

Listening for signs of hope

by **Jessie Palatucci**
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This has been a dark season for many. Every time I look at a screen (and they are everywhere - in my hand, at my desk, on the side of buildings, at the bus stop) I am confronted by stories depicting vivid acts of hate.

Many of my friends and colleagues are increasingly fearful. They worry that they will come under attack because of the way they worship, the color of their skin, or who they love. And I can't tell them they're wrong to be afraid. Not in the face of mounting evidence on the evening news.

The weight of that knowledge makes me want to crawl into bed and stay there. It's so tempting to hide from all the ugliness. It's definitely better for my anxiety. But I find it's not really better for my heart. Shutting off the news and hiding my head under the covers doesn't make me feel better; it just makes me feel lazy. And maybe a little bit complicit.

So I've decided to take a different tack. I've decided to show up more and listen harder for signs of hope.

So far the results have been positive. My first discovery is that many people are good. This should be obvious, but I had forgotten. For the first time in a while I'm having regular conversations with people of different political persuasions, and discovering that they too are feeling bewildered and concerned about increasing attacks on the rights of women, refugees, and people of different faiths. This is an encouraging place to begin the work of making a better world.

I'm also rediscovering the power of local politics. In recent years I've become so focused on efforts to create change at the national level that I've underappreciated the profound impact a small group of dedicated individuals can have on their city and state. Did you know that during the last election voters in four states passed minimum wage measures, and in three states they approved gun safety measures? In Arizona voters unseated Joe Arpaio, the

notoriously anti-immigrant Sheriff of Maricopa County, after 24 years in power (the impressiveness of that cannot be overstated). And right now the D.C. City Council is working to pass the most expansive paid family and medical leave legislation in the country. These are powerful movements for change and I want to be part of them. I started by writing a letter to my D.C. Council member last week and got a thoughtful response back within three hours. It was a very satisfying experience. I can't recommend it highly enough.

Finally, I'm trying to be intentional about the activities and relationships I put my time into. I have a limited number of hours in each day, which means I have to prioritize the things that are life-giving, both for myself and my community. For me that means showing up for the wonderful moments (a friend's elopement on a Thursday afternoon or a weekend with my Godchild) and also making time for the meetings and the planning we'll need to do to prepare for the challenges to come.

Wendell Berry once wrote, "Be joyful though you have considered all the facts." I can't think of a better advice for the moment that we're in. Now is the time to cultivate the things that bring us joy, to rally our people, and start building together from the ground up. In the face of hate and intolerance, we must choose to listen for signs of hope and seize upon opportunities for doing good.

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