



PHOTOS BY ADAM BACHER

Finding the light in the darkness

Street Roots Family Breakfast Keynote Address

Marissa Madrigal, former Multnomah County chair, gave this speech Thursday, Oct. 8, at Street Roots' Annual Family Breakfast.

I'm going to start with a confession. Lately, I've been feeling a little lost, a little melancholy and unsure of myself in the face of all these profoundly sad events and conditions in our community, state and country. I should feel great. My job is amazing. My family is healthy. I have a million and one things to be grateful for. Ten years ago, it was my family that was hanging on to our apartment by our fingernails, but now, we're good. Better than good. Probably the best we've ever been. Yet, I feel this sickening unease, like I'm watching a train wreck play out in slow motion on the pages of our newspapers and TV screens. And nothing I do or say or think feels like enough.

Those of you who know me well know I am fundamentally a hopeful, optimistic person — maybe to a fault. But recently, when I've searched for that thread of hope to sustain me, it's been tough. Some days it feels like there are so many terrible things happening in our world. And some beautiful things, to be sure, but lately the sadness has overwhelmed. I hate that Roseburg, which used to be the name of a town that only Oregonians traveling I-5 knew, has become national shorthand for a nightmare.

A mass shooting occurs almost every day in our country. Families and individuals are choosing between obscene rent hikes and basic necessities like food and health care. The GOP front-runner wants to round up families like mine and send us back to Mexico. Black people and brown people

across our country are being gunned down in the streets by the same people who are supposed to protect them. The god-awful headlines are endless, and the complete lack of regard for each other, the disdain for simple kindness and respect, is, frankly, surreal.

And it's not just the big headlines; it's the little ones. It's the venom spewed on the Internet from real people who are empowered by anonymity to be complete jerks. It's the rush to judgment by everyone about everything. It's the person so convinced that the public right of way in

front of their house is theirs alone, that they put cones in front of their house so that people can't park their car there. Even though they have a driveway — like — a long one. And a garage.

It's practically impossible to read the news and not decide that as humans, we suck. Like we are all just terrible, terrible people. They're terrible because they're jerks. I'm terrible because in the face of this overwhelming ugliness, I just want to give up.

So, last week I was on a long, four-hour train ride, by myself. And these were the

kind of light, sparkly thoughts I was having. I was in a dark place, worried about the world and feeling sorry for myself at the same time when I found unexpected light in the form of a Street Roots story by Llewellyn Gannon about Sherrie Jeweline Navarro Heit. Sherrie was a mother of a 5-year-old — as am I — who developed ALS and chose to end her life.

Confession bonus: I couldn't click the story right away when I saw it online. I was coming home from Seattle, amusing myself by liking all of Michael Buonocore's man bun posts, but I was feeling pretty raw from being away from my kids for a few days. I went by the post without clicking a few times because I knew — it would make me cry. And there are few things more embarrassing than being that weird lady crying in an enclosed space with only windows for emergency exits.

So I turned to the Huffington Post and turned up my music, then started to get mad at myself. Read the story, dammit. Read it, I argued with me. I just can't do it. I'm too tired. I'm too sad already. The Internet is filled with pictures of Donald Trump's terrible hairstyle. Isn't that torture enough?

And then, I don't even know how I made the decision, I just found myself on Facebook again and clicked on the story before I could talk myself out of it. And the first thing I see is a beautiful photo of a woman kissing her son, who could be my son, or your son, next to a table with half-eaten birthday cake. Her final birthday cake. And I lost it.



PHOTO BY ADAM BACHER

At top, Marissa Madrigal, Multnomah County's Chief Operating Officer, delivers the keynote address at the fourth annual Street Roots Family Breakfast, Oct. 8, at the Sentinel Hotel. Above, City Commissioner Nick Fish talks with event goers at the breakfast.

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