

Mothers and daughters march for their sisters



By Brock Weir

Over her 12 years, Lillie Clark-Gerein says she has always been passionate about women's rights and the rights of all people. But, when she got up on Saturday morning and put on her 'Power to the Girls' t-shirt, donned her knitted pink 'pussyhat' and hopped on the GO Train with her mother, her passion kicked into high gear as she joined the thousands of women and men for Toronto's Women's March, one of a series of demonstrations all around the world protesting the politics and policies of U.S. President Donald Trump.

Their 'pussyhats', part of a worldwide movement to take back the word while creating a potent symbol for the fight for equality, added to the sea of pink flowing through downtown streets.

'The speakers had some empowering words,' says the Hartman Public School student. '[It showed me] that we should not be afraid to speak out and we can use our voice. Seeing all the different and diverse people there, different age groups and races, different genders everyone was so unique and it was really cool.'

In the lead-up to Saturday's demonstration, Lillie says she didn't share her plans with any of her friends 'because I know others have different opinions, but those she told before their departure, however were pretty much on the same page when it comes to President Trump, she says.

'My opinion is he is not a great guy and he really shouldn't be President. I don't know how that much power got into his hands,' says Lillie, noting that people need to remain positive over the next four years. 'Try not to think about it too much and just keep marching.'

This is a sentiment Lillie shares with her mother, Corrie Clark.

Ms. Clark, a mother of three young women, said it was important for her to share the day with Lillie because she feels President Trump's policies have the power 'to set the world back 50 years' when it comes to racism, bigotry, and misogyny.

'I fear for the world and the racism and bigotry coming back again when I thought we had progressed to a much more enlightened position,' says Ms. Clark. 'I think this generation is now distant from remembering the Second World War, the Vietnam War, and Martin Luther King as a speaker. They're not exposed to perhaps the segregation and racism in their own country. Being a North American child is a privileged first-world sort of existence and I don't think they have ever seen those problems. Unfortunately, I think they still exist.'

'What Trump has done is brought to light that those issues are still there and he has given them an excuse to express them. I need [my daughters] to be very aware that the fight isn't over. They need to be aware of that and they can go forward to stand up and change that.'

As Ms. Clark took in the demonstration and absorbed the words of the speakers, she also observed a group of individuals supporting President Trump standing near police wearing their red 'Make America Great Again' baseball caps, made iconic by the Republican candidate on the campaign trail

It was a moment of dialogue and perspective for both sides, says Ms. Clark.

'I asked them if they were having a tough day because they were right by the police,' she says. 'They said, 'Yes, we are.' There were a few people who tried to get violent and aggressive with them and they said it has been scary at times walking and being threatened by people. I said it was good they came out because we all have differences of opinions.'

But, she wanted to know more, particularly whether they believed in everything the newly-minted President has been selling. They said they do, she said, but only so far as business. When she pressed them about women's rights, she said they stressed 'people need to understand we're people as well, we just have a difference of opinion, and it is not personal.'

While Ms. Clark says it is important to separate the political for the personal 'politics is business and business is politics' the policies are personal too.

The participation of local women in Saturday's Women's Marches was not limited to Toronto.

American-born Aurora resident Jennifer Ettinger was in the United States with her daughter's cheer team, and they took in a similar march in Indiana.

An author and lifestyle coach, Ms. Ettinger says she is very proud to be an American, she says, and the USA remains 'home' to her. But, when she looks at the state of her homeland now, she says she is 'frightened.'

'I see a country I don't understand and it breaks my heart. On the day of the election, my homosexual friends were posting of fear. I had one friend texting in a total panic attack for his safety. So, when I see women and men coming together to have their voices heard, I feel it is a bright light during dark days. I am glad my daughter witnessed thousands of people attending the rally, to see the impact one person can make. I will continue to do what I can, as a woman, as a mother, as an American to help heal my country. 'It was beautiful for the young girls to see, that women can be so powerful and have the strength of rallying together in a time of need. It's healing. Now the question is: what are the next steps?'