The Best Intentions (For What They're Worth)

August 17, 2016 By Christian Kiley

Last weekend I visited Washington, D.C. with my husband, Michael. It was my first visit to the nation's capital since an overnight field trip in the seventh grade. Michael had never been at all.

It was Michael's suggestion that we go when he found out about a Disarm Hate rally on the weekend in question. By all accounts, it should have been a fascinating time to visit the epicenter of U.S. politics--and if either my husband or myself weren't such dedicated homebodies, perhaps we would have used the opportunity to visit one of the various old friends who live and work in D.C., but arriving on Friday night and leaving on Sunday left precious little time to explore the District--although we were able to cover more ground because like any planned city, traffic patterns actually make sense and it's possible to move about the urban landscape without any ridiculous jams. It's difficult to express my deep and abiding love for my hometown, Boston, but this is one aspect of the Bean that no one enjoys.

Of course, our visit coincided with one of the hottest heat waves on record, which gave our trip an almost equatorial feel. On our first full day, we took a cab to West Potomac Park, where the Rally was organized. We spent a little over an hour listening to speakers and performers advocating for gun law reform. They rallied with vigor and conviction, but the heat took something from everyone.

Michael guessed that maybe 1/3 of the expected crowd actually attended the rally, which made a lot of sense; I had expected 1000 people, and there were probably fewer than 300. I captured as much footage as I could before my iPhone overheated; Michael and I both swooned over Sasha Allen, whose pipes were obviously unaffected by the ridiculous heat-- I approached her afterward and let her know how much I enjoyed her rendition of "How Shall I See You Through My Tears" in 2003's uneven but lovable film "Camp."

We also met a group of filmmakers who had traveled in an RV from Los Angeles to document the rally-- "Disarm Hate: The Documentary" was crewed by friendly and experienced folks who were working hard but still took the time to chat with us. I gave them free passes to season one of my web series, "Unsure/Positive." They are, after all, a big part of my target audience.

After finding some of the solidarity we had hoped for, we braved nearly the entire length of the national mall, about 1.7 miles, to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. I insisted on

this, because the Smithsonian recently restored and put on display the original model of the Starship Enterprise from Star Trek's Original Series. If you've seen my web series, you may have recognized that the protagonist, played by me, is a huge fan of classic Trek. Art imitating life? Call it what you like, I'm a card-carrying Trekker. Imagine my disappointment when the model's lights, the restoration of which I had followed online, were not functioning.

Later that evening, we managed to meet briefly with two of my closest friends from high school who have been living in DC for a couple of years. It was great to hear them talk about how much they miss Boston. Not that it's a competition.

August 12th marked two months since the tragedy in Orlando and that was, on paper, the impetus for our trip. Truthfully, we both needed a break from the grind back home, and while we're very political and passionate people, the rally was really just an excuse to get out of Boston for a bit and do things we wouldn't otherwise do. On that Sunday, we met Mark S. King for lunch and it was so wonderful to connect with him in person, especially after all of the guidance and publicity that he has offered to me and my work. All things considered, the trip was a success.

But before I leave you I want to tie this back to the journey you've been following if you've been reading my stuff up until now. I think the original reason Michael suggested we go to D.C. was because he knew that, just a few weeks beforehand, the events in Orlando had shaken me to the core.

June 12th was a peculiar day-- it was day I had planned to convene a writer's room for Unsure/Positive's second season. The idea was to eat brunch, and hammer out a detailed outline for the second season.

Once all of my writers had arrived, and before we began, I felt I ought to say something. I stumbled over my words: "This is a difficult and emotional day, and... well... um..." I turned beet red. I nearly lapsed into one of my famous verbal train wrecks before Jared, one of the writers, was kind enough to say what I was too stymied and unsure to articulate. He said, "We're here to make art. That's our activism. Today is an important day to do this work."

So on with the show. On with the trips to the rallies about the causes that matter to us. We keep working towards our ends, however we can, and no amount of posturing about election politics and Hillary or Trump (for the record, I'm with her) is going to bring us what we really need, which is community, connection, and a weekend off every now and then.

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