

SAGAGE, from page 4

go to my siblings and some really good friends that I can confide in and say anything to. But the person I often go to, to process and hash things out with is Terry. Twenty years together and fairly often on the same page about relationship and sex issues – we are each other's sounding boards.

S.Z.: *You have many critics, many of whom are the conservative, "Family Values" crowd. But many of your critics are feminists, bisexual and transgendered people. Does criticism from feminist, LGBTQ community or other left-leaning groups affect you differently than criticism from the "moral Right."*

D.S.: It's more aggravating. Some people are bizarrely invested in this caricature of who I am and what I've said and what I've done and what I believe. It says more about them than it does about me.

It's clear that I'm not trans-phobic or bi-phobic. Has my advice always been spectacular? No! But am I trans-phobic? No. Am I bi-phobic? No.

We have enemies, LGBT people. We have enemies. We don't need to create them.

S.Z.: *In fact, today you posted a Tumblr response from Arielle Scarcella who calls out LGBTQ community for criticizing Macklemore and Ryan Lewis.*

D.S.: I love her.

S.Z.: *You posted the video with a comment that: "Too many of the queer social justice warriors rattling around on Tumblr and Twitter are more interested in "criticizing allies for not doing it perfectly." Doesn't this kind of statement kind of rattle the beehive? You speak so confidently that people assume that you see yourself as the end-all authority on everything.*

D.S.: (Laughs) One of my first editors at The Stranger was this really wonderful woman named Christine Wenc. I would write things and preface it with, "I think" blah blah blah. She would come to me and say, "This is a piece that you are writing that has your byline on it. It is what you think. You don't have to say it's what you think. We know it's what you think, it's your column."

Sometimes I believe people think I think I am coming down the mountain with the tablets, when I am just presenting my POV, but not framing it as an "I" statement.

S.Z.: *I read your column regularly and enjoy it. Sometimes I think you offer some great insights, other times, I'm not buyin' what you're selling.*

D.S.: Find me the writer on earth that any single individual agrees with about everything. I don't even agree with myself about everything. I read things I wrote five or 10 years ago and I'm like, "Wow. I don't believe that anymore." My position can evolve.

So, this attitude that some people have on the left that somebody who is also on the left who has written or said something that I disagree with is now my mortal enemy, is just bizarre. There are people on the left I disagree with and I regard them as my comrades in rhetorical arms with whom I have these small disagreements – not people that I have to crucify. And it's not all

people who disagree with me on the left who have that reaction. It's these self-appointed, bat-shit, thought police, psychopaths who would rather go after someone who is actually going to listen to them and pay attention to them.

Bill O'Reilly is not going to give you the time of day. FOX News? Not every word that I've written about transgendered people's issues has been perfect, but we all know a lot more now than we did 25 years ago when I started writing the column.

Think Progress has done this wonderful job documenting all of the really vicious and vile and dangerous anti-trans bigotry and rhetoric that FOX News is pumping into homes all over America in red states and arguably endangering trans people's lives.

There are no demonstrations at FOX News headquarters. And yet these trans activists, often allies of trans people, not actual trans people, will come to my speech in protest because I'm an anti-trans bigot. There is Fox News headquarters, 20 blocks away. And there has never been a demonstration.

It's not like my shit don't stink. I'm saying I have not gotten everything right over the 25 years I've been writing. But in the aggregate, I have a lot more (good things) to show than shit. And I get these relentless attacks. ... I proposed to some trans folks: You announce the demo at Fox News HQ in midtown Manhattan, and I will be there. And I will talk it up and will make sure that my readers know about it and as many of them that can get there will be there. But let's take it to them. But, nothing. Silence. I don't understand it.

Why with so much agitos and activism around the trans issue right now, there is this ...going after Germaine Greer?! Let's go throw glitter at Germaine Greer (Greer was glitter bombed by a group of protesters in 2012 for her 2009 comments about trans women) and the people at Fox News can leave the building unmolested every day.

Google "trans" and "Keith Ablow" and see what comes up and then compare it to anything I ever said that trans people objected to. What (Ablow) is saying is insanely toxic and there is no Tumblr war on Keith Ablow.

I am listening and paying attention and my position is evolving. I am an ally and I am on trans people's side.

I haven't used the word "trannie" in years. The only time I use it is to talk about how I stopped using it. Why do you not know that? Because all of the stir and drive about it online is in the present tense.

S.Z.: *You and your partner began "It Gets Better" in 2010. The organization's mission is to communicate to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth around the world that it gets better, and to create and inspire the changes needed to make it better for them. Tell me how the project works.*

D.S.: It's very simple. My theory is that you don't look at people and present them with a huge problem and make them feel helpless. You look at people and you present them with something they can do: a doable thing.

The project is LGBT adults sharing their stories, their lives, their strategies for how they got through it, how they made it (life) better for themselves. How they survived their adolescence with LGBT kids who might not have access to LGBT adult role models – and that is really crucial.

A kid is bullied because of his race or her faith or his class, goes home to his or her parents and siblings and aunts and uncles or grandparents and they are the same race, same class, same faith who will support them if they open up about the bullying they are facing. And even if they don't talk about it, they are living examples of perseverance – you can get through this.

Queer kids all too often go home to no queer role models or to parents, as in Leelah Alcorn's case.

S.Z.: *Leelah Alcorn is a tragic example of parental bullying. (Leelah Alcorn was a transgender girl who, citing loneliness, abuse and alienation, committed suicide in December and posted her suicide note online.)*

D.S.: What the "It Gets Better Project" does is provide to queer kids (a source) for that information and those strategies, that perspective of an adult person like them that they often don't have access to.

S.Z.: *What can one do when the bullies aren't just (or even) at school, but rather, in one's own home?*

D.S.: There are lots of "It Gets Better" videos that talk about that. I think some of the most impactful "It Gets Better" videos are people – queer adults – with the parents who bullied them throughout adolescence. And the parents apologizing to their kids for what they did to them.

That really gives a lot of queer kids hope – when they see parents, who were the bullies that their parents are, who have come around.

Some of the videos recommend: don't come out of the closet. Tell your parents what you must. Tell them what they insist on hearing and run out the clock. That is a horrible message in some ways. But in some cases, it is the only realistic message.

There are videos made by people who say, "My parents are fundamentalist Christians or Mormons and rabidly anti-gay, and they've thrown one kid out already because he came out or had pre-marital sex, and I knew I couldn't tell them without imperiling my safety, my education. And so I didn't tell them, I waited." And sometimes that is the best message.

A mistake that the LGBT community makes when talking to LGBT youth is pretending that "coming out" is the solution to all of your problems, when for a lot of kids, coming out – or being outed – (can be) the beginning of much more serious problems.

Another failing is we also don't tell our LGBT youth that when they come out, not all LGBT adults are nice. Then you have kids coming out who think everybody they meet who is queer is going to be a nice person and is going to look out for them. Their expectation is that trans, gay, lesbian, bisexual people will be better people. And

we're not necessarily better.

S.Z.: *With the advent of "Fifty Shades of Grey" book and film ... people's kinks are becoming recognized by the mainstream. Basically, "consent" is the new "gay" for mainstream America.*

D.S.: Consent is the baseline that has always existed. When you look at a picture of two people engaged in hardcore BDSM and you look at a picture of missionary position, heterosexual intercourse and I were to tell you to pick the one that is violent, a lot of people would pick the BDSM.

But what if that act were completely consensual and the missionary position photo reflects (an act of) force or coercion? Then that's rape. That's violence.

It's not enough to look at what people are doing to determine what's healthy, what's unhealthy. We have to look at who they are. Are they consenting adults who want to be there and enjoy what's happening? That's the standard by which we should judge sexual conduct – are all parties involved, joyful and willing participants?

For years, I've called it, the magic ingredient. Consent turns to fairy dust. It turns something ugly into something beautiful.

S.Z.: *From my perspective, you have spent much of your career, norming your lifestyle for "mainstream" America: you are an openly gay man who, with one hand, offers the suggestion that his partner looks great in leather, while with the other hand, adopts and raises a child, who is straight. I get the sense that you have spent a lot of your time norming what already is normal for you.*

D.S.: It's what's normal for us. Bringing this back to my critics on the radical queer fringe, sometimes they call me a heteronormative assimilationist and (accuse me) of being sex negative – which just makes me laugh!

We are a gay couple with a child who came out as non-monogamous. We go to events like International Mr. Leather; Terry puts pictures of himself in fetish gear (on social media sites). Um. We are about as non-heteronormative and non-assimilationist as you get.

We entered the mainstream, but on our own terms without compromising who we are. At all.

So, it's not that we changed or we're asking other queer people to change. We made demands, not on queer people to change, but on straight people to change. That's not heteronormative, assimilationist sell-out shit. That's radical-queer-bargaining-in shit.

S.Z.: *Favorite Valentine's memory?*

D.S.: Oh my God. All of the Valentine's Days I've spent with Terry were neither of us got each other anything ... because we don't really give a shit.

My Valentine's Day present is the cup of tea Terry makes for me every morning before I come downstairs. And I pick up after him after breakfast without saying anything. That's what matters – those constant daily acts that no amount of flowers and chocolates one day a year could compensate for, or replace.