

I Have.

By Shayd Williams

From 2,400 square feet to 1,500,
my family moved to the #1 tourist destination
in the world
because beneath its cobblestone streets
and rainbow houses
there is systemic racism
and broken school systems
and discriminatory policing
and
and
and.

I moved from my homogenous
white
Kansas community
to a predominantly
black
Southern community.

We had friends from Kansas visit
our first year here
the daughter asked if our black neighbors
were drug dealers
we had to explain
I had to explain
to all of my white friends
Kansan or South Carolinian
why that black man
walking past our house
wasn't dangerous
or suspicious,
both things Treyvon Martin
and Walter Scott
and Eric Garner had been labeled,
he wasn't anything
but a person walking.

I left a life of Volleyball matches on the weekends
for a life full of awarness
No longer afraid of my body
and my voice
I began to teach young girls
through Girls Rock
that they were meant to use their voices to scream
to be heard

they were meant to be loud
to fill the air
they were meant to fill the space with their bodies
all of the space they took up was perfect
the music they created was perfect
the way they played the guitar
and keys
and drums
and bass
were exactly how they were supposed to be played
to be heard
they were meant to be heard.

The girls and I in my school
were told that
if we wore revealing clothing
clothing that showed our midriff
that we were asking for it
asking to be raped
to have our bodies violated
as if the thought
never went through our teachers' minds
that maybe the reason
we wore the clothes
we wore
was because we felt good in them
comfortable
they acted as if
the only reason
we wore clothes like that
was to attract boys
and that made us angry
so last year
we all wore red A's
girls and boys
making a statement that
when we were dress coded
teachers acted like we were
adulterers
that we should be ashamed
ashamed when our bare shoulder was exposed
ashamed when our skirt didn't reach our fingertips
but we refused
to be ashamed.
I refuse to be told
that boys can't control themselves

that it's my duty to stop them
from drugging my drink
from sexually assaulting me.
The protest opened up the discussion
one male student told us
"Just wear pants all the time
then you'll never get dress coded"
forgetting that women have always
always
been told that their bodies
are something to be ashamed of
that years ago
we weren't even allowed to wear pants.

When your fellow high school students
when the middle school students from your neighborhood
are going to schools
where the suspension rate is 51%
you begin to become angry
I became angry
you begin to speak
I began to speak
I raised my voice
and I began to be heard.
At a gathering of 2,000 people
for Charleston Area Justice Ministry
I told them that black students only made up 42% of the school population
yet they account for 83% of the arrests in schools.
Because of that night
because of the anger of people
who wanted
a change
we received
a change.

And now I know
I know of the power people hold
that I hold
I'm determined
to teach people of the power they possess
Every cell in their body
makes up a being
that doesn't have to accept
the broken system
that we're told is how it's supposed to be
No

We
can speak words
can call people to action
can work
against
systemic racism
systemic sexism
systemic injustice
I believe I can.
I have.



Performing the camp song for campers at Girls Rock Charleston Camp 2016



Speaking about arrests in school at the Charleston Area Justice Ministry's Nehemiah Action 2015



Myself and a group of youth at the South Carolina state house protesting the confederate flag 2015



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Myself and a group at my school, Charleston County School of the Arts, protesting the dress code with our "Not a Distraction" protest 2015



Representing Girls Rock Charleston in Charleston's Pride Parade 2016