

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 7.23.20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
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To: mojo210al@gmail.com
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WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 7 Cars 7 Trucks **6 Runners** 4 Walkers 1 Person fishing

When she was three, one daughter while riding in the back seat in her child's seat, blurted out —“every other one” as we were crossing the Mendota Bridge. Phyllis gently asked her as to what she was referring to. Our daughter responded—every other light pole on the bridge comes with a bump in the road.” Indeed, it turns out she was correct. There is a seam in the road on the bridge at every other light pole as you drive across it. Noticing patterns is an important skill in life—and sometimes you learn it or internalize its importance by sitting in a car seat in the back seat of a car.

For me a real pattern that I constantly am attuned to is the “inside-outside” nature of my life. I believe it is a common experience of many people—but I really believe it is not an unusual pattern of life for Jews of my generational cohort and a little older. Growing up in Denver and then in Lincoln, this pattern was evident in different ways but always clearly present. In Denver, it was about wealth—or in our case the lack thereof. I will always remember my father telling me that our rabbi in Denver told him he could never be president of the shul because he didn't have enough money to hob nob with the donor class that supported it. The fact that the rabbi and he were good friends, that we regularly had meals at their home and that our families were connected—didn't alter the fact that my dad—and probably by extension all of us—were outsiders to those on the inside. In Lincoln, where the defining community in which we lived was not a Jewish one—we were outsiders to the prevailing community in which we lived because we were actively engaged Jews. There again, a family pattern of feeling as outsiders and watching what unfolded on the inside was made very clear to all of us. This inside-outside conundrum is a typical one for many and I think for many Jews it is a recurring pattern in life. The scene in “Annie Hall” where Alvy Singer is sitting at Annie's family table in Chippewa Falls, Wi and her grandmother can only see Alvy as a Hasidic Jew captures how many of us experience the “larger” world in which we live.

In college I wrote a paper about Alfred Stieglitz, the noted photographer who ultimately married Georgia O'Keefe. I suggested in the paper, what probably was not an original idea, that perhaps his own upbringing led him to photography. Not really an insider, he stood on the other side of the lens gazing at a world he sought to become part of. I still wonder if that was true, given his own biography and his own life work. Indeed, understanding that organizing pattern of my own life long ago, drove me to embrace it as part of both my personal and professional life. It is not accidental that I served as a rabbi for a community that saw itself in its original defining narrative as being

“outside” the local Jewish community’s power structure. It was not accidental that our shul became a welcoming place for those seeking entry into the Jewish people or in finding a different rendering of what a Jewish community looked like. Bringing people in from the outside was a piece of my work inside the shul. But it also defined my most significant public engagement as well—that being the advocacy on behalf of immigrants and upholding their dignity and promoting the opportunities immigrants deserves to have.

My work on behalf of immigrant rights was only an extension of my own sense of being an outsider to a world that made the inside difficult to enter. Indeed, in one of the more morbid moments during these past 5 months watching these death count numbers rise as a result of “1600’s” ineptitude, I found myself thinking what aphorism I would want on my headstone—besides the words “funny, loyal good dad, loving partner, proud saba, devoted son and brother and frustrated politician”. I settled on this—“He sought to open up the inside to those who found themselves outside.” That has been my life’s pattern and continues to be my life’s work. My playing field is different today than it was before, but the goals are no less important and the passion I hope I bring to the work that I do now is no less than before. The settings are different—but the patterns I see are still evident. Too many people inside this country our on the other side of the lens (often with a broken camera at best). Too many are standing outside the gates that separate them from opportunity and possibility. Too many are considered “illegal” and “1600” suggests that they won’t be counted because in his mind they don’t count. I was saddened, but not surprised, that there was so little attention paid to “1600’s” recent attempt to exclude “illegal aliens” from our census in violation what and who the census is to count. For me, it is only one more reason to continue to work for human dignity—whether it is because of the indignity heaped on people for the color of their skin, their place of origin, their religious heritage, their rural roots, their particular pronouns. The patterns that define our life, can either become ones that defeat us or move us to work for a more perfect society. In every generation we hopefully move one step further along that path. As for our daughter who saw a pattern—may the bumps in the road she notices move her to seek ways to even them out. Morris

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