

KELOWNA CAPITAL NEWS

Column: Authenticity, equality shouldn't have to be sacrificed in order to belong



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The Salmon Arm Art Gallery hosts the exhibition A Place to Belong to Saturday, Oct. 29, 2022. (File photo)

Much has been said and written about the human need to belong.

“Belongingness” is defined as an emotional need to be accepted as a member of a group, be it family, friends, a religion, co-workers, etc.

It is believed much of what humans do is driven by this need.

But if belonging comes at the expense of who you truly are, if it requires an effort of suppression to “fit in,” is it authentic?

If you haven't visited the Salmon Arm Art Gallery's current exhibition, A Place to Belong (part of the ongoing Pride Project), it is absolutely worth your time. A key part of the exhibit is the cultural mapping research project, through which participants share what they consider to be safe spaces in Salmon Arm – places where they feel safe and where they feel they do not belong.

Above one map is a comment from one of the artists. They explain how a space is perceived (safe or unsafe) can change with one comment.

Empathy is crucial in making a space, a place, or even a city, one where someone feels a sense of belonging.

In another comment shared in the exhibit, an artist refers to burnouts deliberately made on any of the city's rainbow crosswalks. "What's the big deal; it's just a sidewalk, just some tire marks.' It isn't just a mark on a sidewalk. It is a statement – it's a statement that we don't belong and we're not welcome."

On Sunday morning, Oct. 23, the Salmon Arm Pride Project hosted an event at Song Sparrow Hall. Prior to the event, word circulated there were people planning to stage a demonstration at the event. Sure enough, a group of people gathered across the street from the hall. One carried a sign referring to a website whose tagline involves faith, family and freedom. Another person carried a sign concerning the alleged sexual grooming of minors.

[Making Salmon Arm home: Art gallery researches safety for LGBTQ residents](#)

Read more: [Salmon Arm Art Gallery presents A Place to Belong exhibition in Pride Project](#)

If any of the protesters planned to cross the street to buy a ticket and attend the event (venturing beyond their bubble to maybe learn more about the event and the people involved), they were out of luck. The event sold out.

While the demonstration remained peaceful (RCMP remained nearby), the messaging could only be construed as hostile: "You are not wanted nor welcome here."

By and large our sense of belonging is linked to other people. And when it comes to people, it's all too easy to make generalizations around who is good and who is bad, who should or shouldn't belong, without ever having direct communication with those we champion or condemn to determine which is warranted, if either.

To avoid all of this, some couples, as evidenced in comments shared in the 'A Place to Belong' exhibit, choose to belong by keeping their affections out of the public eye. But again, is this authentic? Should they give up their authenticity, or their equality rights, to belong?

The A Place to Belong exhibit runs to Oct. 29.

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Editor of the Salmon Arm Observer, Shuswap Market, and Eagle Valley News. I'm always looking for new and exciting ways to keep our readers informed and engaged.

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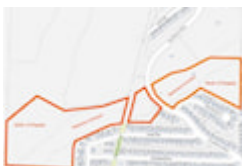
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