

Salt Lake peace rally ends with people spouting hatred



BARB GUY

Sept. 24, 12:15 p.m., 3,000 participants

There's a long, black wall of names on the City and County Building grounds. It enumerates the more than 1,900 U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq. Beneath the somber sign, American flags dot the grass.

Many folks carry placards: **GWB - A Category 5 Disaster; Make Levees Not War; Blessed Are The Nutcakes.**

It's a nice day, a big crowd of ordinary people who want peace. Mayor Rocky Anderson speaks, saying the war is based on lies. He says the media are complicit because they haven't investigated well, haven't challenged what they've been told. I like that he respects his audience enough to use words like *disparage*, *obsequious* and *intransigence*.

A kid of 12 or so, in braces and a Green Day T-shirt, walks past

with his sign: **0% Connection Between WMD and 9/11. No Duh!!!!!!!**

Rev. Dan Webster of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship reminds us the Bible teaches that war is wrong. The simplicity of his message is refreshing. He says peace takes courage. I know he means it.

1 p.m., 2,000 participants
Hip-hop emcees get a groove going.

A man is called to the stage; his wife is in labor.

1:45 p.m., 700 participants
A student activist announces that on the day the Tribune reports the 2,000th American casualty in Iraq, an evening rally at the Federal Building will mark the grim milestone.

2:20 p.m., 300 participants
A man with a huge banner is near the stage, disrupting things. He's not on our side. He's the type who bothers people during LDS General Conference. His sign says Jesus is mad at Muslims, "rebellious women," Mormons, pharmacists, border collies, who knows. He's wearing a black leather jacket with the words, "Jesus Saves Sinners From Hell."

Next to him is a blue-haired guy wearing a black leather jacket with similar lettering that obscenely debases Jesus. There's

a funny-but-not-funny juxtaposition of these two opposing men using Jesus' name to further their profane objectives.

A beautiful blonde girl of about 8 with a bouncy ponytail and an adorable smile stands near her mom and holds a flowered sign she made: "Jesus Said Love Everyone." She saves the day for me.

2:30 p.m., 200 participants
Veterans for Peace take the stage. Peace people surround the now-yelling disruptors, engaging them in conversation, debating them on the Bible, asking them to be quiet. There's hardly anyone left at the rally and I worry it will end on a bad note, maybe even violently; the ultimate irony, the ultimate disgrace.

Joan Maymi, a member of Gold Star Families for Peace (families of soldiers who have died in the war) speaks about the needless loss of her late nephew. She doesn't allow her well-written, passionately given speech to be subverted.

2:40 p.m., 150 participants
Away from the stage, two men quietly walk the soldiers' memorial, tallying the Latino names. It's unscientific, but it hints at the contribution Latino men and women are making. Archie Archuleta and his friend Jorge Riveros are doing the

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counting; Archie is researching this war's effect on Latinos.

We talk about how some Latino soldiers have died in Iraq before even becoming American citizens. I'm grateful for Archie's peaceful example; his humor, love and wisdom have brightened peace rallies as far back as I remember.

Police officers peaceably escort the disorderly guys away; many people applaud. They continue their protest at a distance from ours, which is their right.

2:50 p.m., 80 participants

A prim blonde woman comes spontaneously onstage and says, "My name is Charlotte Mueller and I have a message for George Bush." People applaud, thinking she has felt inspired to speak for peace. She begins to talk about Mexican citizens who enter the United States illegally. She says that they are bringing disease and filth - she hardly gets a few words out before people start turning away or shouting at her to relinquish the stage.

Peace activist Scott Fife deftly handles the situation, reclaiming the microphone and noting that his Native American friends always told him their main problem was their immigration policy. Humor diffuses the hate.

Although conflict-averse, I approach Ms. Mueller as she leaves. I am horrified by her diatribe, especially considering the Latino names on the wall and the presence of good Archie and

Jorge. I quietly say my piece and walk away from her, quaking.

The day started so well. Why am I always surprised when people use the occasion of a peace rally to speak hatred? Rev. Webster said that peace takes courage. I'm all out. I am exhausted by the day's conflicts, by the war, and by being thought unusual for wanting peace. I wish I'd left when the bulk of the crowd did.

I feel scarred by the interlopers' nastiness and by my reaction. Dr. Littlehale of Veterans for Peace said that we must face the violence within ourselves. I notice the feeling inside me, just under my skin; a cold-hot kind of buzzing.

Barb Guy is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.