



Cast Your Vote!

I TEND TO BE A LITTLE RESISTANT TO change. And by a little, I mean a lot.

When the grocery store I shop at remodeled, changing their aisles from running east to west, to now running north to south, I didn't like it. I still don't like it. As I cruised down the pasta aisle the other day, I found myself quietly muttering, "I liked it better *before!*" For years, my mail was delivered in the afternoon, but suddenly, a few months ago, it started arriving early in the morning. I'm not such a fan of that, and sometimes I won't go to the mailbox until the afternoon, just to stick to my routine. With such resistance to change, I definitely didn't like it when our voting system changed to a mail-in ballot.

As an elementary student, I certainly didn't understand the intricacies of the politics, but I always loved Election Day. The gym, which doubled as the lunchroom at Wilson Elementary, also doubled—or, more accurately, tripled—as a polling station on Election Day. Big silver voting booths were delivered to the school the day before the election, stacked high and lined up along the gym wall waiting to be set up overnight. The next day was always exciting to me! The lunch times were shifted so that the whole school could filter in and out of the lunchroom, which had been reduced by half its size, with the far end of the room transformed into a polling station. The best part though, was that throughout the day, "big people" (also known as adults) would trickle through the halls of the school, following the scent of Cheese Zombies or Wiener Winks, which wafted from the cafeteria and drew them toward the polls. I loved watching these adults going about their very serious business of voting. It seemed so official and such a grown up thing to be able to stand in one of those three-walled silver booths and cast a vote. I couldn't wait to vote!

When I turned 18, my voter registration card arrived in the mail, with the polling station to which I was assigned printed on it: Wilson Elementary! As I walked into the gym that first November, I felt so grown up. The smell of cafeteria food still lingered in the air, and the voting booths were set up at the same end of the room. After casting my vote, I walked across the gym floor and proudly placed my ballot in the box before eagerly taking an "I Voted" sticker and affixing it to my coat.

Then, it changed. When mail-in ballots replaced the polling stations and voting booths a few years ago, I didn't like the change. Instead of there being one exciting day on which to vote, the ballot arrived weeks ahead of time and sat listlessly in my mail basket waiting to be filled out when there was a spare minute—maybe while watching TV at night, or while eating breakfast over the kitchen sink. Somehow, it just doesn't seem as dignified, important or as much of an honor to be voting in this way.

Regardless of my resistance to welcoming change, whether it's the grocery store, mail delivery or where I vote, I do begrudgingly go with the flow when changes occur. I may not like the changes, but I *do* have groceries to buy, mail to read and votes to cast.

Whether voting in a presidential election, for or against a referendum, or, closer to home, voting in our Best of the City survey (the results of which are on page 82!) we all have a chance to make our voice heard by casting our vote for what is important to us. That right is such a gift; one that we should embrace, realizing the sacrifice and persecution others have gone through—and still are going through in some parts of the world—just for the right to let their voice be heard and counted. If you choose not to vote, that is your right as well; however, keep your lips zipped if you don't like the results or are unhappy with the decisions made. If you don't vote, you can't complain!

It is not just in politics and the Best of the City survey that we need to let our voice be heard, but in the most precious parts of our lives. We wield such power with our words by what we say, or consequently, don't say. Life is short; so let your vote and your voice be heard! Go after what you want most in life, pursue what is most important and let the people who mean the most to you know they are loved. Doing that may be a change from what we normally do, but hey, maybe change isn't so bad. I vote for embracing it!

Blythe