

Keep Going

by Don Hynes

The color of the morning says keep going, don't let the burden of memory and the unforgiven take you down. Sunrise cuts the rusted iron of fallen leaves, the grass below still green and wet with autumn rain.

VENDOR PROFILE

Bri Bryant

BY DIANA RICHARDSON
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Brianna "Bri" Bryant has a lot to smile about. She loves being Mama to her 21-month-old daughter, Luna. She loves selling Street Roots and credits her work for a transformed personality: from quiet to outgoing, genuinely enjoying chatting with her customers.

"I love listening to people's stories," she said with enthusiasm.

Bri, a Portland native, said she's lived in every part of the city. When she was young, her family moved around a lot. She said she was enrolled in five different middle schools and quit school in seventh grade.

"But I went back in the eighth grade," she said, "because my cousin was in the same school, and we always hung out together."

Bri went to one high school and graduated early, at the end of her junior year. She planned to study to become a nurse practitioner

and enrolled in a junior college.

When that didn't work out, she chose a trade school and was promised an internship at the completion of her formal studies. But the job placement never materialized.

Disappointed, and burdened with student debt, Bri tried working at whatever was available - first at the deli counter at Walmart, then at the gas pumps for Fred Meyer. She didn't view either of these jobs as a career path; they were just to "get some money together."

At 19, Bri discovered her natural love of exploring beyond her neighborhood and went off to live in Mexico with her husband and his family. Eventually she grew disillusioned by the role she was expected to fill as a wife in a culture so different from the one she knew.

She recalled some enjoyable moments in Mexico when a friend who taught English to Spanish-speakers invited her to class one day to assist her in some role-playing with her students.

"They didn't know I could speak Spanish, so they tried very hard to speak to me in English, asking me lots of questions, such as 'Are you going to have children?'" She laughingly told them, "Yes! There's one inside me right now!"

Back in Portland, Bri gave birth to Luna. Around this time, she was reunited with a friend, her current partner, whom she has

known since they were 8 years old. Bri and her partner sell Street Roots as a team. Now, they're looking at the locations that are not reserved by other vendors to see where they'll find their special spot. It takes time, Bri said, to learn whether a place has the potential to be what they're looking for: nice customers and a clientele large enough to support two vendors.

When Bri thinks about the future, she envisions a home of her own where she can find peace and quiet and to raise her daughter. She recognizes that her interest in others is an asset that could open doors to various vocations.

She loves to read and likes to write. Bri reads to her daughter. She takes Luna "everywhere" with her when she is free on weekends.

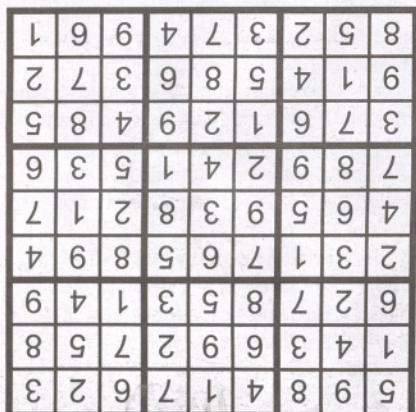
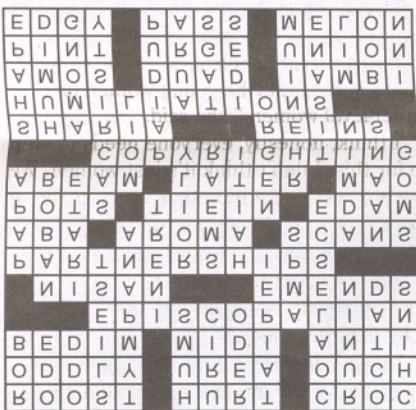
"My daughter and I are so much alike. We love to go out and explore."

Bri said some of her choices were not always the best, but "I've learned to be accountable for myself and to act on that responsibility the moment I notice I'm going off course - to correct it right then."

Becoming a mother changed everything, she said.

"My child is the center of my universe. I can't go floating around. It's very grounding to have her be my center. I love to feel grounded."

Answers to puzzles on page 15



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