

Where the Hell is My Voice?

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I recently lost my voice for over a month. 6 weeks, actually. I fell ill on December 4th resulting in raw vocal chords and barely a whisper to speak with. Friends laughed at my new voice, strangers requested I repeat myself, and I forgot what my healthy voice sounded like.

You see, I've lived in southeastern Idaho for (too) many years now. Winters last five months. Temperatures sometimes drop to 20 below and most folk spend a few days a year bed-ridden with the flu. These are the costs of living in Rexburg, Idaho. And what exactly do people get for putting up with these temperatures? Some pay the price for the nearby wilderness areas. Others come for the Mormon culture. I suppose I cross over into another category—those who stay for the affordable schooling. But I too have a price to pay for this luxury; my body doesn't handle the cold well. I catch an annual virus or two and occasionally lose my voice. It was gone for over three months during my sophomore year of high school. I was worried that I had simply ended puberty and my voice would forever resemble Emperor Palpatine's.

Your voice is who you are—it's how you ask questions, how you argue, how you express yourself. Voices can both soothe and frighten us. Voices make beautiful music and horrendous screams. Not being able to communicate is one of the hardest things for us; we all have a lot to say about other cultures, about challenging philosophical ideas and the struggles of friends and family.

Creative writing books and teachers talk about a “writer's voice,” implying that we all have one and we need simply find it. But what if you “lose” your creative voice? What if you lose your ability to communicate and analyze your experiences and comment

on them? How could this happen?

To draw an analogy, I lost my physical voice from an infection in my throat, which came due to cold weather immobilizing my immune system. Cold air is cold simply because there is a lack of motion at the molecular level—the air is more still. My creative voice is likewise stifled by stillness, by the lack of diversity. Humans thrive in an environment that is more diverse and accepting of various views, even views that challenge the status quo. A community that allows all views to be civilly expressed and—more importantly—civilly criticized seems to adapt better to social issues.

Rexburg is a very cold place. There is little motion in the air here. Most people believe the same ideology and those who believe or think differently often don't feel welcome here. There is little diversity in this town, especially at my school. Many argue that this homogeneity creates a safe environment for schooling and that is probably true for some heavier matters like drug and alcohol use. But it's the trivial things that really chill the atmosphere around here. A lip ring on campus would cause quite the commotion. And few things vilify a man more than 5 o'clock shadow.

The cold air of my hometown is destroying my voice. I need more motion, more diversity. I'm inspired by conflict, by challenging ideas but such things are rarely to be had in a school controlled by white, conservative men in Salt Lake City. Today is Groundhog Day, the day when one woodchuck prophesies how much winter is ahead of us. Here's hoping he sees no shadow, that the cold air will leave, that motion will come back to us, and that I can find my voice again.