

PRIDE,

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and need of such festivals, but there is one metaphor I find especially illuminating.

In the book titled *A Quick & Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns*, by Archie Bongiovanni and Tristan Jimerson, the author and artist equate the everyday experience of LGBTQ+ people to carrying a backpack that gets heavier throughout each day. Every attack, slight and omission (targeted at them or others in their community) is another brick tossed into the bag. The weight is crushing by day's end.

Having a space to put that bag down without fear of judgment is grace and mercy of the highest order. Pride festivals are one of those places.

The only proof I'll ever need is a teenager I've mentored for several years who came up to me on Saturday and said, "I'm smiling so much. I'm so happy."

They are not predisposed to expressing joy so openly, even to me.

2. Confronting Hate

It's impossible to address what came next without acknowledging my role as advisor to the McNary High School Gender-Sexuality/Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) and the important lessons I've discovered since taking it on: 1) I check every box for cis-hetero-white-male privilege, but my journey would have been much less burdensome without judgments imposed by others. 2) Allies can become accomplices and marginalized people need both of them.

Approximately three hours in, two uninvited guests showed up at the party. The first was an ice cream truck whose operator felt it necessary to "bless" those who were buying his treats. By "bless," I mean "exorcise."

Not long after that, a group of several men and a teenage boy showed up waving banners and spouting Scripture to condemn LGBTQ+ community members, their supporters and the attendees of the fair in general. After being dissuaded from standing at the edge of the gathering and filming participants, the demonstrators moved to the far side of the parking lot and front of the Keizer Cultural Center.

These individuals wanted to load bricks

into bags of those trying to unburden themselves for a few hours.

There were volunteers assigned to security on-hand during the festival, but there was soon a call for more assistance. Two of my young charges joined the swell of people headed to the parking lot and I trailed not far behind. This is the type of moment when allies become accomplices. Being an accomplice feels new in every circumstance, but I wonder every single time if I'm doing it right.

When the call went out for more people, it was not made clear whether the intent was to get the protesters to move on or merely prevent them from approaching the main site of the festival. In the absence of more specific orders, a counter-protest formed and the unspoken mission became to oust the protesters from the area entirely.

By the time we arrived, the scene was already mildly chaotic. The anti-Pride demonstrators stood near their van with signs condemning LGBTQ+ people as sinners. Off to their side stood the boy holding one of the signs and filming the spectacle.

Some in our group shouted and screamed in the faces of the anti-Pride demonstrators. Others danced around them. Someone disconnected a microphone, another bolted off with a stack of their hateful signs. Several counter-protesters began physically pushing the demonstrators back toward their van as they tried to push past. Fists were drawn, but I was too tunnel-visioned in the moment to notice if anyone threw punches. A few, too few, even tried holding something like a conversation with the protesters. Soon all of it was drowned out by a blaring speaker and chants.

At some point, the demonstrators were calling police claiming assault while counter-protesters did the same.

It wasn't long before one of my kids and I were at the front of the counter-protesters. One of the men with signs tried to push past us. He bounced off repeatedly as we crossed our arms and silently held the line. The only words I spoke to anyone aside from my kids was to tell a few angered counter-protesters not to give someone a reason to turn violent. I'm not sure any of them heard me.

Unfortunately, no handbook exists for rejecting the people who want to load bricks into our bags. It's entirely possible that love and violence are opposite sides

of the same tapestry, and there is historical proof of both changing the world for the better.

Four Keizer Police Department officers arrived sometime amid the conflict and did an admirable job of de-escalating the tension quickly and convincing the demonstrators to take their leave. The counter-protesters melded back into the party.

Back at the fair, it was heartening to find out there were many attendees who had no idea what happened and hundreds more who arrived afterward.

3. Questioning

During and after the scrum, I second-guessed every choice I made.

When I saw my kids heading toward the scene, there was no doubt in my mind that they needed to see me standing with them. I expect it of myself and they should expect it of me.

I thought about the danger of vague words and how we all find ways to weaponize them. I pondered my role as a journalist and how these conflicts draw attention in mainstream and social media and it becomes a feedback loop of serotonin for many of the participants. I deliberated the desire and wisdom in placing our "bodies upon the gears," how doing so is alluring and the point at which it becomes so infectious that it ravages our reason. I contemplated the perils of compromise when lives are at stake.

My heart grows heavy wondering what anti-LGBTQ+ demonstrators consider a successful day. Do they expect to take home converts? Is it pride they seek in pursuing a place of moral superiority? Is it satisfying enough to simply "own the libs" for a few moments? Do they rest easier at night knowing they've modeled for their children a way to be in the world, its founding principle causing intense unrest and discomfort for others?

Much later, one of the kids confided their disappointment when the counter-protesters began chanting "You're not welcome here." They felt it sent a message in opposition to the whole point of Pride gatherings. I don't disagree.

How different are we actually if we are both acting in the name of love and perceive the other side as purely hateful? The protesters profess uncompromising love of a higher power that demands obedience and those of us on the other side are equally uncompromising in our faith that

love takes many forms. No one here in this moment can settle the argument of who is most righteous and shouting each other down is now the default response.

These questions are grounded in the knowledge that I am privileged to be able to ask them. It's not who I am or my way of life that is under constant assault.

Still, I know what I would have done as the chants rose and fell, as shouting and shoving began, and as I saw what might have been fear flash across the face of that boy protesting alongside the adults.

If I could go back. If it hadn't been quite so loud. If I'd summoned a little more courage. I would have pulled one of the men aside and told him about the role I have in the lives of teenagers who desperately want to feel welcome and safe. Told him that his group's presence at Pride and their message was an active source of harm to countless people I care about.

I would have told him how much joy I derive from getting to be the adult with whom my GSA kids can be themselves. That if the young people they bring along to these events ever made their way to our GSA meetings, I would love them as my own.

I would go to that child, tell him I'm sorry if I scared him and ask him to lay down his bricks.

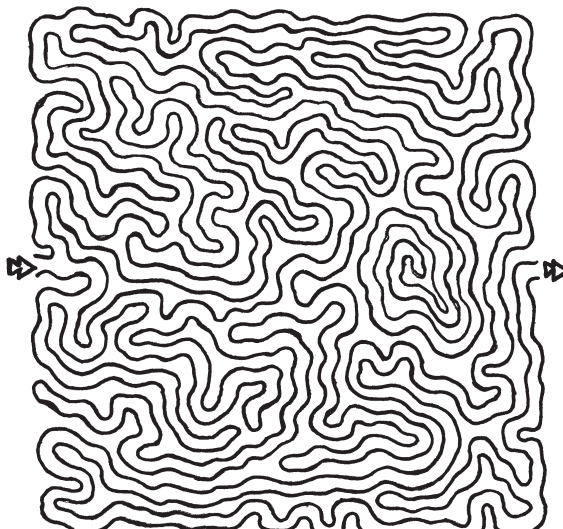
Writer's note: This is one person's perspective on the events of the Keizer Pride Fair and it is not intended to be the definitive account. The Keizertimes welcomes responses and other points of view at all times. Send us letters to the editor or guest opinion columns to publisher@keizertimes.com.

brain food

sudoku

		8	9			4		6
				7	8		2	
	2		6		3	9		
8	4		3					5
		7		1		6		
5					9		4	7
		4	1		6		3	
	6		8	3				
9		3			2	8		

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maze by Jonathan Graf of Keizer

Enter digits 1-9 into blank spaces. Every row must contain one of each digit. So must every column, & every 3x3 square.