

Pursuing Justice 2020: Pittsburgh Loves All Our Neighbors

Two personal stories by Yael Silk, Bend the Arc: Pittsburgh leader

STORY 1: SHACHARIT

It's Monday, October 29, 2018

My house is full of Bend the Arc: Pittsburgh organizers, our partners, Bend the Arc staff. Stosh is in my house.

Most people are planning what will ultimately become the March.

Some are upstairs doing media interviews.

Others are keeping track of funeral times.

And I am singularly focused on planning a Shacharit service in Frick's Blue Slide Park.

Never before nor since have I felt so compelled to pray. I can't explain it, but I knew in my very core that no matter what action we planned that day that we - Bend the Arc: Pittsburgh and our broader progressive Jewish community - needed to start the day in communal prayer.

I got on the phone with Sara Stock Mayo and together we mapped out a prayer service. Later, Dove Kent handed me a phone and I was suddenly connected to rabbis across the country wanting to help.

When I showed up in the part the next morning, Bend the Arc staff handed me our siddur - in Hebrew, with transliteration, with translation, with love - and I davened through brokenness.

STORY 2: PURPLE ROSES

In the weeks that followed the synagogue massacre, people surrounded the Pittsburgh Jewish community with love and support. Some of that manifested in handmade magnei David (stars of David) and hearts that dotted my walk to shul.

These art pieces both comforted and troubled me.

In part, because on June 19, 2018, officer Michael Rosfeld, a white cop, shot unarmed Antwon Rose in the elbow, back, and cheek. Antwon was a high school student, a poet, a Black teenager. And there was no intersectional outpouring of support for Antwon's family.

Over the course of numerous coffee conversations with Jasiri X, I described the public art in Squirrel Hill and asked him what he would need to see in his neighborhood to know that he was seen and loved as a Black man and that people outside the Black community were mourning and fighting with him and for Antwon.

We settled on purple roses.

I bought material, trained volunteers, and soon, felt purple roses began blooming around Pittsburgh where they were needed...starting with outside the Allegheny County Courthouse on the first day of Michael Rosfeld's trial so Antwon's family would be greeted with the love and community support they deserved.