

Life and politics come full circle

Lois Nantais - May 2022

Last month, on the day of the Sarnia Lambton (S-L) Federal Liberal Party's general meeting, my mom died. My brother called me in the afternoon to share the news, and I picked up the phone three minutes before one of my classes. I'm not sure why I picked up that phone right then given I was already on the launch pad, but what I did would mean that I was pushing through a lesson on mindfulness with such news on my mind – oh, the irony. It was already a busy day for me with the Sarnia-Lambton federal party meeting scheduled for that evening where two members of my former campaign team were competing for contested positions on the local board (EDA).

The week previously, my team and I put our names forward for positions on the EDA and were acclaimed to those positions. Eight positions, including six directors at large, were acclaimed. The team decided we wanted to work together in the future because we worked so well together during the campaign. We are a motley crew of diverse opinions and interests, collectively with common goals, intent on working hard for the community where we live. The team wanted to be a part of representing and growing the voices of left-leaning folks in the community who are also grounded in the value of actions beyond ideas. Making change, and not just talking about it, is the common theme we share.

The general meeting, after status reports, was to determine if two positions that remained, vice-chair and organization chair, would stay with those who led the board previously or if change would come sweeping in through a vote with the local Liberals. I very much wanted to be there for my colleagues who supported my own political adventure into candidacy with so much enthusiasm and integrity. Each of my teammates won that evening and with that success, we as a team began the process of representing Sarnia-Lambton and local interests with the larger federal party, organizing ourselves for working for and with the community under the Liberal banner. This is our new website: <https://slfedliberals.ca/>

I am also the president of the Sarnia-Lambton Ontario Liberal Party, and currently my attention is very much focused on finding a strong candidate to represent Liberals locally for the upcoming election in June. I recall, during the federal election last year, how I felt when some in the community said they didn't want to place a Liberal sign on their lawn for fear of being bullied and their property targeted with aggression. That is a problem – not only because it's not okay to bully but also because this is happening in the context of what needs to be political choice in what is to be a free country. Freedom of choice and of expression is what creates a vibrant democracy. It's also ironic that those who are shouting for "freedom" are often the very same ones who are doing the bullying to repress the left-leaning voices of this community.

Very often, life comes full circle. The phone call I took from Chris Cooke, one full day after being nominated as the Sarnia-Lambton federal candidate, was when I was out visiting my folks. Then, as on the night of my mom's death, I was balancing competing interests once again with a phone in my parents' spare room, trying to speak quietly so I didn't upset my family with distractions from what is very important time with them. A few days later, I was in that same room searching for the slip of paper my mom wrote her wishes for songs at her funeral. In the process, I came across my mother's records of her yearly donations to the Conservative Party, which made me laugh until I cried.

Although I'm assured that both of my parents voted for me, my parents are dyed-in-the-wool Conservatives, and it's been a stretch for them to accept some of the views of their left-leaning daughter. People don't always get along. But there's a huge difference between those who represent themselves with egos that need to dominate air space to the repression of others and those who put community-based values and togetherness first in spite of differences. Diverse opinions and arguing is not a sign of failure – the effort to silence others we don't agree with through bullying and intimidation tactics is.

I celebrate my mom's conservative values and interests. How could I not? Her consistent love guided me through life. She taught me that when we are actually listening respectfully, we learn more. We are also strengthened by our differences in many ways; standing up for what we believe, especially when challenged to justify those beliefs by people who disagree, confirms our own convictions. And then, as open representatives of those beliefs, we can find others who agree to work together at the change we want to see.