

## Questions for Eric Fair, author of *CONSEQUENCE*

*Q.) What drove you to tell your story?*

A.) I studied history at Boston University and I learned how important primary sources are to understanding the past. After returning from my second deployment to Iraq in 2005, I recognized that I had become a primary source. As the country continued to either look away or be misled about the story of Abu Ghraib and the true nature of interrogation, I was faced with a clear obligation to provide a record of my experiences. I remain a reluctant witness, but the desire to hide, strong as it is, is not as important as telling this story.

*Q.) How do you think your experience as an interrogator has changed you or shaped your opinion of our foreign policy?*

A.) I am certainly more careful about supporting any armed intervention overseas, but not just because I saw firsthand our weaknesses in such a venture. As an interrogator, I spent numerous hours with men who had supported Saddam Hussein and his brutal regime. And while some of these men were cruel beyond measure, their fervor was fueled not by fanaticism, but by a pragmatic desire to keep their jobs and provide for their families. Dictators like Saddam Hussein are forced to suppress significant portions of their own populations, but those same dictators provide stability and security for those who support them. Those populations are loath to surrender that privilege, making it nearly impossible to remove a dictator without imposing extraordinary violence and suffering on that segment of the population.

*Q.) Before you wrote the book, you wrote some editorial pieces for newspapers. What was the response to those, and how did that make you feel?*

A.) The response was overwhelmingly supportive. Americans, by their nature, are receptive to honest stories that encourage the nation to face mistakes in an effort to advance society. But I cannot deny that I was caught off guard by the level of vitriol that my writing also exposed. I was accused of being a war criminal, encouraged to commit suicide, and had my life threatened in often quite creative ways. Some of these responses left me feeling both ashamed and frightened. And it demonstrated how easily someone can be silenced by just a few intimidating voices.

*Q.) What is the main takeaway you want people to have from reading your book?*

A.) I want them to get a sense for just how complicated a place like Abu Ghraib can be. I want them to know that even now, I remain uncertain about the role I played in torture. I want them to know how tempting it can be to follow that path, and how difficult it can be to abandon it once you've started. I want them to know that paths that lead to places like detention facilities in Fallujah, don't always have a way back.

*Q.) Do you consider CONSEQUENCE to be an anti-war book?*

A.) Kurt Vonnegut said that he would no sooner write an anti-war book than an anti-glacier book. Neither can be stopped. (Though global warming may force us to alter Vonnegut's analogy a bit.) There is a sense of purpose and camaraderie in war that cannot be replicated. It's why so many individuals, myself included, find ways to return to it. There is, however, an enormous price to pay for sampling the brief clarity of purpose that war provides. That price is paid, in large part, by the people at whom we point our weapons. CONSEQUENCE is written to expose those debts that are not easily (if ever) repaid.

*Q.) Are you working on another writing project now?*

A.) I am a dozen years removed from Abu Ghraib, yet it continues to infect every thought. As I continue to process how those experiences affect the kind of person I am, the kind of husband I am, and the kind of father I am, I will continue to write. I'd like my next project to be a work of fiction in order to step behind the curtain a bit.

*Q.) What is the role of religion in your life? How have your life experiences overseas changed this?*

A.) My Christian faith still serves as the foundation for how I interact with the world around me. Iraq exposed just how weak and compromised that foundation could be. I will never again approach the issue of faith from a position of confidence, presuming to know how that faith will affect my actions or influence my personality. Instead, I approach Christianity with a deep sense of humility, recognizing that my overseas experiences have exposed my weaknesses not as an isolated mistake, but as a marker of my true identity.

*Q.) Does being a heart transplant recipient have deeper meaning for you, beyond just a medical issue?*

A.) Like most transplant patients, I struggle with this question. The burden of living two lives at once feels unjust. I am not responsible for my donor's death. I am also not capable of fulfilling their unfulfilled promise, or carrying on their legacy.

I cannot deny, however, that I am alive today because of the death (likely tragic) of another human being. And I cannot deny that I find myself thinking about that life and the path it was following.

I am grateful, guilty, honored, and burdened in ways that I cannot express.

*Q.) If you could turn back the clock, would you? If so, what would you do differently?*

A.) Of course I would. I would change everything.

But in truth, the opportunities to make those changes were already presented to me. I made those choices because of the person I am. I move forward not hoping to change, but hoping I never forget the person that was exposed in Iraq. I am a torturer. I have no right to change that.