

What I would say in my Ted Talk

I was fortunate this week to visit and spend time with my friend Ian Harvie. Born and raised in Portland, Harvie is a Los Angeles-based comedian known for his standup comedy and appearances on the Emmy Award-winning show “Transparent.”

Harvie is transgender. And as it turns out, EqualityMaine just announced it will honor him with its “Great Pioneer” award at its annual gala.

Last year Harvie gave a talk at TEDxDirigo, one in which he tried to put the audience in his shoes, particularly the many who had told him in the past, “I can’t imagine what it’s like to be you.”



ALEX STEED

I was caught off guard when Ian asked me what I would like to say to other people if I were given a similar opportunity. Honestly, I was stumped. But after a little bit of thought, I realized I’d want to say what I’ve said in one way or another plenty of times by way of this column and my blog.

I would encourage those in the audience to try to listen to people who have experiences different from their own. Actually make a concerted effort to do this.

I would encourage those in the audience to try to listen to people who have experiences different from their own

Social media can be this wonderful listening tool, but many use it to amplify their own myopic views. This tendency spans across the political spectrum, and it is sad to see such a beautiful basket of opportunities to better understand each other go wasted day after day.

I would express thanks to those who have opened up about their lives and perspectives and shared them widely. I try to listen as best as I can. I’m not always successful, but I am much better off when I do. You know when you’re talking with someone and realize they’re just waiting their turn to project? It feels that way on Twitter and Facebook, in the comments section and wherever else we engage a discouragingly large amount of the time. But I remain grateful and better whenever I truly try to hear people out and better understand where they’re coming from.

Here is one thing I have learned: If you’re in the middle of an exchange and you go, “No! Actually, it’s like this!” Take a second and ask if you’ve actually considered any other perspective. Chances are if your impulse is “No!” you haven’t really done that. If that’s your impulse, you’re likely shutting out the world even if you fancy yourself progressive and open-minded. You don’t have to agree, but at least try to hear.

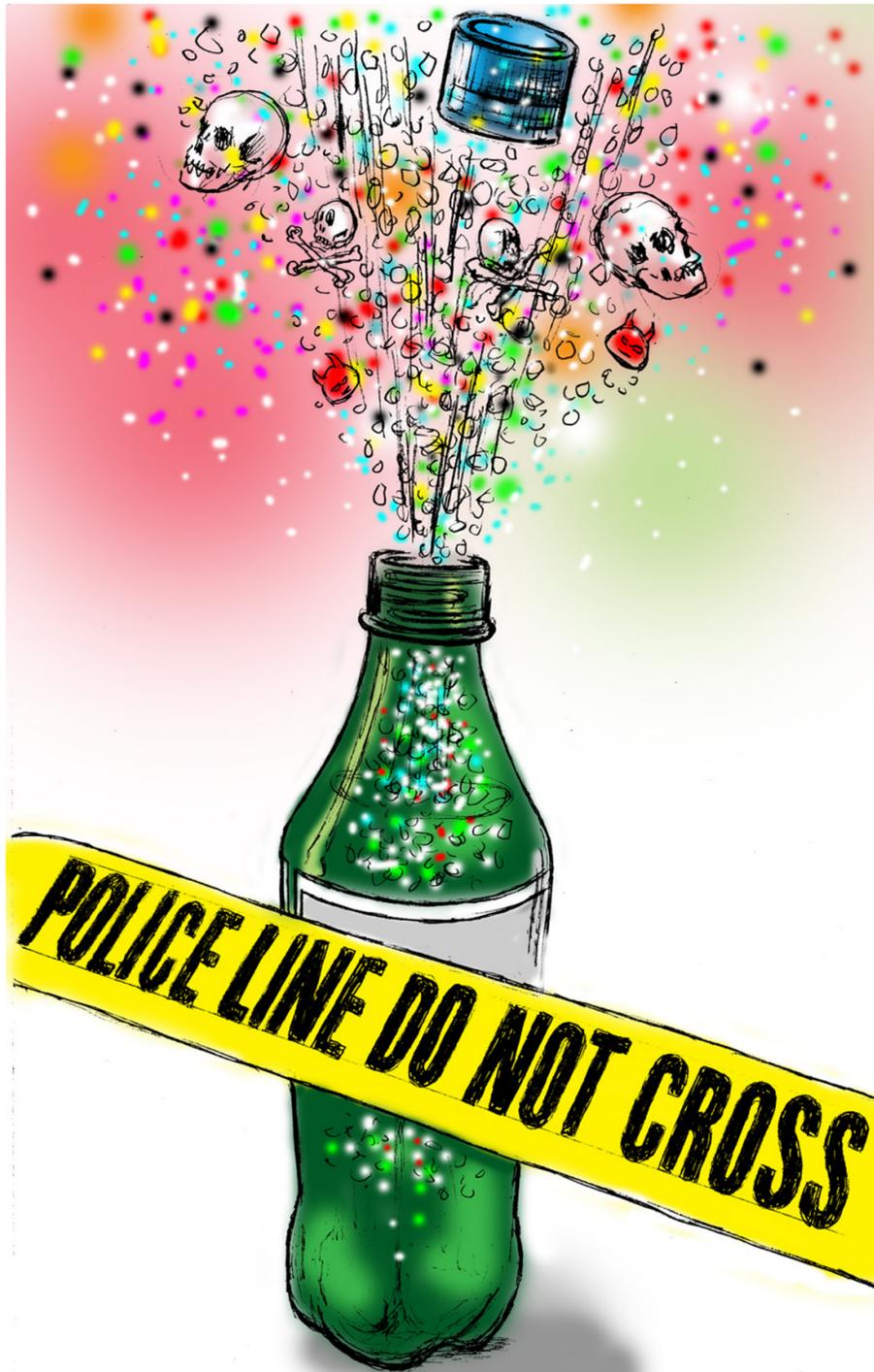
It’s sad to see truly thoughtful people get caught up in their own myopia.

Truly consider your own barriers to experiencing the world the way others experience it. If you are white and straight and cisgender or some or all of the above — those of us with the largest share of characteristics that are referred to by default as “normal” — and especially if you are just living around others who are mostly like you, there are experiences you just will not instinctively understand. It’s OK to not fundamentally understand every experience, so it’s equally OK to not pretend that you do.

Listen before asserting you know what’s up. It will make everything better.

Every time white, straight and cis people insist upon asserting their perspectives without considering others, they’re helping to uphold the systems that have made life more difficult for everyone else. We help police violence continue, we help systemic poverty kill and we help to keep unjust

See Steed, Page D3



OP ART BY GEORGE DANBY

More meth labs in Maine, but not necessarily meth use

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNS
BDN STAFF

Amid Maine’s worsening heroin epidemic dominating headlines, the state’s methamphetamine problem hasn’t gotten any better.

The Maine Drug Enforcement Agency has busted 21 meth labs so far this year — including a suspected meth lab on Hammond Street in Bangor on Wednesday — compared with nine in the first four months of 2015. Drug agents last year seized a record 56 meth labs, and at this rate, 2016 could be another record-setting year.

While Maine has taken pains to crack down on meth over the last decade, the powerful stimulant continues to flow through the state. But data suggest that demand for the drug isn’t rising in tandem.

So why are more meth labs popping up in Maine? Even as the state has cracked down on the production and distribution of the drug, meth cooks and users have simply changed tactics to maintain a supply for even a marginal demand. A meth recipe, known as “shake and bake,” has made it easier for people to get around the complex chemistry of “Breaking Bad” to quickly cook small batches of meth, most of which feed the addictions of just a handful of people.

War on meth

The Northeast has been largely spared the more devastating consequences of meth that have ravaged the Midwest and West Coast since the 1980s. But law enforcement in Maine have encountered a greater number of meth labs than their counterparts in the rest of New England.

In recent years, most of these have been amateur “shake and bake” labs that produce small quantities of meth in under 30 minutes, usually to feed the habits of a handful of people. That doesn’t mean they aren’t dangerous. Just a pound of home-cooked meth can produce five to six pounds of toxic waste. The labs are prone to explosions. And cleaning up after them is no easy task.

“Shake and bake” labs are the latest innovation in a black market that has evolved in the face of a continuing legislative and law enforcement crackdown aimed at eradicating it.

Maine took a pre-emptive strike against meth in 2005 with one of the first laws in the nation to

curb access to the drug’s main ingredient — pseudoephedrine — with the aim of putting local meth labs out of business. This included moving the cold medicine behind the pharmacy counter and barring people from buying more than 9 grams per month.

After the Maine law passed, traffickers fed Mainer’s appetite for meth by smuggling the drug across the Canadian border until the MDEA successfully cracked down on them, cutting off that supply by 2009.

But by then, Maine meth cooks had caught on to methods to get around the pseudoephedrine restriction. Cooks recruited “smurfs” who went from pharmacy to pharmacy to purchase their allotment of the cold medicine, often in exchange for meth.

Coupled with the emergence of the easier “shake and bake” recipe, meth remained readily available. The number of meth labs busted by the MDEA has spiked in recent years, from six in 2010 to 56 last year.

In 2013, the Legislature tried to stamp out smurfing by requiring retailers to log sales of the cold medicine used to make meth in an electronic tracking system. This system can block an individual from going to multiple pharmacies to buy more pseudoephedrine than allowed by law. Previously, retailers maintained written logs, and smurfs could easily go from pharmacy to pharmacy to buy more than their legal allotment.

Even with this technological fix, the supply of meth in Maine has persisted in order to meet the demand for the drug.

Indeed, state and federal laws limiting access to meth ingredients have succeeded only in temporarily reducing meth supply, according to a 2013 report by the Government Accountability Office.

Rx for Sudafed

The persistence of “shake and bake” meth labs prompted lawmakers in Oregon and Mississippi to pass laws requiring a prescription for pseudoephedrine. Maine lawmakers considered a bill in 2011 to adopt a prescription-only requirement for the cold medicine, but it died in committee.

After Oregon’s law took effect in 2006, law enforcement there busted 66 meth labs, a number that fell to a low of seven in 2014. When law enforcement there do find meth labs, they tend to

See Meth, Page D3

Site ranks Maine 4th best for women

But there’s many factors to this story

BY ELIZABETH NEIMAN
AND SHARON KLEIN
SPECIAL TO THE BDN

Popular online finance resource WalletHub published a report this past month stating that Maine is the fourth best place for women to live. The report opens with a rationale: Even as women are increasingly earning undergraduate and graduate degrees, and are pursuing a wide range of careers, discrimination and violence against women continue to persist.

The on-the-ground facts about women’s lives in any community vary a great deal depending on whom you are asking

Using data from multiple sources (such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Violence Policy Center), the report measured two major categories: “women’s economic and social well-being” and “women’s health-care and safety.” For both categories, multiple metrics are assessed, such as the percentage of women who live below poverty and median earnings for female workers (adjusted for cost of living), and women’s preventive health care.

Mainers should be proud to have earned a relatively high ranking, to be sure. But any survey operates at a level of abstraction, using a tiny subset of a group to represent the whole (1.3 million Mainers and 678,305 women and girls). The on-the-ground facts about women’s lives in any community vary a great deal depending on whom you are asking and where you are looking — not to mention the questions you are asking.

Where WalletHub identifies winner states for women, other organizations expose a bleaker reality. For example, the American Association of University Women used the same data as WalletHub to come to a starkly different conclusion, ranking Maine a C+, below all other New England states. But not a single state aced the test: Massachusetts and Maryland ranked the highest, but they still only earned a B+. The American Association of University Women’s lesson is that there is room for improvement for everyone.

While there are multiple factors to consider when weighing the status of women in Maine, we would like to begin by focusing on a basic fact that appears in reports based on U.S. Census data. Like every other state in the nation, there is a “pay gap” in Maine between what men and women earn annually.

In 2014, women in Maine earned 79 cents for every dollar men earned, which is consistent with the national median. The pay gap is a complex issue with multiple factors. Some of this gap is because of choices many women make — such as working fewer hours than men, pursuing careers that do not pay as well as men’s, or taking time off to care for young children.

But the American Association of University Women report stresses that at least 7 percent of the pay gap is unexplained. Across every education level and job category, from firefighting to computer programming to nursing, men are paid more than women.

A new report from the Maine Development Foundation, forthcoming in April, confirms these national trends persist in Maine as well and have not changed much over the last five years.

This is especially distressing in Maine, a rural state that ranks 29th in the nation and sixth in the New England region for the percentage of women above the poverty level (per Maine’s Permanent Commission on the Status of Women). In Maine, 45 percent of families below the poverty level

See Women, Page D3