

NOT AFRAID, from page 11

December at Pioneer Courthouse Square and the Lloyd Center demonstrating their stand against Islamophobia as a way of observing Hanukkah. Participants held nine signs, which together formed the shape of a menorah, each sign spelling out an injustice that needed to be rectified. One of the statements called for a refusal to be silent about anti-Muslim and racist hate speech; another condemned state surveillance of the Muslim community.

JVP's website offers posters saying "Refugees are welcome here" that can be downloaded. T-shirts and other materials are available for sale. JVP volunteers have walked printed posters around to businesses in the city with a request to put them in their shop windows. The posters said: "Stop Profiling Muslims"

Long before the invasion of Iraq, the Middle East was carved up by Western powers. Rosch is not the only one who has noticed that the U.S. systematically overthrows or assists in the demise of existing governments, nearly always leading to chaos. The current result is that we have the biggest refugee crisis since World War II. And we have ISIS. Rosch believes that all this is consistent with our history. "Our country was founded on genocide, then built upon slavery, and there's never been a public apology to either of these groups," he observed bleakly.

Despite a number of misguided federal attempts at concocting terrorist cases, Oregon has experienced less anti-Islamic activity than many other places in the nation. But we haven't been immune. For instance, during the election fever of 2008, The Oregonian delivered it to our doorstep. A free DVD titled "Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West" was tucked into the Sunday paper on Sept. 28, 2008 as "advertising." It was paid for by the shadowy Clarion Fund, founded by the Canadian-Israeli Raphael Shore. The film uses extensive Arab television footage of Islamic radicals threatening and inciting violence toward the West. It also includes scenes during the build-up of fascism in Nazi Germany. Twenty-eight

million of these DVDs were distributed by some 70 newspapers around the country, including The New York Times, although a few principled publishers refused.

Portland Mayor Tom Potter reviewed the DVD and asked The Oregonian's publisher, the late Fred Stickel, not to distribute it. According to a spokesperson in City Hall, "The mayor felt that the tenor of the video contributes towards a climate of distrust towards Muslims that holds the entire Muslim community accountable for the actions of a dangerously misguided few. Distributing [it] with The Oregonian lends the video an impression of objectivity and legitimacy it does not deserve."

Stickel replied that the newspaper had an obligation to accept the DVD as an advertisement on the principle of free speech. A group of more than 30 religious and community leaders also asked Stickel not to distribute it, to no avail. As a last resort, the city's diversity officer organized a protest in front of the newspaper's office, but the damage was already done.

During 2012, messages to "Defeat Jihad," aimed mainly against Palestinians, were posted on Portland buses despite TriMet's objections. Four years earlier, the Multnomah County Circuit Court had ruled that TriMet vehicles should be treated as public spaces and therefore subject to First Amendment protections. The ads remained for a month. They were funded by the American Freedom Defense Initiative, whose president, the hate-blogger Pamela Geller, has launched legal campaigns to force public buses all over the country to run the anti-Islamic messages. Although Geller continues to run ads in U.S. transit systems, she is beginning to get vigorous pushback from social justice groups. In the U.K., the Home Secretary banned her from entering the country because of her inflammatory statements and behavior.

No mosques have been bombed in Portland, as they have in several other places. But on Nov. 15, less than two days after the 2015 Paris attacks, a small crowd of protesters with loudspeakers demonstrated at the Rizwan Mosque in Southwest Portland. They shouted insults and obscenities at the faithful as they arrived for afternoon prayer. The ruckus drew the attention of neighbors and a woman who stopped her car, and

together they confronted the protesters. The evening news played a cell phone video in which a woman's voice could be heard above the din saying, "I feel sorry for you. I'm sure these people will pray for you. ... You should be ashamed of yourself."

Then on Feb. 10, Abdul Jamil Kamawal, a prominent and well-liked member of the Muslim community, was murdered in Metzger. The alleged killer, Michael Troxell, had been hired by Kamawal's family to do some maintenance work outside a home on their property. The Washington County Sheriff's Office decided not to investigate the murder as a hate crime. Public Information Officer Bob Ray stated that there was "nothing to indicate that it's a hate crime," and that "everything has been investigated thoroughly." However, a Feb. 18 article in The Oregonian reported that Kamawal was found outside the home without his shoes, a sign that he may have been praying at the time of his death, adding weight to the hate-crime theory.

In Portland, negative events have been somewhat counteracted by sympathy and outreach. On Dec. 16, the Portland City Council voted unanimously in favor of a resolution whose purpose was to "declare support for the City's Muslim community and reaffirm Portland's welcoming nature for all immigrants and refugees." The resolution called the recent demands seeking a ban on Muslim immigrants "unconscionable" and a violation of both the U.S. and Oregon constitutions, as well as "tragically reminiscent of prior historic profiling of race and religion." The resolution declares the Muslim population living in the Portland Metro area to be an important part of our growing multicultural identity. It calls for an end to the use of anti-Muslim and anti-immigration hate speech and resolves that Portland will continue to welcome many Muslims fleeing their violent and unsafe countries.

We need to learn more about each other's cultures and religions. There are several active interfaith groups in Portland besides EMO. Wadji Said mentioned a club for Christians, Jews and Muslims called Cousins; and Jan Elfers described a group called

Between Women, where Christian, Muslim and Jewish women meet on a regular basis to talk about religion. Common interests in their kids and lives have led to lasting friendships. When Elfers hears someone making negative comments about Muslims, she often asks, "How many Muslims do you have as friends?" Or, "How much do you know about Islam?"

One way to get to know our Muslim neighbors would be to visit a mosque or Islamic center. There are at least 11 in the Portland metro area. Better yet, visit the recently opened center of the Muslim Educational Trust in Tigard. The MET is a community center and school dedicated to education, cooperation and networking through a variety of programs to benefit both Muslims and non-Muslims. The building houses a gym, swimming pool, Islamic museum, art studio and library, as well as classrooms.

The center hosts a potluck supper on the second Saturday of the month and serves brunches featuring Middle Eastern food every Sunday. The public is invited. The MET's website, www.metpdx.org announces current events of interest.

We can all go a little beyond our comfort zone and reach out to those who seem different from ourselves. Have coffee, visit a mosque, go to a brunch or pot-luck, take a course, or page through a copy of the Quran. Find out what Islam is all about – and what it is not about. We can even appreciate differences in appearance. In our midst are Jews wearing yarmulkes, priests and monks in long robes, ministers in clerical collars, and all kinds of people wearing crosses, so we should be able to appreciate women in headscarves. It is their right to wear them.


Nadia Najim asserted that right during the City Club forum when one of the audience members came up with what he thought would be a helpful solution. He noted that France has barred women from wearing the hijab and perhaps our country could do the same. That way, the differences wouldn't be so obvious. Nadia was quick to point out that this was an Islamophobic suggestion. Next question.

Alice Hardesty is the author of "An Uncommon Cancer Journey: The Cosmic Kick That Changed Our Lives."



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