

Reflections on marching in the 2020 Rose Parade with the League of Women Voters Float

Researching local suffragists. Getting land permissions for Pomeroy markers. Entering data for the National Votes for Women Trail (NVWT). Sometimes it feels like thankless work. But four NVWT State Coordinators can attest to the fact that the world appreciates you!

Sarah Bell represented Kansas, Freddie Kay represented Massachusetts, Nancy Brown represented New York, and I represented Kentucky as outwalkers for the Pasadena Celebrates 2020 float in this year's Rose Parade. This is an honor none of us will soon forget.

Our day started at 3:30 AM, boarding a bus to go near the parade route. We were released to go the float about an hour prior to the parade. We could feel the excitement building as we walked past a series of amazing, flower-carpeted floats. We were a sea of women (and a few men) all dressed in white, sporting hats full of purple and gold ribbons and flowers. While it would have been privilege enough to be among this amazing group of walkers, we were following a 50-foot float featuring a eucalyptus leaf covered Statue of Liberty, and noteworthy float riders such as civil rights icon, Dolores Huerta; Coline Jenkins, great-great-granddaughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton; Michelle Duster, great-granddaughter of Ida B. Wells; Ernestine Martin-Wyatt, great-great-grandniece of Harriet Tubman; and Kenneth B. Morris Jr., great-great-great-grandson of Frederick Douglass, to name just a few.

The five and one half mile parade route delivered a reception so warm, so mission affirming, that none of us will forget the genuine enthusiasm that all ages, all genders, all ethnicities offered us. Deafening cheers greeted us every step of the way. Proof positive that our entire country is hungry for the information we are collecting, sharing and celebrating. So rest assured, your work building the National Votes for Women Trail is hugely important, and future generations will be celebrate YOU for doing it!

Onward,

Marsha Weinstein, President , The National Collaborative for Women's History Sites
Member, League of Women Voters of Louisville

Reflections of a Rose Parade Outwalker

Representing the suffragists of New York would be impossible for one person. There are simply too many luminaries, not to mention the throngs of unrecognized women who served in suffrage clubs in every county in the state. Yet there I was in Pasadena, pinning on my banner to represent New York State for the Pasadena Celebrates 2020 float in the Rose Parade on January first.

Joining the other 99 outwalkers behind the 50-foot rose and iris covered float, complete with a eucalyptus leaf covered Statue of Liberty, I was humbled. I was looking forward to shining a light on the hard work of the women and men of previous generations who worked so selflessly

to pass the nineteenth amendment to the United States Constitution, which granted many women the right to vote. The Stealth Bomber flew over, Alicia Keys' "Girl on Fire" blasted from the speakers, and we headed out, left foot first.

But as we marched the five and one half miles of the parade route, something very unexpected happened. The crowd didn't seem to recognize us just as a symbol of history, they saw us as a symbol of hope. The middle-aged man who put his hand over his heart as we passed. The elderly woman nodding her head with tears in her eyes. The teenage boy with both fists pumping in the air. The young women standing and whooping. Our chants changed as we marched from, "Votes for Women!" to "Use your Vote!" and the crowd joined in. In honor of float rider civil rights icon, Dolores Huerta, we began, "Si se puede!" Spanish for "Yes we can!" Again the crowd roared back. The energy never stopped, we were waving furiously and high fiving hands even through the last block.

As the parade ended, we weren't the same people we were when it started. Those spectator faces -- every age, color and gender -- nearly one million by most accounts, had empowered us. The suffragists we were honoring were proof that grassroots organizers can make a change. We can't let it stop with them. Those cheers reminded us that there is still work to be done, not just for women, but for equal rights for all. Let this year's Pasadena Celebrates 2020 float kick off a new decade of activism, collaboration, and change, so we can genuinely earn the applause that we so generously received.

Nancy Brown's letter to the NY Times editor