



THE RALLY THAT CHANGED MY MIND

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I wouldn't be caught dead at a Donald Trump rally. I mean, come on—I've given money to Bernie! And yet, there I was—February 2020, listening to the President of the United States address a crowd of 11,000 supporters.

How in the world did that happen? Well, it all started with... knitting.

I knit to relax—to escape the drama of real life. But like almost everything nowadays, even knitting has become political—to the point that only those with politically-correct views are welcome in the online knitting forums. You think I'm kidding? I wish I were.

But I'm not. The online knitting mob is real. And like all mobs, it's mean. That always made me uncomfortable—the insults and the name-calling. But I despised those knuckle-dragging Republicans as much as the next knitter. So, despite my discomfort, I never gave it much thought.

Truth is, I'm more interested in mastering a three-needle bind-off than discussing immigration policy. But the knitting mob wouldn't drop it. It became a fixation—a daily litany of how horrible the president and his followers were.

It started to bug me. All I wanted to do was knit. But then I began to wonder: Could those Trump supporters, some of whom were literally my neighbors, really be as irredeemable as they said? I assumed the answer was yes, but I had to find out. And that is how I came to be at a rally for the president on the eve of the New Hampshire primary. My friends urged me not to go. They feared for my safety. One offered me her pepper spray for protection. I declined, but I won't pretend I wasn't nervous. I had no idea what to expect.

I arrived four hours early. The line outside the arena was already a mile long. At first, I said nothing to those around me. I didn't want to provoke a scene. But then, as people are wont to do when stuck in a long line, we started to chat—first pleasantries, and then to more serious topics.

And here's what I discovered: These people were soooo nice! No one harassed me. No one intimidated me. No one threatened me. In fact, when I mentioned I was a Democrat, their response was invariably a smile and “welcome.”

These were decent, hardworking people from every walk of life: electricians, lawyers, schoolteachers, small business owners, veterans. I might question some of the policies they supported—they were only too happy to debate me—but I couldn't question their good

intentions or decency.

Inside, the atmosphere was electric—more like a rock concert than a political event. People were dancing and having a fantastic time. They were actually enjoying themselves.

As it happens, two days earlier, I had been in this same arena for a Democratic Party rally. The contrast was stark. Whereas the event for the president was full of optimism and enthusiasm, the Democrats' event was all doom and gloom: the country was wracked with racism, sexism, and xenophobia. At the Trump event, the participants were bursting with national pride.

Of course, the president touted his achievements—especially the economy, and attacked his opponents. But I was surprised how funny he was. And his energy never flagged. He seemed to be enjoying the event every bit as much as his audience.

Here's something else that surprised me: While the crowd had obvious affection for the country's chief executive, there was nothing slavish or mindless about it. These people were not stupid, not brainwashed, and, as far as I could tell, not racist, sexist, or phobic-anything. So, did going to a Trump rally change me? Well, my values are the same, but my perspective is different. I'll even say the experience made me a better person.

I learned that the people who come to these rallies aren't there because they hate anybody. They're there because they love America. Somewhere between pearl one, knit two, I had lost that love. Now I have it again. And I'm grateful.

The rally also reminded me that we are a people. Yes, we have fierce disagreements on how to solve our problems. But those who differ with us are not evil. Thinking that they are—*that's* the problem. That's what's tearing us apart.

I refuse to add to the divisiveness any longer. I refuse to hate people I don't know simply because I don't like the way they vote.

I invite you to join me. Let's make America civil again.

If we can do that, we'll all win.

I'm Karlyn Borysenko, independent voter, for Prager University.