

COMMUNITIES

## Yesterday, I Took Time To Grieve. Today, I'm Ready For Action

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Hundreds of protesters rallying against Donald Trump gather outside of Trump Tower, November 9, 2016 in New York City. Photo by Drew Angerer via Getty Images

Like millions of Americans, I'm still in mourning. As I watched the news trickle in Tuesday night, what I was certain would be a commanding Clinton victory—every single poll, pundit, and newspaper predicted it—turned out to be more like watching a plane crash in slow motion. Only that plane was carrying my country, one that I love and respect more than I can express. As a Jewish, LGBT man, I have felt, especially over these past eight years, even more proud to call this place home. We have been moving towards more inclusion, diversity, and tolerance. And I worry that all of our progress is at risk.

I've long been a political junkie. Even before the conventions, I refreshed Five Thirty Eight and the Upshot almost every hour, like an addict needing his fix. I was more invested in this election than any of my lifetime—almost embarrassingly so. I wrote articles about Hillary Clinton, donated to her campaign, spent countless hours defending and extolling her on Facebook. The stakes have never been this high, the Republican nominee never so terribly, uniquely awful. Surely the America I know would never elect this buffoon president.

But America did.

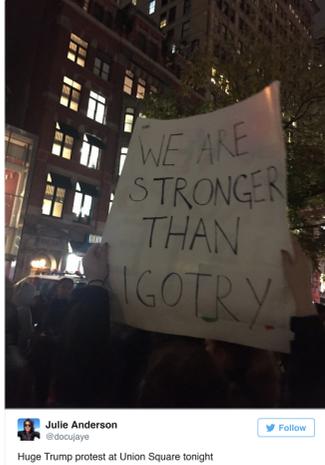
Once it became clear Hillary would lose, my first reaction was to immediately post on Facebook that I was seriously considering leaving the United States. "I say this with great sadness and gravity," I wrote. "If Trump wins, I will be moving out of the United States. I can't stay in a country that votes for him." I was distraught. I could not imagine living in a country that would elect this monster president. I spoke to friends who, like me, were not deeply rooted in their lives with families, careers, and other obligations. I could move. I still might do it.

With every passing hour, however, I'm sensing my emotions mutate. The shock is still there, the despair and grief now making way for anger. This is expected: the gradual unfolding of the stages of grief. Like me, I'm sure many of you have cried, experienced anxiety attacks, couldn't sleep the last two nights, barely made it through the day. I know you've reached out to friends and family members in search of comfort, consolation, solidarity. I know you've considered the unprecedented national nightmare that the next four years might bring, and how those years may irrevocably alter the fabric of our nation.

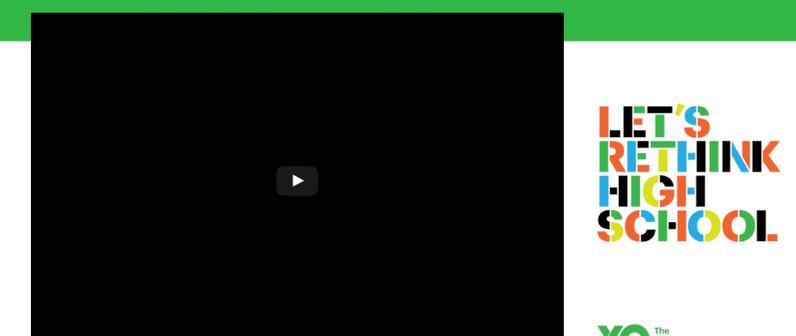
Now I understand: I spent the past several years asleep. My personal dream was a life spent in a liberal New York City echo chamber, one that scoffed at the possibility of a Trump victory. A city comprised of so many people who'd fled smaller towns (though I was born in the city) where they were afraid they might not fit in. My home now is a safe space of like-minded individuals—but safe spaces can easily become bubbles. I knew Trump had millions of followers. But I did not understand these people and their rabid disdain for Hillary Clinton. I didn't understand their lives, or even bother to think much about why we were seeing our country through such vastly different lenses. I didn't think I had to bother, because so many Republicans had disavowed him. Surely, an overwhelming majority of people would have the common sense not to elect someone who sexually assaults women, who doesn't pay taxes, who is a pathological liar, a failed businessman, a narcissist, a Putin apologist—a list of disqualifications so long I diminish it by listing only a few here.

**"To be forced awake into an entirely new way of perceiving the world is painful. But I am not helpless. Neither are you."**

**"We are not defined by our fears, but rather by how we respond to them."**



Julie Anderson @docujays Huge Trump protest at Union Square tonight 3:43 PM - 9 Nov 2016 858 2,343



To be jolted from this dream, to be forced awake into an entirely new way of perceiving the world around me, is acutely painful. It gives rise to despair, makes me feel helpless. But I am not helpless. And neither are you. In these moments as we move from sleep to wakefulness, we must process our grief. And once we're done grieving—once we are fully awake—we must understand that there are better ways to channel our energies than to wallow in despair or throw in the towel or move to Canada.

We are not defined by our fears, but rather by how we respond to them. We are a resilient nation, and we have faced these struggles before. And now I've come to realize the only thing we really need to fear is our own complacency.

It's time to organize. Time we stop taking our liberties for granted, fight hard for what we believe in, and stand up for those who might be especially disadvantaged by a Trump presidency: immigrants, Muslims, minorities. We must be willing to do more than pay social media lip-service to these causes, sharing petitions, articles, and "likes" as if this somehow could ever be enough. We must be ready to make serious sacrifices of our time and our energy, put aside our differences and minor squabbles, and rise up with a collective voice to each and every threat to our values.

We must run for office, for county seats, state legislatures, even for Congress. We must be ready to engage in repeated large-scale nonviolent protest. We must disrupt: through boycotts and strikes. Protests such as the **Million Woman March** currently being organized for inauguration weekend in Washington, D.C. National walk-out-of-work days, for Hispanics, African Americans, LGBT people, even women. Imagine an entire day when women decided not to work, and what kind of message that could send. Instead of rallying around the idea of moving to Canada, we can rally around the idea of moving to a swing state.

We must be innovative, fearless, and relentless. Yet we must do this with compassion: trying whenever possible to forge some common ground with those people who felt like Trump was their best option, without ever sanctioning bigotry, racism, or xenophobia. Many of us may have family members or friends who voted for Trump. We cannot simply "unfriend" them now as if this will somehow make them disappear. We have to explain to them our fears, and ask them to join with us to stand up for things that they too find intolerable or unjust. We may be pleasantly surprised at their reactions when we ask.

Even as I write this, I realize how inadequate my words are in response to what has happened. Yet this is exactly what I hope everyone who reads this begins to think about: or even share it. That's great—but it's only a start. I hope everyone starts asking themselves, every day, if they have done enough, or if there's more they can do. I for one have already attended meetings with friends about our next steps, and hope to organize an event in D.C. in February at the large gathering of writers for the **Associated Writers and Writing Programs** festival. This, too, isn't enough. But it's a first step. I do this—we do this—because we must. Future generations are relying on us.

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**"I hope everyone starts asking themselves, every day, if they have done enough."**

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