

To say that I was completely taken by surprise and blindsided by the actions of the Library Board of Trustees this past Monday night (10/18/21) would be a true understatement. Notwithstanding the complete disregard for city policy, library by-laws and being kept completely in the dark without indication of what was to come, in retrospect, it still should not have surprised me.

As a female and POC, the world can generally be a difficult place to navigate due to the countless inherent preconceived prejudices of the world. Add being in a public position to those intolerant and hidebound mindsets and you have entered a race that is lost before it even begins. I initially perceived Lancaster as welcoming and friendly and yes, there are some of those people here. I have had such great pleasure to have met and connected with a few. It was what caused me to consider life here at all, thinking to myself what a lovely and safe place it appeared to raise a family. It further motivated me to accept a job offer within this city despite the fact that there were other institutions that were trying so insistently to woo me into being *their* librarian.

However I was quickly introduced to a hidden world of hateful agendas, hypocrisy, and true resistance to change, a situation that would have sent any wiser and more seasoned librarian running for the hills (and in fact, it did, to the person who was hired right before me). At times this place has felt like a war zone and I with an obvious target on my back as evidenced by being stuck between a mayoral bid for power and control and an outward lack of support from some on the library board. In one specific instance, I was threatened (not in a public meeting, mind you) that if I wasn't doing exactly what that specific board member wanted, I would be getting fired when my year here had concluded. As it turns out, that was not an idle threat. Rather than sacrifice my integrity by naming those people behind the scenes who worked so hard to discredit me and propagate lies to elevate their own personal agendas, I chose to stay silent when I could have spoken out about the continuous backlash and obvious hate that I was experiencing with my every move. That, unlike uprooting my whole family from a life that we had always known, is a decision that I will never regret.

There is a reason, Lancaster, Wisconsin, why so many of your youth do not want to stick around. The rigidity, the push against positive change, and the fear of anything that might not be initially understood will forever hold you back. Your reputation throughout the state is well known for this reason and it is crucial to the ultimate success of this city. Alas, open forums of outright hate are welcomed (even encouraged) and anything that is new and fresh is criticized by those too scared to change.

During my time here I tried to provide at least one safe space for the disenfranchised and marginalized population in this area, offering programs that were free and attempting to curate an accessibility that wouldn't just be catered to one specific contingent of citizens. My heart breaks when I think of the patron that reached out asking if there was a reason that this city is so hateful to new community members which increased my motivation to continue to welcome the outsiders. I looked into innovative ideas that would draw the portion of this population that

feel overlooked and disregarded and hoped to truly make this place a hub in which anyone could come and just be themselves without fear.

Lacking support on many sides and being in such an isolated position, I took it upon myself to cultivate a network of librarians throughout the state and even the world in order to bounce ideas around in my own safe space. I was asked to speak about my experiences as a new library director at the upcoming Wisconsin Library Association conference. I volunteered (and still do) with the Library of Congress on weekends for fun just because my passion and love for librarianship is so enormous. I joined committees dedicated to continuing to advance this field and subsequently, our communities. I had a well attended book club with the most amazing group of individuals who provided a fresh, insightful and smart take on every tome we discussed. I attended many of our free programs to be a support to staff and to meet the community outside of library structure. I consistently took on tasks that were not necessary for me to do in order to lessen the burden on the library staff, typically working well over forty hours a week while wracking my brain for ways to make the library and this community thrive. These were not mentioned or noticed by those who made that fateful decision on Monday night. A true disappointment, yes, but so it is.

To the open hearts of Lancaster that I have had the pleasure of meeting: continue to be kind and love. Speak out against hate. Support in these strange times is difficult to come by and so many truly need it rather than the loud and vengeful voices consistently trying to ruin and destroy everyone who has a different opinion, background, color of skin or ideological view from them.

In the meantime I will hold my children tight and wipe the tears that they shed at night because no educational institution feels safe for them now in this community. We will try to put this behind us and remedy the fact that I uprooted our former life for an ideal that could never work in a frigid place so scared of people that they can't understand and therefore refuse to accept.

Thank you to the media for giving me the platform to explain my motivations and finally the ability to voice my side of the story. To the City of Lancaster I am truly thankful for this opportunity, such as it may be. To the next librarian of Schreiner Memorial Library and Potosi Branch, I am truly sorry for what you will have to overcome but I will absolutely root for you. I will support you and champion your cause, knowing what you are up against. I hope that you are able to make a change for the better and prosper in this outwardly beautiful place. I pray that you are given the grace and understanding to make mistakes and to have the chance to learn and grow from them in order to become a strong leader in this community, rather than discarded by the wayside. I sincerely hope for the best for you.

I leave you with this excerpt from a famous poem written by activist and freethinking radical Maya Angelou, who understood what it meant to be vilified for having hope in difficult times...and yet:

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

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