Breaking Radio Silence

Introduction

A Lesson in Silence, and Breaking It, Too

One night, I had a rider in the car with me and we got to talking and he asked me what I did in addition to driving for Uber. I told him I was a writer working on several projects including this blog. I then mentioned I was liberal in my political beliefs and off to the races we went (he wasn't liberal though he refused to say he was conservative).

We disagreed on many things but then he asked me what I was doing to back up my opinions.

I said nothing in reply to his question, and I let the silence hang between us. But I will freely admit what he said to me rocked me hard, hard enough to lead to a long drive back home working through a lot of shit that single question dredged up.

And the shit that was dredged up goes back a long, long way for me. Because I've heard this before, been challenged like this before, and like before, have responded with silence.

I've responded with silence because I don't feel like I have done enough in my life for the things I believe in. I have crumbled in the face of challenges to my opinions when told I have no right to them because I haven't done anything to back them up, like donate money to causes or volunteer. I won't make excuses for that but I will try and explain why I've crumbled into silence, and why I'm trying to pick up those pieces and carry on.

Because I've been quiet and shy all of my life, when I do speak up I think it comes as a shock to some people. I think they're surprised that I think and feel the way I do, or that I even have thoughts and feelings of my own. It's worse when my thoughts and feelings don't align with theirs, or with their expectations of how I should think and feel. I know this sounds harsh but trust me, I've been told that I have nothing to complain about, and no reason to feel anything at all sometimes.

I won't try and figure out why those things were said to me, or what those people were motivated by. I spent a lot of years trying to figure out why people reacted like that to me and damn near drove myself nuts in the process. And I know that I haven't been the most accepting of other people, either. I've said and done things I'm not proud of, things I will always be sorry for in this life and the next. And this is why I try to live my life by the following two principles: do no harm, and remember that everyone has a story to tell and that it's the story they're living.

As I listen to people who have told me that I have no right to my opinions since I don't back them up in a way they deem worthy, I hear one thing behind their words: fear. I hear a lot of fear about being harmed, about being overwhelmed, and fear of things that challenge the beliefs they were raised with. I think some people are responding with fear by pushing me away from them because I have opinions not based on fear. Also, people have told me I would probably feel differently if I had the same experiences they've had.

I believe that every single person responds to things in their own way, and that no one knows how they will deal with something until they have to. It's this knowledge that I don't know how I will react to something until it happens that has taken a lot of fear out of me.

But on the dark highway back home I asked myself: what do I fear?

I fear harming people when that's the last thing I ever want to do. I fear not being kind, and acting out in anger and pain. I fear losing control of my emotions and saying things I can never take back.

But do I fear people harming me? I have felt the fear of being hurt physically though I haven't been. And I have been told because I haven't been physically harmed that I shouldn't have the faith I have in the good of this world. Yet I refuse to give in to those fears because I know things can happen at any time both good and bad.

Though I haven't been physically harmed by anyone, I have been hurt by people mentally and emotionally. I have been alienated, ostracized, and condemned for being myself, and not for doing anything wrong. I have tried to get close to people then been pushed away. There were times I said and did things to make people push me away, like let my temper get the better of me. All I can do is learn from my mistakes and hopefully not make the same ones again. I have learned to forgive those who have hurt me because I can't hold on to anger and live fully. But I'm still learning how to not to be so hard on myself. Because as I write this, I feel the weight of regret bearing down on me.

I fear stepping out of my comfort zone, of reaching out to people and being rejected. I fear trying to enter a new place and being ignored, or told I'm not wanted. I fear being asked why I haven't done this sooner, and being pushed away because I've taken so long to take that first step forward. It almost feels like a trap sometimes, a lure into a box that will slam down on top of me if I do take that first step.

But here's what I want to do with my life despite these fears: I want to write even when it's almost bringing me to tears like right now. I want to write about whatever comes to me, and I want to publish it where people can see it. With my writing, I want someone to know they're not alone in how they think and feel. Because I know I'm not the only person who has ever felt this way: isolated and

alienated, scared and hopeful at the same time.

I know some people as a compromise will say that I should make time, or squeeze out a few dollars to give elsewhere. I won't tell anyone to do that, so therefore I don't think that's for someone else to tell me. I believe every single person has to make their own choices with what they have to work with. Right now, I have a certain amount of time to take care of my needs, and anything left over I put towards my wants. If that makes me a selfish bitch in someone's eyes, that's their opinion, an opinion I can't, and won't try to change.

I interact with people on a daily basis in my job and I try to do so with a smile and a kind word. I try to listen with an open mind and an open heart. I try to be supportive and encouraging. And I tell myself every day that every person out in the world is living their story, and that it's their story to live and tell, not mine. I say that I try to earn Karma points every day, but I don't live my life by that alone. I try to live my life doing the right thing and being kind because kindness is what I want most in life. I've been the recipient of a lot of anger, condemnation, ridicule, alienation and ostracization, so much that I don't want to be that way in return. Yes, I get angry at people who harm others, but I believe that makes me human. And being human means both good and bad, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

So even though I wanted to crawl into a cave after that ride and never come out

again, and even though I went to bed with a heavy heart, I remembered something

my father always used to tell me: no matter how bad your day was before, or how

awful a night you had, over there is east, and the sun's going to come up and

you're going to be given another day to work with, so try to make the most of it.

When the sun peeked through the curtains the next morning, I gave thanks for

that day, like I do every day. I tell myself I might not be out changing the world,

but that I'm trying to make my part in it a good one. I won't stop being kind to

people, I won't stop feeling emotions both good and bad, and I'll always believe in

the good in this world no matter what happens.

And most of all, I will do my best not to remain silent. I will spend my days

finding a way to free the words inside my head and in my heart.

I will break my own personal radio silence, no matter how hard that may be

some times. And I will encourage others to do so, too.