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Will They Ever Trust Us Again?

Michael Moore

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Foreword: Letter from Michael Pedersen

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Hello,

Hey momma, well sorry I haven't been able to call. They took the phones seven days ago; and before the office at Hunter in Savannah would only dial local numbers; they wouldn't even dial 1-800 could you believe it? We are out here in the middle of the desert and they can't even dial the numbers we need. Anyway I got the letters and box. That is so cool your first grandson came the same day your oldest son did. How is everyone? I am doing fine we are just out here in the sand and wind storms waiting; what in the world is wrong with George "TRYING TO BE LIKE HIS DAD" Bush? He got us out here for nothing what so ever. I am so furious right now momma. I really hope they do not re-elect that fool honestly. I am in good spirit and I am doing ok; I really miss you guys. Thanks for the bible and books and candy. I really look forward to letters from you guys. I received 2 letters already from family in MINN. Tell them all thanks for the support. Tell all the family hello and that I am doing fine. We don't expect anything to

happen anytime soon. I cannot wait to get home and get back to my life. Tell Spudnick congrads and I'll see my first nephew soon as I get back to the states. I am sorry I wasn't able to call you guys; I hope you understand. I'm sorry I had to send you that grim letter last time; I just didn't have time to discuss that type of stuff with you before I left. Next time it will be 1 of my first priorities. Hope you guys are doing ok and keep sending the mail, it makes getting through the day easier. Well I am on my way to bed so I will write you guys soon. I love and miss all you guys.

Love,
Mike

Will They Ever Trust Us Again?

Introduction

A man came up to me on the street the other day and introduced himself as a navy officer just back from Iraq.

"I was on a ship off the coast of Iraq the night you gave your Oscar speech" (see page 8), he began. (This is a beginning I am not all that unfamiliar with; only the location of where each individual heard the speech is different.)

"When you said what you said about the president and the war, I was really angry at you. I booed along with all the others who were booing you.

"But now that I've been over there for the better part of the last year and seen what I've seen and know what I know . . . I just want to apologize to you for being so mad at you that night."

He held out his hand, and I shook it. I then said "You do not owe me any apology. What did you do wrong? *You believed your commander in chief.* You're *supposed* to believe your commander in chief! You're in the navy! All of us should be able to believe whatever comes out of our president's mouth. If we can't have that—at the very least THAT—then what are we left with?"

I went on to tell him that just because I didn't believe Bush in that first week of the war and said so in a very public way doesn't

make me right. I didn't know if I was right that night. I'm not a weapons inspector. I *thought* I was right, but, hey, I coulda been wrong. It just turns out that I was a good guesser and a bad Oscar speech giver.

"No," I said to the navy officer, "*you* don't apologize to *me*—it is *I* who needs to apologize to *you*. I and the American people owe you and all the other servicemen and women over there a HUGE apology for sending you into harm's way when it was not only *not* necessary, it was done to line the pockets of a few greedy men. To risk your life for that, I am sorry, and millions of Americans are sorry. Please forgive *us*."

I think he was a bit shocked to hear this.

"Well, hey, Mr. Moore, *you* didn't send me over there!"

"But I didn't find the right words to convince enough people. I am, in part, responsible. And I helped to pay for it. I pay my taxes, so that means I continue to foot the bill. I am responsible."

We chatted a bit longer and then I wished him well. He asked for my email address. I told him to send me a letter, that I like getting letters from our troops.

Truth is, I get thousands of them. In the weeks and months since that night of the Oscars my email box has been flooded with letters from soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. At first I was surprised. I guess I made the wrong assumption that guys in the military were not going to be very supportive of what I had to say about the man in the Oval Office and my desire to prevent him from taking us to war.

But, as I found out, that was far from the truth. Letter after letter from these soldiers expressed a profound disillusionment with our mission in southwest Asia. What makes their comments unique and so intense is the fact that they are not the words of the Left or the rhetoric of the antiwar movement—they *are* the war movement. Their observations are filled with such purpose be-

cause they are the *witnesses* to war, the men and women on the ground being asked to do the killing and slowly realizing that their job has little to do with defending the United States of America.

Since the beginning of the war the American media has worked overtime to portray our brave troops as some sort of monolithic machine of men who are of one mind to rid Iraq of the bad guys and bring the goodness of Uncle Sam to that country. It wasn't until *Fahrenheit 9/11* that most people had any clue there were so many soldiers NOT in support of what Bush was doing. I was amazed at screenings of the film, watching people with their jaws open, as soldier after soldier spoke of his dissatisfaction with the war effort. Why had we not heard these voices before? Surely the media knew this was a growing feeling among the troops. Those networks are there in Iraq every damn day—I've never set foot in the country! How could I find this out so easily—and they couldn't?

Of course the answer is they've known all along that this is how many of the troops feel about the war. They knew and they covered it up. Just as they did with so many other things about this war and the "reasons" why we went to war. Covered it up or looked the other way. Censored themselves so that others higher up wouldn't have to. It has been nothing short of disgraceful and dishonest that our free press first refused to do its job—ask the hard questions and demand the evidence before letting a president take us to war—and then went on to paint a picture of troop morale in Iraq that simply has no bearing in truth.

Just the fact that this book needs to be published should be an embarrassment to our national mainstream media. If they had reported on what you are about to read in this book, these letters would never have had to be sent and I would not have to waste good paper in bringing them to you.

Now, talk like this will only get me in trouble with these so-called journalists. Their "conventional wisdom" (which is usually so full of b.s. and nearly always wrong that it pains me to denigrate the word *wisdom* when used in this way) is that people like Michael Moore and his ilk are despised by the troops because they don't support the troops and their antiwar work undermines the war effort and puts these young men and women in even more danger.

But then along comes an article like the one in the *Washington Observer-Reporter* from Pennsylvania about the veteran who had set up a "cyberspace bookmobile" on the Internet to get free books to our soldiers in Iraq. It's called BooksForSoldiers.com. You probably haven't heard of it as not one other paper picked it up—perhaps because it contains a paragraph that flies in the face of everything the media hold sacred about the Michael Moore they've invented:

> The most popular fiction request: anything by Stephen King, Williams said, with Tom Clancy a close second. It might surprise some people to learn that filmmaker and vocal Bush critic Michael Moore is the most popular non-fiction request, but Williams confirms that's the case.

When I read that, I have to admit, even I was surprised. But why should I be? Remember when the war started and how kind of scary it was to make any statement against the war? If you did, you had better follow it up immediately with this line: "BUT I SUPPORT THE TROOPS!!"

I am here to tell you that you didn't need to say that. Of course you support the troops! Who are "the troops"? The majority of them come from the poor and working classes, the very people most of you have always sided with. Many of you have

spent your lives helping those who sooner or later become "our troops." At the very least, most of you have voted for representatives who have promised to be the advocates for those who grow up on the other side of the tracks. You do not need to be defensive and blurt out that you support the troops. As far as I'm concerned, that's all we have ever done.

And the troops know it. That's why they want my books and that's why when I asked them if I could share their letters with you, they were ecstatic. The chance that someone might listen to them, that their voices would be heard by millions, moved them deeply. Not one soldier whom I asked to contribute his or her letter to this book refused.

As I am writing this, I am at my father's home in Michigan. He turned eighty-three today. I am so proud of my dad. He served in the First Marine Division all through the worst battles of the South Pacific in World War II. His brother, Lornie, was killed in the Philippines. He told me tonight that I reminded him of his brother and how much he wishes we kids could have gotten to know him.

My dad never talked about the war much while we were growing up. He told us that if we heard anyone talking a lot about his war stories, he was probably never really in combat because if you were in combat you never wanted to relive it, only forget it. My dad has always been a peaceful and gentle man, and I have benefited much in having the good fortune of being his son.

He still loves the Marines, still has some Marine stuff around the house, but as he watched the news tonight, with Mr. Bush refusing to condemn the ads which smeared John Kerry and his service to our country, my dad was filled with disgust. And then on TV came fellow World War II vet Bob Dole claiming that "Kerry never bled," even though he had three purple hearts. My dad was nothing short of offended.

"Bush didn't even show up for his service—and he thinks he has the right to do this to Kerry?" he asked incredulously. "Let's hope Bush doesn't win."

By the time you are reading this Bush may or may not have won. Regardless of the outcome of the 2004 election, the Iraq War does not seem as if it will be over any time soon. I hope that the letters in this book will provide some glimpse into what many soldiers are feeling about the "mission" on which they've been sent.

A few words about the ground rules in this book: In asking these soldiers for their permission to reprint their letters to me, I gave them the option of remaining anonymous. A lot of what they have written can and will get them into trouble. That is not something I want to see happen. So I encouraged their anonymity. Nonetheless, many of the soldiers wanted their names to be printed. All I can say to the Pentagon is that I ask you, in the spirit of everything this country stands for—and especially that First Amendment, which guarantees everyone freedom of expression—not to harm these good soldiers who have risked their lives for us and who have courageously chosen to let their fellow Americans in on what they have personally seen. There is no reason to punish them for speaking the truth. They have not disobeyed your orders. They have shown up and done their job (unlike a certain man who now sits in our White House). Leave them alone. If you don't, I will do everything I can to shine a very public light on any of your vengeful actions and I will provide whatever help I can to any of these soldiers whom you may try to punish.

Near the end of this book, I have included two other chapters of letters. One batch is letters from the family and friends of soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. So many families have had to suffer at home through this ordeal. Whether it's been the attempts by the Bush administration to cut aid to soldiers' families or to cut

back on their combat pay or to reduce services to veterans, it's clear that there is one group of people in this country who don't support our troops and it's called the Bush White House. Again, another story untold by the media.

The other is a group of letters from veterans of past wars. I wanted to give voice to these older Americans who learned the lessons of war long ago and have much to offer our young soldiers today.

We are now learning of the multitudes of soldiers who, after returning home, have found that they don't have jobs and that their lives are in ruins. Some are suicidal. They need our help. The ones who have returned home without limbs or eyes—and they number in the thousands—also need our assistance. In the back of the book I have listed resources for you to help them. There is also a list of ways to help the people of Iraq who have been ravaged by our war. And there are some ideas about what you can personally do to help end the war.

Earlier last winter, I went to the home of Lila Lipscomb in Flint, Michigan. She lost her son in Karbala, Iraq. She wanted to know if she could read me his last letter home. We rolled film. Sitting behind the camera, I tried to control my tears. I didn't want her to see me crying. But the pain caused by this man's last words rang loud inside my head (as it will to my dying day). I thought I was going to have to stop filming because I couldn't see through the tears any longer. Then she got to a line in his letter, a line that was, in effect, his last wish: "what in the world is wrong with George 'TRYING TO BE LIKE HIS DAD' Bush? He got us out here for nothing what so ever. I am so furious right now momma. I really hope they do not re-elect that fool honestly."

I stopped crying. From the grave, SGT Michael Pedersen, the son of Lila Lipscomb, was asking a nation to do one last thing for him, a young man who gave up his life for us. Is this not the

least we can do? In that moment I knew what I would do for the rest of 2004—honor Michael Pedersen's request from his last letter home.

My hope, as I write this, is that all of you who support the troops will join me in doing what SGT Pedersen has asked us to do.

Michael Moore
Flint, Michigan
August 23, 2004

Transcript of Michael Moore's Oscar Award acceptance speech:

"Thank you. Thank you very much. Ahh. On behalf of our producers, Kathleen Glynn, and Michael Donovan from Canada, I'd like to thank the Academy for this. I have invited my fellow documentary nominees on the stage with us, and we would like to, they are here, they are here in solidarity with me because we like nonfiction. We like nonfiction and we live in fictitious times. We live in the time where we have fictitious election results that elects a fictitious president. We, we live in a time where we have a man sending us to war for fictitious reasons. Whether it's the fiction of duct tape or the fiction of orange alerts, we are against this war, Mr. Bush. Shame on you, Mr. Bush. Shame on you. And any time you got the pope and the Dixie Chicks against you, your time is up. Thank you very much."