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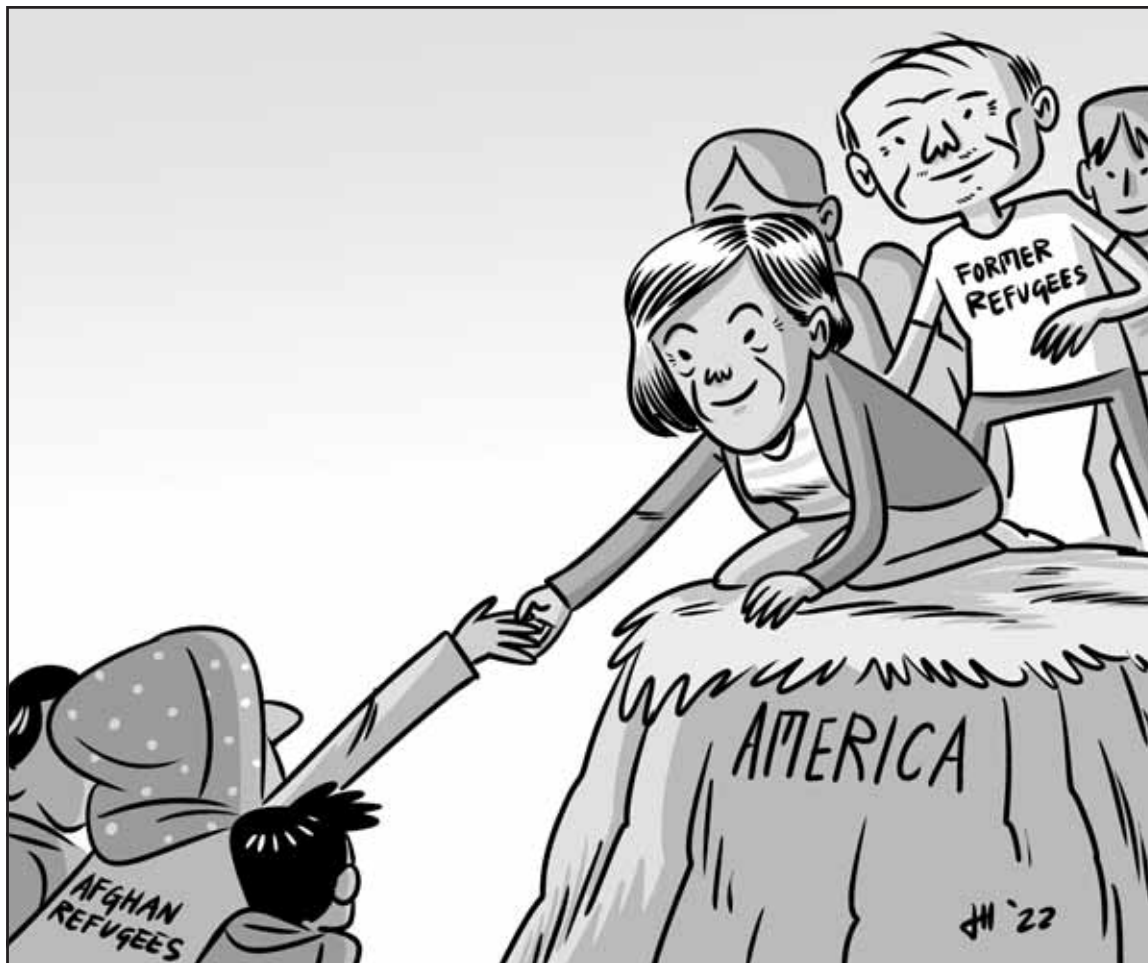
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MY TURN

■ **Dmae Lo Roberts**



Hoping for a better 2022

About this time last year, I wrote about the very difficult year we endured dealing with coronavirus pandemic precautions and the shutdown. The world seemed to move in a maelstrom of change as we grappled with the impact of racial justice protests the previous year, a time marked with much upheaval and uncertainty as we donned face coverings and waited impatiently for a vaccine that could position us back to some form of normalcy.

Like everyone, I hoped 2021 would be better. My husband and I had just adopted a fearless new kitten prone to occasional biting. Binsky, no longer a kitten, has fully grown into a high-maintenance cat who essentially dominates our house and keeps us on our toes. Despite his mercurial nature, we've learned how to co-exist with true affection. I note his fast growth and understand the true speed of a year.

The years seem to pass at a faster pace the older I become. People who are roughly my age and older are passing away with more frequency. I ponder my own mortality and due date. But one must push through when planning the next year.

With the availability of COVID-19 vaccines, life in 2021 became less fearful. People started to gather, first in small groups, then with larger audiences in theaters and at public events. Schools reopened, offering both in-person and online attendance. We learned to live a hybrid existence of virtual meetings and viewings, and for those with boosters, actual public attendance at movies, performances, and parties happened.

Yet the pandemic has forever changed us. With each new coronavirus variant, we realize life likely will not return to what it was before. But when has it ever? We are indefinitely transformed as we consider our platter of choices about what makes us feel safe while being together. Zoom meetings every day are now so embedded in our lives, I believe they will remain in 2022 and beyond. But we will still gather more and more, if somewhat warily.

As I look at the year ahead, my hope is to learn from the peace as well as the lack-of-work stress I have experienced. As an ambivert (someone who can be either introverted or extroverted depending on the situation), I enjoy both working at home and also venturing into the world for a media project or to rehearse with other people in a theater.

Previously, at least once a year, I enjoyed travelling around the world or closer to home, but not for the last two years. I wonder if I will make any trips in 2022. I hope so.

My concerns have not been the heartache worries of a majority of Americans because my husband and I have the security of a home we own outright, and our biggest bill is our health insurance premium. I'm slated to direct two Asian-American theater projects in 2022, and it's probable I'll experience increased anxiety and stress working in close proximity with people again.

My obstacles are minimal compared with those who have closed their businesses permanently and are trying to rebuild, or families who are having a difficult time putting food on the table or heating their home, or people who were furloughed and are rethinking their jobs. What rings clearly to me is that the most vulnerable of us have grown in numbers.

Since the pandemic began, there appears to be even more unhoused people living in cars, tents, or ramshackle structures made of tarps and cardboard held together with duct tape. We see unhoused persons living on sidewalks and freeway medians or in parks. Many, including families with children, are recently displaced to the streets and are especially hard hit by the loss of jobs and homes.

We all see unhoused people living on the street in neighborhoods across the city. How many times have you passed by a cardboard-and-tarp dwelling and imagined the person who lives inside? Portland is currently working on setting up more shelters and places like tiny home pods for individuals to live. It's a small ray of hope as the city invests pandemic aid funds into housing options.

Many organizations have worked tirelessly to provide food, shelter, masks, and even vaccines to the unhoused, lower-income families, and shut-ins. I highly recommend a few charities that I support if you're looking to make a donation. They include the Portland Rescue Mission, <www.portlandrescue.mission.org>; Blanchet House of Hospitality, <www.blanchethouse.org>; the Meals on Wheels People, <www.mowp.org>; and the Oregon Food Bank, <www.oregonfoodbank.org>. Small efforts by individuals can help us build a better world.

I wish you all hope and health in the coming year.

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