

# OTHER VIEWS

## Life without Matt: A daily nightmare

### Excruciating pain endures after drunken driver kills son

**M**y son was killed by a drunken driver. Matt was a student at Florida State University, a senior with one short semester before graduation. He was looking forward to grad school. Home for winter break, he had just left to go scuba diving with friends. But on Dec. 21 last year, instead of receiving a phone call that Matt had arrived at his destination, I received the call that every parent dreads: I was told that Matt had been airlifted to the hospital because a drunken driver had crashed into the back of the car in

which he was riding. I arrived at the hospital to find Matthew in Trauma ICU, hooked up to a respirator. The young man, whose response when I told him to slow down a bit was always, "Mom, I live life," was in a coma and couldn't breathe on his own. Matt's sternum was fractured, his spleen ruptured, his lung collapsed. Worst of all was the severe brain injury, and the bolt in his head to relieve the pressure to his brain. After days of waiting and never once giving up hope, I was told that my beautiful, brilliant son was brain-dead. Matthew died Dec. 29 at 12:33 a.m.

No parent forgets the births of their children, the exact moment they arrived into the world. I will never forget the exact moment my son left this world. There is nothing worse; no pain more excruciating. I will never again hear my son's voice, hear his laugh, see his beautiful face, hug him or anxiously await his phone calls and visits home. No one is left to call me "Mom" again. I will never have grandchildren. The drunken driver took all of that away — the extremely promis-

ing future of a young man ready to start his life as a marine scientist. The drunken driver took away Matt's future, my future, and affected the lives of so many. Things will never be the same. The drunken driver, who had just turned 21 weeks prior to killing Matt, is now sitting behind bars awaiting trial. His life will also never be the same, nor should it be. Matt did nothing wrong. He was a passenger wearing his seat belt when he

became the innocent victim. This horrific nightmare is 100 percent preventable. Killing or injuring others while drinking and driving is not a mistake, but a choice. One who drinks and drives chooses to make a vehicle a deadly weapon, no different than a loaded gun. If you plan to drink, please choose to make transportation arrangements with someone you trust not to drink. If you drink, please don't drive. If not for yourself, do it for your parents, your loved ones, the parents and loved ones of the people you very well may end up killing. Do it so that my daily nightmare does not become theirs.



CONNIE BEARD SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

Instead of receiving a phone call that Matt Beard had arrived at his destination, his mother received the call that every parent dreads.

I still wait for my son to walk through the door. But he never does. He never will.

Connie Beard lives in Sanford.

#### MY WORD

CONNIE BEARD

## In Omaha mall, it could have been one of us

By JOHN MORLINO SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

**W**hen I first heard of the horrific tragedy that took place at a Nebraska mall last week, I thought to myself: It could have been me. What I meant, of course, was that I, too, could have been killed or wounded, had I been in the wrong place at the wrong time. A short while later, I had an equally unsettling thought: Had life given me a different hand to play, I could have been the gunman.

No one really knows what the breaking point is for the human mind, or the human heart. There is no way to measure the capacity of one's resolve. Each of us is unique, with varying degrees of genetic history, experience, choice and luck contributing to the way we respond to the world. And while it is true that, like the vast majority of us, I have successfully dealt with the challenges in my life thus far, there

could come a day when I no longer can.

When Robert Hawkins shot 13 innocent people and then himself, the quest to find "the reason why" became the focal point of the resulting media coverage. Reason, however had nothing to do with it. How could it? Like Seung-Hui Cho (Virginia Tech), Dylan Klebold and Eric

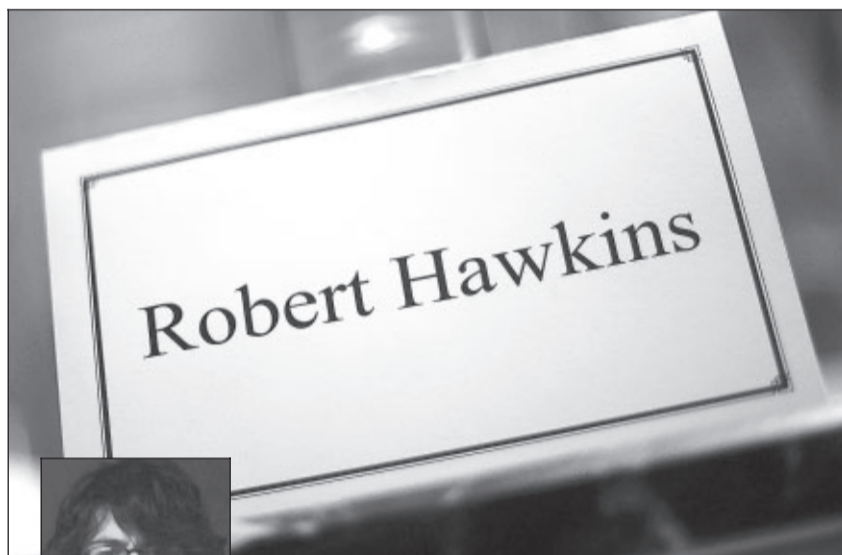
**I, too, could have been killed or wounded, had I been in the wrong place at the wrong time. . . . Had life given me a different hand to play, I could have been the gunman.**

Harris (Columbine) before him, Hawkins' psychological and emotional pain had become unbearable. So much so that, from his distorted perspective, the only way to quell his anguish was to carry out a murder-suicide.

I cannot imagine, under any conditions, ever reaching such a conclusion, myself. But, as the friends, family members and witnesses affected by this tragedy can attest, the very foundation of our well-being can be immeasurably fractured without warning.

The inability to function or cope with unfathomable despair and desperation can coincide with any number of life-altering events. The death of a loved one. A financial crisis of epic proportion. The cumulative trauma of physical or mental abuse. In other instances, there is considerable difficulty in identifying a precipitating factor.

Each year, 15 million American adults experience major depression. Still, there is a growing trend in our society to chip away at the availability of community-support programs for our most vulnerable members. As a former social worker, I can attest to the paucity of comprehensive physical/emotional-health services, follow-up care, housing and job training for people in severe crisis or in transition from hospitals, prisons and other institutions. Case in point: In contrast to the billions of dollars spent on military operations in Iraq, municipalities across the country admit they are woefully ill-equipped to treat the thousands of



ERIC THAYER/GETTY IMAGES



A card with the name of 19-year-old Robert Hawkins (left) the perpetrator of a shooting at the Westroads Mall, rests near a candle during a vigil at St. John's Church in Omaha, Neb., last week.

servicemen and women expected to return from the war with a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Accounts of stories like the shootings at the Westroads Mall frequently highlight the sensational, such as the killer's morbid prediction of subsequent fame. Yet no one with a healthy mind views murder/suicide as an ideal. And to suggest otherwise minimizes the devastating hopelessness inherent in those words and makes it easier for us to distance ourselves from the pain

and suffering of the shooter. Hawkins was not a monster. He was a deeply troubled, fragile human being. And while I never expect to reach such a dark and lonely place in my own life, there are no guarantees that I won't. Should that day ever come, I hope I can get the help I need.

John Morlino is a former social worker and is the founder of The Essence of True Humanity Is Compassion (The ETHIC), [www.the-ethic.org](http://www.the-ethic.org), a nonprofit organization that promotes peace, nonviolence and compassion.

## Trying to make sense of the Bali agreement

**B**ALI, Indonesia — As readers of this column know, I have a rule that there is a simple way to test whether any Arab-Israeli peace deal is real or not: If you need a Middle East expert to explain it to you, it's not real. I now have the same rule about global climate agreements: If you need an environmental expert to explain it to you, it's not real. I needed 10 experts to explain to me the Bali climate agreement — and I was there! I'm still not quite sure what it adds up to. I'm not opposed to forging a regime with 190 countries for reducing carbon emissions, but my gut tells me that both the North and South Poles will melt before we get it to work. There is a better way. Just make America the model of how a country can grow prosperous, secure, innovative and healthy by becoming the most clean, energy-efficient nation in the world — and let everyone follow us. Unfortunately, the Bush team has not been able to lead on this issue — for two reasons. First, its credibility is shot, even though if you add up all the clean energy, biofuel and other programs the administration has initiated

### WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT?

over the past two years, plus the half-a-loaf energy bill spearheaded by the Democrats that the president is scheduled to sign today, they're not a zero anymore.

There was a revealing encounter here Thursday between the U.S. negotiating team and environmentalists that was worthy of payer-view. The American team was giving its big briefing. The room was packed with activists from around the world. They came loaded to carve up the Americans, who, it was just assumed, had to be stupid because they represented the Bush administration.

And then something unexpected happened. For 90 minutes, Andy Karsner, who runs the Department of Energy's renewable-energy programs; James Connaughton, who heads White House climate policy; and their colleagues put on a Power-

Point performance that was riveting in its understanding of the climate problem and the technologies needed to solve it. Their mastery of the subject was so impressive that it left this room full of global activists emotionally confused: On the one hand, it was obvious that these U.S. officials really knew their stuff, yet on the other, I'd bet not a single person there believed they reflected the true Bush policy.

As if reading the minds of everyone there, Malini Mehra, the chief executive of the Centre for Social Markets, an Indian activist group, took the microphone and, in so many words, asked the Bush aides: Who are you and what planet did you come from? It could not possibly be from planet Bush.

"Anyone who has been listening to the news on climate change knows that there has been one message from this administration: that any serious action on climate change threatens the U.S. economy and our way of life," Mehra said to me later. So to now hear these American technocrats "present what was a thoughtful analysis that made sense, flies in the face of what we have come to know about this administration," she added. A lot of this is the price America is paying for the gratuitous way President Bush trashed the Kyoto treaty in 2001, without presenting any alternative for six years. Message to world: "Get lost. We only care about ourselves." So now, when both Bush and Congress have moved a little, few people believe even that is for real. As Irwandi Yusuf, the governor of Indonesia's Aceh province, bluntly said to me: "We don't believe the Americans in this administration." The other reason we can't be a model is that whatever the U.S. is now doing to address the global warming challenge, it is not transformational. It is an incremental approach to a scale problem that can only be solved by triggering massive innovation in clean power. And with-

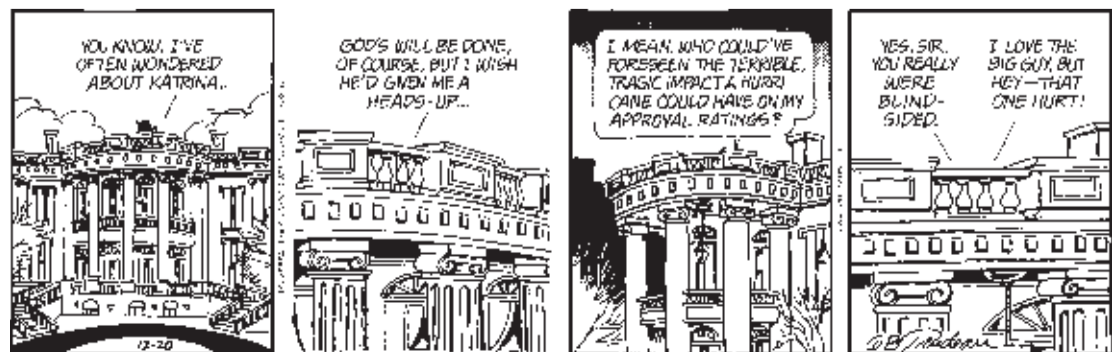
out a price signal — a carbon tax or cap-and-trade system — to make it profitable to invest enormous sums, long term, in new clean technologies, it will not happen at scale.

The Bush team loves new technologies, but not the price signals needed to initiate them. By the way, finance or energy ministers who deal with price signals weren't even at the Bali convention, which was dominated by environmental regulators.

"This is a problem of economic transformation, not environmental regulation," said Glenn Prickett, senior vice president at Conservation International. (Disclosure: My wife is on its board.) "The transformation needed will require far more than just passing one law or signing one treaty. It will require the same level of focus and initiative that the Bush administration is devoting to the war on terror. No political leader in the U.S. is approaching this issue yet with anywhere near the seriousness required."

So I still don't know what Bali was about, but I do know that it was incremental, not transformational — and incrementalism, when it comes to clean energy, is just a hobby.

### From the left | Doonesbury by Garry Trudeau



### From the right | Mallard Fillmore by Bruce Tinsley

