

Orange: Emancipation from a Hatred of a Color of the Sun



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If you are confused, check with the sun
Carry a compass to help you along,
Your feet are going to be on the ground
Your head is there to move you around...

—REM, “Stand”

Dear George,

Orange is a color of the sun, the color of a citrus fruit from a tree, and a color of a shoe that you stole from me in the early 1980s. Orange is the color of the last scrawny pumpkin alone and surviving in the pumpkin patch, the colorful combination of primary colors: red, the color of passion and pain; and yellow, the color of joy and jaundice; a colorful blend of the red stoplight and the yellow caution light that proved to be direction-less in a scarred musical memory—one of many, a plethora. Yet, it is in the pain of that memory where I continue to stand.

Stand in the place where you live, now face North

Think about direction, wonder why you haven’t

Now stand in the place where you work, now face West

Think about the place where you live, wonder why you haven’t before.

—REM, “Stand”

I endured the red light of rage and abuse in middle school, and later, the yellow light to proceed with caution in the male-dominated high school drum line, cringing in case the light turned red again. Ideally, the light should have been green the whole way, green as in go, as in a basic lesson that children learn in kindergarten with the large yellow electric stoplight in the corner of the classroom. Red light! Green light!

The kindergarten teacher would exclaim. Green means go. And we would laugh, as everyone was going in the same direction—or so I thought. Somewhere in the steady decline from the utopia of kindergarten into the abyss of early adolescence, the lesson was lost. The humanity was lost, the decency was lost, the traffic light in the corner shorted out, and the lights started going AWOL, from green to yellow to red. Green means go, Green like a REM album title. Face north. Face west. Go west. Go west, young man.

Where's my orange shoe?

—Lori Caskey-Sigety, 2012

Apoplectic is an appropriate term of anger to refer to an ass. I experienced anger when you, the knuckle-dragging, uneducated man-child—one of many—the prepubescent perpetrator, who stole my shoe, recently de-friended me from a social networking site in 2011, because you couldn't handle the fact that I called you out on your past behavior. It's never a good idea to infuriate an artist by virtual de-friending in the 21st century, for she may collage, paint, or sculpt—or a musician, for she may create, drum, or sing—or a writer, for she may control, paste, and scribe about your offenses. And George, yes, in your pathetic defense, you provided a half-assed apology when you informed me, in a dismissive manner, that the past is in the past.

Well, George, to quote you, “the past is in the past,” but I shoulder heavy invisible scars, akin the heavy black harness I used to carry my drums with in the marching band. However, now I am armed with the ardor and vigor of all three of my muses: art, music, and writing—not to mention my arsenal of education—all because you could not handle my confrontation of your glory days—of your verbal abuse, bullying, and harassment in middle school band classes in the seventh and eighth grades. All because of an orange high top shoe that you played hide-and-seek with. You stole it from me. Not only was my shoe stolen, but so was my dignity as a skinny scrawny Ugly Betty before the concept of Ugly Betty was conceived. I think Ugly George is much more appropriate, I may have been perceived as ugly on the outside, but you were the epitome of ugly on the inside. Even if I sported thick horn-rimmed glasses, a curly mullet mess, braces, and social awkwardness, I had the right to take music classes, I had the right to be a musician, and I had the right to play a drum without being assaulted by drumsticks on my arms, ass, and legs. I had a right not to be referred to as “TNT”—a

horrible term coined by male students at our middle school—as Totally No Tits. I had a right to fit in—or at least be left the fuck alone to play my drums in peace, without physical abuse, without harassment, without condemnation for who I was—or who I wasn’t—perfect, popular, or pretty. The band director was an incompetent, mealy-mouthed dolt, and life was much worse for girls and women pre-Anita Hill. It was apple pie, cheerleaders, and high school football. “Boys will be boys” seemed to be the anthem of my adolescence. What about the girls? What about ME?

How could I venture north, west, south, east, or anywhere with only one shoe, George? All I could do was stand there, in 1983, direction-less, with my bespectacled, big-haired, beaten-and-bruised (with drumsticks), scrawny, skinny self as my shoe was being passed over my head by you and other male band members laughing and mocking, especially after I started to cry. And in the concrete educational pool of snarky middle school kids, a teardrop equals a drop of blood in a shark pool. Let the feeding frenzy begin.

All I could do was stand at an abusive, abysmal, and aggressive crossroads. Stand, trapped in my pre-pubescent body, shaking, with drumsticks clenched in my left fist. Years later this pain, endless memories of the episodes of endless and relentless bullying, would manifest, into an eating disorder. I shrank myself down to 104 pounds. It was an attempt to purge myself from my perceived former ugliness in an attempt at achieving perfection. So tell me, George, is the past really in the past?

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—REM, “Stand”

George, in spite of you and many others, I continued to move north in the uphill battle for equality while playing drums and percussion. I survived the seventh and eighth grades. You, like many others, underestimated my resilience. My mother and music teacher (who was a woman), wouldn’t let me quit. I didn’t let you win. Over thirty years later, I still play music.

So, George, it’s time to bury the proverbial hatchet. Let’s bury it in the form of my lost orange shoe and trade it in for mules. Orange you happy

I'm bestowing you with forgiveness? I am no longer your victim, but rather, I am a survivor of your transgressions. It's time for me to reclaim my former younger self as a drummer, a musician, a percussionist, and a proponent of emancipation from a hatred of a color of the sun, a hatred of bullies, and a hatred of you.

Colorfully Yours,

Lori