NOH8 Photographer Adam Bouska

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Adam Bouska and Jeff Parshley created the silent protest that everyone is talking about

CHICAGO, IL -- Shortly after the passage of Prop 8, photographer Adam Bouska and his partner, Jeff Parshley, returned to their apartment from a march, inspired to put a face to the issue of marriage equality.

Using a simple white background and placing duct tape over Parshley's mouth to represent the way in which LGBT people are silenced, Bouska took a portrait of Parshley and shared it with their thousands of Facebook friends.

"We just wanted to speak out to our own social networks, "Bouska said. "I wasn't any kind of activist then."

The response to the photograph was overwhelming. A year and a half later, Bouska has photographed nearly 3,200 people for now well-known No H8 Campaign, including a large number of celebrities from Kathy Griffin and Pete Wentz to Jane Lynch and Cindy McCain.

"We didn't intend for it to be this big," Bouska said. "The fact that it grew so much is amazing."

Bouska describes the No H8 Campaign as a "silent photo protest." Through the captivating portraits, he and Parshley hope to keep the dialogue going around marriage equality, as well as other issues, such as Don't Ask Don't Tell and hate crimes.

"We want to address all forms of hate," Bouska added.

While many of those photographed are openly LGBT or known allies, there have been a few surprises along the way. Bouska said he was shocked that Cindy McCain, wife of recent Republican presidential nominee John McCain, wanted to participate. He quickly welcomed her support, especially because both Bouska and Parshley aim to show how diverse support for LGBT equality really is.

Other surprises include Anthrax singer Scott Ian, who showed up for an open shoot.

"I think it's provoking dialogue," Bouska said. "I think it also shows the kind of support that is really out there.

It's a silent protest, but it's still visually loud," he added.

Bouska has no intention of stopping any time soon. One, there are still countless individuals he would love to photograph, including Lady Gaga and Elton John. Secondly, despite the thousands of photographs, the duo feels that their work has just begun.

"It's definitely in its early stage," Bouska said.

They have visions of The No H8 Campaign growing and expanding. Ideas include allowing individuals to submit their own photos, starting a national tour and launching a large media campaign.

Bouska will share his experience creating The NoH8 Campaign at the upcoming Unite + Fight Equality Across America Midwest Conference, which will take place March 12-14 at Columbia College Chicago.

The photographer said he hopes to provide advise and inspiration to budding activists.

"Activism is a daily thing," Bouska said. "If it's born out of something you love, it should come naturally."

Bouska also advises for activists to keep things simple.

"I just took duct tape and paint. It doesn't have to be any more complicated than that."

Learn more about The No H8 Campaign at www.noh8campaign.com.

Learn more about the Equality Across America Midwest Conference at unitefightmidwest.ettend.com