



THE MIDDLE OF THE STORY

Hands Off Rally, Durango CO, 2025

By Vivian Smotherman

I'm not here to whisper.
And I'm not here to make you comfortable.
I'm here because I've seen this story before.
And I know how it ends—unless we change it.

We are not at the beginning of fascism.
We are in the middle.

The books have already been banned.
The teachers have already been fired.
The laws are already rewritten.
The fear is already normalized.

This is not leadership. It's punishment.
And it's not chaos. It's learning theory.

This is behavioral conditioning—deliberate and strategic.
Make resistance painful.
Make obedience just slightly less painful.
And eventually, people bend.

The institutions have already bent.
Our Principles have already bent.
Their truth is broken.

When truth breaks, people disappear.

You don't need soldiers in the street to have fascism.
You just need silence.
You just need compliance.
You just need enough people to think it's not their problem.

But I've stood where silence leads.

Not so long ago, I stood on the hallowed ground of Auschwitz-Birkenau.
On the rubble of those accursed furnaces.
And I felt the weight of a million voices.

Ghosts.

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I heard them asking me:

“What gives you the right?

Why do you get to walk out of this place, when we never could?”

And that question has followed me.

Haunted me.

Shaped everything I’ve done since.

I owe them an answer.

And today, I offer it.

I walked out because I had work to do.

I walked out because someone had to preserve truth.

I walked out because someone had to light the flare before we had fallen too far.

If you think it can’t happen here—**you’re already too late.**

This is not the beginning of fascism.

This is the middle.

And the ending depends on *us*.

I’ve said it before, I’m a planner, a doer, and a fighter. I’m not here to whine about injustice, I’m not here to talk about resistance, I’m here to prepare for survival. For we must remain whole, if we’re going to overcome.

Today we march,

Tomorrow we adapt.

We resist.

We become dangerous in ways they can’t track.

And if we want to stop this descent—if we want to survive it—we cannot just resist.

We have to adapt. We have to subvert. We have to outmaneuver.

When they ban books,

we build libraries in our basements.

We teach banned history by candlelight if we have to.

When they surveil us,

we go dark.

We speak in playlists and memes, in QR codes and fliers.

We drown their propaganda in history and facts.

When they weaponize eggs and the economy,

we become the wrench in the machine.

We leak. We delay. We reroute.

We build mutual-aid markets they can’t monitor or tax.

When they erase our identities,
we flood the system with too many to track.
We change names, shift pronouns, rewrite the rules.
We become ungovernable by refusing to vanish.

When they strip DEI from our schools,
we embed those values deeper than policy.
We become walking curriculum.
We organize behind closed doors, and raise resistance in every bar, every bookstore,
every back room.

When they make it illegal to protest,
we jam their culture.
We mock them.
We remix their slogans until they mean nothing.
We use stickers, murals, poems, and noise.

And when they abandon us?
We come together like family.
We coordinate shelter and supplies through encrypted channels.
We create ride networks, safe zones, backyard clinics, and food circles.

Because this isn't just resistance. It's a reckoning.

Sometimes, the most radical thing you can do is survive out loud.

This is how we win.
Not just with protests.
With presence.
With community.
With courage made ordinary.

With the quiet thunder of people who refuse to disappear

This isn't about slogans.
This isn't about hashtags.

If they fear our truth—good.
Let them fear it.

Because we are still here.
Because we are louder than their noise.
Because we have ghosts behind us and generations ahead of us.

And I intend to be worthy of both.