



OPEN DOORS

The Newsletter of the Northern Illinois PFLAG Chapters

President's Column

I wish that I could adequately express my sheer excitement following today's (April 26, 2014) meeting of the PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois! Four times a year representatives of all the PFLAG chapters in Northern Illinois get together to talk, to plan, to strategize, to dream. We discuss our chapters – the successes as well as the areas that need improving. We swap ideas. We learn from each other as we build a sense of community among ourselves. We are all one PFLAG, working toward the same goals expressed in PFLAG's mission statement: support, education, and advocacy. I leave these meetings energized and with a sense that, together, we can do anything! The following is a brief overview of the meeting.

First, we welcomed Patty Dillon from Equality Illinois. She is our new liaison between the NI PFLAG Council and Eqll, replacing Caroline Staerk who sat on council for a number of years. We feel that there is great importance in forging stronger relationships between ourselves and sister organizations that have the same goals as we do: justice and equality for all. (Please take note of the Eqll LGBT Equality Institute on May 17. Details may be found elsewhere in this newsletter.)

Next, we planned our participation in the June 29 Chicago Pride. There will be one HUGE change this year: we are not renting a trolley. The cost of the trolley is in the neighborhood of \$1000, and the last two years, the trolley has had only a handful of people riding on it. A cost benefit analysis demonstrates that a trolley is not the best use of our funds. This year we will have an actual float, which will serve to increase PFLAG's visibility as well as to provide seating for 10-14 people. I'm excited for the possibilities it provides. The council voted unanimously to give this new option a try.

I've saved the best for last. We are planning a "retreat," a day set aside for all PFLAG chapter members (dues-paying or not – doesn't matter) in Northern Illinois to come together to "build relationships, deepen leadership, and ignite passion" (*Gail Hanson-PFLAG DuPage*). The date has not yet been determined; however, we're seriously considering the end of October, beginning of November for the gathering. There will be presentations, lots of time for discussion, and the opportunity to get to know PFLAG members from other chapters. Together, we will rediscover the meaning that PFLAG has had in our own lives and in the lives of those we love, and we'll leave energized and better equipped for the tasks that lie ahead.

By Toni Weaver

Your NI PFLAG Council:

Toni Weaver – President (McHenry)
 Maureen Goldin – VP (Deerfield)
 John Hickey – Secretary (DuPage)
 Tony Domacher – Treasurer (at-large)
 Carole Abrams (Palatine)
 Wayne Adams (Chicago Metro)
 Arlene Collins (Chicago Parents of Transgender Individuals)
 Josie Dabrowski (Hinsdale)
 Patty Dillon – Equality Illinois (at-large)
 Carolann Dunn (McHenry)
 Matthew Lowry (at-large)

Peter Ji (at-large)
 Lori Judkins (DeKalb)
 Kate Kroker (Oak Park)
 Helmut Matthies (Hinsdale)
 Sylvia Menninga (Oak Park)
 Deirdre O-Connell (Palatine)
 Lynn and Llona Steele (Aurora/Fox Valley)
 Lea Anne Stoughton (Joliet)
 Meg Valentini (Chicago Metro)
 Gail Hanson (DuPage)
 Sue Ginsburg (Deerfield)

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is a non-profit, tax-exempt, all volunteer, local community-based organization of parents, relatives and friends of gay persons. PFLAG is not affiliated with any ethnic, religious, economic or political group.

OPEN DOORS is a publication of the Northern Illinois PFLAG chapters. Articles that appear do not necessarily reflect the opinions of PFLAG, its Board of Directors or members. We reserve the right to edit any submissions. Priority is given to original work by the membership.

Send submissions, comments and photos to:

OPEN DOORS Editor
og4equality@gmail.com

Editorial Board

Editor-in-Chief:

Maureen Goldin

Newsletter Team:

Arlene Collins and
Jackie Frett

Database: Tony Dornacher

www.pflagillinois.org
www.pflag.org

Kye Allums
by Claire Buchanan

Society tells us what image we need to adhere to in order to fit in. Stand out. The LGBT community promotes pride and acceptance of all individuals. Last month, Northern Illinois University welcomed Kye Allums who shared his story to a diverse audience. As a trans man, Allums travels around the country communicating about the trans community, growing up with adversity, and battling for acceptance.

Allums attended George Washington University on a full scholarship for his athletic ability. His story began with self identifying as a lesbian. Born a natural athlete, he ascended from a high school in Minnesota to his chosen university where his skills developed. There came a point in his collegiate career when being a lesbian was not the right label for Allums, in a world obsessed with labels. Changing his name and gaining acceptance from his basketball team became the first task in becoming a trans man. Allums proceeded to speak to audiences about his experiences while still learning about himself.

"I Am Enough! This has been Kye Allums mantra for quite some time. It was the very catalyst for him to start sharing his story with athletic departments and Universities across the US, the story of being the first Division I, openly transgender athlete in sports history. It was then that his mantra became the self-love movement. As Founder & Creative Director of *Project I Am Enough*, Kye has dedicated his life to reaffirming, empowering and inspiring people in their power and purpose."

He respectfully and thoroughly answered questions at the end of his presentation. Included was a question regarding taking hormones and transitioning. "This is my trans man body, why do I have to change my body to what society deems a man is?" Allums explained that there was a lot of pressure in the trans community to transition. Many conversations Allums held with trans people were comprised of questions about his plans for upcoming procedures. "It's not a look, it's a feeling." He is comfortable being himself, as everyone should be. The presentation left a feeling of self-love, the very thing Allums has spent his life promoting.

Kye Allums (September 16th, 2011) ...*aboutKye*. Retrieved from
<http://kyeallums.com/>

Last month an article was featured about the passing of Vernita Gray. I failed to site the source being from Tracy Baim of *The Windy City Times*.



What's Happening in Our Chapters?

MCHEMRY CHAPTER

by Toni Weaver

McHenry County has been the place to be! The April 12 meeting of PFLAG McHenry featured Tracy Baim, editor of the Windy City Times, as she introduced us to her new trivia game, "That's So Gay!" (By the way, it's available on Amazon.com and sells for just \$25.) I now know who NOT to play against – Michael and Chuck! They swept the rest of us away with their knowledge of films and film stars. The rest of us didn't stand a chance!

Pride 2014: The Changing Perspective of the LGBTQA Community held at McHenry County College on April 12 was a resounding success! PFLAG members from not only McHenry but also DuPage and Hinsdale made a strong statement of support by their very presence. PFLAG was responsible for one of the breakout sessions which was conducted as an actual PFLAG meeting. It demonstrated very visibly that we are, indeed, all ONE PFLAG. The keynote speakers for the conference were Bob Wells and his life partner, Dave Johnson. Using humor as their medium, they led participants in exercises designed to promote people-centered leadership skills, ones that will prove invaluable in our PFLAG meetings. Check them out at www.chickenlips.com.

PFLAG was represented in two other events at McHenry County College. One was an expo on empowering women and the other was a program centered on violence against women (Take Back the Night). It shows that PFLAG as an organization is being recognized out here in the "super boonies" of McHenry County.

We are looking ahead to two summer parades: Harvard on June 7 and Crystal Lake on July 6. EVERYONE is WELCOME to join us! Lunch is included for both of them. For more info, please contact Barbara Marian, our parade coordinator, at natvproj@gmail.com.



DEERFIELD CHAPTER

by Sue Ginsburg

We were honored to welcome, Aidan McCormack, Community and Congregational Relationship Coordinator from The Night Ministry. It has been about two years since someone from Night Ministry came to our meeting. At that time, some of our members were inspired to volunteer at The Crib, one of the sites where homeless youth can spend the night in a safe environment. We volunteer to make breakfast for the young people who have spent the night.

During Aidan's presentation, we were informed of some very disturbing statistics. For example, the average age of a homeless person in American is 9 year old!!!

The Night Ministry deals with youth from 14-21 years of age who are homeless. There can be many reasons for homelessness: economic hard times, foreclosure, mental illness, substance abuse, physical abuse, etc. Once a child is put into foster care, at the age of 18, they are out of the system and can be on the street; even with a job, they may not be able to afford housing. Those youth who identify as LGBT may be kicked out of their homes or they may have left because it's not a safe place to be. At least 40% of homeless youth are LGBT!!!

The Night Ministry has been around for 40 years. Eighteen different interfaith congregations make up the support of the Night Ministry. Not only do they offer a safe place to sleep for LGBT youth, they serve meals, provide advocacy (develop policies that prevents homelessness), health outreach by providing buses to many neighborhoods each week which provide medical care, HIV testing, safe sex needs, hygiene needs, etc.

There is an outreach team which appears on Belmont and Halsted every Tuesday and Thursday, which does the same thing as the buses do, along with having social workers and ministers who give the opportunity for youth leadership skills. They provide the impetus to show these young people that they have potential, giving them the power to decide what services are important to them. There are other overnight shelters besides the Crib, such as a pregnant and parenting center. There are also longer term programs with will help find housing, employment and schooling. Most important, The Night Ministry welcomes youth along the entire LGBT spectrum.

We also presented Aidan that evening with a check. After the passing of our beloved founder and member, Marilyn Keller, many monetary donations were made in her memory. Our chapter wanted to donate those funds to an organization that would greatly benefit from them. The Night Ministry was the first that came to our minds. Aidan was very appreciative. He informed us that there will be an article in their newsletter about Marilyn and her involvement with PFLAG, so we are looking forward to that.

You can contact Aidan at:

Aidan McCormack
The Night Ministry
4711 N. Ravenswood Avenue, Chicago, IL 60640-4407 |
Tel: 773-506-6004 | E-mail: aidan@thenightministry.org



OAK PARK CHAPTER

by Nancy Johnson

Gy and Sylvia invited us to have our Fifth Sunday Potluck on March 30 at their house. If we had a hospitality award for our chapter, it would have to go to Gy and Sylvia who've hosted many of our potlucks and always grill hamburgers, hotdogs and brats! Thank you Gy and Sylvia! And this potluck was a huge success. We had about 15 people, including 2 newcomers, and at least one whom we don't get to see very often. Oh yes, and my son David and his partner Chuk were in town and attended as well.

On April 5th, I attended a meeting where I met Marsha Aizumi who has PFLAG group for Asian and Pacific Islander parents who have LGBT children. Their website, www.sangabrielvalleyapiflag.com, has links to PFLAG materials translated into several Asian languages, among them Korean, Japanese and Chinese. I think it would be a good resource if we could refer people to that online information (if such a need should arise.) I also met people from some Asian American LGBT organizations that are trying to reach out to parents. I think it would be good if we could share information with those organizations so we could reach more parents.

On April 9, I attended a meeting at UIC about the adding of transgender services to the health policy for students. It was an informational meeting, primarily pitched to UIC students, faculty and staff. The presenters mainly spoke about the implementation of the new health services.

Since the CampusCare student health plan covers surgery, hormone, pre-op/post-op medical services and mental health care services related to gender-affirming health services for students, spouses/partners, dependents, it is clear they need a large variety of specialists. These will be doctors that they can refer the students to and they are still in the process of identifying referral doctors.

Another topic was repeatedly mentioned, and it was training for all staff about how to interact with transgender people, especially in a medical setting. The student's preferred pronouns should be used, and the

student referred to and addressed by a preferred name as well. When the students in the room were allowed to ask questions and make comments, the main complaint was the treatment by the staff at the health center in regard to failing to use the preferred name or preferred pronoun.

May is Annual LGBTQ month at De Paul University. Many events are being planned, including a Community Resource Fair on May 22 at the Lincoln Park Campus. I've had a PFLAG table there for the last 2 years. If anyone is interested in joining me this year, please let me know.



HINSDALE CHAPTER

by Barb Medley

Our April 6th guest speaker was Aidan McCormick, a Unitarian Universalist minister and Community Congregational Relations Coordinator for the Night Ministry, who wanted to tell us about the Night Ministry's work with LGBTQ youth through their youth outreach team and the Crib. Much of their work is devoted to youth from 14-21 years of age, many of them homeless. Sad to say, over a year only about 10% of the homeless are able to find night housing. It is hardest for LGBTQ people, for reasons including mental illness, abusive home, substance abuse in the home and housing instability. Of the homeless, approximately 40% are LGBTQ. LGBTQ youth gravitate to Lakeview and Boystown because they view it as welcoming. Aidan told us about their youth street outreach team. The Night Ministry was started in 1976 by a UCC minister who went out at night to talk to homeless people. The youth outreach van goes to Belmont and Halsted on Tuesday and Thursday. It is a smaller van than the main Night Ministry van but still manages to see 200 youth per night. Some van staff are LGBTQ. They offer a meal, HIV testing and referral for medical care. They partner with Howard Brown and refer these youth to resources for housing, education, social services and shelter programs. They are particularly welcoming to gender non-conforming youth.

Their Crib shelter is now used as a model for five more shelters by different agencies. The Crib provides breakfast and dinner, showers and laundry, in a unisex environment. They also provide outreach education. Listening to Aidan confirmed that our long-standing support to this organization is well deserved.

DUPAGE CHAPTER

by John Hickey

Rainbows and Sunshine -

As the close of the school year draws near, my weather forecast calls for lots of rainbows and sunshine. Well, at least that is my wish for all of you. While life is not always sunshine and rainbows I know I can always count on my PFLAG family to brighten my day. I am very thankful for the kindness, understanding and friendship I have found in PFLAG. Every month I am moved by the heartfelt sharing of stories, joys, sorrows, concerns, lessons learned and more. This is a true testament to the character and principles of those in our PFLAG family. We really do provide a safe space for people to experience and authentically share their thoughts and feelings and have the dialogue that is so important to us all. You are all truly kind, caring and supportive people that I am happy to call my PFLAG family. Thank you all!

I was thrilled with the turn out for our April 20, Easter Sunday meeting. We had 15 in attendance for our viewing of the film [Fish Out of Water](#) followed by nice round-table discussion. Fish Out of Water is an enlightening film that explores the impassioned relationship between homosexuality and the Bible.

Looking Forward:

- Our May 18th meeting will include a program on suicide awareness and prevention. This is an important topic for all parents, especially parents of LGBTQ who are at increased risk.
- Our June 15th, Father's day meeting will feature a showing of the film [Daddy & Papa](#). Daddy & Papa is a one hour documentary exploring the personal, cultural, and political impact of gay men who are raising children themselves. Come join us and celebrate families and parenthood.
- We are looking forward to attending the Chicago Gay Men's Chorus performance of [Bouncing Off the Walls: Broadway Our Way](#) coming up on June 1st in Naperville. Get your tickets <http://www.cgmc.org/events>
- We look forward to marching in the Chicago Pride Parade with all of the Northern IL PFLAG Chapters on June 29 and marching locally in the Wheaton Independence Day parade on July 4th. Join us in celebrating and embracing diversity.

Please feel free to join us for a meeting and experience the support and fellowship unique to PFLAG. **PFLAG DuPage** meets at 2:00 p.m. on the 3rd Sunday each month at **St. Paul Lutheran Church at 515 S. Wheaton Ave, Wheaton, IL.**

Warm wishes,
John

PALATINE CHAPTER

by Dierdre O'Connell

I recently came back from a visit from Ireland. I was there to spend time with my family. I don't get home often enough – but this visit was very special to me. I used to have one sister and three brothers. Let me explain.

I got to meet, for the first time, my 'new' sister. We had talked via Skype, but I swear she was broadcasting from some cave in Eastern Europe. It was always dark and I could barely hear her. Sometimes I felt I was watching a real time ultrasound.

She told me in November of 2011 that she would be living her life as her authentic self. As a woman. So when I landed in Ireland on St Paddy's day earlier this year, I couldn't wait to meet her.

I have a very dear transgender friend here in Chicago. I've seen her struggle. I'm a PFLAG person. I get it. But this was family – and that put it on a whole new level. (that reads like a tagline for a Rambo movie) I figured it might be awkward meeting my sister for the first time because I was used to her being my brother. I grew up with her as my brother.

When we finally did meet I was amazed. First of all – she looks a lot like our mother (ha!) Secondly, it was obvious presenting as female was her 'proper' self. It was so natural and it felt really 'right'. I felt closer to her now than I had before.

It seems a lot of transgender individuals came out later in life. Though I think society in general is becoming more accepting. Still have a long, LONG way to go, and I have to give props to those older trailblazers who led the way in the LGBT community. It had to be even more difficult back in the day, when being gay or transgender was a huge no no and shrouded in shame and misunderstanding. Considered wrong and abnormal. (And still is by some)

What is really 'wrong', I think, is that people are burdened with feeling they have no choice but to masquerade as gender they don't identify with. Sometimes for years and years. We (the straights) can get uncomfortable when something is out of the norm. It makes us uneasy. We don't like it. Stop it. Go back to pretending to be something else for our sake.

But my sister, in our small neighborhood, in Holy Catholic Ireland, finally stood up and said 'no more'. This is me, the authentic me. And she came out, knowing full well what the consequences would be. Knowing that she would face prejudice and judgment. And she did it anyway. If we were hanging out together and someone did a double take I think my reaction would be "I know, right? Isn't she awesome?!"

I am so incredibly proud of her for taking that step. I feel truly honored to even know her, let alone the fact that we're family.

I (almost) feel sorry for those who don't get it. How sad for them that they miss an opportunity to know an incredible soul. A funny, compassionate, talented person.

So now I have 2 brothers and 2 sisters. If you include me that's three against two. And the sisters are kicking arse and taking names. The three Irish amigos.

We (as a society) still have a long way to go. But I have to remain optimistic and believe we are moving forward. Don't ask Don't tell is gone. Same sex marriage is being accepted more and more. We're getting there. And PFLAG is one organization that is helping. For what it's worth, we three Irish Amigos thank you all for that.

*Go raibh maith agat ar'is
Na Tr'i amigos na h'Eireann.*



PTI CHICAGO CHAPTER

by Chad Gaynier

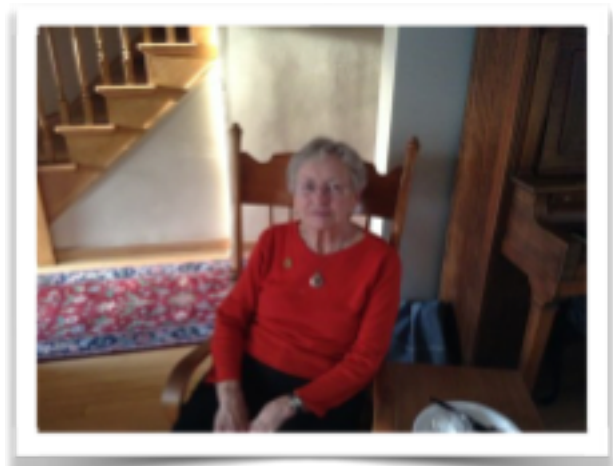
Our April meeting was well attended with 18 people in attendance. The meeting featured Jen Carr as guest speaker, a former member and mother of a transgendered child, and author of the transgender inclusive children's book "Be Who You Are". She shared with us her journey and her current advocacy efforts with her blog. Jen then answered questions and engaged with those in attendance.

A second guest speaker, Jess Scott, told the story leading up to her recent public coming out as a transgendered woman teaching middle school for CPS. Jess spoke about the behind the scenes, and the responses she's received from the other teachers and students. Jess also took questions from the members in attendance.

The meeting also featured the introduction of a new chapter lending library of transgendered literature, featuring titles appropriate for multiple age-ranges. Upcoming transgendered conferences were also announced, and there was time for sharing and open floor discussions as well.

May's meeting will not have a guest speaker, but will be devoted to sharing and support. We look forward to seeing everyone there!

OAK PARK CHAPTER POTLUCK



What PFLAG Means to ME

Thank you to all who have contributed to this section of the newsletter. It is a testament to the good work that PFLAG does for our community members.

Please submit your write-up to
OG4EQUALITY@GMAIL.COM.

Submitted by members of PFLAG McHenry:

"PFLAG is a place where everyone can come and be accepted for who they are." (T. H).

PFLAG means to me the coming together of the gay and straight members of our world in an accepting way where we are on equal ground of learning from each other as well as need each other as family. Each may have been hurt either from the rejections of their family for being gay or families finding out that a member of their family is gay and they are either shocked, hurt, do not understand or may very well still find a loving spot in their heart for them. We come together for understanding. Peace.

(L. S.)

As a gay man in a nearly 30 year relationship, the efforts PFLAG makes to assure me and my partner and our gay friends equal rights, including the right to marry, is deeply appreciated. We're impressed that so many non-gay people care about us and give of their time to make our lives better. At the local level, we have made many wonderful friends

(D.K.)

PFLAG gives me a chance to feel supported and loved as an LGBT person in our community. It has increased my understanding of the difficult plight of transgendered people, and has given me the opportunity to be of support to the parents of gay kids. (C.H.)

What PFLAG means to me; PFLAG means family. A family of caring individuals who accept and care about you for who you really are not what society says who you are. A family that doesn't judge you just embraces you as a human being. (C. D.)

PFLAG means a community of like-minded individuals who are working to create a better world for MY children and grandchildren as well as other folks. A world of diversity in which my kids will learn broader-minded possibilities for living together harmoniously. PFLAG has helped me to look at people more lovingly and to understand their journeys, too. (B.T. and E.T.)

PFLAG is a place you can go to learn from others and to help others. It is a place of encouragement and to encourage others. It is a safe place for "new" parents and family members to go and learn from others. (K. W.)

....What PFLAG Means to Me cont'd

PFLAG to me means Love Unconditionally.

I LOVE my Gay son unconditionally, just as I love my straight daughter unconditionally.

PFLAG to me means Comfort.

I can meet PFLAG people and feel at ease and comfortable. We can talk about anything.

PFLAG to me means acceptance.

PFLAG accepts me and my gay son and my WHOLE family. My family isn't judged because of sexual orientation.

PFLAG to me means equality.

PFLAG helps me work to get equality for Both of my children. PFLAG helps me fight discrimination.

(D. E.)

"As a young lesbian, I love coming to PFLAG. I feel that offering a different perspective to parents who may be worried about what the future holds for their young LGBT children. I love seeing some amount of hope and relief in their eyes as they see me, hear my stories, and feel safe knowing that their child can lead perfectly normal and healthy lives." (A.H.)

What PFLAG means to me is unconditional love for everyone and me. I imagine PFLAG was what Jesus meant, when he taught us to "LOVE" He meant EVERYBODY. We have to keep reminding ourselves, what would Jesus do? I'm not saying PFLAG is founded on Christianity because remember we love everyone. But you asked me to personally tell you and this is how I feel about PFLAG. Also, I feel the most safe in this world at a PFLAG meeting. I can be myself and know in my heart that ALL members have unconditional love for my gay son and me. Sadly, believe it or not, I had not experience this before I attended my first PFLAG meeting. I was a total basket case. Thank you PFLAG!

(J. S.)

Thank You, McHenry Chapter!

LGBT Resources for you

LGBT Supportive Organizations:

- **Center on Halsted** - www.centeronhalsted.org
- **Illinois Safe Schools Alliance** – www.illinoisafeschools.org
- **Howard Brown Health Center** – www.howardbrown.org
- **Lambda Legal** – www.lambdalegal.org
- **Youth Outlook** – www.youth-outlook.org
- **Transparentcy** – www.transparentcy.org
- **Open Door Clinic** - www.opendoorclinic.org
- **Links** – www.linksyouth.org
- **Heartstrong** – www.heartstrong.org



- **What Does Gay Mean?** – How to talk to kids about sexual orientation and prejudice - <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/what-does-gay-mean>
- **Welcoming Schools Helps Make Classrooms Safe Spaces for All Students (HRC)** – <http://www.hrc.org/blog/entry/welcoming-schools-helps-make-classrooms-safe-spaces-for-all-students>
- **GLSEN** – www.glsen.org
- **LGBT friendly college campus search** – www.campusprideindex.org
- **Children of LGBT parents** – www.rainbowrumpus.org

For a more extensive list, visit the **RESOURCE** section of the Council's webpage at

WWW.PFLAGCHICAGO.ORG

DON'T MISS OUT
ON THESE UPCOMING EVENTS!

CHICAGO GAY MEN'S CHORUS presents

Bouncing Off The Walls

BROADWAY OUR WAY



SATURDAY, MAY 3 @ 7 pm

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rockford

SATURDAY, MAY 17 @ 8 pm

North Shore Center for Performing Arts, Skokie

SATURDAY, MAY 31 @ 8 pm

Harris Theater for Music and Dance, Chicago

SUNDAY, JUNE 1 @ 7 pm

Wentz Concert Hall, Naperville

LGBT

Equality Institute

PRESENTED BY



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Saturday, May 17
9am to 5:30pm
(REGISTRATION OPEN AT 8AM)

Embassy Suites
Downtown/Lakefront
511 N COLUMBUS DR, CHICAGO, IL 60611

Mark your calendars for the *LGBT Equality Institute*, a day-long conference geared at bringing together the state's LGBT community and allies, progressive advocates, and community groups to discuss the issues that affect our community. More details are forthcoming on how to register for the institute and apply to present.



CELEBRATE PRIDE WITH THE SKY!

Sunday, June 22nd at 12pm



VS.



\$17 Zone
\$30 Sky Deck All-You-Can-Eat
\$40 Floor*
 *Includes Sky Pride T-Shirt

Each ticket includes entrance to a post-game networking event and panel discussion with AthleteAlly founder & CEO Hudson Taylor and former Stanford Guard Toni Kokenis in the Skyline Room.



AthleteAlly
 Victory Through Unity.

Parking is \$13/car or \$20/bus
 Allstate Arena - 6920 Mannheim Rd, Rosemont, IL, 60018



FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO PURCHASE,
 CONTACT **NATASHA LARRY** AT **312.994.5990**
 OR AT **NLARRY@CHICAGOSKY.NET**

WINDY CITY TIMES Presents

Chicago 2014 homeless Youth Summit

LGBT

Dream it, Speak it
Do IT!

<p>Friday, May 2 2-9 p.m. Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital</p> <p>Open to youth 25 and under who have been impacted by homelessness.</p> <p>Registration: FREE But you must register online</p>	<p>Sat., May 3 9 a.m.-5 p.m. University of Illinois at Chicago Behavioral Sciences Building, 1007 West Harrison</p> <p>Open to youth, nonprofits, government agencies, politicians, foundations, activists, service providers.</p> <p>Registration: \$45 adults, youth free You must register online</p>	<p>Mon., May 5 8 a.m.-Noon Museum of Broadcast Communications, 360 N. State St.</p> <p>Report from the summit to government agencies, politicians, foundations, and other funders.</p> <p>Registration: FREE But you must register online</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Information and links to registration and donation pages here:
<http://chicagosummit.lgbthomelessness.com>**

The foundations and groups so far assisting with the summit include: The Crossroads Fund, True Colors Fund, Polk Bros Foundation, Alphawood Foundation Chicago, Liz and Eric Lefkowsky, Pierce Family Foundation, Ronna Stamm Lehman-Stamm Family Fund, Heartland Human Care Services, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, Affinity Community Services, Lambda Legal, AIDS Foundation of Chicago, Chicago House, Howard Brown Health Center, and ChicagoPride.com. The venues donating their facilities are: Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital, the University of Illinois at Chicago Gender and Sexuality Center, and the Museum of Broadcast Communications.

Still Me

by Jo Ann Larsen

(A lovely story about one Mom's journey to acceptance)

On a sunny day in June 1987, a little baby boy was born by instrument birth, causing him to be his mom's "little lump head baby." The lump went away; the little boy remained. He really liked food and was always willing to try new kinds. He liked toys and action figures and was in no hurry to grow up.

The boy was quite creative and used to save the twisties from his lunch and make little toys out of them to play with in his desk while the teacher droned on. He even developed a special face that made him appear to pay attention while he daydreamed. One time when he was bored silly at an assembly, he found a little piece of paper on the floor and made a toy out of it.

At the same time, he was very perceptive, and always had insight into life. He saw the sensible side of things. His mom thought he should be a psychologist.

As a young child, he did not seem to make a lot of friends, however, one friend invited him to join cub scouts. The boy enrolled and had a lot of fun, except for camping; the boy seriously did not like camping. He was, however, very good at food arranging for parties and such. Also he was always his mom's fashion consultant when she was going somewhere special.

Then in middle school good things began to happen. He was in choir and French and went to Quebec.

By high school, he was in numerous choirs, dance groups and drama. He had parts in two plays; both musicals. He took voice lessons and performed at recitals. The boy was stellar at French. Due to his musical ear, he had a super accent. He also became the social director of his, by then, very large group of friends.

When he went on a tour in Europe, with his choir, his mom predicted he would love Europe. He called from Austria to say he was staying. However, he was only seventeen years old and funds were an issue, so he returned to finish high school and college. During college, the now young man, had an opportunity to study in Paris. He later reported it was life changing.

The young man worked his way through college by selling electronics and cell phones. He was very good at it. His boss told his Mom that the young man had a wonderful work ethic. After college, the young man worked full time for the cell phone company. He became a manager and was a right-hand man to the owners. However, all this time, France was calling him.

He applied for an assistantship and in September 2011, left for Europe. He lived in a town about an hour from Paris called Beauvais. He made some great friends while teaching English at a lycee (school). He joined a choir. The teacher he worked with enjoyed working with him very much. She and her entire family were so kind and generous to him.

In May of 2012, the young man's mom came to visit. She met the teacher and her family and heard how much his French had improved, and how much the boy was liked.

Before the two were to return to the States, the young man secured a position for the next school year. It was a two-year assistantship at a university in a small town in northern France, near Belgium.

The young man, now twenty-five years old, returned to the States and stayed the summer with his mom. He worked, saw friends, and packed the rest of his belongings to ship to France. Then just before he was scheduled to return to France, the young man left his mom a note: "I have something important to tell you before I return to France. I'm not sure if it will be upsetting to you or not. So pick a time, probably not when you are eating or going to bed."

Of course, the mom did the true mom thing and went right to the worst case scenarios in her head. She sent him back a reply with umpteen guesses on it. However the thing he was going to say didn't even make the list.

When the two met to talk, the young man said, "It's none of those things on the list. It's about me."

Then the mom did another mom thing and said, "Please tell me you're not sick." "No", he said, he paused and the mom could see in his face that he was struggling, as though he were thinking, "How am I going to say this?" and then he just said it, "I'm gay."

The mom was actually relieved the young man wasn't sick. The mom was also confused. She just wanted to say "Whuh-what?" Instead she said, "Wow, I never thought of that because you have all these girls around you all the time." His reply was, "that's part of it." Then it all clicked for the mom.

He had not just been waiting till he got to France to start a relationship – not wanting to be tied to the States. Even the girls he met in France were all just great friends. None would ever be "the one." No hope of grandchildren unless he adopts.

The mom told him he was still her son. There was no judgment. Her only concerns were his health and safety. She was glad he was returning to France where people seem to have a more open and relaxed view of sexual issues. She also told the young man that whenever he found a life partner, the partner would be welcome in her home. The two hugged and both went about their day. Then soon after, the young man returned to France.

Every time the mom thought about it, it seemed so odd- not weird or shocking or bad, just odd- like "how could he be gay?" It was just hard to wrap one's brain around. The mom remembered when her former pastor used to say, "it's fine to be against homosexuality, until your son comes home and says he's gay." In those days the mom couldn't imagine that ever happening. Yup never say never.

At the same time the mom just could not fathom ever rejecting her son. She said in prayer, "Lord, I hope You're not offended, but I accept my son. I hope You don't expect me to reject him or his life because I just can't do it."

The mom had been attending a very conservative church where she like the people, but had never felt totally comfortable. Now she really felt out of the loop. She realized if she told most anyone there her situation, they would expect her to be upset and would encourage her to pray that her son would become "ungay." The mom realized she needed to find a new church.

The research began: dvds, books, Bible passages church search. It was eye opening, affirming and led her to PFLAG. She wanted to ask her son what he thought about her attending a meeting. However, she was afraid he might think, "She needs PFLAG? I thought she was ok with everything." Instead his reply was, "I think you should go." The mom went to a PFLAG meeting somewhat timidly. She asked herself, "How off the wall was this? How will the people be? Will they be all pushy about their cause? To the mom's amazement, they were all just regular people, all super nice and welcoming. All just moms and dads and families on a similar journey to hers: wanting to be supportive, comfortable with themselves, and not always sure how. Everyone was so open, understanding, non-judgmental, kind and so very welcoming. Just wanting her to feel comfortable and ok. As she sat at the meeting she no longer felt concerned that she may be offending God. It felt right to be there. As she sat there in the sharing circle, she thought, "Wow, I never thought I'd be here." And then as she looked around at everyone, it occurred to her that none of these people ever figured they'd be there either. It's just what is. It's not bad or wrong or scary or sad. It just is.

After the meeting, the mom reported on Facebook how good the meeting had been, and how helpful. She decided it was time to take a public stand. She contacted her state representative and requested she vote "yes" on marriage equality. She ordered a rainbow flag, took a picture of it and emailed it to her son saying, "This is for you." Her son thought it was very cool. Doors opened for them to talk further through emails and Face Time.

The most important fact in all this is her son is still the same person. Think of it – did he suddenly lose his singing voice or

his affinity for languages? Did he become anti-social and have no friends, no people to say how fun he is? Had he lost his work ethic, or sense of humor or creativity?

The mom thought, "Isn't he the same person who, all those years ago, crossed the Jewel parking lot with her when they laughed so hard at something they fell against each other?"

Didn't they still share their love of Europe and all things French?

Her son did not become a criminal, or a mean, hateful person; he's gay. He is not hurting anyone. He simply wants to live his life.

And her son is not offending God by being who he is.

Jesus, after all, was radical, avant-garde and did the opposite of what people of the day expected. He shared meals with tax collectors and sinners. (Matt. 9:10). He had a conversation with a Samaritan woman. (John Chapter 4). He healed people on the Sabbath. (Mark 3: 1 following). The only people who really annoyed Jesus were the self-righteous, who were so sure they had all the right answers.

Therefore, the mom wants to make an appeal to anyone with a gay son. Please do not let the words, "I'm gay" become an enormous eraser that wipes away all the good, great memories. And don't let the words become the giant broom that sweeps away your son.

Life isn't over, it's just beginning when your son comes to you and says, "I'm gay."



We are always looking for new and exciting material for our newsletter.

If you have something to share, let us know!

PFLAG Aurora/Fox Valley

Meetings held 2nd Sunday – 2 pm
 New England Congregational Church
 406 W Galena Blvd, Aurora 60506
 pflagaurorafoxvalley@pflagillinois.com

PFLAG Metro Chicago

Meetings held 3rd Sunday – 2 pm
 Center on Halsted (Senior Room)
 3656 N Halsted, Chicago 60613
 pflagchicagometro@pflagillinois

PFLAG Deerfield

Meetings held 2nd Thursday – 7:15 pm
 Congregation BJBE
 1201 Lake Cook Rd, Deerfield 60015
 pflagdeerfield@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG DeKalb County

Meetings held LAST Monday – 7 pm
 Northern Illinois University
 Montgomery 109 - DeKalb 60115
 pflagdekalbcounty@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG DuPage

Meetings held 3rd Sunday – 2 pm
 St Paul Lutheran Church
 515 S Wheaton Ave, Wheaton 60187
 pflagdupage@yahoo.com
 www.pflagdupage.org

Entre Familia: PFLAG En Espanol

Meetings typically held 2nd Sunday – 1:30 pm
 Please contact us to confirm date,
 time and location
 pflagenespanol@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Hinsdale

Meetings held 1st Sunday – 2 pm
 Unitarian Church Hinsdale
 11 W Maple, Hinsdale 60521
 pflaghinsdale@pflagillinois

PFLAG Joliet

Meetings held 3rd Sunday – 2 pm
 Good Shepard Church & Preschool
 25 Alexander Circle, Romeoville
 pflagjoliet@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Kankakee

Contact Barbara Lohrbach
 815-932-2845

PFLAG McHenry

Meetings held 2nd Tuesday – 7 pm
 Tree of Life Unitarian Church
 5603 W Bull Valley Rd
 McHenry 60050
 pflagwoodstockmchenry@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Oak Park

Meetings held 4th Sunday – 3 pm
 First United Church
 848 Lake St, Oak Park 60304
 pflagoakpark@pflagillinois.org

PFLAG Palatine

Meetings held 3rd Monday – 7 p.m.
 Countryside Unitarian Church
 1025 N Smith Rd, Palatine 60067

Parents of Transgender (Chicago)

Meetings are held the 2nd Thursday – 7 pm
 Center on Halsted
 3656 N Halsted, Chicago 60613
 parentsoftransgender@pflagillinois.org

Parents of Transgender (McHenry)

Meetings are held the 4th Wednesday –
 7 p.m.
 (not in December)
 Tree of Life Unitarian Church
 5603 W Bull Valley Rd, McHenry 60050
 flynnmb12@gmail.com
 marygenzler@hotmail.com

**PLEASE JOIN US
 AT ANY CHAPTER MEETING.**

**If you are not comfortable meeting in a
 large group, arrangements can be made to
 meet one-on-one.**

**Contact any one of our chapters
 for more information.**