

I'll Stick Up for YOU!

January 6, 2019

This message is about being a good ally or advocate to people and groups who have to deal with oppression. Or-as I learned as a kid-how to stick up for what is right. I'm also going to share some progress that has been made-and work that remains.....

In Nov. 2008, I was elated that Barack Obama, was elected President of the U.S. I celebrated our country's forward movement in creating equality for all of our citizens.

Fast Forward to 2016, when Donald Trump was elected President. I was absolutely stunned. What the heck had just happened in our country?

Since that election, hate and hate crimes have been on the rise. Pittsburg Oct. 27, 2018. 11 people of the Jewish faith were killed and 7 injured at the Tree of Life Synagogue. A week later, 8 UUSMV members attended a solidarity Shabbat to stand with over 400 allies from our island community.

On a national platform, people with disabilities have been mocked and made fun of. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. There is hunger and homelessness right here on MV.

Human rights/civil rights for LGBTQ people are still being fought for. In Nov. 2018, In a statewide referendum on transgender rights, MA voters said “YES” to maintaining a 2016 law that extended nondiscrimination protections to trans people.

Children and young LGBTQ people are still bullied; the rate of suicide of our gay youth is 3x higher than for straight youth.

For a country built by immigrants, we have become increasingly hostile to immigrants.

There seem to be many people who believe that if America would drastically reduce the level of immigration we can return to our cultural greatness. I’m not one of those people.

Women, as a collective group, suffer violence at the hands of men, all too often.

The Dec. 13, 2018 Vineyard Gazette had an article about (quote) “the hundreds of domestic disturbance complaints they receive yearly.” The Connect to End Violence Program from MVCS and the police work closely together. Domestic dispute calls can be one of the most dangerous calls the police respond to.

1 out of 4 girls will be sexually assaulted or raped by the time they are 18, most often by someone they know and trust. Domestic violence and sexual assault are about POWER, plain and simple.

White supremacists have become emboldened in their actions against POC, particularly African Americans. The family tree for many African Americans started with ancestors who were slaves. Many had someone with a rope around their neck swinging from their family tree. After more than a century and 200 attempts, the US Senate unanimously passed the Justice for Victims of Lynching Act of 2018, as a federal hate crime, on Dec. 19, 2018! The bill classifies “lynching” as an act that “willfully causes bodily harm to any person, because of actual and perceived race, color, religion or national origin”. The bill also calls for legislators to acknowledge the historical impact and lasting harms of lynching, which were largely ignored by law enforcement. Because it did not get to the House before the end of 2018, the Senate will have to start the process over again in this year-nonetheless there is hope for progress to right an unrightable wrong.

On July 27, 2018, The Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery Al opened its internationally acclaimed lynching memorial museum. One exhibit the museum has are glass jars with soil from the ground

under over 4,000 confirmed lynching sites, between 1877 and 1950, in the state of Alabama.

Today, 2.2 Million people are in prison or jail somewhere in the US-more than any country in the WORLD! Progress on criminal justice reform got a little closer on Dec. 19, 2018. Passage of the First Step Act is an important milestone in the long road to ending mass incarceration in our federal justice system. Federal prisoners number about 181,000 prisoners today. Federal mandatory minimum sentences for drug offences are among the harshest in the country. This law was passed by both the Senate and the House of Representatives and signed into law by President Trump (son in law, Jared Kushner pushed hard for this bill; his father spent 14 months in prison tax evasion, illegal campaign contributions). We will watch how it plays out. It is certainly a First Step.

Over 200,000 juveniles enter the adult criminal justice system each year, most for non-violent crimes. The Equal Justice Initiative is currently involved in seeking to end extreme sentencing in the prosecution of children under the age of 18.

Let me share 2 examples of racism pretty close to home:

Last summer there was a black man who flagged down a VTA bus in Edgartown. Bus driver drove right past him. When the black man caught up to him in OB, he asked why the driver why he didn't stop: "Because you are black." The story spread on FB like a wildfire. By the end of the day the VTA fired the driver.

Before Christmas a local business dressed some bottles of olive oil in blackface in their window during Christmas. They were called out for this racist display and removed them. They did the same thing last year and were called out and apologized. The NAACP wrote a scathing letter to the editor in the local papers. Blackface is connected with minstrel shows that were popular in the US early in the 19th century; white performers painted their faces black and did comic skits, music performances etc. that mocked people of African descent.

Let me share some characteristics of an effective Ally, from my perspective:

- The word Ally is not a noun. It speaks to action.
- Being an ally is about listening to the marginalized voices.
- Allies don't take breaks. POC have no choice but to resist racism whenever it occurs. Trans

people can't walk away from being ostracized or bullied. Dedicated allies can be counted on to be there. Every day. Every time. Whether or not it is convenient.

- Allies educate themselves constantly. Learn about the history of the oppressed or marginalized group so that you can make sense out of how oppression against them plays out today.
- Understand intersectionality of oppressions. Think of 5 corners in VH. Intersectionality meets where they merge; we can't separate our race - from our sex- from our age- from our religion- from our sexual orientation. The lens through which we view the world is different depending on our age and what we have experienced in our lifetime; our race and sex; what part of the country we grew up in or the religious views of our family of origin.
- Sometimes well intentioned allies do or say something wrong. We all make mistakes; when you make one, get back up on your bicycle, continue the journey, and deepen the dialogue.

It is also my opinion that we should not expect any gratitude for our ally work-this is a privilege, a responsibility and our time in history to be doing it.

There is much to celebrate in a life lived in the pursuit of justice.

In closing, I leave you with these words by Albert Camus:

“Don’t walk behind me; I may not lead.
Don’t walk in front of me; I may not follow.
Just walk beside me and be my friend.”