

# Three sanctuaries

BY DUSTIN DANDLIKER  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

When I was 9, the library was just a one-story wooden building up the road between school and a corn field, but it felt like another country. It was a citadel, and I was its ward. For just a little while every afternoon, I was granted amnesty from the beatings and captivity that waited at home. Heroes in capes flew out of comic books or blasted off in sci-fi spaceships and took me away from mom's abuse.



## A crooked path forward

By Dustin Dandliker

This series is a first-hand account of the struggles and successes of overcoming trauma, mental illness, addiction, homelessness and more.

The library is a mighty cathedral of human concepts and enterprises. I go through its doors and join the reverent hush of other patrons. I mingle my timid thoughts with those of geniuses and giants: Willa Cather, Rumi, Zora Neale Hurston, Malcolm X, Albert Einstein and so many more. They are my deacons, my priestesses, my imams and mentors. They break my heart and lift my eyes. They whisper and shout from each page. I tithe in tears, laughter and sighs.

When caped heroes and spaceships just weren't strong enough or fast enough, my dad's church bought a plane ticket and flew me here to Portland. I loved and hated Sunday mornings. The people were kind but the sermons too long.



ILLUSTRATION BY KAT DAVIS

The church loved and educated me just the same. They conducted my wedding and counseled me through divorce. They hosted funerals for my grandma and my mom. They paid for my drug treatment and, when I graduated college, the pastor hooded me at the ceremony. The church isn't a sanctuary in the physical sense. It's made out of memories and relationships and acts of love. The church is everywhere; it is everyone; it is me.

My third sanctuary is the movie theater. When I was 12, I came home at the end of the first week of seventh grade and my stepmom was alone in the kitchen. She was packing the last few things she was going to take – along with my step-siblings – out of my life. I don't remember what she said but

I do remember hot tears in my eyes and hot anger in my chest. I remember punching the wall under the stairs. I remember how it hurt and how I wanted it to hurt.

After that, Dad and I just had each other. So, we went to the movies. For just a buck fifty, we travelled the world; far away from our empty apartment. We fought robots and demons. We heard familiar words in foreign languages. Sometimes, after a particularly good movie, we would watch the credits and point out funny or unique names. We did it all together. It's been that way ever since.

The movie theater has vaulted ceilings and neon iconography. People line up for the sacraments of popcorn and soda. When the lights go out and the movie starts, we are all one witness to the greatest stories

ever told. When we talk to a stranger at the bus stop or a friend over coffee, we say things like, "Did you see ...?" and "What did you think of that scene where ...?" We quote funny lines and relive car chases. We sing the soundtrack and cry over loves lost and found – and lost again.

Today, I have the honor of sitting on the renovation committee at a small library in Tigard. Each time I suggest a book for the collection, remove an old one from the shelves or catalog a new one, I think of how far I've come from that Illinois one-story and all the authors that carried me here. When I speak at church about the frustrations and joys of my spiritual experience, I'm really saying, "I love you. Thank you for saving my life." And I have the good fortune of working in a theater. So, when I sweep up popcorn after a movie, sometimes I watch the credits for names to share with Dad.

A sanctuary is a place of refuge. It is a safe place. It's where you go to pray, heal or find out who you really are. It's where you go when you have nowhere else. I have three. They are real oases in a mirage world.

I urge you to think of your safe place(s), your sanctuaries. Go there again and find a way to say thank you. Perhaps, grab a broom while you're there.

*Dustin Dandliker moved to Portland at age 10 to escape an abusive home. By age 14, he developed major depression and PTSD that went undiagnosed for years. He sought escape through drugs and alcohol, eventually ending up in and out of jail and homelessness. He also managed to get his GED, graduate college and work in mental health for eight years.*

BEANS  
NOT  
BOMBS

LAUGHINGPLANET.COM

22 SW  
3rd Ave.

DOUGHNUT  
WORD JUMBLE

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Which doughnut is named after  
Elvis Presley's entourage?

Print answer here

THE [ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ][ ]  
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