

## Be the grace in the world

PITTSBURGH — Listen up. Virginia Montanez can't hear. But you need to hear what she has to say.

Of course, if you happened to be in the audience when she delivered her remarks to the graduating class of the University of Pittsburgh's School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, you heard her story — about how her hearing has been fading, how diminished audial ability has shaped her life, how a single word from a dentist provided her with insight and restored her faith in humanity.

Montanez, 48, is a prominent Pittsburgh figure, a blogger, comedian, social critic and engaging character known for her mastery of the culture of the colorful city-state in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania. She has a novel coming out in June, "Nothing. Everything." Along with coal and natural gas, she's one of this region's greatest natural resources. Mostly she is known for laughing more than lambasting.

But when she stood before the graduates the other day, she was all business, delivering a speech that has bounced around the world, coming to my attention from a friend in Afghanistan who forwarded it with the admonition that I must drop everything and read it.



DAVID M. SHRIBMAN

It is the testimony of someone who lost the voice of her son, then the sound of her own voice.

Though she suffers from bilateral profound sensorineural hearing loss with a reverse slope, she has not lost her more powerful voice, the voice that bids us to heed the words of a woman who can no longer hear the flipping of newspaper pages.

You'd think being born into a supportive family that never made me feel weak or limited would have meant I'd develop a healthy relationship with my disability. On the surface, I'd claim as much for decades. This is me! This is my disability! I am not ashamed!

Inside? Well, inside I lived a life mostly trying to pass as hearing, and when I failed at it, shame swirled around me. Mocking me as I relegated myself to the shadows.

Those shadows consumed her, darkening her days, even the one when she needed to have a conversation with Franco Harris, the late Pittsburgh Steelers author of the famous Immaculate Reception play that was the highlight of the 1972 AFC divisional playoffs and — along with Bill Mazeroski's walk-off homer in the seventh game of the 1960 World Series — the greatest moment in this city's sporting history.

In an account in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette last year, she recounted how during her conversation with the beloved running back she "maxed the volume and stuck my ear up against the speaker like a medieval time-traveler confronted for the first time with telecommunications."

It worked. Montanez — sometimes known hereabouts as PittGirl — has a genius for making things work. One of the ways she has made things work is to read lips. She reads lips the way others read books — with great attention and great pleasure. But COVID and its masks ruined that.

I said no to so many things I wanted to do because my ability to communicate had been taken away. Stress was my constant companion in every interaction in every store or business. Weakness. Embarrassment. Frustration. This was my new existence.

The result was a heartbreaking episode when she took her child to the dentist. She couldn't figure out what he was saying. She did something she had never done before. She told Dr. Jordan Telin that she was deaf and, because of the mask, couldn't read his lips.

He held up a finger and then walked away, leaving me there in my frustration that this was my COVID life. When he returned, he handed me a notepad near the top of which he had written a word that changed my life:

"Hi." Exclamation mark.

It was a redemptive moment. Let's listen again to Montanez:

The "hi" dissipated the swirling fog of shame, and it let me focus on something I had never recognized before but I'm now certain many had shown me: grace.

The point of all this — the point of her story, and of this column — is that Telin's handwritten message freed her to seek the helping hand of others, to do what another Pittsburgher, Fred Rogers, once advised: "Look for the helpers."

In her speech to the graduates, Montanez expanded on what we might call Mr. Rogers' Rules of Order:

His message was simple: When you're scared. When you're anxious. When things are bigger than you ... look for the helpers; that's where the comfort lies.

After I read this speech — relayed from Kabul — I told Montanez about my own moment of being helped, from the other side of her circumstances. She can't hear; for a long time I couldn't speak without stuttering. It was a public-school speech therapist in our town by the ocean who handed me a book of Franklin Roosevelt's speeches and told me to go to the beach and deliver those remarks to the Atlantic.

I learned a lot about FDR. I still know passages of those speeches, word for word, handy in my eventual line of work. I also know the grace that comes with a helping hand.

Montanez answered me, saying that my story was "further proof that sometimes it just takes one person ... to push the first domino toward change. Amazing to think that without her, your life might have been so very different."

True. And this is a good place to add that, for a stutterer, the helping hand is time. Be patient. Never — absolutely never — complete a stutterer's sentence. And don't mistake halting speech for a halting mind. Joe Biden, the nation's most famous stutterer, will agree. In our case, the movement of the sweep hand of the watch is the helping hand.

Montanez concluded her remarks to the graduates with a challenge:

If you see the need, YOU fill the need. If you see they're feeling small and looking for the helpers, YOU be the helper. Even when a patient doesn't realize they need it, YOU be the grace.

Be the person who removes the shame. Be the person who with a wave of your hand, with the scribbling of your pen, erases years of stress. YOU be the one who pulls them into the sun.

Words to live by, from Virginia Montanez, who lives in the sunshine even in overcast Pittsburgh, and who provides it, too.

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### Letters to the Editor

#### Make this summer a Summer of Success

To the Editor:

Are you a small business owner or job seeker looking to amplify your online presence and achieve success in your professional life? Look no further than the Summer of Success Seminars, a series of free in-person workshops and webinars presented by the Avilla Area Chamber in collaboration with Grow with Google and other business-focused groups and services.

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Kevin Kelly  
Avilla Chamber of Commerce

#### Defining wokeness

To the Editor:

A friend asked me to define woke/wokeness.

Cultural Marxism, Neo-Marxism, Progressivism, social justice, anti-racism, and critical theory/intersectionality are related terms.

Woke implies the person has undergone a conversion experience enlightening him to power dynamics, systemic racism and

serious injustices of Western civilization.

The new convert experiences critical consciousness. He laments his whiteness and forsakes his white privilege. He joins his comrades in indoctrinating others and dismantling hierarchical power structures to achieve equity.

Equity is the mandate of wokeness. Equity does not mean equal opportunity. Equity means equal outcomes for all regardless of individual initiative and merit. Redistribution of social and economic capital/privilege is required to achieve equity.

Hierarchies are considered inherently oppressive. Parents, for example, are oppressors of children. Woke educators justify covert indoctrination into wokeness and gender ideology on this basis.

Cultural Marxists are embarrassed by the word "woke" although they coined it. I prefer it because it accentuates their cultishness.

In woke ideology, the hegemony is the collective of white colonizers who created systems of oppression, which operate today in hidden systemic forms requiring critical consciousness to perceive.

Their goal is to undermine the current social order and replace it with a Neo-Marxist state.

Woke ideology is advanced primarily by the long march through the institutions, a phrase originating with activist Rudi Dutschke.

This long march involves capturing the means of cultural production by infiltrating key leadership positions within institutions: government, education, media, entertainment, corporations, churches, and healthcare.

Stabilizing institutions like the natural family, marriage, father-led homes (patriarchy), parental guardianship, heteronormativity, and biblical churches are targeted. Christianity and our constitutional republic are despised. These institutions hinder dependence upon a Neo-Marxist State.

Undermining the current order includes planting seeds of chaos, envy, resentment, rage, and division. Propaganda, indoctrination, political activism, intimidation, and violence are also used.

Developing a sense of victimhood and entitlement is essential.

Wokeness is totalitarian. Affirmation, not mere tolerance, is demanded once adequate penetration is accomplished.

Critical theory provides wokeness with an illusion of

serious scholarship.

Critical theorists examine culture for power structures and systemic oppression with a Neo-Marxist lens. They always find oppression because its presence is assumed.

Victimhood status is coveted in the woke community. Intersectionality is the scheme used to assign victimhood points.

White, heterosexual, cisgender (non-transgender) Christian males are considered alpha oppressors. Their intersectionality score is low.

According to intersectionality, a black lesbian experiences more oppression than a white heterosexual male. Therefore, she should be platformed and receive more social and economic capital/privilege. He should be silenced and his social and economic capital/privilege should be stripped.

Members of historically marginalized groups are deemed oppressed and require a transfer of capital/privilege to restore them.

The woke reduce mankind to groups primarily based upon ethnicity, sex and unbiblical sexual behaviors and identities.

They do not focus upon our collective humanity or individuality. Therefore, as a white man, I am complicit in evil acts of all other white men across time, especially slavery.

The woke maintain unfavorable disparities between ethnicities are caused by systemic oppression. More credible explanations like absent fathers and culture-specific values are dismissed as victim-blaming.

Woke reasoning is circular and reductive. Their worldview predetermines their conclusions. Double standards and blame-shifting abound. Thomas Sowell, black economist, author and former Marxist, is adept at exposing this.

Redistribution of capital/privilege and shared guilt based upon class, ethnicity, or skin tone are thinly disguised Marxist adaptations.

Wokeness is not mere awareness of social causes. It is an anti-white, anti-Christian, anti-American, totalitarian worldview with a Neo-Marxist foundation.

I recommend "Awake Not Woke: A Christian Response to the Cult of Progressive Ideology" by Noelle Mering for more information.

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Rome City

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