

Pariah People

In the spring of 2008 Kathy and I asked Betty Kreeger to consider keeping a journal about her new life in Snowflake, Arizona. Kathy and I knew this was a life changing move for Betty. We were hoping Betty would chronicle her experiences for a future Pariah article. We discussed and envisioned an article on the transformative solitude of life in the desert. Unfortunately, as you will read, Betty's life was changed by this venture in very different ways than anyone of us could have foreseen a year ago.

This is that article...

Lucinda Hodges, Co-creator of, Pariah, A Healing Journal

Secrets, Lies & Liberties

A Journey Into...and out of...The Desert

By Betty Kreeger

Our disability may be invisible, but we should not be.

Secret acts and lies begin small, so small that we barely notice - such as the single small word “no.” Designed to silence us, secrets and lies slowly destroy our liberties, and the magnitude of that destruction is realized only when we are on the very brink of losing them. Others decide - in secret - what is for “our own good” stealing our liberties while we were just living our lives. As a nation, the struggle to obtain and keep liberties is never ending. As a community of chemically injured, our struggle is no less. Our stolen future has become more than just about the toxic pesticides Rachel Carson wrote of nearly five decades ago in [Silent Spring](#), or our struggle to exist in a toxic environment. It is the toxicity created by the desire for power and control within and without the MCS community that steals our hope of equality, civil liberties, and dreams of a healthy future.

As chemically injured we are always looking for safe housing and a refuge from a toxic world. When the long-awaited [Old Concho Community Assistance Center \(“OCCAC”\) MCS Housing Project](#) was finally completed in Snowflake, Arizona, I was elated to have been accepted in January 2008. I wrote my friend and long-time “activist” who had been instrumental in obtaining the funding for this project. Her response to me was

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“Congratulations...I think.” Concerned something was wrong I wrote back and asked “is there a problem?” “No” she replied. That seemingly small lie began a long and painful excursion into the desert that five months later would leave me emotionally traumatized and financially ruined as I headed back to California. Many have asked what really happened in Snowflake. This is my answer. Hopefully my story will help others avoid a similar fate.

In her article [Fascism in Our Midst](#), Kathy Fitzpatrick reveals the sobering parallels between the fascist shift taking place in America and the one taking place within the chemically injured community. Kathy asks, “*Are we, as a community, so wounded, so mired in learned helplessness we refuse to speak out against the tyranny being waged upon us by our own community?*” I would suggest we don’t even recognize that tyranny.

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Tyranny does not burst into being. If it did it would be instantly crushed. It begins small in communities across the nation - communities such as ours - and grows until the magnitude of it is too bold to be ignored. We do not recognize tyranny or fascism because it is designed not to be recognized. It is a systematic stripping away of

our liberties that begins with secrets and lies in “*an inevitable shift toward a fascist state.*” It ends when true patriots speak out to reveal it. But those true patriots are labeled “unpatriotic” and are largely ignored. One such true patriot, [Naomi Wolfe](#), traveled across the country warning of the “*ten steps to a fascist shift*” and loss of Liberty happening in America.

In her new book, [Give Me Liberty](#) she writes about the Core Values of Liberty. The first principle of these Core Values is “*We are required to Speak Freely.*” “*Before there can be freedom to act, protest, or legislate, there must be freedom to think and then freedom to speak.*” The second core principle is “*We have a duty to rebel continually against injustice and oppression.*” Therefore, when others work to strip away our civil rights, we have not just a “right” but an “obligation” to speak out whether it is the President of the United States or those within our own MCS communities. If we do not protest injustice and protect our liberties in our own communities, how can we possibly expect to achieve any success outside it? If we do not respect rights of others, how can we possibly expect to retain those rights for ourselves? It is our right and our duty to do both. Telling the truth requires strength of character, because even as others ostracize you, they will become the beneficiaries of your truth telling even if you never do. Truth, however, is its own reward.

When we fail to follow these principles - think freely, speak freely, and rebel against injustice - Fake Patriotism and Fake Democracy are instituted as people are systematically lied to, controlled, and intimidated. Fake Democracy is creating the illusion that the people have a voice in government by asking for their participation while actively silencing dissenters. Leaders secretly implement policies, and anyone critical of them are labeled “unpatriotic” and “un-American.” Patriotism becomes identified with “blind loyalty.” Fake Patriotism is the act of criticizing and intimidating anyone who disagrees with those in power for the purpose of silencing them. Fake

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Democracy and Fake Patriotism are flourishing within the chemically injured community, and our Liberty is in jeopardy. The evidence is now too bold to be ignored.

Silencing those who disagree is the greatest threat to our Liberty. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote *“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”* Dr. King refused to be silent about the immoral taking of civil liberties, and we now equate the [Civil Rights Movement](#) with him and his “I have a dream speech.” Or with [Rosa Parks](#) who was arrested when she refused to give up her seat to a white man sparking the boycott that ended segregation on buses in the South. Or little 9-year-old [Linda Brown](#) who wanted to attend a so-called “separate-but-equal” white school and ended school segregation with the famous case of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

However, this is exactly what is happening within our community. Blind loyalty is expected while secrets are kept and lies are told and decisions made.

However, the Civil Rights Movement began long before and is alive today with every single person who refuses to silently endure injustice and wait for those with power to do the right thing. Inaction for them simply is not an option. As Naomi Wolfe writes, *“Their souls will not allow it....True patriots seem driven by a personal*

burning sense of responsibility to act in the face of a great wrong...the desire for Liberty of thought and action, the desire for justice, burns in you as it did for the founders and as it does for dissidents. And when it burns, you need to speak out in protest and assemble.” Dr. King, Rosa Parks, Linda Brown and many others of that era had a burning desire for justice. But consider for a moment. What if Rosa Parks had silently risen when a white man demanded the seat she had a moral right to sit in? What if, instead of boycotting the buses, her fellow riders had shamed her and told her she should “just wait for things to change” because at least she was allowed to ride the bus? What if little Linda Brown had just silently continued to attend an inferior school nearly two miles away when a better one was just seven blocks from her home?

What if, instead of supporting these brave acts that demanded justice not just for them individually, but for all African-Americans everywhere, Dr. King had not challenged the status quo? What if instead he had said *“be patient and things eventually will change”*? Or

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what if he had told them by calling attention to their individual plights, they were jeopardizing the civil rights movement? Or what if he had perceived their outrage at these injustices as intimidating instead of a burning desire for justice? And what if instead Dr. King had betrayed them and gone to the Governor’s staff and secretly conspired to coerce them into not exercising their civil rights? Would they - would we today - be outraged at those actions? I think we would.

But this is what is happening within the chemically-injured community - these attempts to control, intimidate, and silence others into blind loyalty - this practice of Fake Patriotism and Fake Democracy.

Certain individuals through their long and arduous activism have established themselves as the “defacto leaders” of our community. These long-time activists have accomplished much, and continue to work to accomplish much. I will not minimize those accomplishments. However, neither their accomplishments nor their longevity in the community earn them the right to expect blind loyalty while they make decisions in secret. They have not earned the right to undermine the efforts of others to achieve justice for our community when it does not comport with how they do it. However, this is exactly what is happening within our community. Blind loyalty is expected while secrets are kept and lies are told and decisions made. Dissenters are coerced and intimidated into silence and labeled the equivalent of “unpatriotic” and ostracized - [a Pariah](#) - an outcast no longer accepted by the community.

As a community, we are outraged when these tactics are used against us by government agencies and those outside our community. But where is the outrage when these influential “*defacto leaders*” in our midst work quietly and deceitfully behind the scenes to silence those members of the MCS community who would tell the truth and assert their civil rights? Where is the outrage when members of our community attempt to shame and intimidate us into silence by claiming our genuine quests for justice will somehow harm the MCS community? Do you recognize the Fake Patriotism tactics? We are asked to condone - even embrace - this type of behavior from those who live among us and have appointed themselves as our “*leaders*” and spokespersons? Or did we appoint them by our silence? Where is the outrage when our community “*leaders*” make statements such as filing a Civil Rights Complaint “*may very well keep the Concho project from succeeding,*” or “*don’t do anything (in their opinion) that would hurt the MCS community?*” Or “*Just wait it out and things will change once others move in and start to complain.*” The “*Concho project*” refers to the four houses in Snowflake Arizona, and the person to whom these things were said was me. The people who said them were not outsiders. They were members of the MCS community. These types of statements do not just undermine our rights, they lower our expectations.

Abraham Lincoln did not just continue to “wait” for slavery to gradually end. No, he fought a Civil War over it and emancipated the slaves. Dr. King did not say “by speaking out against injustices you will keep the movement from succeeding.” History has shown that sitting and waiting for things to change does not work. It did not work to end slavery. It did not work to end segregated buses. It did not work to end separate-but equal. And it will not work in our fight for justice in housing. That is why we have laws - to protect people from those in power who refuse to do the right thing. And we should use these laws to protect and advance our rights.

Even though I was told there were “no problems,” in fact there were - and still are - significant and disturbing problems in these four houses. However, the most disturbing problem is the disrespect, hostility, and lack of accommodation OCCAC management shows toward the MCS community. No policies exist to protect the residents - not even the basic essential

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accommodation of a “no-fragrance policy” for employees frequenting the premises. The well water quality was a serious problem. Within a week of arriving I developed a severe rash all over my body from the water that lasted for months. The water pressure slowed to a trickle or completely stopped almost daily. The made-in-China kitchen sink emitted toxic fumes when I ran hot water. The Arizona Department of Housing (“ADOH”) repeatedly ignored my requests for assistance. The houses smelled strongly of paint and other building products making it impossible for most to tolerate staying in them for even a few hours. I was the only tenant. When I asked OCCAC for a few basic accommodations around these issues, three weeks after I moved in they sent me a 5-page threatening letter stating they were not going to accommodate me; I was not to ask for any further accommodations; and they forbid me from asking for accommodations for others. They forbid me from following up on any issues. They refused to provide me or my doctor with any information regarding the water and sink. The coup de grace was OCCAC management - and later their attorney - told me that if I couldn’t live with things as they were I could “file a complaint and make the necessary arrangements to move.” What was their stated reason? “MCS disorders has not been determined to be a handicap.” So I did.

The *coup de grace* was OCCAC management – and later their attorney – told me that if I couldn’t live with things as they were I could “file a complaint and make the necessary arrangements to move.” What was their stated reason? “MCS disorders has not been determined to be a handicap.”

Needless to say, I was completely devastated by this letter. That weekend I talked about the situation with the MCS community at a gathering. Everyone expressed concern for my situation. They told me OCCAC had been hostile toward the MCS community even before the project was completed. In fact, several people told me OCCAC had banned from the housing project the “community leader” who had told me there were “no problems.” I repeatedly asked for assistance

from this “community leader.” Her silence was deafening, and I was left to fight the OCCAC discrimination and hostility alone. Many people inquired about the project, but every person who called me to find out about the houses told me I was the only one in the MCS community who would tell them the truth about this project. While I had been directly lied to, they had been lied to by omission. They felt betrayed by the members of the MCS community who had refused to be truthful with them. The Snowflake MCS Housing advertisement was quietly removed from Our Toxic Times without explanation. The truth was still being hidden and to tell the truth was betrayal. George Orwell’s statement “In a time of deceit telling the truth is a revolutionary act” would prove all too prophetic for me.

After receiving OCCAC’s threatening letter, I asked ADOH for assistance enclosing OCCAC’s letter. However, despite the fact that the State of Arizona gave OCCAC nearly a million dollars to build these houses, incredibly they would not help me - there was no oversight. Instead ADOH told me to “work it out” with OCCAC. I then asked the Program Coordinator at Arizona Statewide Independent Living Center (“SILC”) for assistance. She agreed, but as I patiently waited for two months for this assistance, an email between her and the “MCS community leaders” (her friends), inadvertently sent to me, divulged they had been secretly collaborating to silence me and sabotage my Civil Rights Complaint against OCCAC. Having accidentally revealed their deceitful behavior, they now claimed they were acting out of concern for me. However, people who are concerned for you do not ignore your

pleas for their help. They do not exclude you from the decision-making process, secretly act against your interests, and then accuse you of intimidation when you are just trying to survive in an emotionally hostile environment. Their close personal friends do not come to your house and try to bully and intimidate you into “not doing anything to hurt the MCS community” - while he witnesses your obvious distress due to OCCAC’s most recent hostile phone calls.

I had been outraged at OCCAC’s hostile and discriminatory behavior, but I was even more outraged not only at my own community’s lack of support but its outright hostility toward me.

Later, SILC and the MCS community would accuse me, the person betrayed by and ostracized by this community that advertises itself as “EI-friendly” and wanting to “facilitate communication,” of having an “intimidating manner.” Having been emotionally assaulted by OCCAC for several months, I was now being emotionally assaulted by

SILC, and the MCS community itself. When they could not manipulate, control me, and intimidate me into silence, the only thing left was to label me with labels belonging to them - intimidating. Recognize the Fake Patriotism?

As a long-time activist, I have faced many challenges of discrimination at the hands of landlords, employers, and even the EEOC. I am used to people trying to silence me, but I have always refused to be silent when injustices are perpetrated. Even with my considerable experience I underestimated the lengths to which these “leaders” and SILC would go to silence me. After months of ignoring me and refusing to help me combat this discrimination, SILC and the MCS community “leaders” tried to blame me and shame me into not filing a complaint because, in their words, it “may very well keep the Concho project from succeeding for those with EI. In the state of Arizona, the amount and condition of low income housing for people with disabilities is dire, so protecting what exists is extremely necessary.” I had been outraged at OCCAC’s hostile and discriminatory behavior, but I was even more outraged not only at my own community’s lack of support but its outright hostility toward me. Outrage is the proper emotion and it is time to speak out. “We have a duty to rebel continually against injustice and oppression”; and we “should and must be free to be angry, disruptive, outraged, loud, confrontational, and obnoxious in expressing their views - especially if their views are being trampled or overridden in secret.”

We *are* outraged when people outside our community violate our civil rights. But where is the outrage when our so-called “leaders” - those who have had a long track record of activism -

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secretly work to violate our civil rights? Where is the outrage when they decide what is good for us -while excluding us from the debate? Where is the solidarity? We need to build alliances by supporting each other in our quest for justice - not destroy them through secrets, lies, deceit, intimidation and ostracizing those with whom we disagree. We may have differences of opinions about how to resolve problems, but we owe each other the respect of debate and consultation instead of secretly excluding those who have a stake in the decision-making process. Liberty requires debate not dictum. Liberty requires transparency not secrecy. As President Obama has repeatedly reminded us “secrecy destroys community and trust.”

Dr. Martin Luther King understood that these were brave, selfless acts and understood that all their rights hinged on *individual rights*.

We must emancipate ourselves by refusing to tolerate injustices without and within our community. Individuals, such as Rosa Parks, who fought for and insisted on her individual rights, were not selfish. Dr. Martin Luther King understood that these were brave, selfless acts

and understood that all their rights hinged on *individual rights*. In an act of solidarity, he and other ministers then spoke to their congregations and asked them to boycott the buses. The boycott would last until Blacks were able to sit wherever they pleased on the bus. Almost a year after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on that bus the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Jim Crow Laws were against the law. This is what a community can do when one person, and then another, stands up and demands their civil rights. If we do not act in solidarity, we will forever be relegated to the back of the bus.

Unfortunately, this housing isn't safe for most of those who try it. We should not just settle because it is the best we've got. Being on the bus is not enough! But that is what was expected of me - silence. The myopic fear-driven goal of the Snowflake MCS community "leaders" was to

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protect their own privacy and not call attention to themselves - even at the costs of the Liberty to those living in this housing project. We cannot afford to compromise our principles and our civil rights. We cannot afford to hide the truth - whether by outright lie or omission. We cannot afford to compromise our ethics for the success of any single project - success at any price is failure. To quote Benjamin Franklin, "*Those who would give up an essential Liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither Liberty nor safety.*"

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And contrary to SILC's accusation that my complaint "*may very well keep the Concho project from succeeding for those with EI,*" the Arizona State Civil Rights Division issued a Reasonable Cause Finding that OCCAC had violated my civil rights. And the person who

moved into the house I vacated, and who previously could not tolerate being in it for even a few hours until I spent five months outgassing it, wrote "*I think you changed OCCAC's attitudes a lot, they're much more accommodating now.*" However, when I asked specifically what accommodations they were making she refused to comment stating "*I do not want to discuss the MCS Housing with you.*" So even now as the Snowflake MCS community benefits from my efforts to gain respectful treatment and reasonable accommodation they continue to invoke a code of silence against me. I suspect they will continue to try to discredit me. However, just as I have always done, I will continue to speak out against injustices no matter who should perpetrate them.

I leave you with this thought by Naomi Wolf: "*The more you silence yourself (or allow others to silence you), the more the silencers are emboldened; then, the freer they feel to scare you, then the scarier the methods they use become....The more freedom a citizen*

has, the more he or she believes in his or her capacity to take great risks and make great change; the more he or she sees the results of these great risks, the more courage that citizen will show; the more courage that citizen shows, the more psychological space opens up in the mind and heart of that citizen and in those of his or her neighbors. Before there can be freedom to act, protest or legislate, there must be freedom to think and then freedom to speak.”

Be courageous. Speak freely. Do not allow yourself to be silenced. As Gandhi said, “*Even if you are a minority of one, the truth is the truth.*”

Our disability may be invisible, but we should not be.

Betty is a former legal assistant and attended law school until she became too ill to continue. She enjoys legal research and has advocated for accommodation of the chemically injured in the workplace for more than 15 years.