

Debora



There's a quote, 'It is more degrading to fear than to be feared.' If you fear me, you're the one who's being degraded in the experience, not me.



My name is Debora. I'm from Washington State, but I grew up in Fresno. I'm an art teacher in Desert Hot Springs, and creativity has always been my companion – creative thinking, creative writing, creative actions ... In the 80's, I was the lead singer in one of the coolest new wave bands ever, and I still have that rebellious and indomitable spirit.

I'm not a straight person, and I'm not talking about gay or straight. I'm talking about alternative or straight. I have groomed myself to not see myself through anybody else's eyes but my own. That comes from being hurt, and making a choice to be proud that I'm not like everybody else. Being safe is its own prison.

Growing up was not easy. I was a smart little fat brown girl, and people who I encountered hadn't seen that before. At school I was always getting into trouble. I was never disruptive; I was always just challenging them and they didn't really know what to do with me. In first grade I had a teacher who actually

made me wear a dunce hat and sit in the corner of the room, because I was talking during art class. I remember feeling aghast, even at six or seven years old.

Then I had an algebra teacher who sent me home because I wore pants. Oh my God, you know? But why should I have to wear a skirt on a cold day when the guys got to wear pants? It didn't make any sense to me. I also got in trouble for writing song lyrics on my spelling book. They made me go home because I wouldn't admit that was the wrong thing to do. Hey, free speech, and also I bought the spelling book! Finally it was like, "You don't want me? Fine." I dropped out after the 10th grade.

I was also kicked out of school once for wearing an Indian headband. Talk about being culturally insensitive! My mom always had encouraged us to take pride in being Native, and to develop a spiritual relationship with nature. I remember just before junior high somebody I'd known for a few years asked me, "What nationality are you?" And I was like, "Oh, I'm Native American." She said, "Well I wouldn't be proud of that." And I had this reaction like, "What?" That had never occurred to me.

But me being fat? That was actually an embarrassment to my mom. She was a veterinarian, and she had this mentality that you are not being a good owner of a pet if you let them get overweight. She applied the same rule to her kids. She would criticize me and make fun of me, and she took me to doctors to try to get me to lose weight. I was on a synthetic thyroid when I was 11.

It was the same thing with my dad. He was a P.E. teacher and a baseball coach, and physical fitness was very important to him. I remember being in the pool one day and my older siblings standing on his shoulders and diving off, but he wouldn't let me do it. "Oh no, you're too big." I might have been heavier than my brother, but by how much? I remember being kind of traumatized by it, honestly. The feeling of rejection and judgment still stings. To have these two important people in my life be so negative as a kid was tough.

But I honestly do not have a problem calling myself fat. Being fat is just a descriptor. It doesn't have to be a judgment, or indicate anything else about that

person. Fat is just fat. I do remember one time, years ago, that I hid behind the band at a photo shoot. The label wanted someone "more attractive" as the lead singer. It wasn't that I agreed with them — finding a romantic partner was never an issue of mine. But I didn't want to let being proud of who I was hold the band back.

I've had friends say things like, "Trump's fat and disgusting." I can't believe they would take that cheap and easy shot that actually says nothing about his policies, philosophy, or qualifications, you know?

The last election was hard for me for other reasons, as well. I just felt like it was a repudiation of everything I've ever stood for in my whole life — living our freedoms, protecting the earth. When the teacher's lounge turned to politics, I started to eat lunch in my office. Unlike junior high, when I ate lunch alone because the smart-girl social scene became completely closed to me due to my appearance, this time it's a choice. My company and my conversation are consensual, and I don't give it away to people I don't respect.



Woven cedar and deerskin headband, made by Debora while attending an artists' gathering at Evergreen College in Washington, where the Cowlitz nation is also centered.



"With my Native American community I can express the love of nature, and the sensuality of being, and the thrill of being alive, and all these spiritual things. And I know that audience, they get it. And they accept it. And it's something I'm really proud of."