

From Spokane Spokesman-Review:

# Sue Lani Madsen: Divorce is not an option

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By Sue Lani Madsen

It was an invitation to an event with an irresistible name. “Walk a Mile in My News” is the latest effort by the Braver Angels organization to improve civic communication skills.

Braver Angels chapters across the country are places where people of strong convictions agree to disagree on politics while depolarizing their rhetoric. Chapter leadership and many formal events require evenly matching partisans from each side.

A Central/Eastern Washington Alliance was formed in 2020 and is actively seeking new members, especially from the Red team. Unlike some purportedly nonpartisan political organizations, the Braver Angels commitment requires bipartisan participation at all levels of leadership and actively seeks diversity delving more than skin deep.

Braver Angels chapters sponsor a variety of workshops and opportunities for 1:1 connections across partisan lines.

The Walk a Mile in My News event was developed by the Sacramento Braver Angels Alliance but open to members across the country. Organizers paired Red- and Blue-leaning volunteers to discuss how you know what you know and what sources to trust. The three dozen or so unpaired Blue registrants participated as observers to a reunion workshop where the Red-Blue pairs reported what they had learned. It's an exercise designed to build up intellectual resiliency and the skills to engage as citizens dedicated to an inclusive country.

My partner in the conversation was Beth, a physician from Nashville, Tennessee. We both listed abortion as a hot topic, with Beth identifying as pro-choice and me identifying as pro-life. Beth wanted abortion to be rare but available, I described it as an end of life decision worthy of the same ethical framework as at any other stage of life. We found common ground in shared concern for supporting women facing unplanned pregnancies. I shared a link to Feminists for Life, a group addressing the economic desperation and lack of relational support that lies behind the majority of abortion decisions.

But Beth said she just didn't trust Republican men because she hadn't read news reporting their support for women. My news diet includes stories about Republicans supporting a variety of local initiatives directly caring for pregnant women, promoting adoption as a choice and supporting foster families. But in a mainstream media culture framing the debate as pro-choice

versus anti-abortion, there is little room for pro-life stories. And for Blue-leaning Beth, those local initiatives weren't the big solution she was looking for.

Our conversation led me to an insight that also resonated with Beth. We have a partisan communication problem rooted in the difference in our political love languages. It's an analogy wholly appropriate to the Braver Angels' roots in marriage counseling.

"The 5 Love Languages" is Dr. Gary Chapman's best-selling book at over 20 million copies. His experience as a marriage counselor led him to identify five different ways people receive and express love. Mismatched love languages are a barrier to lasting relationships, whether husband and wife or parent and child.

For individuals, Chapman identifies the love languages as (1) Acts of Service, (2) Receiving Gifts, (3) Quality Time, (4) Words of Affirmation and (5) Physical Touch. Anyone who experiences feeling loved primarily by hearing words of affirmation may miss seeing the love expressed by a fresh pot of tea if it's not accompanied by an "I love you." One spouse wonders why the other never says anything, the other wonders why the other keeps talking. The result is a dysfunctional relationship.

There may not be five political love languages but there are at least two: more government and less government. Blue political love is expressed and received through new federal and state initiatives, believing in both the responsibility and power of government to fix people problems. Red political love focuses on individual responsibility and is skeptical of the government's ability to act effectively, as expressed by the punchline "I'm from the government and I'm here to help."

The result is Democrats accusing Republicans of not caring about an issue when they oppose a bill with an attractive title because they don't think it will work, and Republicans accusing Democrats of not caring about whether it works or not as long as it sounds good.

America needs relationship counseling.

We are 332 million individuals living in 50 states plus the territories – and still one country. We tried it once, and divorce is not an option. That's where the Braver Angels have stepped in, not to change each other's minds but to put a stop to demonizing the other side. As one participant to Walk a Mile in My News put it, "We have different ways of solving problems but we see the same problem and have the same heart for the problem."

E pluribus unum. Out of many, one.

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