



GoLeft's Star-Activist Interviews - Tracie Gardner

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GoLeft tracks where pop culture and activism meet (who doesn't enjoy the escapism of Hollywood and the great shoes?), but the real celebrities of our world are the progressives working every day to fight injustice, improve everyone's quality of life, and build community. So here's our version of the celebrity profile: GoLeft's Star-Activist Interviews, which helps us get to know some amazing people doing fascinating (and important) work.

Interview with Tracie Gardner

Tracie is the Director of NY State Policy/Coordinator Women's Initiative to stop HIV/AIDS at the Legal Action Center, a pretty long title that barely covers all that she does working to make positive change for people living with HIV/AIDS. Our GoLeft interview with Tracie covers the absurd and very serious and gives credence to why progressive activists need pop cultural escape more than others. To find out more about the work Tracie is doing you can visit the Legal Action Center's [website](#).

GL: How do you explain your work to people?

Tracie: I tell people I'm a lobbyist but that I lobby for good. And I lobby without being an attorney. I lobby for people who've are in the criminal justice system, living with HIV/AIDS, fighting discrimination and stigma.

GL: What is great about being an advocate?

Tracie: When you're an activist you can see between the lines. I can look at things as they happen in the world, nationally, and locally and see beyond the black and white that's presented and can speculate on the grey. I love that I understand the machinations behind the story, the spin and both the big policy and little policy that goes into the news.

GL: What makes you a great activist?

Tracie: I'm angry. I'm lucky that I found a way and place to vent it. I'm also able to tell a story. I'm such a ham and I don't shy away from using props. I can engage people in understanding the precariousness for young black women by talking about coming home parties where men released from prison are given three girls to have sex with to make him forget his time in prison. When I tell stories I am able to move people.

GL: Which celebrity would you choose to be the voice for your cause?

Tracie: I use to think Lauren Hill because she had the seriousness. And Queen Latifah has done some good stuff - she made the movie Life Support about HIV/AIDS. I really think if Jennifer Hudson talked more about and to young women about booty calls and sexuality she would get heard in a way that would have a big impact on young black women.

GL: What do you love about pop culture?

Tracie: Everything! Gossip, gossip, gossip. Page 6, Reuters entertainment, I was with Gawker from the beginning. I want it all. I love the art of spin and they do it so well. It is still a guilty pleasure though. I will buy People magazine every week but I will not subscribe to it, I can't have it showing up in my mail.

GL: When was the last time you used a pop cultural reference in your work?

Tracie: I had to explain to my six-year old why R.Kelly peed on someone and whether or not that was consensual. That was disturbing. Yet this information is out there, and I'm not the type of parent to say, "don't say that," so I have to talk.

GL: When solicitors come to your door do you answer or pretend not to be home?

Tracie: I only open the door to FedEx or UPS - you have to have something for me.

GL: What is your astrological sign and how does that affect your advocacy?

Tracie: Most people don't believe I'm a Virgo because I'm so opposite. I'm a learned extrovert. I had a mother larger than life who took my shyness as something to overcome. Ideally I would love to be locked in a room with food, water, books and magazines. But my public persona works for me though it's not my nature.

GL: Are you in a relationship? If so, how do you balance your passion for your activism with your passion for your partner?

Tracie: No relationship. Right now I'm closed for repairs.

GL: Does your family support the work that you do and is that important to you?

Tracie: Yes, definitely. I see what I do as part of my parenting. I've had my kids with me on city hall steps, lobbying. I want them to be strong by seeing me be strong.
