

October 5th, 1862. Today we exhumed and photographed the bodies that lay in that sunken road betwixt the farms Piper and Roulette. The troops remaining no longer see it as a nameless road, however. They call it “Bloody Lane.”

Every year my mother picks a room of the house to attack under the guise of “spring cleaning.” Some kids get to go to Disneyland on their spring break. I get to come home and work in the attic.

After a few hours of work, the attic is nearly cleared out, save one corner. I go straight for a box that looks like it’s been patched over three or four times with various kinds of tape. Riiiiip. I open it. Huh. A bunch of old letters? I pick up a letter and a photo drops out. It’s a picture of the dead. I look at the date on the letter. October 5th, 1862.

“Today we exhumed the bodies of... Bloody Lane.” Bloody lane. I read about that. Battle of Antietam. A real turning point for the union. 5500 casualties. Nowadays, that isn’t such a big deal. “300,000 soldiers killed during WWII.” “17,000 hurt or dead in Iraq.” But really, no one pays attention to numbers now, unless you’re some yuppy war protester looking to put someone’s pain up on a signboard. But Antietam wasn’t expressed through numbers. Instead, there were images. Images which were suppressed for a year.

The government no longer hides “images of war”; instead they flood our minds with pictures, numbing our senses. I saw the towers fall every day for a month, I saw terrified men in suits jump out of windows again and again on replay, I saw tanks rumble into Baghdad and murder innocent kids! I saw—and then I turned off the TV. I was sick of watching. All of us were.

“Alexander Gardner believed in capturing the beauty of history, and only put one photograph in each letter he wrote.” I see the aftermath of Antietam enclosed in this solitary photograph taken October 5th, 1862, I see it and I am suddenly there in their illuminated world...

October 5th, 1862. Suddenly spring cleaning doesn’t seem so bad.