



THE PARIAH POOL

Being a community activist isn't the easiest route to take in life but doing what feels right rarely leads to regrets. Speak the truth. Don't be afraid.

Last year was a time of big sweeping change for me. I lost two pieces of my deepest love to the great beyond, grew closer to another human being than ever before, and let go of another round of “friends” to superficiality. There seemed to be a feeling layer of marginalization spread throughout the year. Even now, in the second month of 2013, it walks beside me, greeting me at every turn. The truth is, that particular feeling and I have been walking hand in hand for as long as I can remember.

Most recently, this marginalized feeling came from some members of the queer community as well as some in the right-wing evangelical Christian community not agreeing with my inter-community dialogue work between the Mars Hill Church and members of Portland's LGBTQ community (as well as my very public comments and opinions about the vandalism and threats of violence which followed); it came from community “leaders” who didn't appreciate me stirring up the status quo; from the tech community after an article I wrote about music piracy turned into a full blown shitstorm; from the pro-gun folks in the wake of my speaking out about gun control after the Sandy Hook tragedy; from every asshole on the internet who commented that they didn't like my face, body, words, ideas, melodies — you name it; and from that old voice inside my head that still always agrees with all of them that I am of no particular value.

At times it can feel as though there is no break from the pressure. I remind myself constantly that not everybody agrees with my position in the world and that they don't have to for it to be valid. To their credit, I don't always say or handle things perfectly... but I didn't become an activist to play it safe, and I haven't. Staying true to what I believe to be right is what matters to me, and I do not do the work I do to make friends. At the end of the day, I'm willing for other people to disagree with me, even hate me for my position, but I am not willing to hate myself for not speaking out or for caving under pressure. The way I see it, if everyone everywhere agrees with me at this stage in the game, chances are pretty good that either the battle has been won, or I'm doing it all wrong.

To be able to stand for yourself and your dream of the world amidst public pressure or extreme fear requires a particular skill set that is often born from great hardship. Having to stand up to the cruel kids who teased me growing up and the difficulties I had coming into my own

as a gay preacher's kid in a Christian cult were in some ways my greatest teachers, preparing me for the very openly critical existence I have known since I got signed to a record label at 17 years old and first entered into the world of being myself professionally. I learned early on that I have no control over what anyone thinks, writes, or says about me, my music, or my work. I also learned that if I really want to be free, I have to do what feels right to me no matter the cost. It's not always the easiest route, but I rarely regret having taken it.

RuPaul once said, “What other people think of me is none of my business,” and I think there is deep wisdom to be found there. I have watched strong people retreat from important work because of fear that their reputation would suffer, and I've seen people with no reputation to speak of roll up their sleeves and put their lives on the line for something they believe in. At different times in my life I have been on both sides of this fence, but I have never been very good at being anybody other than myself. When all is said and done, I would rather be in with the “losers” who are changing the world than the so-called “winners” who, in my estimation, are fucking it up.

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however inconvenient, and
I will continue to speak mine
as long as I am able.

Love me or hate me, what you see is what you get. I may not always be who others want me to be, and I may blunder my way through unexpected landmines occasionally, but I am still on the minefield, still moving forward. I will not be silenced and I will not be swayed by fear. The truth is the truth, however inconvenient, and I will continue to speak mine as long as I am able. In the long run, being popular is far less important than being real. §

Join me in the pariah pool sometime, won't you? The water's fine.

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