

A Response to Nationalism
Sometimes Words Are Not Enough

Friday, June 21, 2019, SMOC Café

Greyson reached below his academic gown, removed one of his vivid red sneakers, and proceeded to lift it above his cap much to the delight of the audience. He took this action of his own volition, but perhaps my 'egging' him on from the podium had given him license.

After the ceremony Greyson introduced me to his sister, Georgia, and the 'crew' from Tempo who did much to support him during his studies.

SMOC's annual Celebration of Learning. A truly soul expanding and soul enriching event.

One of our student speakers, David, gave a heartwarming, impromptu speech decked out in a three piece suit hidden beneath his gown. It was clear David had formed a great relationship with Mary Lou, our Hyset/GED program co-ordinator.

After the ceremony David introduced me to his children, his fiancé, his mom and his future father-in-law, an older man with a tired, yet sweet smile on his face. Helping watch two little ones can be exhausting work.

Today we were celebrating the learning achievements of 9 Hyset graduates and 25 English language learners.

Our second student speaker, Enseau, gave a carefully crafted speech focused on what learning to speak English was all about. His words were both written down and practiced. He acquitted himself very well. Later I learned he arrived from Brazil. His native country is Haiti.

After the ceremony I met Enseau's nearly two year old son. Enseau, a tall man, is concerned that his son will eventually dwarf him. Later I learned that Heidi, Director of Medway

House, where Enseau and his wife and son are guests, attended the ceremony to celebrate his achievement.

Outside it was a sunny day. No clouds were in the sky, a number of speakers, standing right in front of the SMOC logo which prominently features an outstretched sun, mentioned that today was the Summer Solstice. The threads of their remarks to the graduates contained words of hope, encouragement and congratulations.

Many pictures were taken, many hugs were given and received. Cake and fellowship were the order of the day. I got to meet the graduates, their families and loved ones. Jose reminded Darlene that she had rented him his first apartment many years ago. I got to meet and shake hands with Carmen, Dales, Rosanna and Gabriella and her family. At one point during the fellowship I wondered if we'd had music would folks have danced.

This is what I want to share with you and this is the context I want to share it:

In the last few years, since the current president was put into office by the Electoral College, I believe there has been a frightening rise in the amount of hateful speech and actions coupled with a rise in the seamier side of nationalism.

Yet from the speaker's podium as I gazed out at the packed Café I saw overwhelming evidence of the enduring promise of what my America stands for and what it can be:

Diverse, Inclusive and Welcoming.

The lyrics of an old standard played in my head.

I see trees of green, red roses too
I see them bloom for me and you
And I think to myself what a wonderful world

I see skies of blue and clouds of white
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night
And I think to myself what a wonderful world

The colors of the rainbow so pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces of people going by
I see friends shaking hands saying how do you do
They're really saying I love you!

•Sung by Louis Armstrong

Jim
June, 2019