

PORTRAITS OF LIFE EXHIBIT OPENING

Embracing Diversity

A Speech by
Montgomery College President
Dr. DeRionne Pollard

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Thank you all for being here tonight. It is my true honor to welcome you to *Portraits of Life: LGBT Stories of Being—Embrace, Empower, Express*, devoted to celebrating the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Transgender Community of Montgomery County.

We are grateful to have with us this evening Delegate Heather Mizeur from District 20—home to this wonderful campus. As many of you may know, she sits on the House of Delegates' Appropriations Committee. Heather is a health care policy expert, a human rights champion, and a dedicated supporter of the mission of community colleges!

We also are fortunate to have Senator Ida Ruben here to celebrate this event. We are grateful for all of your years of advocacy on behalf of the College and the Takoma Park/Silver Spring Campus. And, of course, we are deeply grateful to everyone who made this day possible.

Thank you to our honorary co-chairs of the steering committee—Delegate Anne Kaiser and Mayor Jeffrey Slavin. Though they could not join us tonight, Anne and Jeffrey are a true community leaders and dear friends—to me personally, to the College, and to the entire LGBT community.

Thank you to the Sanford and Doris Slavin Foundation for sponsoring this wonderful, and important, exhibit.

Thank you to the members of the College and the broader community who have devoted their own time to making this idea come to life.

And thank you, especially, to those of you who shared your story—those of you who remind us that, as I once heard, “the fundamentals of change are stubborn faith, rebellious hope, and defiant love.” I celebrate you for giving voice to your experience as a member of this community. In fact, all we really are are just regular members of the community who contribute to everyone's well being.

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What do I really mean by this? I picture local communities, such as Montgomery County, like one of those [Russian Nesting Doll Sets](#). You know, the ones where the bigger doll within a smaller one and within that one an even smaller one and so on. The largest doll is the county; but inside it sits a great number of subsets, smaller communities that fill out the core. Each community makes the larger one stronger, more stable, more unique. Without these communities, the larger one is empty inside. It is just a shell without the communities filling it out.

I would suggest to you that we all are just shells without other people around us. In fact, there is a whole concept centered on this idea- the South African philosophy called ubuntu. South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains that the fundamental tenant of ubuntu is: “[i]f I diminish you, I diminish myself.” If I diminish you...I diminish myself. The essence of being human centers on how we relate to other people, and our differences are meant to be embraced. The archbishop has said, “all belong: gay, lesbian, so-called straight. All, all are meant to be held in this incredible embrace that will not let us go.”

Not too long ago, I sat next to a gentleman on an airplane and, as often happens, we began to share personal information. I told him that this absolutely phenomenal woman named Robyn and I have loved deeply for more than 20 years and about this glorious little boy named Myles who is simply, to borrow from Mayor Corey Booker, “a manifestation of the conspiracy of our love.” Near the end of our time together, the gentleman said to me: “You must have great courage to be in your role and to be out.” I paused contemplatively and replied, “It is not great courage, but rather absolute freedom and self love.” I then shared with him a portion of a piece by Marianne Williamson that has literally transformed my life: “As we let our own light shine,

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we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

To me, this is what Portraits of Life is all about. It is about the embracing who we are, but also embracing the diversity of our entire community. Rather than diminish others, and thus diminish ourselves, we tell our stories to lift ourselves and one another up. We recognize that without each other, we are mere shells, we are just the outer nesting doll: void of substance, void of strength, void of humanity. I hope this exhibit makes you embrace the diversity of our community and, in turn, makes each of us a better, fuller, more enriched person.