

The Story

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behind

My Name: Paul Revere

"Now that's a story with a very long tail." That's what comes to mind when I think of telling you the story of how My Name: Paul Revere came to be written.

Where to start? My father, my self. I think that's far back enough. My father: a strong, passionate, socially concerned man - so much concern with injustice. And yet he did so little to actually make change happen. Me: lots of similarities, and long a sense of helplessness. No idea what to do, to actually get any positive change happening.

College and university teaching - that finally gave me a way to reach people. So amazing.

But for now, back to my father, my self.

Here's an old story, told to me by my father in my childhood, about a doctor named Semmelweis. The time - about 1900. He figured out why women were dying after giving birth in the hospitals of Vienna. Doctors were touching corpses, and people with massive infections - and then reaching inside women giving birth, infecting them. Several days later, they died of a massive infection. The remedy was easy: washing the hands with a strong antiseptic solution. But the doctor could not get his colleagues to listen, and eventually went mad.

He's not a well known figure in North America. We know of those who got heard: Louis Pasteur, Marie Curie, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell. There isn't much attention given those who tried and tried - and did not succeed.

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A story has haunted me - the story of Cassandra, who knew the Trojan horse was a trick, knew that the Greeks would destroy Troy, but could not get her

fellow Trojans to listen. They pulled the horse into the city, partied, fell asleep - and then the Greeks stole out from the horse, murdered and pillaged and destroyed and took captive.

Well, if the Greeks managed to steal out from the horse without being detected, I imagine Cassandra could have stolen to the horse with a torch and could have set fire to it. End of evil Greek plot.

But she didn't even try to do this. So, not only were her fellow citizens deaf to her information, she herself could not come up with any plan on her own that might have foiled the Greeks. There was a curse on her: no one would listen. But there was no curse to prevent her from acting. And yet she did not act.

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Cassandra is better known than Semmelweis, but also not that well known.

She's been a powerful image for me - as I've often felt akin to her. I have messages, and have found it so hard to get them out into the world.

More than 2 decades ago, I did research on the impact of rights movements on those who get involved - women who get into feminism, blacks who get into racial rights, etc. I found there was so much available on the damage done by prejudice, by racism, by incest and battering, by homophobia, and so on. There was nothing on the impact of getting involved with a rights movement.

And no one went, eureka! this is brilliant! what an important topic! Instead I couldn't find anyone interested in publishing my findings.

Cassandra.

I did end up creating a course based on my findings. Very satisfying. But much less satisfying than being widely heard.

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How to stop being a Cassandra?

That has been a longtime quest - a quest that goes back at least to my father.

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Over the past few years, I've felt even more like Cassandra.

With the findings on the impact of involvement of rights movements, there was just a general absence of interest.

But over the past few years I've come up against something harsher.

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The story.

It all began with a Danish cartoon. Muslims marched in the millions against the publication, in a small Danish magazine, of a cartoon they claimed offended them. But no Muslims were marching against violence - thousands of murders - done by Muslims to other Muslims.

It did not make sense to me - that mass murder was less of a priority than a small cartoon. In fact, the cartoon showed the Muslim prophet with his turban turned into a bomb - as in fact Muslims were using their religion to justify violence. For me, all the more reason not to be offended by the cartoon. But I couldn't hear anyone else saying that - especially not publicly.

Ever since that time, I've slowly been drawn into exploring what's been happening in the West with Islam. No criticism allowed. No offending allowed. Anything that could be considered remotely unfavorable about Islam is labelled Islamophobic.

Look at truths about the Qu'ran ... and there you go again. You're very likely labelled an Islamophobe.

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I've cared about rights and justice and fairness all my life - women's rights, gay rights, racial rights, disability rights. All of a sudden, if I brought up anything less than positive about Islam, I was being eyed with suspicion - or even downright hostility, assumed to be a right-wing bigot, somewhere to the right of the Ayatollah Khomeini.

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I hadn't found a wide audience for my findings about the impact of rights movements on those who get involved.

But this was different.

Suddenly I was no longer associated with those who cared about human rights.

And this wasn't just happening to me. Anyone less than enthusiastic about Islam or the Qu'ran was being, as the saying goes, tarred with the same brush.

It made no sense. Anything negative about the Qu'ran came up against ... "What about the Crusades?" and stuff along those lines.

As someone brought up to be critical of anything to do with the Bible and Christianity, I knew all about the Crusades.

On the other hand, I didn't know, until recently, that they were in large part a response to the Islamic invasions into Christian lands.

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I still haven't gotten to Paul Revere.

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The time. June 2011. How to get my message out? I had read Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*. Most of it is gone from my mind. But I vividly remember that one of the necessary things is the right kind of messenger.

Not a loser like Cassandra. She's great for opera - lots of death and sobbing and arias. Shrieking wailing choruses as mayhem is erupting. A long long long aria from Cassandra before she is being dragged off to captivity. Most likely she is on a parapet, a dark figure against a dark red background, dragged a foot or two between verses.

No. Not the right messenger.

So ... what about Paul Revere? Malcolm Gladwell saw him as one of the messengers who got his message across. Gladwell was talking about the historic figure.

My Paul Revere is someone different. He's the figure of myth, the hero who rides in the night and is heard.

Yes. Eureka.

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June 2011. The equinox was coming. I was driving to Montreal. Driving is, for me, a time for thinking.

"I've hardly written anything these past few months, hardly any poetry or songs," I thought.

And "How might I reach lots of people with my ideas," I wondered. Over the past few months, I'd heard a bunch of interesting speakers. Most of the people in the audience were over 60. A large chunk were over 70. I remember one person identifying himself as 93. Great that a lot of people over 60 were socially concerned and socially active. But what about younger people - including those in their teens? How might they be reached?

"Imagine" from the Beatles went through my mind. And "All we are saying, is give peace a chance" from John Lennon.

Rap.

I started hearing words in my head. Rap words. I pulled the car over, got out paper, started scribbling, then drove on. Soon, more words.

Over the next couple of days, June 21 to June 24, words and more words. 17 rap pieces. The last was this version of Paul Revere - My Name, Paul Revere, Freedom Rider.

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This was quite something different for me.

Usually my ideas are expressed in idea pieces. Prose. Neat arguments. A beginning, middle and end.

I've written hardly any rap, hardly any poetry, spoken word, songs that are even vaguely political. They've been expressions of emotion, of moments of life. Love. Heart break. Loss. Confusion.

It had felt so natural to me, to have the ideas come out in idea pieces, and the emotions in poetry, rap, songs.

Now it felt that somehow there had been a barrier inside me.

When I thought of Paul Revere, that barrier disappeared, faded into thin air.

Paul Revere, figure of myth, does not - for me anyway, exist in an essay. He exists as a messenger carrying a message.

In this case, he rides in the night in rap, raps in the night with his message of freedom, free thinking, clear vision.

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It's not just Paul Revere who came to me, by the way.

There are 2 other messengers. I speak more than one language, and came to wonder - who would carry the message in French and in German?

French. Joan of Arc, the maid with the banner of snow.

German. Santa Claus, who knows he's slated for extinction if Islam takes over. (This figure courtesy of the musician I'm working with, Fern.)

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In the meantime, here's to Paul Revere, Freedom Rider - and to the message being heard.

A message of truth.

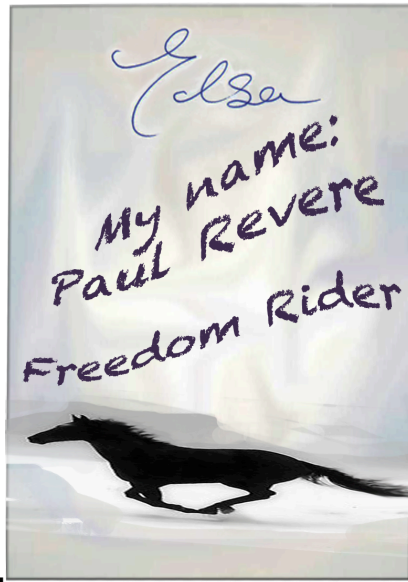
A message coming from love of freedom.

Love of life.

Elsa

Sept 5, 2011, 4:55 pm

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