

My First Steps to Fighting Injustice

We are not prepared. I don't mean that we are not ready for the weather; because my mom and I have lived in the lower mainland our whole lives, we are always ready for rain. We are ready for the exhaustion, too, as I am wearing my most comfortable runners and my mom has brought her usual bag of tantalizingly organic goodies. We are simply unprepared for the magnitude of the event. This does not surprise me because, at the age of eleven, this is my very first protest march.

The march starts in an area of Victoria I am unfamiliar with, but grasping my mother's fingers as we weave through the throngs of calmly angry people reassures me. My mom squeezes my hand with one of hers as she raises the other to wave to a few familiar faces nearby. She takes a moment to find a path through the crowd from point A, us, to point B, the group we are meeting, and we begin to weave again. The hugs and smiles at the end of this short journey make it feel like we have already won, but this is not the victory we have come to achieve.

I am handed a sign. It is not just any sign; it is now my sign. I stand proud and tall with my sign as I try to figure out what it means. "Children are NOT a special interest group," my sign screams, but I wonder why. I think children are special and interesting. It is not until I am older that I will truly understand the bitter sarcasm behind the phrase on my sign, but for now a short explanation of the government's treatment of the Child Care Coalition is enough. I decide to hold my sign until I can't hold it any longer, and we begin to march.

“Gordon Campbell is a poo-poo head!” are the enthusiastic words of the only other child in our group. At about four-years-old, this sticky little girl is lucky enough to have a free ride on her Grandpa’s shoulders or in her wagon the whole way. I try not to be jealous of a pre-schooler as I focus on being angry with the government. As the march progresses I can feel the tension between this group of fed-up protestors and the unseen government escalate. It is as if there is a wall between where the protest began and the legislature, and we are turning it into dust. The tension peaks as we reach the government buildings, where the salty sea wafts into our nostrils. A line-up of police patiently await our arrival, standing on the side of the street in front of their armoured vehicles, braced with shields in their hands. This is much more difficult for my eleven-year-old brain to understand than my sign. Why would these fully armed police people be here? What are they waiting for? After an hour of marching with all of these thousands of people, struggling for the same cause, I feel as if they are all my friends. They are loud and obnoxious, but this is just because they care; no one is being violent.

A band sets up while someone speaks over a faulty microphone. Directions of where to stand on the lawn cut in and out, but people are scattered all over. We are pumped up and proud of ourselves. We showed the government that we care, that they can’t just do whatever they want. We were all in it together, each with our own concerns and values, each fighting the injustice together. It is so exhilarating that I am wiped out and just about to fall asleep in the wagon beside the four-year-old. I am still clutching my sign and smiling at how unprepared I was for such an experience.

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