

**Reflections by Sharlene Kerelejza, Barbara Kline,
Karen Ligammari, and Moly Nolan
on the Million Women March of January 21, 2017
for
“Women Making History: Pink Hats in Motion”
Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden
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**Reflection by Sharlene Kerelejza
The Hartford Rally**

This truly is the moment when the prepared speech goes out the window, but this is something I want to share. You can picture it, St. Joseph College, 1991. I am a survivor of sexual violence, and like many survivors, I found safety and freedom, and I fell apart. A survivor, safe for the first time in my life, I was hurting and oozing all over the place.

I was traumatized, triggered, terrified, and tired. I was looking for help from everywhere and I was worried about my ability to stay in school. My days and nights were long, and I was a mess.

Traumatized, terrified, triggered and tired became my daily M.O., and I know I'm not alone. Who knows that place?

I know you do. 25-40% of women know that place. And we're not alone. Our brothers and sisters of color know that place: Traumatized, terrified, triggered and tired. LGBT, folks with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, the Muslim community, we all know that place.

Traumatized, terrified, triggered and tired, I carried on in those early college days, and it landed me in an epic rant with a beloved mentor one day.

“I don't want to be a survivor anymore! I don't want to be hurting, striving, healing, working, coping.” I don't want to “minute at a time” my life! I don't want the flashbacks and nightmares. The body memories and panic attacks. I don't want it anymore.”

She pulled the mentor death-star silent gaze. You know the one, the one that leaves your insides x-rayed and you feeling vulnerable and exposed. After a ridiculously long silence she said with more compassion than I'd ever seen, “I hear, truly, all that you don't want. Tell me, Sharlene, what DO you want.”

I didn't know. I had no idea. Yet, that is my question to you today. You see in that question, truly, everything changes. From a survivor running away from my feelings of loss, betrayal and anxiety I became a survivor with a future.

That's the question for today.

The election was devastating. Let's not pretend any differently. I sobbed to my wife at 2:30 in the morning, "We lost EVERYTHING!" At that time I meant the presidency, house, senate and Supreme Court. But I ALSO meant my safety and security, potentially my rights, my family. Traumatized, terrified, triggered and tired, I rejoined the place of "I don't want this," and like many of you, I lived there, triggered, terrified, tired, my survivor-self remembering the horrors that were once my life, afraid they would become true once again.

I looked around at my staff. I looked around at my clients, survivors of domestic violence. They lived there too. Tired, triggered, terrified.

Stuck neck deep in "I don't want," it took a while to remember those amazing and powerful words, "Sharlene, what DO you want?"

I want this. I mean, look at you! I want community and fellowship, belonging and inspiration. I want action and a belief in our own power. And I want hope.

Reflection by Barbara Kline

The New York City March

Good morning! I was one of the women who went to the rally/march in New York City. I have a deep connection to the city. My father's family came to America from Sicily and lived in New York City. The trip was not an easy one, and my great-grandmother when she was going through Ellis Island was deemed sick. Mind you, she was pregnant with my grandmother at the time and sent back to Sicily. They sent a pregnant woman back, across the Atlantic, on a boat, because her eyes were red. After my grandmother was born, they came back and my grandmother grew up in New York City and became a citizen much later. In 1959 she took her oath on Liberty Island and loved the beautiful lady in New York harbor. So I was very excited to go to my ancestral lands, so to speak, even though I am not that comfortable in crowds and can get anxious in large groups of people.

When I got to Grand Central Terminal, there was a buzz of excitement in the air. Most of the people I saw were going to the march, with signs and pink hats on. I felt comfortable and at ease. It was also nice to have Jane [Dioguardi] with me; that helped. We made our way to the park and actually could hear a lot of the speeches. We were surrounded with New York people, and I felt at home.

I noticed that it was all about what is good about our country—acceptance and inclusion. I was not there fighting against anything or anyone; I was there for all people—for immigrants, for refugees, for all people being seen and heard. I found this a very positive event and a celebration of the true diversity that makes up the USA. I want to make sure that the beautiful lady standing in New York harbor still welcomes all yearning to breathe free and that we truly listen to each other and learn about each other with open minds and hearts. We are, in my opinion, a great big tossed salad. Better together, and each keeping their own flavor, so to speak. I left Grand Central Terminal with sore feet and a full heart. I was feeling that we can make a difference; and, no, I won't be quiet.

Reflection by Karen Ligammari The Washington, DC March

What difference does it make?

As a not-so-left-leaning Democrat, more just middle of the road, I never considered myself political. And as life sometimes goes, this was all about to change. I did not understand when. Immediately after the election my friend Rachel and some of her friends wanted to march. “What difference does it make? Marching may have worked in the past for civil rights, but it won't work today. We will just be perceived as sore losers.”

As the hateful words and horrible actions became more drastic, I became angrier. People stated that rights would be taken away. “Really? That can't happen,” was my thought.

December 9th was my turning point. That is when the now *PRESIDENT* Of the UNITED STATES, who became TIME'S PERSON OF THE YEAR, balked that he should have been MAN of the year. He even polled the audience for validation! I realized that something which was once given can be taken. Rights CAN be chipped away at. Everything I came to know in the 50 years of being a strong female was teetering on the brink.

As the march got closer, my desire to join grew just *slightly*. Not only did I still feel, “What difference does it make,” but I was feeling hypocritical and a bit ironic. Here I am—livid at his wanting to exclude my gender—yet I am attending a WOMEN'S march???

I looked into going to a local march, but I thought: This is too important. This is historical. I found a seat on a bus to Washington, DC just two days before the March. Go big or go home.

Dreading the thought of boarding a bus at 1:30 in the morning, I thought, “What difference does it make if I don't show up... just one single person like myself ... doesn't show up?” In retrospect, imagine if all of us thought that way. After arriving at RFK Stadium parking lot, I walked the two miles to the Connecticut staging area. All along the way, signs dotting front yards remained from the MLK holiday the weekend before. The signs bore inspirational messages from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He seemed to be supporting us. His spirit lives on. Many residents were cheering and clapping from doorsteps and open windows.

Crowds were manageable, since I got there early. A coordinated meeting with some friends was successful. Rachel surprised me with a pink pussy hat. I was thrilled because she didn't think she would have time to make one for me. Time went on. Crowds grew. Eventually we were literally pressed up against each other—front to back, side to side. You could hear their breath, feel their warmth. No personal space at all. Literally women and men with all different shades of pink hats as far as the eye could see. With no room to spare, still a quarter of the crowd managed to hold signs. We barely heard speeches over the monitors, but we could hear the chants of “WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS” and “THIS IS WHAT DEMOCRACY LOOKS LIKE.” Exhausted from standing many hours, we had no idea why we weren't MARCHING. We learned afterwards that there were too many of us to march... TOO MANY OF US TO MARCH....so we only STOOD. In reality, wasn't that more poignant? STANDING up for what you believe.

My feelings of hypocrisy waned as I looked around me. I wasn't there just for Women's Rights; I was there for the rights of every minority group. They were all represented around me. People of color and different ethnicities, gay and trans people, people who were disabled. Those, incidentally were people whom I spent a lifetime helping and our President publically mocked, cutting them down in mere seconds. There were the very young in this packed crowd. I am talking infants in baby slings and the very old. They were my favorite of the crowd. When I felt tired or exhausted, I would gain inspiration from their resolve despite their being much older than me. Those silver haired women also held my favorite sign: "I can't believe I still have to protest this s#!t." People covered every square inch including overpasses.

As a small group of five we managed to press our way through to the porta-potties. The crowd wasn't happy with this, but no one complained. Tempers didn't flare. At one point, a woman in her 30's pushed her boyfriend forward in haste. She shouted, "I have to get him into the porta-potty. He is having an anxiety attack." It showed on his face. As they both disappeared into the porta-potty, I couldn't help but wonder what the President would think about a person who, solely by his gender, could be named MAN OF THE YEAR? Would he see the human in distress or bully him with horrible words and labels?

After we ironically found a Mexican restaurant and had seats at the bar, when watching the footage of marches in DC, around the country, and around the world, every part of the world, every corner of the world, I realized IT DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

On the bus ride, when they read what you now have in your orders of service—the CT DELARATION stating that January 21st is Women's March on Washington Day in the State of Connecticut—I realized IT DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

That I now consider myself a political activist, I realize IT DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE. When someone smiles and still says, "I like your hat," I realize IT DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Reflection by Molly Nolan

The Hartford Rally

It wasn't just the March or the rallies on the day of the March that made it so special. It has been a long time since I was part of a large demonstration, larger than any of us dreamed.

I was part of the knitting brigade. Hats that I made made it to DC, New York City, Philadelphia and Hartford. Knitting the hats was a big part of the anticipation for me. Would many people be wearing them? Had the word really spread? There had been a bit of chatter on the internet questioning the hats and questioning the March itself. There was a big element of faith in preparing for something that we could not know would be as big as it turned out to be. It was a time for me to strengthen my resolve and commit to actions beyond the day of the March. All that and more were knit into every hat I made.

It was a beautiful, sunny, unseasonably warm day in the Northeast. Pictures of the subways, train cars, and busses, full of people in pink hats were all over the internet. The momentum was building and it was contagious. Most of the people in the lot where I parked were headed for the Hartford rally. Before I left the house, the Facebook page was saying that 5,000 were expected. You could not see how big the crowd was from where I was parked or the number of people streaming to the rally from the area I was in. When I finally got to the Capitol and was about to cross the street to the site, I could see that the crowd was much bigger than anticipated—twice as big, as it turned out.

I was back so far I could not hear the speakers, so am especially glad that I had a second chance today. It did not matter. There were so many people—women, men, children, several generations of family and friends rallying together. As I wandered through the great crowd, I saw more mothers with children and pregnant women in one place than I have ever seen before. So many people getting out of the house and into the streets for freedom, for justice, for the many things our principles and sources call us to do. I had that flash of recognition of my truest self, joined to the many others working in a force, a body greater than myself, simultaneously needing my individual physical self to be that witness.

Just as Stanton, Anthony, Stone, Wells, Paul and the women and men who worked with them made much of my life possible; the work I had done, as part of the second wave of feminism, when I was in college and beyond, made the witness of 21 January possible. We were all there in Hartford, and in cities and towns across the US, and the world, to safeguard the future for ourselves and our children and the futures of unknown children not yet born. We were and are part of a longer thread, a greater struggle, called to do holy work.

Blessed be.