

Mother Courage Cindy Sheehan's real and imaginary diary By

Dario Fo and Franca Rame

PERMISSION NEEDED FOR PERFORMANCE

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A close-up image of a marine is projected on a screen at the back of the stage, beside him is a column of smoke – the classic image of an oil well on fire. This image slowly fades: a light change illuminates a woman who slowly takes form from the darkness. Beside her is a white plastic garden chair, upon which she will later sit down.

I've found something my son once said often echoing around my head: 'I want to go to university, and the only chance I've got is to join the United States Army. They'll pay my fees. There's no other way I can do it.'

A month after he left for his zone of operations an army cheque came through payable to Casey Sheehan: this money would pay his first round of fees. Three days later three US army officers knocked on my door and told me Casey had been killed in Iraq.

I fainted.

It was as if everything had flown away: the house, his room, his civilian clothes, his games, his bike...

All dead.

The cheque was of no use now.

His friends called round to ask for news, they stammered and mumbled their condolences. His girlfriend was as white as a ghost but couldn't bring herself to cry. I prodded her a bit but still no tears would come.

About a month after his death I said to myself: 'I've had enough of crying for my own son, now I'm going to cry for all mothers'...

I saw an article in a local paper that listed all the dead in my area. I traced down some of the families and spoke with other mothers. Two of them kept on asking me the same question: 'Why did they send my son over there? Why did he die in a country that I didn't even know existed?'

I start going on demonstrations... marches against the war in Iraq – but I realize that they're not making any difference.

I left home on 4 August, taking with me everything I needed to sleep in the open, as if I was going camping. Two days later I was in Texas, getting off a bus near the entrance to George W. Bush's ranch.

An image of Bush's ranch is projected onto the screen.

I opened up the camping chair I'd brought with me and sat down, right in front of the two big cattle horns that were supported by other huge wooden beams, that marked out the entrance to the estate.

After a while a car that was truly worthy of a President arrived and stopped in front of me. The driver asked me if I needed anything: 'I'd like to speak with the President, I'm the mother of Private Sheehan, killed in Iraq.'

The driver didn't answer. He pressed the accelerator and was gone. I moved to the side for a second to avoid the cloud of dust that was heading in my direction.

Then Stephen Hadley, a National Security advisor, and another congressman stop and start asking me questions... I answer them... they leave – 'A waste of time' I said to myself.

I took out a scrapbook, sat back down and started to write. Later on, at dusk, the sun had created two huge shadows of the cattle horns.

A policeman on a motorbike arrived and I signaled for him to stop, and he drew up right between the cattle horns: 'Officer, would you mind delivering this letter to the President?'

'I'll see what I can do!' the policeman replied. 'Ma'am, do you think you're going to be here for a long while?'

'No! Just until I get a reply. It's not illegal is it?'

‘No, I don’t believe it is. This is public property, as long as you stay outside the ranch nobody should bother you. Goodbye and good luck.’

Another cloud of dust and he was gone.

I got ready for bed. I put my tent pegs in the ground and raised the tent up.

Another two policemen stopped with their lights flashing. They asked for my i.d.: ‘Ma’am, what are you doing here?’

‘I’m waiting for the President to reply to a letter I’ve had delivered.’

‘Wouldn’t it be more comfortable to wait in your own home? You put your address on it, right?’

‘No. All I wrote at the end was that I was out here underneath the cattle horns, waiting for a reply.’

It got dark. A huge light came on between the cattle horns, spraying out powerful rays of yellow light. To shield my eyes from the light that shone inside the tent I wrapped a scarf around my head.

In the morning I was woken up by children singing. I pulled the scarf off of my head and stuck my head out of the tent – a troop of scouts, boys and girls, was passing by. They were going to see the President. A journalist who was following up behind them stops and asks me very politely what I was doing there. I told him about the letter.

‘Excuse me for being blunt’, he commented, ‘but I don’t think your provocation is going to have a lot of success.’

‘It’s not a provocation. George Bush is our President, and I think I’ve got the right to ask him about my son. It was he who declared war on Iraq and sent my son Casey off to fight. I just want to know why.’

The way the journalist looked at me now he seemed almost upset. Then he said: ‘You remind me of an old Tibetan monk who once said: “Together, frankness and belief can move mountains. But getting a bigoted man to take just one step is far more difficult.”’

Two girls came across and grabbed his jacket to drag him away. He quickly collected a bunch of wild flowers and put them on my sleeping bag. ‘We’ll be meeting the President soon’ he says, ‘and I’ll try to raise your case with him.’ And then he was gone.

Throughout the day cars, motorbikes and groups of visitors were going in and out of the ranch, those on foot would walk back to the buses parked on the highway. Few of them took any notice of me, hardly anybody stopped to ask me a question.

I had taken my portable computer out, and was balancing it on my knees and writing to all the websites I knew, telling people what I was doing. Thanks to some bloggers, the appeal I launched was being forwarded to an incredible number of sites.

The following day some boys from Houston came to visit me. They brought me stuff to eat and drink. They also showed me some newspapers that, even though what they had written was a bit sloppy and inaccurate, had mentioned my protest – calling it ‘Camp Casey’.

An FBI agent comes and tells me that if we don’t leave the area, in 48 hours my friends and I will be classified as a threat to national security. We talk about it among

ourselves, and decide we're not going to move.

The next day Democratic members of Congress insist that Bush meets me and other relatives of dead soldiers. They also demand he gives an assurance that nobody will be arrested for demonstrating peacefully.

Two days after that and Bush is getting nervous, the media are really pushing this... public opinion is moving my way. So he organizes a press conference in his ranch and says that Cindy Sheehan has the right to express her opinions but he wasn't going to take the troops out of Iraq.

Every day the number of visitors to Camp Casey is growing, people come as delegations so as to show all the solidarity they could with me. Democrat politicians arrive, and celebrities start visiting. Over a thousand white crosses are planted beside the road that leads up to the Camp, each with the name of a soldier who died in Iraq.

In a ranch nearby Bush organizes a fund-raising barbecue where he expects to get \$2 million for the Republicans. So I wrote on a placard: 'Why has he got time for his donors but not for me?'

Meanwhile in a California courthouse, Patrick Sheehan files for divorce, citing 'irreconcilable differences'. Patrick Sheehan is my husband, father of our boy Casey.

Many of the people arriving are women, many were mothers with sons in Iraq, some of them like me had lost their son. A Mexican immigrant, still very young, came over and sat down next to me: 'I'm a mother in despair, just like you. My boy joined the American army but he wasn't a US citizen, just a Mexican immigrant. When he joined up they promised him that if he completed his service and got an honourable discharge they would make him a full US citizen. But he never got this privilege because he was killed in action. The helicopter on which he was a machine gunner was brought down over Baghdad after just a month.' And then she said ironically: 'But I'm lucky, due to my boy's sacrifice as his mother I've been given the same rights. Now me and my two other boys enjoy the same rights as any child of a gringo father and mother. We've got health insurance. I'm so lucky that it was my oldest boy that got killed.' Then she burst into tears.

A week passed. Even important newspapers like the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* realized I was here, under those two enormous cattle horns. Journalists came to interview me, and right behind them there were television crews from CNN and CBS. By now I'm feeling really embarrassed: 'I've got to be cool, detached. I can't let myself act the part they want to play – a kind of Joan of Arc meets Batman's mother.' I'm just an ordinary mother, like millions of others, I reckon I'm just an average kind of woman.

A few groups have decided to set up camp alongside me.

I was very moved when I heard that protest vigils against the war, and in solidarity with our action, had been held across America. An incredible number of local groups, more than 1,600, organized protests: they sang for hours or went on candlelit processions. They were singing folk songs, songs made up on the spur of the moment, or even religious ones.

Ah yes, religion...

I've noticed that Bush often uses phrases from the Bible in his speeches. Therefore

you can presume he's a christian... well I'm a christian, but I don't agree with his tone or with the phrases he uses. Bush divides human communities up into rogue states and right states. It's obvious that we're in the right, and that the rogues are the ones we're getting ready to attack. The people who've got the oil.

I've been leafing through the Bible and I've found nothing that comes close to all this stuff. In fact I've come across the very opposite: Christ asks us to love our enemies and not distinguish on the basis of race or religion. And there's more: he never talked about just or holy wars, on the contrary he always insisted that any war was unjust and criminal.

Bush has repeatedly said that he often finds himself talking with God. He swears to us that it is him, the almighty in person, who calls him and asks for a chat. He asks him: 'what are you thinking of doing?' He provokes him. He asks him questions, he gives him orders. Just like the crusaders of old, Bush has got a permanent alibi: 'God told me to do it'.

But this God talking with our President is bloodthirsty and vicious. He is a God of revenge, the God of the military. He's got nothing to do with the compassionate father, tender as a mother, that we came across in the Holy Scriptures...

One thing's for sure: up there in heaven there's been a mugging or a kidnapping.

That old giver of creation and life has been cast out and thrown down into the depths. And Christ has been nailed up on the cross again, to stop him making any more trouble with his obsession about love and forgiveness.

Journalists in all kinds of newspapers have wondered how all of this has happened: how an ordinary insignificant woman, without any charm or charisma, has managed to gather around her such a big, and above all active movement – one which shows no sign of demoralization or of getting tired.

Something that has really struck me about all this comes from an unusual ballad which was dedicated to me by Buskaar, a poet from Nevada who is descended from the Mohicans. It's called: 'Listen to the turning stones'.

These stones are out in the Nevada desert, at the edge of the Great Prairies. They're round and almost hollow inside, apart from a small stone, which is round as well, but that acts like a shuttlecock. When the wind starts blowing the stones start turning, and inside them the smaller stone moves faster and increases the whole momentum.

If you slightly push one of these stones you'll hear a strange sound come out, which makes a noise like somebody who's talking but who makes no sense. That's why these stones are also called the 'talking stones' or the 'singing stones'.

Anyhow, this Mohican poet says: 'Cindy's story is like the old Indian tale about the singing stone, blown by the wind, it's forced to spin around out on the prairie. But its movement drags other stones along with it, and they all rub up against each other, creating sparks that set fire to the whole prairie.

'Nobody would have bet a dime on that woman sat out in front of the President's ranch. Nobody dreamed that Cindy was a talking stone, and that so many people would have been moved by her words. First they were moved, and then they really got moving,

because of her simple question: “Why did my son die?” Buskaar then ends his dedication by saying: ‘Maybe we haven’t realized, but isn’t that anguished question, put into such simple words, the same as Christ’s mother underneath the cross: ‘Why have they killed you, my son?’

I find out that a caravan of three buses has been organized through donations that have been made, and that it’s soon going to leave Crawford, arriving in Washington on 1 September.

By now there’s an avalanche of television coverage every day. They’ve already got a couple of nicknames for me, and there is a kind of competition to stick even more labels on me, like ‘peace mom’, ‘mother courage’, ‘the heroic woman from California’ etc etc. The *New York Times* gave me a full page:

Cindy Sheehan is 48 years old and from California. She’s white, a catholic, and her son Casey joined the US army to pay his university fees, dying in Iraq in April 2004. Overall Mrs Sheehan is an ordinary woman and her story, as simple as it is tragic, is not very different from that of over 1,800 American mothers who have lost their sons for a ‘noble cause’, as our President frequently states.

Yet since she arrived in Crawford Texas on 6 August, setting herself up in front of the ranch where Bush spends his summer vacation, Cindy has become one of the best-known people in the United States. Almost a third of the population, a hundred million people, has heard about her and is talking about her.

It is certain that the fame this woman is suddenly experiencing derives from her demeanor of being an unprotected individual. She doesn’t raise her voice or wave flags, she is the first one to be concerned, frightened and intimidated by the clamour she has created.

More than a month has gone by.

The number of friends coming to visit me is bigger every day. A few friends have decided to set themselves up alongside me in Camp Casey. Two peace activists, who want to remain anonymous, have bought a house a few hundred yards away from the ranch entrance which they have renamed ‘The house of peace’. That is now my home.

There’s no reply from the President, so I decide to send him another letter. I send it out to all the websites I’m in contact with, asking them to pass it on to as many people as they can. Here it is:

‘I have waited five weeks for a reply. Perhaps my first message got lost in the mountains of mail you must receive every day. Therefore I have decided to send you a second letter, which will be distributed over the Internet and published in newspapers. Hopefully this time it won’t get lost.

I am writing to you because I want to ask your help in filling a very painful gap in my knowledge that has been worrying me since I heard the terrible news that my son had been killed in Iraq.

I have a very simple question to ask you: Why? For what reason have you, and your Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice repeated in almost all your speeches that young Americans who have lost their lives in Iraq have sacrificed themselves for a ‘noble cause’? Could you explain to me

what 'noble cause' means to you? Where is the nobility in deaths such as these?

You assured us that fighting this war was a sacred duty to save the world. You and your political and military advisors said you were certain that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. The evidence was there, and you declared to the press and television that you had photos from satellites and spy planes: there were heaps of photos of weapons factories.

You said it was certain that within a year Saddam Hussein would have developed nuclear weapons with which he would have been able to attack and destroy both America and the entire world.

But the United Nations had a few doubts about the authenticity of your accusations. This is why they sent out their own observers who didn't find a thing.

What kind of response did you make to the UN's negative findings?

You assured us that the UN were unable to trace the weapons for the simple reason that long before Saddam's intelligence services had hidden away his secret weapons in inaccessible and well-hidden underground bunkers.

And again you stated: 'We have photos of them being transported.'

But after having launched your attack and defeated the enemy, when you were able to occupy all of Iraq and search wherever you wanted – why were neither weapons of mass destruction or even bits of them ever found?

Our generals were forced to admit that these terrible weapons, which you had categorically assured us about, had never existed.

Therefore I ask you: 'How can you destroy something that has never existed?' And once again I ask you: 'Why did you send my son over there to die?'

What is the noble cause for which my son and 1,800 other American citizens have sacrificed themselves?

I have noticed in newspapers and television reports that my continuous presence outside your ranch has caused you some irritation. A journalist told me that you, Mr President, and your staff were going to take action to counter my presence and cancel out my 'petulant' questions. With this in mind you have tried to find – among the many mothers who have lost a child in Iraq – somebody who was willing to oppose my protest.

Perhaps it was malicious, but one newspaper wrote that this was a very difficult task. Out of the 1,800 mothers you approached, it appears that nobody was prepared to give you a hand. Then finally you found somebody who declared: 'I am proud to have sacrificed my son for this country.'

I really didn't like that last phrase.

An opinion like that seems hysterical and false given that this has been an illegitimate and illegal war, based on a pack of lies, in which you can't breathe the oxygen of truth but only the smoke of oil wells burning in the distance.

Every day it's getting clearer to me that that image is the real reason behind this war: our oil reserves are really low, we need that gas, it's ours... that oil is ours, ever since the day we decided to go and get it.'

After twenty six days, we packed away our tents outside the President's ranch today. Bush isn't here any more, he's moved back to the White House. But we can't just leave him on his own...

We leave Texas on board those three buses, stopping off at Austin Texas,

Louisiana, and heaps of other places. At every stop-off point I criticise Bush and his militarism – he’s clearly not bothered about the problems in American society – just look at what happened with Hurricane Katrina.

The demonstration we held in Washington wasn’t big, there were no more than a thousand people – and there were many more policemen on duty than demonstrators. We were almost outnumbered by the media too.

We arrive in front of the White House and stop. Then the cops moved in on us, and I feel four arms literally raise me off the ground. Hundreds of cameras are flashing and I hear a voice telling me I’m under arrest because I didn’t move on. Another 383 demonstrators are also told they have been arrested for demonstrating illegally. They push us all onto some buses which are round the corner and we’re taken to the main precinct. We’re released the following day after paying a \$75 bail bond, telling us that we will put on trial within a couple of months.

There’s a tidal wave of e-mails either describing what’s happened or commenting about it. Heaps of people call for a bigger demonstration, maybe in New York.

At almost the very same time a counter-demonstration is organized in Washington by pro-government organizations. Some of those marching are Vietnam veterans, but naturally nobody gets arrested...

Over the last few weeks I’ve discovered that my knowledge of American life, history, politics, truth, is virtually zero. To be blunt, I’ve discovered I’m an ignoramus.

I’ve always called myself a progressive and a democrat, but today I know that to really be a democrat you need to know about things, you need to understand clearly what a real democracy is.

By now the anti-war movement has set up a study group, made up of professors – and people who had written books and articles about the war, economics, cinema, the media. And these people gave us some real lectures. We read and discussed a whole heap of articles and statements from the newspapers or on the Internet. We organized debates that threw all the stereotypes and prejudices I had been taught up into the air.

It was like going back to school.

I had always believed that the decision to launch the war against Iraq was an emergency, which came out of the 11th September massacre – it was an attempt to close down or destroy terrorism. But then, thanks to these discussions, I discovered that the decision had been made a long time before. In the neo-cons’ programme, dated September 2000 – ‘The Project for a new American century’ – they were already insisting that the USA had to use its strength as the world’s only superpower, and ensure access to the Middle East’s huge oil reserves. It said they needed to get control of oil reserves outside of OPEC, such as the huge reserves in Iraq. Iraq... where they sent my son to die.

Four months have gone by since August. More than one expert has tried to explain why Bush is silent, why he is determined to ignore me. One explanation is that my straight down the line question over the war has derailed all the President’s plans. Somebody even

says I'm responsible for his sudden drop in the opinion polls over the last few months. So wouldn't it be better for the President to end his damaging and embarrassed silence?

The director Michael Moore has given his own explanation: 'Bush can't answer. He's created a huge web of lies – each bit is connected to another just like the architecture of a cathedral. If you just take one bit out the whole lot will come down on his head. Although we're really talking about a house of cards, in the real world the vacuum that would create would be disastrous.'

And somebody who talks about God couldn't stand not living in a cathedral, even if it is a fake one.

As a good christian I want to make it clear that I don't hate him... all I feel is contempt. I'd like to keep it just to this, but I just can't stop. When I see him on t.v., getting out of his helicopter, with all his Ministers and Generals waiting, he's always got this little dog in his arms. And it's always well groomed and looks like a ball of fluff – and I can't stop myself from saying – 'oh isn't that cute! Our leader must be such a kind and sensitive man!'

No Mr President. I don't believe you love animals: I bet your spin doctors told you to do this.

I can see them saying: 'Many American voters are just crazy about dogs... And their children love them as well! A recent survey has estimated that at least fifty million Americans have got a dog of some kind. So if you pick up a hairy poodle – even a British one – and you cuddle it, you give it a kiss, you'll definitely get the votes of at least fifty million animal lovers.'

You love neither animals nor humans.

I watched you once on a live broadcast, when you were hunkered down among some schoolchildren. You were trying to be friendly, fatherly, but you couldn't do it – you were clumsy and embarrassing to watch.

But you don't hate kids, you're even worse – you ignore them. The thousands killed in Iraq and Afghanistan during the bombings don't exist, they're just collateral damage... Nothing out of the ordinary. Predictable murders, inevitable... What kind of numbers will create just a slight sense of guilt in you?

When this anger and pain build up inside me and it gets too much I say to myself: 'Forgive me, forgive me!' I can't stand it any more.

But it's your arrogance, Mr President, which has been damaged by the irritation I've caused you, that keeps me going... because when it's all said and done you haven't just wiped out my son, but through him something else I was waiting for anxiously... a child of his own. Yes, next year Casey and his girlfriend were going to get married. And I just know they would have had a baby.

I dreamt about it. I still dream about it. And I wake up crying.

You, and your war, have killed my dreams as well!

Damn you!

Mr President, I've got one image of you fixed in my mind. You're dressed in a pilot's

jump suit and you're getting off a fighter plane which has just landed on an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf. There's a big crowd of soldiers and sailors around, cheering and slapping each other on the back. You're climbing out of the cockpit with your pilot's helmet and saying: 'Mission accomplished!'

Straight away this reminded me of an old picture in a history book I always carried around in my school bag – it was Alexander the Great's victory over the Persian armies.

I was touched: it's nice to honour a fellow warrior...

I didn't know you had been a brave fighter pilot. A spokesperson from your staff reminded us all of your courage, that as a young man you had seen action in Vietnam.

But then, I found that your spokesperson had lied... and that you, Mr President, had never seen the inside of a fighter plane during the Vietnam War. Oh no, you went AWOL from your unit. You didn't even do your tour of duty with the Alabama National Guard air arm.

And now you're wearing military uniforms and talking to us about heroic actions.

You really shouldn't have started putting on this kind of show – missing your lines and missing your part has now become a habit to you...

Not long ago Hurricane Katrina attacked our coastline, destroying New Orleans and the whole of Louisiana. Everybody knew beforehand what was going to happen: that hurricane was going to destroy the poorest and most undefended part of America.

Yes! The duty of a President, so keen on quick and decisive responses, was to be in the eye of the storm, or at least close to it. Instead you, Mr President, weren't there. Where you were there wasn't even a breath of wind. You spent the weekend on your ranch -where the skies are not cloudy all day.

It was a real struggle to get you to visit the disaster zone. And you only went there later, when all, or nearly all, of the survivors had been evacuated. Everything had become a swamp, and you were being driven about on this amphibious truck as if you'd come ashore as part of an invasion.

The wrong place at the wrong time – again. This time around it looked like you were wearing a camouflage jacket... that was a wise precaution, as a few of the survivors up on the roofs might have recognized you and...

I can remember an old farce set in the Civil War. There's a scene where some brave mayor up in the north was encouraging all the young people from his county to go and join the Union army. He was talking about duty, defending civil rights, freedom from slavery. But when these kids went into battle he wasn't there.

Mr President, it seemed a caricature of you...

But I have to say that you're in good company with your government... The tendency of your staff and senators to hide away has been commented on all over the world – them and their families. Out of the 535 members of Congress, the very people who led the charge about the American army's duty to go to war – just one of them can boast about having their own son in a combat zone!

There's only one thing to say to that: you're just a bunch of General Custers who

never rode out to the Big Horn!

She sits down on the white plastic chair, taking out a pen and notepaper.

‘Dear George Bush,

By now I have written you so many letters without ever having received a reply. But as I have already said, I can live with this.

I have created such intense communication with you I feel you have become one of the family, I can take things out on you, treat you like a punch ball. Therefore from now on I have decided to address you as George, but without the W. Is that alright by you? You’re not answering? Alright then, I’ll carry on anyhow!’

On the other hand some of your people have answered me Mr President, I beg your pardon, George! One of them was Karl Rove, a senior member of staff at the White House.

Our friend wrote to me, attacking me, and saying that I, Cindy, was a clown, and that the people who were taking part in the campaign against your war were ‘non existent’.

My God! I must be seriously ill... I’m suffering from hallucinations! At the last big demonstration in Washington I could have sworn there were hundreds of thousands of people who were shaking my hand and hugging me. We were all singing together... men, women holding their babies – and there were heaps of cops around, there were so many they filled up all the roads leading to the White House.

And now your spokesperson is telling me all these people don’t exist... They’ve never been born, never drawn a breath, neither lived nor loved. They’re spirits – ghosts that could be carried away on the breeze in a second. So maybe the cops weren’t there either. What would they be doing there if that huge demonstration didn’t exist? Only I, Karl Rove insisted, was real. He was right about one thing though: I’m a real clown.

But I don’t understand why your spokesperson, sorry I almost said dogsbody, uses the word ‘clown’ as an insult. He ought to know that in our culture the figure of the fool, or the clown, has always played an important role -you always find them in Shakespeare and other Elizabethan plays. For example Marlowe once made King Richard say: ‘Never just laugh at a clown’s antics. Listen and learn from his voice and gestures’.

So George, would you please tell Rove that it’s nobler to be a fool than an advisor... He really needs to take lessons in being a clown!

But if the truth be told a clown doesn’t just represent lively intelligence. Take the figure of the fool – it also means madness and suffering. In the concentration camps the Nazis called their prisoners crazy fools. They’d forced them into that situation, making them walk around like idiots, no flesh or muscles on their bodies – and with a blank expression.

I’ve seen the same kind of people in Guantanamo Bay, being carried around by two American policemen. They were wearing these bright orange overalls, just like clowns. And you could see that when they gazed around them, they had no idea what they were looking at.

I’m sure those men you’ve captured and imprisoned in cages fit only for animals belonged to a group of fanatics – the Taliban – who oppressed and killed women, taking

away their faces and their dignity.

But until somebody proves anything different, we live in a civilised country. Like any US citizen, when I was little I learnt the words of our Constitution, and there's one phrase I've never forgotten: absolute respect for human beings, even if they're guilty of terrible crimes.

So how could you? – empty the brains of those prisoners, deprive them of all humanity, turning them into puppets being moved about by a puppet master – who in the meantime had gone mad himself?

Dear George, I'm sorry to tell you that I watched those scenes I became ashamed of my country. No, that's not what I meant to say. I've got all the love and admiration in the world for what its ordinary people do – I'm ashamed of my government, the police and the military, and of how you've ignored the good democratic laws this nation created when it won its freedom. In his will, our founding father George Washington said:

Always being able to tell the truth does not just come from the education you have in your youth, but from the constant need of generations of men who have always held truth to be at the heart of any society. Today, telling the truth gives me immense pleasure... whereas for others it is tiresome and painful.

I find it disgusting that today, in our country, there is somebody else called George who lives and works in a city which was named after George Washington – and as opposed to this first George, he is a man who can never tell the truth.

This second George is forced to spend all his time trying to sort out the damage his lies have created. And he's starting to look more and more like a circus juggler who keeps throwing balls up into the air and tries to catch them before they hit the ground – but in reality those balls are bombs which fall on kids who are playing in real streets.

(This next sequence is meant to describe a clown-like sequence of events).

I'm imagining a time in the future.

It emerges that all those stories about the evidence for weapons of mass destruction were just a huge con trick. They were created by George's staff – and by now the big liar is staggering around like a punch-drunk boxer in the ring.

All his hangers-on have been convicted by the Grand Jury as liars, hypocrites, and fabricators of evidence.

Scooter Libby has been brought to trial.

We're surrounding the White House, looking upwards, waiting for all the President's men to jump out one by one, just like an old silent movie. But there are no nets underneath – so it will be a real show when they hit the ground.

I'm in the crowd as well, waiting for them to jump.

But I'm not happy. I can't get the image out of mind of 2,180 mothers' children sitting on the White House lawn. Both them, and their mothers like me, have been sacrificed by the

cynicism of these big clowns -not to 'save civilization' but to back up the criminal plans of the people who govern us.

In other words, to the cry of 'Less freedoms for better security' the war has been used to keep the country in a permanent state of fear, and get people to accept sacrifices and cutbacks in civil liberties.

Soon we will watch the last big liar take his fall – but us mothers won't applaud.

We know only too well that the world won't change by just one bum taking a dive. It only changes if all of us wake up our minds and start getting involved.

TO BE INSERTED LATER

Today is the day some of us arrested at the White House are going to court to argue our case.

This is going to be my defence:

My dear sweet boy died in Iraq on 4 April 2004. He was killed by an Iraqi resistance fighter but George and his lying gang of neo-con criminals could have easily have pulled the trigger themselves.

Over and over again it has been proved that those crooks lied to us about the need to invade Iraq, and they continue to lie to us about the occupation.

When I was arrested they told me I had broken the law because I was taking part in an illegal demonstration on the pavement in front of the White House. But I was there to point the finger at the murderers living and working inside it. If it wasn't for them my son would still be with me, and tens of thousands of other innocent people would still be alive.

Isn't murder a crime? When will those people be called upon to face justice for their war crimes, their crimes against humanity?

Who wants to live in a world where murderers are allowed to move around freely, raining death and destruction down on innocent people?

I know I don't.

I'll let you know how I get on.

I've decided to send a letter to Bush's mother. Here it is:

Dear Barbara,

On 4 April 2004 your eldest son killed mine – Casey Austin Sheehan.

As opposed to your eldest boy, mine was a marvellous person who joined the military to serve his country and to make the world a better place. Casey didn't want to go to Iraq, but he knew it was his duty.

Your son George went AWOL from his unit during the Vietnam war. He couldn't even bring himself to do his tour of duty with the Alabama National Guard air arm.

Casey joined the army before your son became commander-in-chief. We all know that your son was thinking about invading Iraq before September 11th. Casey was a dead man before he even joined up, before George became President.

I raised Casey and my other children to always use discussion as a way of resolving conflicts. From when they were very little, I told my kids it was *always* wrong to punch, kick, fight, pull people's hair and all the rest. If my children couldn't find the words to solve a problem without turning to violence, I always told them to turn to a member of the family or a teacher to get help in finding the right words.

Did you teach George to use words and not violence to solve problems? It doesn't look like it. Did you teach him it was *always* wrong to kill other people for oil profits? Obviously not.

Was I the only one who washed their mouths out with soap when they lied... did you do that with your George? Could you do it now?

He's lied and he's still lying. Saddam didn't have weapons of mass destruction or any links with Al Qaeda, and the Downing Street memorandums prove that your son knew all this before invading Iraq.

On 3 August 2005 your son claimed to have killed my son and other honourable and courageous Americans for a 'noble cause'. To tell you the truth Barbara, as one mother to another, this got me really mad. I don't believe that to invade and occupy another country – one that is clearly not a threat to the United States – is a 'noble cause'. I don't think invading a country, killing innocent civilians, destroying its infrastructure so your family and friends can get rich is a 'noble cause'.

That's why I went to Crawford to ask your son what 'noble cause' had made him kill my Casey. He didn't want to talk to me. It was obvious he didn't have good manners. Do you think that a President, even if he is your son, should be so inaccessible to his citizens? Especially towards one whose life has been totally devastated?

Since then I've been to the White House many times, trying to get a meeting with George, and I'm going to be going back to Crawford. Could you give him a call and tell him to do the right thing? Tell him to bring the troops home, away from this illegal and immoral war in Iraq that he started so recklessly?

I've heard you're one of the few people who still speak to him. He doesn't want to talk to his father, who knows how difficult it is to invade Iraq – that's why he didn't go in at the end of the first Gulf War. But if you don't want to tell him to bring the troops home, at least you could ask him to have a meeting with me?

I remember you being interviewed on *Good Morning America* a year before my sweet beloved little boy Casey was killed by your son's policies. This is what you said: 'Why do we have to talk about coffins and dead bodies? What I mean is – they're not relevant. So I'm asking myself: why should I worry my sweet little mind to think about things like that?'

Barbara, don't you think you owe an apology to me and all other parents in the *Gold Star Families for Peace* organisation for making such a cruel comment, of which you should be ashamed?

You know something Barbara... I didn't want to hear about coffins and dead bodies either. On 4 April 2004 three US army officers knocked on my door and told me Casey had been killed in Iraq.

I fainted, and as I was coming round I begged that cruel angel of death to take me as well. But the angel of death who took my son away was your son.

Yours faithfully, Cindy Sheehan Mother of Casey Sheehan Founder of President of Gold Star Families for Peace Founder of Camp Casey Peace Foundation