



**In the PINES**  
By T. Lee Brown

**On the corner of Cascade & Larch**

Virus or no virus, a slow river of traffic wends its way through our small town every Saturday. Flanked by Wild West storefronts, drivers have something new to look at this year: Sisters residents demonstrating for justice and equality.

Near the iconic bronze statue of a rearing horse, people line Cascade Avenue/Highway 20 on both sides. One day I joined a group of teenagers, retirees, children, and all ages in between. Most of them appeared white. Masks were worn; social distancing was kept loosely.

The signs were all home-made. "Rural and Anti-Racist," read one. "Racism is not patriotism," and "Time to heal our white privilege," others proclaimed. One protester got specific: "White Accountability = Reparations."

American flags waved overhead and in the hands of children. A woman handed out fans with the letters "BLM" carefully glued on in what looked like African cloth. I could hardly believe that a few weeks ago, the letters BLM signified the Bureau of Land Management around these parts.

It was a big day for tourists. Some appeared flummoxed by this display of

solidarity in a majority white town. Many broke out in grins, hastily rolled down their windows and hollered out support.

Others shook their heads in disgust. A number of white fists gave the thumbs-down. A few drivers burned rubber and drove erratically as they sped off. I wasn't there last Saturday, but protesters tell me that one guy drove by seven times, rollin' coal in an attempt to scare them off — or at least damage their lungs.

One day when I attended, many drivers stared straight ahead, faces set in stony expressions. They appeared to be of various ages and ethnicities. They drove sporty SUVs hauling kayaks, trucks pulling livestock trailers. Little cars, big cars, semis, Harleys.

When a car emblazoned with the Deschutes County Sheriff's Office logo crawled through, a person of color pushed his way to the front. The deputy inside, a white man, waved in a friendly manner.

The protester was Luke R., age 28, who identifies as BIPOC. (He is of African, Brazilian, Portuguese and Native descent.) Luke said he was affiliated with Central Oregon Peacekeepers, "a loosely built group of activists including people of color, veterans, members of clergy and punk rockers."

It was his first day checking out the ongoing protests in Sisters. He appreciated the "really good turnout." Sisters Indivisible, a progressive organization, counted 85 protesters.

Originally from Arizona, Luke has lived in Bend for 12 years.

"I grew up where half the billboards were in English, half in Spanish," he said.

Yet he attended a private school where he was one of only three students of color. He experiences more racism



PHOTO BY TL BROWN

Here, and across America, small-town residents make their voices heard.

here in Central Oregon than he did there.

A U.S. Forest Service truck drove by. Its white driver looked straight ahead, stone-faced. Shortly afterward came a USFS law enforcement pickup, whose occupant offered a neighborly wave. In an older pickup truck with Tennessee license plates, an elderly white woman sat straight upright, wearing a country-style plaid shirt. She nodded, gave a modest smile, and waved.

A Black woman popped her head out of a van window. She and her companion, a white woman, yelled that the protesters were going to hell. "Repent, sinners!" read their cardboard sign.

"At the end of the day, this country was built on allowing everyone to have a voice and to feel comfortable voicing that," Luke R. told me.

A young Black man drove a low-slung, sporty red car through a slowdown, staring the stone stare.

"God bless America!" shouted a white man from his vehicle. "I agree!" responded a demonstrator. OK, maybe that was me.

Two white Sisters High School students held up signs. Sage R., age 15, said she was sending a message that "Black lives are just as important as anyone else's."

Sixteen-year-old Rachel L. said, "Black people are oppressed." Race and white privilege were discussed at Sisters High School while reading "To Kill a Mockingbird" in literature class. The subject was also brought up in the advanced placement U.S. History class she and Sage attended.

"I feel like we're lucky," Rachel said.

A white man in a black

F-450 made his way through the bottleneck to the open road, where he could speed off without interacting with anyone. Then he yelled angrily back at the crowd, dropping N-bombs all the way.

"Did he say...??" one protester asked another.

"Yes he did," she answered, "with a hard r."

Another big black truck pulled through the intersection at Cascade and Larch, hauling a trailer of ATVs. This time the driver, also white, flashed a smile and gave a thumbs-up.

Then a shiny SUV pulled out from its parking space at Suttle Tea and joined the highway traffic. A young girl with dark skin and black hair looked out the window at the people and their signs. Her eyes widened and her jaw dropped in surprise. Then she smiled a big, delighted smile.

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