

May 26, 2020

An open letter to the editors at @bendbulletin and @sourceweekly -

• Hero (noun); /'hīrō/ - 1. a.) "A mythological or legendary figure often of divine descent endowed with great strength or ability." Source: Merriam-Webster.

Thank you @bendbulletin and @sourceweekly for these stories, and for calling attention to this campaign, however I do not accept recognition as an unsung "hero" or any kind of hero while communities of color continue to face disparities and oppressions due to the systems built against them.

A hero is also defined as 'one who shows great courage' - and I ask you all to understand, when my friends and brown relatives in Central Oregon are being discriminated against, exploited, pushed aside and oftentimes forgotten, what choice do I have but to speak up and help tear down barriers the systems hold against us? Equal rights does not equate to equal treatment. We show great courage because we are forced to. Forced to self advocate, forced to build our own communities up, and in no way is that mythological or superhuman. It is as real and as human as it gets. It is not heroic to me to have common decency and humanity or compassion, it is simply the right thing to do, the way my parents raised me.

I am the daughter of once 'immigrant' parents - my father of Indigenous Mexican descent once considered 'illegal' on stolen land. I am a single parent of two mixed race children in Bend, Oregon, and in no way are we white-passing. Living through daily microaggressions, passive racist remarks, blatant racist remarks, listening to my 13 year old retelling a story of being called the N word on the playground of Cascade Middle School earlier this year. In a constant state of fear due to the color of our skin, I share these personal stories to make you aware of the reality we live in right here in Central Oregon.

With no other option during COVID-19, and unwilling to turn a blind eye, I chose to take on the responsibility to act and be present for my community when others continued not to be. It is no more 'heroic' for me to act in a decent and humane and equitable way towards those in an even more adverse existence than me, then it is to say to our local papers, 'Thanks, but no thanks' for this recognition.

My gratitude is insurmountable however, but more so for my own community that has put their trust in me. That has exposed their vulnerabilities and have shared their most personal struggles with me and our volunteers. The undocumented people that built this economy right here for us to thrive in and never once seeking praise for simply doing their jobs. The folks that work for menial wages, that expose their health and safety in order to feed their families and simultaneously put food on our tables. No, we're not all field workers. Some of us hold the privilege of speaking the dominant culture's language, have diplomas and higher education degrees to hold jobs in sectors we traditionally do not because of the inequities that exist there as well, and we find ways to advocate for our communities because we've lived these realities our entire lives. But from the janitors and custodians at our schools, to the rural agricultural farm

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workers, to the Directors of Latinx programs at our colleges, Central Oregon we are essential to this community beyond COVID-19.

To the Bend Bulletin, and The Source Weekly; I ask you to designate these titles you have given me and my organization, Mecca Bend, and give it to those that have earned it; the undocumented, migrant, Latinx, Indeginous and People of Color of Central Oregon, that contributed millions of dollars to our national economy and local economy and never saw a dime of financial relief during this pandemic. The laborers in all industries that make Central Oregon one of the top ranked cities to live in, that pay into funds such as social security, unemployment, and state taxes through individual tax identification numbers, and yet do not qualify for these programs you and I do. Recognize the children living in fear for their lives because of the color of their skin. The non-english speakers that were unable to understand the severity of the pandemic and city orders because our local businesses, organizations, newspapers, and news stations refused to make a priority or a line item in their budget to provide translated public service announcements. No, not all, but that should go without say.

To the director of the local 'progressive' news station that sent me step by step instructions to enable closed captioning on my TV, rather than answer the countless emails sent to address the need for them to use this as an opportunity to show all members of the broader community that we truly were in this together; what a wasted opportunity for you.

Lastly, to the allies that donated, shared our posts, and emails and jumped into action when called upon; Thank You. From the \$5 donations to the anonymous \$45,000 donation, our grassroots campaign has raised a lot of money, but also a lot of awareness of why this matters. Thank you for stepping up. Thank you for showing up.

Janet Llerandi Gonzalez
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