

Terry Black

VIVA, LAKE FOREST

Who doesn't love a parade? Especially when you've been asked to accompany a July 4th float — and by "float," I mean a decorated car — on behalf of the Tapestry Unitarian Universalist church, known as UU, with its message of unity, tolerance and inclusion in these troubled times.

Plus, the Kiwanis Club is offering a special \$6.00 pancake-and sausage breakfast before the parade begins, because human dignity is important, but who doesn't love pancakes and sausage? I dig in, knowing my arteries are hardening for a really good cause.

Not long after, with bellies full and clothes syrup-stained, we join the parade. We're given little cards to distribute, with several multicolored catch-phrases. The first is indisputable: LOVE IS LOVE. I like it because it's something no one would dispute, both sweet and really obvious. The second line reads CLIMATE CHANGE IS REAL, which seems less sentimental, and more in the realm of the physical sciences. Plus, it's controversial: only 97% of the experts would agree.

So we're strolling alongside the UU car, handing out cards about love and climate, and I keep falling behind the float car because so many people, especially kids, want those cards. Grownups can be blasé, but here's something that's always been true and always will be: Kids love free stuff. You could give them the instruction manual for a toaster-oven and they'd say, "Thanks, Mister!"

To be fair, though, we can't compete with the Comic Quest float, sponsored by a local comic book store. Because they're giving out free comic books, and what's more cool than free comic books? Forget metaphysical inspiration, give me DC Superhero Girls any day. Something about Supergirl, and that cute little skirt that bullets bounce right off. I think it's a metaphor, but I'm not sure of what. Bottom line, I'm a comics nerd first and a UU promoter second (just don't tell them I said that).

But like I said, I'm falling behind, which gives me a chance to see some of the other attractions. Like the Elvis float, featuring The King himself, who's apparently not dead because there he is in his Elvis-car, singing his lusty rendition of "Viva, Lake Forest! " — doing an ongoing in-character improv, saying "Thank you vermuch" to the crowd. Of all the famous dead people, he's easily the most active.

But the coolest thing of all, on a par with free comic books, is the Jurassic Park float. It's a big steel cage on a flatbed truck, with a squealing dinosaur poking out his long neck, flashing vicious dino teeth, threatening to devour the passers-by. "I'm worried the dinosaur might escape," I tell Lisa, who rolls her eyes. "If you think it can't happen, that's the same thing they said in the movie!"

Of course, joining a parade is an opportunity to renew old acquaintances, and today's no exception. During my card-handing-out duties, I'm recognized by two (count 'em, two) people in the audience, who wave and say, "Hey, Terry!" They're delighted to see me here, and I enjoy seeing them, too — though I've no idea who they are. That happens a lot, there's an army of Terry Black supporters out there, forgotten but fiercely loyal, and I'd just like to say to them, "Thanks, uh... you guys."

Then comes my big moment. As we go by the grandstand, the woman narrating the parade asks the passers-by if they know any jokes. It's a compulsion, forgive me, I can't NOT do it. I run over to the grandstand, lean in and ask, "Why did the turtle cross the road? To get to the Shell station!" The laughter, as they say, brings new meaning to the word "adequate."

The parade is mostly fun, here on this beautiful July 4th holiday, surrounded by the good folks of Lake Forest and its neighbors. Still, the long march takes its toll, under a broiling summer sun, as we near the end of our voyage. By now all our cards have been distributed, we're footsore and tired and our spirits are waning (at least mine are). I've begun wondering if it's really worth spreading a message of tolerance. I want to say Look, love each other without me for awhile, I'm tired and my feet hurt.

No, really, I'm just kidding. Love is love. Knowledge is good. Use correct postage. Apply brakes when stopping. And remember to enjoy the little things, like how this friggin' parade is finally over.

Thank you, Jesus!

Today I marched for social justice, got free comic books, listened to undead Elvis, avoided being eaten by an audio-animatronic dinosaur, told a bad joke to several hundred people, and met two old friends I liked very much though I can't say who they were. Now I'm ready for some serious couch time — all in the name of American independence.

Who's got a cheesy joke for next year?