

Recently I read a collection of works from literature, philosophy and religion that provoke thought about civic engagement and community involvement. Many of the pieces I had read before without putting them into the context of volunteerism or activism; this time I examined my place in my community and the barriers to others being involved in theirs. It was through reading about others' civic engagement that I started to understand my own.

I'm a "doer." To say that I'm passionate about issues I believe in is an overreaching understatement. I'm also a flitter, meaning I flit and flutter between my passions, sometimes leaving some behind for other people to attend to while making my way to the next thing. I've never been able to make a long-term commitment to any one cause—I am, as author Seymour Krim wrote, one of those people who have "never really nailed it down, who have charged through life from enthusiasm to enthusiasm, from new project to new project, even from personality-revolution to personality-revolution." Yes, flitting has always been my thing.

Although I'm sure that everyone has a role to play, I now have a deeper understanding of how easy it is to *not* be engaged—I understand that sometimes even very good people feel apathetic. It's far easier to assess blame than to look at ourselves and our role—or lack of role—in society. Although it's idealistic and often unrealistic, I've always felt a deep responsibility toward others and my community and I want to try to leave the world a better place than I found it.

# The Importance of Engagement



living out loud

BY KATHRYN MARTINI

The work of social change will not be done by the government or a revolution, and it won't be the sole responsibility of hardcore activists—it will be done by the rest of us, the ones right in the middle.

This sentiment, however, doesn't mean I don't carry some amount of resistance to doing the right thing. I have purposely not answered my phone, knowing it is some organization or another asking me to volunteer or donate money; I've attended functions out of obligation, not with a happy heart; and I've found myself holding on to my money for selfish reasons instead of giving it to a better cause. It's this I have been inspired to change within others and myself.

Not being engaged is often a symptom of privilege. We live in a world that encourages us to think about our own situations rather than the needs of others. It's easy to turn our backs on (and our hearts from) a seemingly unpleas-

ant situation that maybe we'd rather not know about. Not being engaged is also a symptom of oppression. Those who are unable to have their basic needs met are going to think much less about volunteering their time or being involved in an outside cause.

Social reformers have debated for decades about how exactly to represent the under and unrepresented, and who is responsible for change. I'm certainly not in any position to figure that out, but I do know that we each have not only the opportunity but the responsibility to look outside of ourselves and do something, anything, to make a difference. The work of social change will not be done by the government or a revolution, and it won't be the sole responsibility of hardcore activists—it will be done by the rest of us, the ones right in the middle.

Within our own community, there are many organizations that need help. It's impossible to try to do something for all of them, but that fact can't be the excuse to do nothing. Basic Rights Oregon is ramping up for a big campaign toward marriage equality and people

throughout our state are needed to give their time, talent and treasure for this cause. Of course, BRO has its heavy hitters to drive the effort forward, but it's up to all of us to lend a hand. Even if we've never volunteered for anything before, each member of the community can engage individual citizens of our state to join together for equality.

Activist and *Blue Oregon* contributor Carla Axtman recently told me, "When I am doing outreach to those who don't tend to be engaged the way I am, I try to make it personal to them. I talk about the way it potentially impacts them in their daily life. People become open to engagement when they can see how it affects them."

Reaching people who have never considered what it means to be civically involved is probably the most important work we can do as community members. They have much more to offer than even they realize and it's up to those of us who know how critical our work is to try to engage them—and hopefully the behavior will become contagious.

I know I will get distracted and never be a great leader of a social revolution, but I do hope to play a part in creating some kind of positive change, as everyone should. We need flitters and hardcore activists, but what we really need is everyone in between—each person making a difference a little at a time. ☐

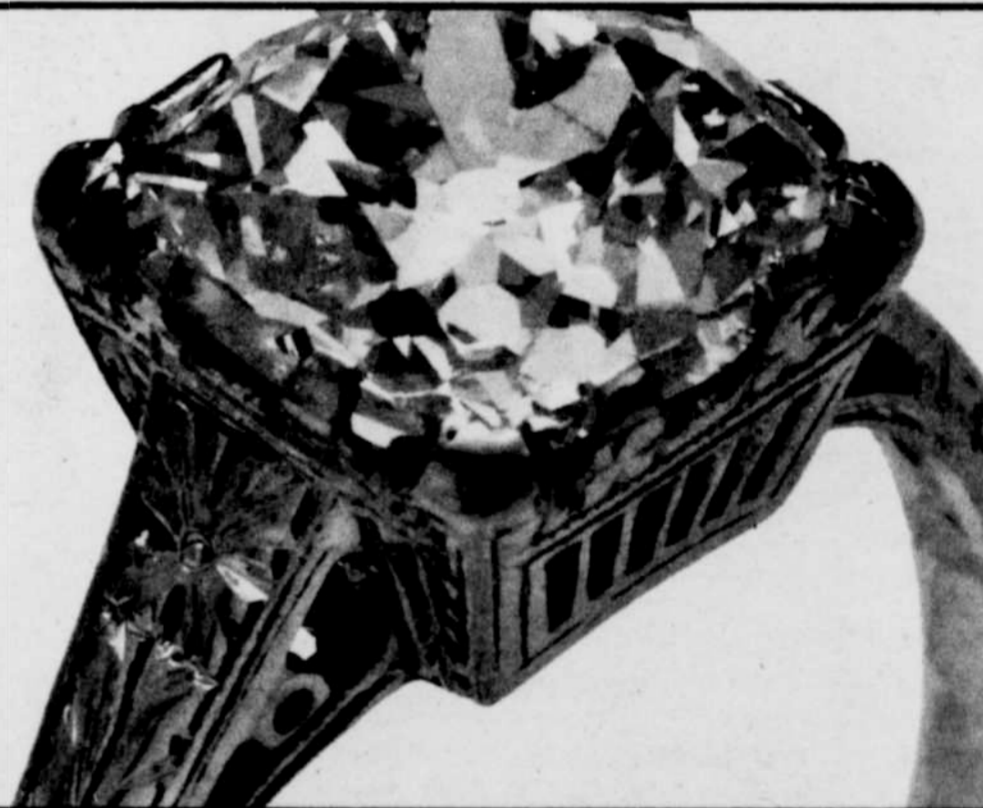
KATHRYN MARTINI is a freelance writer, mother, wife, student and wannabe revolutionary. Reach her through [kathrynmartini.com](http://kathrynmartini.com).

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