

April 3, 2017

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

There has been considerable discussion comparing the attendance figures from your inauguration to those of the Women's March on Washington, and its sister rallies, the next day. However, this letter isn't about those numbers. It's about one person, who on January 21<sup>st</sup>, made a difference in the lives of her fellow Americans.

The story begins before dawn, outside Pennsylvania Station in Baltimore. Hundreds of people had arrived for the 7:35 a.m. MARC train to Washington. The station was packed, and people spilled out the door, all the way around the block. The line did not move for the longest time, but it's important to note that no one moved out of line, either. We were determined to get to Washington, to march on behalf of women.

Maryland Transit Administration officials soon realized that this was no ordinary Saturday morning. They scrambled to add cars to trains, and to even add trains – in order to get people moving.

When my section of the line finally entered the station, we were quickly ushered to the tracks to board one of those additional trains. People were thrilled, and cheered all the way down the stairs. To our surprise, we were met by an equally excited MARC conductor, Shannon T. Harper. She greeted us with a big smile on her face, and was high-fiving each of us as we hustled into the train. Her co-workers on the platform applauded.

As a photographer, I am always looking for people and situations that capture moments like these. So I felt lucky to be able to shoot a photograph of Ms. Harper greeting passengers. Soon into the ride, however, the story became all the more magical.

It turns out this conductor was not scheduled to work that day. She and a group of fellow female MARC employees volunteered to make the run, even agreeing to work later than normal to get people safely back to Baltimore. Apparently they were in full support of their sisters and brothers who were traveling to Washington that day, and wanted to do their part.

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As the train left Baltimore, I posted the picture I took of Ms. Harper on my photography Facebook page, The Uncensored City. And on a day filled with surprises, I was taken aback by the reaction. The picture, and the story behind it, went viral. Nearly 3,000 people liked my post, nearly 500 people shared it, and it was seen by more than 132,000 Facebook users.

Perhaps most heartening, though, were the accompanying public comments. Ms. Harper's humanity and warmth filled people with excitement and hope. We felt like we were all part of a passionate, positive community, moving forward together – both figuratively, and through Ms. Harper's efforts, literally.

In the on-going debate over crowd size, I think it's easy to focus exclusively on numbers. The risk, however, is that you miss the stories behind those numbers. Shannon T. Harper's story, for instance.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I am enclosing a copy of the original photograph I took of Ms. Harper at Penn Station, as well as another at Union Station, as we de-boarded the train and headed to the March. I'm also enclosing a photograph I took at the March itself, as crowds gathered in front of the Capitol. While we may not agree on the specific issues addressed by those in attendance that day, I hope you will appreciate their passion as Americans. That is something I think we can all support.

Sincerely,

John Patterson  
Photographer