



University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

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January 15, 2005

To: Women's History Month Awards Committee

From: Patti See

RE: Nomination of Liz Anderson's essay

I am pleased to nominate Liz Anderson's non-fiction essay for the Tillie Olsen Award. Liz writes about her experience of recently rediscovering her voice when she confronted a man on the city bus after he made inappropriate remarks about two young girls. This was a turning point for Liz, one that helped her reclaim not only her ability to speak up but also rediscover her personal spunk. Her essay is a well-written, insightful piece that captures a moment which changed her life.

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Tillie Olsen Award

One Crazy Broad: A fairly dramatic account of finding my voice

WMNS 210: Culture of the Third Wave

Elizabeth A. Anderson / Junior, History

Patti See, Instructor

Until most recently, I was frightened—frightened in the sense that I couldn't open my mouth and speak my mind. The thought of having an opinion and voicing it scared me. Ironically enough, my first eighteen years of life I was extremely opinionated. I loved to argue, be it intelligent or not. I loved to fight with my words. I would debate anyone on any topic. I had a real 'Bring It' attitude. If someone wanted to argue with me I had the mentality of, *ok but prepare to lose*. This mentality soon helped me refine my arguing into a real art. I was good. I had a real knack for shutting people down, which led my parents to believe I had a very promising career as a lawyer. The truth of the matter is, though I was good at voicing my opinions, there was no in between for me. I couldn't find a balance between arguing too much and not arguing at all. It's not like I was a beast to be around, but when the time came for arguing, look out!

It was when I came to college that I decided that I needed to change. So I did, but instead of just learning to tone it down, when appropriate, I just shut down completely. Over the next three years I became the opposite of my old self. I could be described as a shy, timid, quiet person, who fears confrontation, arguments or any other form of debate. Though my argumentative side has come to the surface from time to time, I would avoid it more often than not.

It wasn't until recently that my old self had a chance to remerge. I thought that a liberating act assignment for class would be a good time to let loose and start speaking up. I decided to *cat call*-make a sexual commit towards a male passerby- using such cliché terms as, "hey girl how you doing?" or "nice... (add body part here),"and why not

a whistle for a more dramatic effect. I took this behavior to the local mall, and started the liberation.

After about a half an hour of chasing and saying obnoxious phrases to unsuspecting men, I realized there was nothing liberating about this. It felt all wrong and false. The only true enjoyment I got out of the whole thing was seeing the shocked look on the guys faces. This wasn't me. There was no liberation; the only thing I succeeded at was looking like a jerk. I thought, *what is so liberating about acting?* Besides, I was acting like people I can't stand. I hated the whole thing. I felt that I had missed the entire point of the assignment, so I trudge home a defeated soul, trying to figure out what to do.

I racked my mind thinking of what to do, but nothing came to me. It wasn't until a bus ride home after a long, hard day at work that my liberating act happened to me without warning. The air conditioner at work wasn't working properly, and I had spent the bulk of the day dealing with an angry customer. As one might imagine, I was cranky. I had the mentality of, *"I want someone to say something stupid to me... no I dare someone to say something. Go ahead, cause you will not like what you hear."*

When the bus arrived I was somewhat delighted to see that it wasn't too full of people; my delight, however, was quickly squashed when I sat down and the scent of must, perfume, and body odor wafted its way towards me. The fresh bouquet of smells was giving me a headache, and all I wanted to do was get off the bus, so I sat silently waiting to just get home.

Normally while riding the bus I don't really pay attention, but on this day, one man stood out. He sat across from me, seated with his legs shoulder length apart, both his hands held the top of his cane, which he had placed slightly in front of his feet. He

appeared stern and steady. The way he was sitting made me laugh a bit on the inside, because it reminded me of British men who all look like that Monopoly guy, sitting in a parlor room drinking brandy and discussing politics. This man, however, looked nothing like an aristocrat with a top hat and monocle. He reminded me of a scary guy that you might see in some cheap horror film from the seventies. He was in his late forties and overweight. His hair was shaggy with tints of brown and gray; he had attempted to part his hair to the side, but clearly his attempt had failed. His eyes were dark and sunken in, with purplish heavy bags underneath. He wore a pair of thick brown glasses that were slightly tinted yellow. His face was speckled with dry spots of red skin and facial hair. He had on a short-sleeved, maroon flannel shirt, with a packet of cigarettes resting in his pocket. His jeans were worn and came complete with a pair of navy blue suspenders. He looked like he had lived a long, hard life. To be honest, though, there wasn't really anything about him that I hadn't seen in other people before.

The bus continued on its route, then pulled to the side of the road and picked up two girls, no more than twelve years old. They were skinny little things, dressed to go swimming. They slowly got onto the bus, paid their fare, and sat down. It was obvious that the two girls weren't used to riding the bus, as if their parents never let them ride before. How lucky I thought they were. I wish I could be that age again, where I could go swimming on a hot day and not worry about work. My brief jealousy passed, and with no other excitement, the bus moved on.

It was when the two girls got off the bus when some excitement happened. The bus had stopped at Fairfax pool. The two girls stood up and prepared to exit the bus. It was at this time that the man with the cane began to look the two up and down. I initially

assumed he noticed something on them, or perhaps he thought the girls resembled someone he knew. When the girls got off the bus, the man turned to his friend sitting next to him and began to say the most disgusting, perverted, sexual things about the two girls. Things that even a grown woman should never be described as or referred to, comments so foul that I refuse to repeat them here.

Something began to stir inside of me; feelings of anger, rage and deep disgust. How could this man do that? They are children; they play jump rope, have Barbies, and still think boys have cooties! How could he take that little girl image away? How dare he do that? No one has the right to do that! These thoughts kept circling in my mind, fueling my fire. I stared at him fiercely, while he laughed and joked with his friend. The sound of his voice lifted the hairs on the back of my neck and his laughter made me ready to explode.

Suddenly it seemed as if the bus froze--the engine died, wheels stopped--and the passengers ceased to move or even breathe. It was dark as night and the only thing I could see was him; as if there was a spot light on him and I could see everything about him: broken, overweight body, his grizzled appearance, the scent of bad booze and cigarettes. With my heart pounding so heavily it almost hurt, I yelled like I haven't yelled in a long time. Words just flew out of me. I said things my mother taught me never to say, and I couldn't stop myself! This man had awakened something inside me and there was no turning back from this point. How long I yelled I cannot say, but I scolded and insulted the man until I couldn't do it anymore; I went on until I ran out of adrenaline and breath.

I stood there heart still beating fast, face flushed, realizing what I just did. The bus driver stared back at me in shock. Other passengers just looked at me with jaws wide open. Some pretended not to notice what had just happened, while others sat there quietly trying not to laugh out loud. And then there was him. He sat there with the most hateful face. I could see the rage building in his eyes. Suddenly fear began to overtake me; I began to think of possible escape routes. Ridiculous notions began to swim in my head. *What if he tries to attack me or turn people against me? I have no way of defending myself against an angry mob! What if I get kicked off the bus? Could I get in trouble from the police about this? This is public transportation-- you really shouldn't do anything stupid ...it's run by the city. I am in big trouble!*

I sat there, my body frozen, hearing only the frantic thoughts in my head, when he began to shift in his seat. I waited there, too scared to move, when he unsteadily stood up. He leaned on his cane and stared at me. It seemed like an eternity. *What is he going to do?!* He opened his mouth and said, "You crazy broad." Then quickly moved to the other end of the bus away from me. I finally let out a deep breath, and thought, *That was it? That was all he could say? This big man was, dare I say... intimidated by me?* The whole idea of that makes me laugh even today.

I came to my stop and got off feeling a little bit cocky. Let's face it, I felt like I had just won the heavyweight boxing championship belt, with no training and weighing in at only 120 pounds. It was a feeling I can't say I've ever had. It was new, and it made me feel so empowered. I liberated myself, and it came without thinking or planning.

It was an ugly scene, but yet one of the most beautiful. I was setting something free, like a caged animal waiting to be released into the wild. I had recaptured something

I had lost: my voice. Something I took for granted all those years; something I was so ashamed of. My voice is my tool and my passion is my gift, and I refuse to lose either of them again.