

I've been thinking about shock. Something surprising and upsetting. A sudden disruption in a body that now must rewire for a new reality. A community is a body, and those of us who were in community with Tony are reeling from the seismic jolt of his death. Shock is a matter of perspective: we think we see the whole of someone, when really, we teeter on the veneer above hidden multitudes.

I was close enough to Tony to know that his incredible resilience lay in his ability to delicately fold together many and sometimes conflicting identities. That the fierce and tender way he showed up in different spaces and lives drew from deep wells of empathy and a complexity of experience. Tony was always real, but there were few places in which he could and did show up as his full self. It is easy to confuse the two. We believe that when someone is consistently unafraid to speak truth to power they are unfurled before us. But we are capable of holding so many complexities within us.

Suicide is often described as shocking, especially when it precipitates the loss of someone who is viewed as accomplished, ambitious, brilliant, charismatic, exuberant, a fighter. Tony was all of these things. But we are not well-served by a dichotomy between excellence and struggle. It is false. It is often the people who show up the boldest, the kindest, or the most playful who use these traits to cover deep wounds. And this was Tony too. "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." A friend recently shared this Leonard Cohen line, and it keeps playing in my head. Tony felt tremendous pressure to hide his cracks.

I'm going to take a moment to share my own cracks, and I want to be clear that my intent is not to make the passing of a Black man about my experience as a White woman, but

instead to practice radical vulnerability on the public record. I want also to acknowledge that my race and my position of power afford me this privilege; that as a Black man, and in particular as someone without a permanent position at this Bureau, Tony was at far greater risk if he told his truth. Finally, I should name that what I am about to say may be a trigger for some people, so I am going to put the Multnomah County Mental Health Crisis line up on my screen [*SHOW SLIDE OF: (503-988-4888)*] and I invite anyone who needs to virtually “step out” and take a break at this time for any reason to do so without judgment.

I have wrestled with depression, anxiety, disordered eating, and self-harm for most of my life. In January, I tried to kill myself after our PSC retreat. I felt an incredible amount of shame coming out of that space and it exploded the next morning when I woke up to an article that framed me as a White savior. I cycled through a series of mistakes that allowed this narrative to be published. The harm I perceived that resulted felt insurmountable. I felt too destructive to continue to exist. But I was able to dig deep inside myself, to see that these were thoughts and not realities, and I sought help. I was almost too late. My heart stopped and had to be shocked back to life in the ambulance.

I am grateful to be alive today, grateful to be doing this work, grateful to the people who loved and supported me then and now, and grateful for the time I knew Tony.

[*REMOVE SCREEN SHARE*]

A joy in the past week has been hearing story after story of people who felt the warmth of his sun. I certainly did. But it has also been cathartic and feels important to hold space for anger at the ways in which that light was so frequently diminished.

The Bureau of Planning and Sustainability failed Tony. It failed him again and again, just as it has failed and lost other BIPOC, especially Black, staff, in less tragic ways. We failed Tony. We, the Planning and Sustainability Commission, are the body that is meant to hold BPS accountable, but we are complicit in long-standing and institutional practices that have done and do harm. Tony's death is a shock in that it has short-circuited a culture in which racial equity is addressed nominally while internally and externally perpetuating systems of oppression and white supremacy. This is a reckoning. This is an emergency.

Rebecca Solnit reminds us that "Inside the word "emergency" is "emerge"." This is a hairpin, not a deadend. Tony consistently laid the groundwork for change. He left behind documents and ideas that clearly articulate what actions must be taken to transform the Bureau and our City. We have a map to find our way. Tony's email signature ended with: "The most difficult thing is the decision to act. The rest is merely tenacity." He got that quote from a TV show about people surviving alone in the wilderness. Tony was surviving in his own wilderness through sheer force of his tenacity.

We must be tenacious too. And when we are ready we must decide to act. Change must move at the speed of grief; healing and reparations for BIPOC staff and the communities that Tony touched must be prioritized. These are the first steps and are not separate from the work, but if I knew Tony, he would have kept grinding, kept hustling, kept pushing. I

don't want to lose sight of his big vision, so I'm going to grind, and hustle, and push for radical transformation in honor of his memory.

Tony was supposed to present his anti-displacement work today, and our recent focus on racial justice is a direct result of internal organizing to which he contributed greatly. He and I were working together to amplify and codify this, and I'd like to share some context for how that effort came to be. We will hear later about Tony's contributions and guidance around anti-displacement.

As a Black man who loved to run, Tony was deeply affected by the murder of Ahmaud Arbery. Already one to think about how he navigated space and spaces were designed to be navigated, he felt the constant danger. Shortly after, he humbled me when I tried to cross a street against a light. He reminded me that I hold a privilege of safety and rule-breaking in a world that was constantly trying to kill him for any or often no infraction. I thought about this whenever we were in protest spaces, what it meant to put my body on the line before his. And I thought about this when, energized by the streets, he wanted BPS to explicitly add to the call from the Portland African-American Leadership Forum (PAALF) and Unite Oregon to defund and dismantle the police. At a time when his job was uncertain and unstable, Tony still spoke up, demanded action, and made himself vulnerable. Tony was courageous.

As organizing shifted to address injustices within BPS and forward the actions in the PAALF People's Plan, I helped create a container in the PSC to receive the generative work. Tony and I wrote language to change Title 3.33 of the City Code to give BPS an explicit charge

for racial justice and accountability for the racist history of planning -- if that was the direction in which the organizing collective wanted to move and chooses to move when it is ready. During the first PSC meeting centered on racial justice, Tony and I texted back and forth. As he got more excited, he started thinking bigger: a racial justice state land use goal. He later remarked that such a milestone would cement someone's legacy if it were achieved. I want that for him. I will fight with fury and love to make that happen. But I cannot fight alone, and many of you hold other pieces to Tony's legacy.

I keep coming back to Nipsey Hussle with Tony. Today, with the lines:

Dedication, hard work plus patience

The sum of all my sacrifice, I'm done waitin'

Tony cannot continue this work. He will never see the sweeping changes he saw were necessary but were constantly deferred. He will never bear the Racial Equity Planner title he hoped to create. Now, we are all responsible for his legacy, and we will never lose him if we continue to hold true to the course he set. Tony lives in the courageous, brilliant, tenacious, and resilient passion we must all channel now.