



## HOW I LOST THE WAR AGAINST WAR AND LEARNED TO LOVE ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

In 1982, at the fervent age of eighteen, hippy-skirted, long-hair everywhere, I bussed to New York City to be one of the million who rallied in Central Park during the UN Second Special Session on Disarmament. My heroes were Helen Caldicott, Mahatma Gandhi and the Bergigan Brothers, two priests who snuck into a nuclear missile silo and tried to hammer a nose cone into a plowshare. After New York I spent the summer at the Movement for a New Society Life Center, a Philadelphia commune, before returning to Canada to start university in the fall at the University of British Columbia. Throughout my UBC years I faithfully attended countless demonstrations and endured endless meetings in mildewy basements, but by the time graduation approached the non-violent direct action group I was involved with had degenerated into, of all things, poetry reading, and I was heartily sick of the in-fighting of the left. Also, I'd started to write fiction, which required me, if I wished to write it well, to abandon ideology.

How conventional I became! I blame it on the writing. The discipline it demanded eventually crowded out other interests, such as world peace and social justice. I still want world peace. I still want social justice. I just want other people to take their turn fighting for it while I write my books.

I got married. I had a baby, a son, who is now eleven years old. He's a nice

boy; many people have said so, not just his relatives. Part of the challenge of childrearing is instilling values. Since our son sprang from the womb somehow already knowing how to share his toys and side-step conflict, I felt I had little to do in that regard. Also, unlike less prepared parents who first must find out what their values actually are, I knew mine. I could say with unwavering confidence, for example, that nice people don't kill.

The war against war started the summer my son turned four, when he was desperate for a water pistol and I refused to let him have one. Water pistols are guns and allowing children to play with them was, I thought, a political act. Did I want my child bearing arms in the playground, signalling to everyone that I opposed the long-gun registry? I did not. Whenever some visiting child (likely American) actually did turn up with a water pistol, the shunning he and his accompanying adult received was always swift and unmistakable, though other children were drawn to the pistol-toter in the same way they were drawn to "Turkey in the Straw" chiming out across the park when the ice cream truck pulled up.

That summer was hot by Vancouver standards, not the kindest summer to get our roof replaced. I felt sorry for the workers levering off layers of tarry shingles under the sun, dislodging the carpenter ants. The second day of the new roof my husband took our son to run some errands, more as an excuse to get away from the noise and enjoy the free air-conditioning in the stores. When they returned, I could hear our son's jubilant cries even above the din of crowbars and hammers.

"Mama! Look! Look what we got!"

He ran to me, giddy, dragging along a package nearly as tall as him. It contained, in bright summery colours, not only a water pistol, but a water Glock, a water 12 Gauge Shotgun, a water Uzi, a water Flame Thrower. An entire Water Arsenal.

*Didn't we discuss this?* said the look I shot my husband, which he did not see because both of them were already ripping the arsenal out of the packaging and filling it with the hose. Within minutes,

all hell broke loose. They were darting around the trees, exchanging fire, exactly as if my son had been born armed and dangerous. Guns were tossed up to the sunburned roofers, who joined in, making our yard a veritable sniper's square in Sarajevo.

How strong the urge to pretend to kill things is! I knew my son didn't get this urge from television because we never watched it. We rented DVDs. (At that age his favourite shows were still harmless—*Scooby-Doo* and *Justice League*.) It seemed to me that day that the human male was born with a thumb and forefinger on both hands specifically to shoot guns or, in the absence of a gun, to be guns. (*Huh*, you say. *What about girls?* In girls these same two digits seem mostly for plucking petals off daisies.) Yet all the males I knew as a peace activist had pretty much stamped out of themselves the urge to role-play war. This was of tactical importance: they'd done it to themselves. Being judgmental and disapproving would only backfire in the war against war. As the peaceful parent, the one tsk-tsking furiously, I would merely be a petal-plucking drag. Instead, I would have to subvert my son's play life and hammer his swords into plowshares without him realizing it.

So when our next-door neighbour's grown son handed over his old toys, including about a thousand miniature plastic soldiers in various postures of mortal combat, I whisked them away while my son was distracted with the spaceship. The spaceship, in mint condition, was equipped with four missiles that launched with the push of a button. My son was already fingering the missiles, so I quickly demonstrated (before the neighbour could) how to release the four "food packages."

"When you fly over Africa, press this button and the packages will fall to the hungry people on the ground. Isn't that wonderful?"

He looked vaguely disappointed, but nonetheless went nowhere without the ship for several months. In the fall when kindergarten started he took it for his very first "Montre et Recontre." Bursting out of the class at the end of the day, he was ecstatic.

“Mama! They’re *not* food packages! They’re *bombs!*”

This, you see, is why people home school.

Six months before, the Coalition Forces had invaded Iraq. Naturally camouflage was all the rage in Gap Kids that season, not the deep G.I. Joe green of my own childhood, but a dull jigsaw of brown and tan. The wars had shifted out of the jungles and into the deserts, and children’s fashion had followed.

Of course my son wanted the whole get up.

“Do you realize there are places in the world where five-year-olds are abducted and forced to be child soldiers?” I ranted to every parent who would tolerate my outrage. “Do you actually think that would be any fun?” I didn’t say any of this to my son. I was worried he would say, “Yes!”

I permitted him to have a camouflage shirt on one condition. The condition was that we make it.

“We’re going to make camouflage?” he said. “How?”

“We’re going to tie-dye it!”

I bought the white shirt, the dyes, the string. We had a lot of fun scrunching, tying, dipping. The next morning my son marched proudly off to school in his camo t-shirt, looking for all the world like a perfect little hippy.

So how did it happen that one evening last spring I came home and found that, not only was my five-year-old eleven, he was watching *The Terminator* with his dad? The same way, I guess, that by the end of Grade One he had a real camo t-shirt, a camo backpack, camo cargo pants and camo underwear. The only thing he wore unsmirched by the dust of illegally invaded deserts were his socks. I capitulated on camouflage when I learned to see it from his point of view. While *I* was opposed to children dressing up as soldiers because *I knew* real child soldiers existed in our wretched world and that, post-Guantanamo Bay, being an adult soldier would probably not lead to glory, *my son didn’t*. To him, a soldier fought back the alien invaders on *Justice League*. Also, he had the coolest guns. He had the coolest guns precisely because

he was a hero. Was I opposed to heroes?

I was not.

So, yes, killing people is wrong: I will not budge on that. But *pretending* to kill people? Isn’t that another thing entirely? Have I not popped off fictional characters myself, given them cancer, heart attacks, placed them in cars I knew perfectly well would crash? We may *be* because we think, but are we necessarily *what* we think? Actually, I think we’re more complicated than that.

*The Terminator* opens in 2027, in the aftermath of the nuclear war I once fought so hard to prevent. A race of machines is battling with the last human survivors who scramble around in what looks chillingly like a combination wrecking yard and killing field. (Exactly how I feared we would turn out.) This in our living room where we’d recently enjoyed all 138 episodes of *Get Smart*.

I asked, “What are you watching?”

My son was on the couch wearing what was his preferred get up now: t-shirt that reached almost to his knees, a line across it at waist-level below the caption *You Must Be This Short to Fight Me*; skull-patched jeans; toque. (The toque is as necessary to the eleven-year-old as the diaper is to the eleven-month-old.) He answered without taking his riveted eyes off the screen. “It’s just a movie, Mom.”

In *The Terminator* the human race eventually triumphs because there is a hero to lead them to victory. So the evil machines deploy an anti-hero, a cyborg assassin, and send him back in time to 1984 to terminate the hero’s mother before he is conceived and born. He comes into our world curled fetal and buck-naked, then wastes no time bare-handedly dispensing with a few punks to steal their clothes. He literally reaches inside one and rips out his heart. But what he really needs are guns, lots and lots of guns. Next stop, the Econo Gun Mart.

I knew then it was pointless. If Arnold Schwarzenegger with his AMT Hardballer, his .45 Longslide and IMI Uzi and Colt Trooper and Ithica 37, not to mention his brioche-like muscles, was on their side...Wait a minute! He wasn’t the hero. The cute blonde guy was!

Whatever. I had already lost the war.

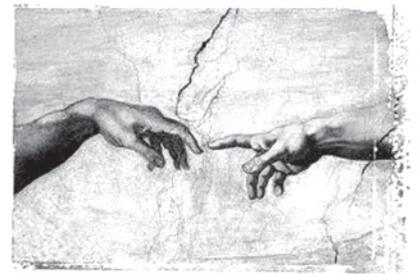
Or maybe I could mount a non-violent protest, stomp to the kitchen and slam pots, or put on Bach full blast.

Or maybe I could sit down and watch.

I went to the kitchen. My husband called, “Where are you going?”

To make popcorn, I told them. “But don’t worry,” I said. “I’ll be back.”

—Caroline Adderson



## HAVE A LITTLE FAITH

On the late January morning I went to meet Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the former Archbishop of Quebec and Primate of Canada, and, since last fall, the Prefect for the Congregation of Bishops at the Vatican, I first paid a visit to the Vatican Museum. The two frescoes I found myself returning to over and over are well known but difficult to contemplate because they are high up on the palace’s ceiling. In one, by Raphael, Christ is on the cross deep in the background behind a broken Greek sculpture that seems ready to tumble over the edge of the painting, set on a sweeping and otherwise empty courtyard. The small painting is in counterpoint to Raphael’s great “School of Athens” fresco, in which Plato and Aristotle, amidst a host of other ancient philosophers, stroll through a palace, framed by an arch and an egg-shell blue, cloud-scudded sky. Plato points to the heavens; younger Aristotle gestures forward, a guide into the future. “School of Athens” is about the absorption of Greek thought into Christianity; the ceiling painting is about the triumph of Christianity over ancient pagan beliefs.

The other fresco that captivated me was Michaelangelo’s “Creation of Adam,” in which a bearded God appears to be