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A Girl and Her Makerspace: A Tale of Loss



Cole LeCody

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2



I've been mulling an event over in my head. Turning it like a grain of painful sand caught in my core and hoping that it will change into a pearl. I'd wanted to write this from a place of wisdom and calm reflection. Because had I done it when I first wanted to put pen to paper about what happened, righteous fury would have burned through me till only ash lay in my wake.

I wanted people to rise up in anger around me. I wanted this story to take the internet by storm. I wanted those of you who speak out against injustice and bullying and assholes to stand beside me and give my voice power.

Perhaps I let it simmer too long, waiting for wisdom to come. The fire has burned me clean through. All I have left is the story of a girl and the Makerspace she loved and lost.

Once upon a time my husband found a group of people on Meetup.com who wanted to collectively share their tools and knowledge and love for making things in a collaborative workshop.

At the time, the idea of a Hacker (or Maker) Space was still relatively new. There were a couple across the US, but overall, it was a baby concept and so there was only a fledgling amount of interest in such an endeavor.

But I went with him to a meeting to see what it was all about.

The Dallas Makerspace met in a small rented space with attached warehouse off Audelia Road on the far side of Dallas. The area was less than inviting, but the rent was affordable and it allowed storage of tools and workbenches. I'd like to be able to say I was there from the DMS's birth, and in a way I was, but this idea was not born of me. It came from the Dallas Personal Robotics Group when several members wanted to expand their creative endeavors to

include more than just designing, building, programming, and operating robots in their free time.

These people had a vision for something that would ultimately grow and sweep the nation with a fervor.

And I think Andrew and I felt that back then. We could see its potential even though they had little in the way of the large machinery everyone wanted.

We started small. A laser cutter that wasn't even owned by the group as a whole. Alyssa Pipe, a DPRGer and founder of the DMS, brought her personal laser cutter and set it up for us to use. And another member brought their personal 3D printer (early prototype at the time even!) and let members tinker and test it out.

This was a collective of seriously knowledgeable people who liked to make things. And they wanted to make them together. To create a non-profit that would share tools and knowledge with each other. To teach skills.

Our goals were to one day be able to buy larger and better machines. CNC Routers, Lathes, Table Saws, Plasma Cutters.

But we started small in those early days. With little more than a few cool, expensive toys and dreams.

When it came time to solidify the DMS as a legitimate Non-Profit with a focus on education, Andrew and I ran for the first board and were elected. I remember sitting around during our meetings, working on setting up rules (our main one, even to this day, is 'Be Excellent to Each Other') and working

through the pages and pages of documentation needed in order to become a 501c3.

In fact, the original paperwork has the line, “Andrew LeCody and Nicole Greeley are engaged to be married”, because I wanted it noted in case there was ever the idea anything hadn’t been forthright. I mean, it was most likely not even an issue. But that’s how much I wanted to do this the right way. To be honorable, honest, and forthright.

And I would recuse myself if my vote might be compromised by my relationship with Andrew. Because he was elected President by the Board, I never wanted anything about the DMS’s integrity to be called into question.

For two years I helped shaped the space as a board member. I worked long hours when we finally had enough membership dues to afford moving to a better location with more space. There were Saturdays devoted to painting rooms, knocking down walls, remodeling, running cable, setting up shelving and building tables. We ripped up carpet to make concrete floors, which were more conducive to our experiments and maker mishaps.

I loved that early connection with the small, brilliantly creative group of individuals who made up the first membership. I cherish those memories.

But time changes everything.

I, with the handful of devoted members who kept that place going, organized Open Houses to showcase the space and projects we’d worked on. Each year I helped coordinate that event we had more members join, more dues added to our revenue, which meant better tools, better equipment, and a larger pool of knowledge.

The board took a lot out of me as the space grew in size and membership but the number of volunteers didn't. I stepped down to run chair on a few of the committees I'd helped start, mainly PR. We wanted to expand the space and membership not only that we might afford better equipment, but that we might inspire a whole generation of future makers to not just dream big, but DO big.

Eventually, even that took its toll on me as there was little interest (at the time) in doing what was needed to spread the word about us. Not to mention the larger the group, the more potential for people to clash. Without dredging up the details of bygones and stresses that have long since gone cold I will say that I found myself taking a step back from everything and the thankless nature of running an organization as a volunteer.

But regardless of my burnout, I wanted the Dallas Makerspace to succeed. And I knew under those who remained at the forefront of its progress, it would. It was in good hands.

I lay all of this history out there because in order to understand why the events of the night I'm about to discuss (and all the injustice of the thereafter) hurt not only me, but so many others, you must first understand the chunk of life I committed to its success. To this place I loved.

In my time away, the space grew in membership, surpassing even the first of its kind and former largest makerspace, HackDC. We'd become the largest makerspace in the nation. After months had passed where I hadn't even set foot in the space (but still paid my full dues because it was something I believed in) I decided to return and test the waters. See if drama, politics, and a draining lack of volunteerism had finally washed away.

I met new people, made some new connections, but ultimately determined that it hadn't been long enough and stepped back once again.

The DMS moved, again, to a bigger and better space. They finally purchased all those shinies the early members had dreamed of so long ago. It'd grown from a single laser cutter, a single 3D Printer, a Dark Room, and a warehouse with myriad amounts of tools unlabeled and unsorted. From a place where members would meet in the tiny room attached to a warehouse and work on their projects on folding tables, where they'd talk about their ideas and conjure up new ones. Where they'd collaborate on artistic and electronics feats with little means (at the time) to accomplish their goal.

Now there was an automotive section, a room devoted to 3D Printers of all kinds. An Electronics Room. A woodshop. A jewelry making section, several high powered, large bed laser cutters, even a blacksmithing area complete with forge and plasma cutter. There were sturdy, durable work benches allowing for more makers than the early iteration of the DMS could allow. The tools were organized and labeled, supplies and scraps for use were plentiful.

This was the space we'd wanted for our community.

And I felt like it was time to return.

What I returned to was amazing in scope of access to tools I wouldn't easily be able to afford myself. But the changes in the board, the changes in leadership and the stories that made their way to me about the dealings of said board and leadership made me nervous.

After nearly five years of helping run the DMS as their board appointed President, growing it into something successful, Andrew decided to not run again during elections so that he could utilize the larger workshop he'd helped create, which, as a board member, you sometimes have little chance of doing.

The first hurt came in the form of lost history.

I get it. Time doesn't care to remember what isn't recorded. And too often, newcomers to something don't care about the history of a place. Only about their spot within it in the here and now.

But I remember catching wind of praise being heaped upon a woman who was elected to the board as being the first female board member and lauding how progressive the space was to do such a thing.

The thing was...the DMS had already had its first female board member. Me.

And it felt silly to be hurt by that because it was said by someone who didn't know. Didn't understand the time, effort, and sweat I'd put into building the space. And it wasn't just me, either. The contribution of that early guard was forgotten, tossed aside in the face of a group of individuals who sought to wrest power from those they deemed "unworthy" of running the makerspace, even though they'd been responsible for growing it into the success it became.

The elected woman reached out to me on Facebook having heard of my hurt over this misinformed statement and tried to assure me that she wanted to honor those who'd laid the groundwork for the DMS.

And then, when she'd said her peace, tried to look like the magnanimous and accepting bigger person, and enough time had passed, her feigned friendship disappeared with her removal of me from her Facebook.

That act was the seed of distrust that would later bloom in the face of her later actions.

Now, I'd love to speak to the interactions the board has had with several of my friends — the ways in which shady practices, manipulation, favoritism, and power-hungry acts have painfully impacted them — but that is their story to tell. I only have my own.

And there were things and information given to me about the “closed door” conversations taking place with a few select board members who'd formed a voting block against the last reasonable board members, eventually forcing them out because they could no longer stand the stress of fighting against this group. But going into the how of this information and the who is also not my story to tell.

Only that in knowing this information, a picture of these people began to form in my head. And in the wake of their growing followers...a fear.

Because that word of mouth information was proven true when, without having talked with the other board members, their first meeting steamrolled over voting points, the “block” on the same page as though they'd held a private meeting to discuss how they would vote in order to overrule the other two board members. They also placed their own person in the position of President by deciding ahead of time she would be their pick, preventing any dissent from the two remaining board members because they wouldn't have the votes to counter such a recommendation.

This was just the first of many things that found their way to me about how this new board handled their decision-making methods.

The next year, those last two board members chose not to run again and were replaced by people who sided with the block voters.

What was once an organization run by Gen Xers and Millennials, made successful by those people, was now taken over by baby boomers who sought to curb the progress and inclusiveness our organization had once set in motion by driving out all dissenting voices from positions of leadership.

With every large group there is friction. Not everyone will get along or even see eye to eye. And that's not exactly a bad thing. Echo chambers create closed mindedness and viciousness. They rile you up. Exposing yourself to new and conflicting ideas and notions not only helps you expand your mind but help you learn how to best discuss your own viewpoints.

But there are times that friction creates hostile environments. And they require action on the part of those set upon by the people who elected them to protect the integrity of the organization of which they are wards.

This was one such incident. And our board failed us.

Our first and biggest rule at the DMS has always been 'Be Excellent'. It was chosen because we, of the first board, didn't want a huge list of rules and regulations (so to speak) a mile long for every time someone did something the group found problematic. This rule put a lot of faith and trust in the membership and allowed for an open-door policy so that members could bring issues to the board and believe it would be heard and resolved fairly. Our motto was, "Don't make us make a rule."

It's a shared workspace community which means, yeah, sometimes you're going to want to use a tool someone else is already using. So, don't move their stuff just because they step away to go to the bathroom. And you don't take up the entirety of the workbench area just so you can spread everything out across five large tables. Be excellent to your fellow maker and they'll be excellent to you.

We wanted a place that would inspire collaboration, would get people talking to each other about their interests and their projects, would allow for a wealth of knowledge from which to pull from by advocating for people to talk, get to know each other, and share their experiences for others to learn from.

That night, one member did not act excellently and the board's favoritism and handling of it effectively destroyed the spirit of that original dream in many of us, myself included.

I'd started going back to the space to work on projects recently, especially with Wasteland (an event I've started going to in California in September) approaching. I'd meet up with friends from the group going to work on our costumes, props and themed camp.

That night we arrived to two members working in the automotive section which butts up right next to the work benches.

Before I go into my encounter with these gentlemen I must say, this is only part of what happened that night because not all of it happened to me. I can only speak to what I observed, overheard, and what was said to me. But their stories are a matter of public record, saved by Andrew in the board meetings

they had to discuss what transpired that night. Should anyone want to see them I can provide links.

The two gentlemen in automotive were working on what appeared to be a bumper, using a sanding tool. This created a ton of dust that plumed up into the air. Before I even was involved, I know that Andrew had asked them if they might consider taking the sanding outside because of the particles it was throwing up into the air. According to him, they declined to do that.

Once I'd set up, I started to notice the smell. A smell that quickly made me shaky and nauseous. Now I admit, here is where some facts get fuzzy for me, because a friend there with me went up to the gentlemen and asked them what they were sanding and I can't recall if the fan was there before or after that point.

Suffice it to say my friend received a very curt and threatening reply to his inquiry. One of the gentlemen told him they were the vice chair to Automotive and would ban him for giving him crap about sanding the bumper. Unprovoked. Uncalled for. Over the top.

That was probably when I noticed the fan, but I'm not sure it was always there or if that interact spurred them to get vindictive now that they'd been asked by two different members to move their sanding outside.

The fan blew the particles over to our group, filling the air with a noxious smell. Fiberglass particles to be specific.

I admit, I don't know what the health hazards are of breathing fiberglass, but I know it's not good. It's possibly carcinogenic even, though later research would reveal it's not been proved definitively.

But I'd just been diagnosed with cancer and I could only imagine breathing that stuff wouldn't help my situation.

I grew shaky and dizzy from the smell alone. It was hard to breath in the immediate area and my eyes watered a bit just being at the table next to the automotive area. Because the fan was blowing it right on us.

Worried, unsettled, and not wanting confrontation in light of his hostility towards my friend, I went outside to get some fresh air. But really, I knew I couldn't be in there so long as they continued to sand the bumper and kick up dust into the air.

I don't recall at what point this happened, only that it did, but another friend of mine, another former board member in fact, asked them to perhaps move to the metal shop where there are vents to pull toxic of noxious fumes up and away from the work area. They still refused.

Multiple people complained about the smell and the particles and still, they would not be moved.

When I finally came back into the space it was to a discussion already happening with the DMS' President, the gentlemen involved, and two of my friends (one of which had been the one threatened with banning) so I missed a huge portion of it.

But I know that someone from our group pulled the President aside to mention that the behavior of those two individuals in automotive was anything less than excellent. And he tried to defend his words saying that we were the ones harassing him.

His posturing, his manner of speech, his very presence was coiled with aggression, with intent to do nothing about his actions. To defend his right to clash against us over a simple request that we might have an environment we could all work in.

And the President looked at us, agitated, or at the very least like she didn't want to be there in that exact moment and probably regretted coming through the workshop instead of the front entrance to the space.

She said nothing, made no overture to handle or mediate a compromise or resolution to the situation. Instead, she brushed us off by saying, "Well, I just arrived." Then proceeded to walk away.

She. Walked. Away.

And she didn't come back to help us resolve the issue.

Enough time has passed and the following events far more of a burning coal lodge into my throat that I've let go some of the anger I feel for what happened that night, except for how it relates to the events of last night and Andrew's subsequent banning from the Makerspace.

We followed the proper process for lodging a formal complaint against the member we'd had a run in, presenting it to the board to act upon. Everyone who'd been there that night added their recount of the events and it was added to the agenda of the next official Board meeting.

I mention this because I want to draw a comparison between how the complaint against this member was handled and how Andrew and the rest of the finance team was handled.

They put it on the agenda, thus giving everyone ample time to prepare to defend or counter against it. Then, on the day of the board meeting, it was pushed aside and nothing done on it. The reason being that one of the board members didn't feel like they'd given the target of the formal complaint enough warning to arrive and hear the verdict out. So, they pushed the resolution of that issue to a later board meeting.

Then, at that later board meeting, they voted to do nothing about the complaint. Which in turn emboldened the subjects of the complaint to heckle and taunt those of our group who'd shown up to defend their position. They'd hoped that the board siding with them meant we'd quit the organization and never come back.

I'd like to point out that this member wasn't banned pending the Board hearing and resolution vote. His access wasn't removed. He was still welcome to come and go as he pleased.

And yet, the way Andrew and the other were banned, is reserved for people deemed a physical threat to the space. Not once have any of these members acted violently, made any kind of violent threats, or acted wild and erratic while at the space. They have no prior history of any of these things either. And yet they were deemed a "threat" such that it warranted their immediate removal from the space.

Andrew was given no prior notice of the vote by the board to ban him. He wasn't allowed to defend himself. And he won't be able to hear the reason for his banning until a Board Meeting at a later date.

I fully believe this ban comes as a reaction to his investigation into fraud, negligence, self-dealing, and possible theft by several members of the

makerspace. He'd been requesting information (of which many others wanted access to as well) and that activity that looked like a payout of a member for services undocumented be properly exposed so as to not appear criminal in nature.

Every time he and others have asked questions (of late) about the financials regarding an expansion project for the space, he's been met with resistance, obfuscation, anger, and now, finally, a tactic meant to shut him up under the guise of "protecting the space".

I don't have all the evidence. I don't have the fullest understanding of the finer details. So, I can only speak to what I've been told by people who DO have that knowledge and evidence. Things are going on that are, at their very least, incompetent actions by the board and, at their very worst, purposefully criminal.

Several weeks ago a question was posed to the board BY a fellow board member via the forums we use. It was in relation to some potentially shady dealings involving the expansion project. The board deflected and tried to claim that the business dealings were private and privileged information. To their own fellow board member, they said this. About a non-profit, which is required to make its financial information available to those who ask.

So, they gave him no warning, held a meeting, and removed him as a board member.

Let me say that again. He questioned them and they removed him as a board member and cut off his access to everything. He'd been talking with Andrew about this and his concerns too. Then, the board had a meeting where they reinstated him.

This same person, who had been on the wrong side of the board, then proceeded to unanimously vote to have Andrew and the rest of the finance team (one of which is DMS' treasure, and one a former treasurer) banned from the space.

Then, when they've protected people in the past with complaints against them, they paraded this on the forums in what I can only call an attempt at shaming them.

Their justification, as I hear it, is that Andrew leaked "sensitive financial information", and I think there is this idea that he broke attorney/client privilege, even though the information he shared with the membership was not protected by that, nor was it sensitive financial information because again...as a non-profit, this information should be made readily available to the membership as a whole.

But we have no way of knowing for sure because no reasoning has been made officially public about the banning. I am heartened to know people are questioning it. Are starting to draw the same lines that Andrew and "cohorts" have been drawing for a while now.

Part of the flimsy coverage the board tried to throw over the whole thing involved some cryptic Non-Disclosure Agreement that prevented them from talking about anything. From disclosing the architects and general contractors working on the space's expansion project. They appointed someone to approve large charges for this expansion but they did it retroactively after the money had already been spent.

Not to mention, they allowed her to sign this so-called NDA that allowed them to keep the membership in the dark about the project under threat of a

\$95k penalty for even revealing who the NDA was with and apparently this NDA was in effect for all eternity. I do not say that with melodramatic effect. That was what was told to the membership. We couldn't even know who the NDA was with, according to the board, for forever.

Why would you give a member the ability to approve expenses up to \$15K and then allow them to sign a contract that not only goes against the legal requirements for a non-profit's financials, but also puts the space on the hook for \$95K if they were to breach said NDA contract? Everything about this was a giant red flag. Not to mention the way that the same member given this authority also paid out bills in excess of \$12K to a company they owned without documentation showing that this company had followed a proper bidding process and without revealing what those other bids were so that the membership as a whole could see that they were indeed the lower option.

The whole expansion project has been shadows and mirrors from the get go. Whenever asked direct questions people were met with misdirection, insults (about not understanding how business is conducted), and subterfuge. Discussion and input became a closed-door affair.

This was what Andrew was trying to ensure the board correctly documented. Because this could blow back on several people.

He's been questioning undocumented expenditures.

He's been questioning undocumented vehicle rentals.

He's been questioning undocumented meetings.

He's been questioning favoritism. Misconduct. Abuse of power. Theft of Makerspace resources.

Then they removed him.

And he's not alone. Others who have seen the warnings clear as day have been silenced. Their posts hidden. Their questions unanswered.

I'd said in the beginning that I wanted this righteous outpouring. But I'm still learning so much about what lies under the surface of everything. I'm heartened to see that others in the organization are decrying their actions, asking the hard questions.

There is still so much to unravel, so much to unpack. And I admit to a level of disorientation. A level of shock. Because I look back on all the years prior and never felt so sour a pool settling in the pit of my stomach over the actions of any prior board. Regardless of a dispute or disagreement that might have been had in the past, this present level of...I don't even have a word that can contain everything I feel could be attributed to this, so I'll just say...worrisome behavior could spell a major shift in everything this organization once represented.

Without divulging what evidence has been gathered, suffice it to say there is plenty, I'd encourage anyone who wants further details to reach out to Andrew. He's willing and ready to talk to anyone who wants further details about everything to contact him. I ask that you share this. If nothing else, spreading the word and shining a light on this will hopefully encourage a swift removal of any who are engaged in questionable activities.

And I implore those of you who've sat on the fence, unsure which way to lean, to seriously question the current leadership. Make them accountable for their actions. You have power to bring about change. You have it in your vote (if you're a voting member), you have it in getting involved, if your schedule allows for it, as a committee chair or even a future board member, you have it in speaking up when you know something is wrong.

Hold those in power to integrity. To honor. Ask them to keep their positions sacrosanct, given to them by the people who voted them there, and they should treat it with the respect it deserves. The respect their membership deserves. Hold them to clarity. To a level above reproach. Let them never fear the questions because they are ready and willing to explain every action, every cent spent should someone wonder.

I plead with those that still care about this place to save it. I've lost what this place once meant to me, the haven of dreams it once provided. But it might still be that for future generations. Don't let them tear it down on their way out.

This isn't the end, darling, this is just the beginning.

Makerspaces

Personal



Written by Cole LeCody

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Mark Randall Havens △ The Empathic Technologist

What are your thoughts?



Abner Attagirl
Mar 6, 2019



Cairenn Day:

There doesn't need to be a mention let alone an advertisement for the DMS in your response. I'm an old member and a former member, I used to spend hours up there with my friends and working on props and 3D printing. I can now, longer... [more](#)



251

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Cairenn Day
Mar 6, 2019



What an interesting account No mention that the space had boomed in size under the that new Baby Boomer board We now have over 2200 member up from the less than 350 that moved to the new space a little of 2 years ago

And that board she thinks is self... [more](#)




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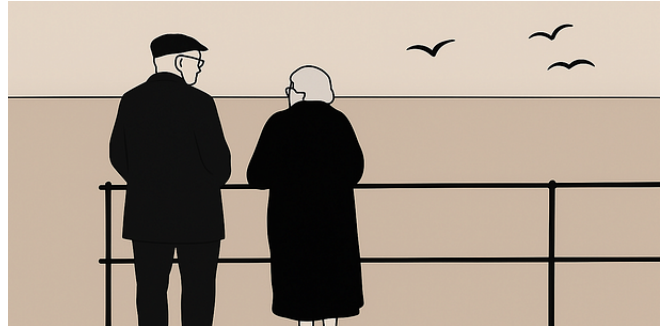
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