

Earning the Voter's Trust: Rob & H

Most of our deep canvass conversations run ten to twenty minutes, but sometimes they take longer.

One of the first times I felt successful on a canvass was when I got to H's house, on a cul-de-sac of nicer homes and small multi-unit apartment buildings. I knocked on the door, and we spoke through the screen for a while. She was suspicious, and decidedly wasn't going to vote in the midterm.

I listened to her and tried to understand. Her feeling was that it's pointless, nothing changes and her vote didn't matter, Democrat or Republican. She had lived in the neighborhood for 25 years, and was first-generation Mexican-American and had a huge family--a lot of them living with her. I told her that I felt the same way, that I was frustrated with things not changing, and I was most worried about my step-dad who had multiple heart attacks last year, and wouldn't have insurance without the ACA.

H, I soon learned, was the family matriarch. As we talked, she told me about each of her neighbors and gave me the gossip on what they were doing wrong: how they were lazy and accepting aid; how there were drugs in certain houses; how property taxes were going up because of all the new condos being built. But she did seem to relate to what I was saying about my stepdad, that it was good he was OK; that hard-working people should be able to go to the doctor. She's had to go a lot lately herself.

By this point, she had come out of the house and was talking to me on the steps. She was still adamant about not voting. I told her more about myself, that I was a recovering addict, that sometimes I get really overwhelmed and feel powerless about the world around me and try to control what's in my grasp. But it rarely works. She nodded--all while younger people kept coming in and out of her house, "That's my niece, say hi. That's my nephew say hi. That's my nephew's girlfriend, say hi. Her?" She pointed to a young girl about sixteen who had been sitting on the lawn the whole time we had been speaking, "She's my niece, too. Say hi."

Then she told me that her son had died from a heroin overdose the year before. And we sat for a while together. I told her my cousin had died of a heroin overdose two years before, after battling addiction for 25 years. She said, "You want something to drink?" I said, "That would be so nice." She brought out a bottle of

water for each of us and we drank them together. I said, "H, we need people like you to vote. And I drove an hour-and-a-half each way just to have the opportunity to talk with someone exactly like you. And you're right—maybe things haven't changed much, but I see my vote as a gift to my stepdad for his healthcare, and a gift to those who lack the privilege that I have so that their rights and opportunity might be protected better.

And you said that you don't care about politics--but you do. You know what everyone in your house is doing, what every one of your neighbors is doing. You know what's happening in your neighborhood with real estate, schools, homelessness, and you have an opinion. So don't tell me you don't care. And THIS election, is about YOUR neighborhood, YOUR district, and here, a single vote matters a lot. Will you think about using your vote as a gift to your nieces and nephews, your son who has passed, the homeless that need housing in your neighborhood, or your neighbors that need assistance? And if not, maybe a gift to me for all my driving?"

She looked at me for a minute and said: "Who is it that you want me to vote for?"

I said, "That's up to you, but you should look at the two nominees running, one has been around for a while--"

"Dana?!?"

"You mean, Dana Rohrabacher? Yes, he's currently your congressman--"

"Oh I hate that man. I will vote the other way. You should have said that before."

"Well, H, I was enjoying our talk, and our organization is non-partisan--"

"Dana is terrible. Let's get him out."

I told her I'd call her and help her get to the polls--but she said she knew where it was. Cause she knows what's up in her neighborhood. I thanked her for her time, said good-bye to her family and went to the next door.

That conversation was an hour and fifteen minutes long and I will never forget it.