



Art by  
Jennifer Spektor (Red)  
– page 10

November 2018 | PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois Newsletter

# Monthly Open Doors



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# ***Please join me as a proud PFLAG member this year!***

This month we mark the beginning of PFLAG's 45th year of making a difference for the LGBTQ+ community – helping others through extending Support, providing Education and promoting Advocacy in the spirit of a better future for our LGBTQ+ family.

As a PFLAG member, you support the great work of our PFLAG team in Washington -- those who lead our quest for justice and equality, help defend our rights and fight for affirmation across our society, those who advocate for and inspire us, and equip us to be advocates in our own communities. Your membership dollar helps us to build and foster thriving chapters here in Illinois, to partner with supportive organizations, work with our schools, share support resources and bring our voices to important local forums.

There is so much work to be done – perhaps more than ever – and so many bases to cover. And our team needs you.

**“give legs and hands and ears and arms and voices to this wonderful team of committed allies”**



## **Won't you help –**

- give legs to those who march in parades, who travel our country and throughout our communities as advocates for the LGBTQ+ community, when and where it counts, in state capitals, in Washington, in community forums that support our youth?
- give hands to those who reach out to build relationships with supporting organizations who share our mission?
- give ears to those who listen and then hearts to respond with understanding, compassion and action?
- give arms to those who pull us together, educate and organize us?
- give a strong, proud voice to those who defend our rights, fight discrimination and let all know that we are here?

## **And so I ask –**

Can I invite you to a fearless quest for justice, fairness and equality, to a roll-up-your-sleeves, get-in-the-game campaign for a better tomorrow for our LGBTQ+ family?

Can I invite you to a throw-your-shoulders-back, hold-your-head-high, beam-with-pride celebration of the joys and achievements of our LGBTQ+ family?

Can I encourage you to give legs and hands and ears and arms and voices to this wonderful team of committed allies?

Please say YES and join me as a PFLAG member this year by visiting [www.pflagillinois.org](http://www.pflagillinois.org) today and clicking on [Memberships and Donations](#).

And thank you for standing with us!!

*Don Donahue  
VP and Membership Chairperson  
PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois*



Council of Northern Illinois (PCNI)

# The Power of Positivity Time to Thrive!

2018 PCNI FALL CONFERENCE  
November 10, 2018  
8am-4pm

## CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

8:00 am - 8:30 am Registration/Continental Breakfast  
8:30 am - 8:45 am Welcome

8:45 am - 9:05 am

“LGBTQIA+ POSITIVITY Moving beyond the surviving to thriving narrative”  
Gearah Goldstein

Uplifting stories abound in our community but we have been very slow to lead with this narrative. Restrictions, government aggression and social negativity make it difficult to focus on anything else. We are the people who must change this narrative and teach that living and supporting our community is not only positive, but incredibly beautiful and important. Time to thrive!

9:05 am - 10:05 am

“ADVOCACY & POLICY How to Create Change”  
Mike Ziri

LGBTQIA+ affirming laws are key to building a better Illinois. Mike will talk about issues in focus now and provide insights on useful tools to advocate for policy change as well as how to have an effective meeting with your legislator.

10:05 am - 10:15 am Break

10:15 am - 11:45 am

“IMPACTFUL PUBLIC SPEAKING”  
Gearah Goldstein

By improving the skills necessary to communicate publicly, our community will continue to positively advocate for itself. This workshop will explore impactful public speaking. Confidence, vocalization, persona and presentation tools will be discussed. This workshop will also highlight basic strategies for building a speaking resume and finding opportunities to speak. Regardless of skill, level this workshop will help you focus on positive, uplifting and impactful public speaking.

11:45 am - 12:30 pm Lunch

Lunch is provided, compliments of PFLAG Northern Illinois Council

12:30 pm - 2:00 pm

“CREATING INCLUSIVE MIDDLE SCHOOLS”  
Panel Discussion

Our panel features people who have successfully implemented LGBTQ+/ally organizations in their middle schools. They will explore the motivations and importance of their work, the process of establishing the organization, provide insights into their challenges and successes and show us how we can engage our communities to create more inclusive middle schools.

2:10 pm - 3:40 pm

“CREATE THRIVING CHAPTERS”  
Jamie Curtis

PFLAG chapters that thrive have some common characteristics and this session is an opportunity to share some of those with you. Learn more about how the most successful chapters reach new members and keep current members engaged.

3:40 pm - 3:50 pm Close of Conference

SUPPORT

EDUCATION

ADVOCACY

### Post conference networking is encouraged!



## SPEAKERS



### Keynote Speaker, Gearah Goldstein

“LGBTQ+ Positivity; Moving beyond the surviving to thriving narrative”

PCNI is excited to have Gearah join us at this year's conference. Gearah is a nationally recognized expert helping to bridge a deeper understanding about gender and its impact on community. Gearah also focuses on the implementation of public and private gender inclusion practices.

Gearah is also the co-founder of the The GenderCoolProject which is a national awareness campaign featuring the stories of transgender young people. Gearah is a diversity and inclusion consultant and is a certified law enforcement trainer for the State of Illinois. She has been featured on NBC's Today Show, NPR, in Rolling Stone magazine and the New York Times.



### Michael Ziri, Director of Public Policy-Equality Illinois

“Advocacy & Policy; How to create change”

Mike spearheads an aggressive legislative agenda in his position as Policy Director for Equality Illinois, the state's civil rights organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people.

Before joining Equality Illinois in 2015, Mike was the Director of Legislative Affairs at the EPA, legislative liaison at the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, a Dunn fellow at the Governor's office of Legislative Affairs and worked as a legal assistant at the EPA.



### Jamie Curtis, PFLAG Director of Chapter Engagement

“Creating Thriving Chapters”

Jamie joined PFLAG IN 2003. As Director of Chapter Engagement she works with chapters throughout the United States while overseeing the Chapter Engagement team. During her workshop, Jamie will be sharing the common characteristics of a chapters that thrive.

Prior to serving as the Director of Chapter Engagement, Jamie served as Field & Policy Manager working with chapters in the eastern United States. Prior to joining PFLAG, Jamie worked with underprivileged youth in Washington D.C. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in international relations from American University.

## REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Event date: November 10, 2018  
Event time: 8:00 am - 4:00 pm  
Registration Fee: \$5.00  
Register by: October 31, 2018

Conference location:

The Fellowship Room  
Southminster Presbyterian Church  
916 E. Central Rd.  
Arlington Heights, IL



### REGISTER TODAY

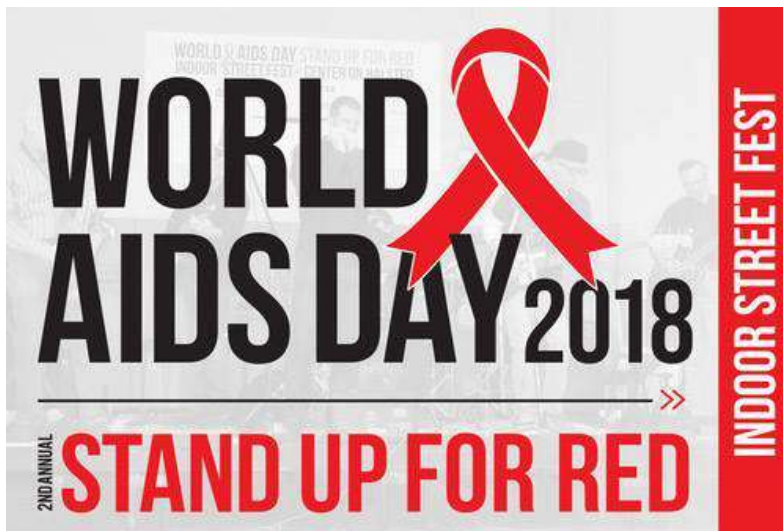
<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-power-of-positivity-time-to-thrive-tickets-50202326510>

Registration fee includes continental breakfast and lunch.



November 6th is just around the corner, and PFLAG wants to make sure you're poll ready and know just how much is at stake. **Vote** and encourage your friends, family, and neighbors to do the same.

The Transgender Day of Remembrance (**TDoR**), also known as the International Transgender Day of Remembrance, is observed annually on November 20 as a day to memorialize those who have been murdered as a result of transphobia and to draw attention to the continued violence endured by the transgender community.



World AIDS Day, designated on December 1<sup>st</sup> every year since 1988, is an international day dedicated to raising awareness of the AIDS pandemic caused by the spread of HIV infection and mourning those who have died of the disease.

Center on 3656 N. Halsted, Chicago organizes an AIDS Day Indoor Street Fest on November 29<sup>th</sup> this year.

**WHERE.**  
AT CENTER ON  
HALSTED

**WHEN.**  
THURS 11/29  
>> 5:30 - 9:30



## News from PFLAG McHenry

by Toni Weaver

We welcomed two new people to our October meeting. We reminded everyone that October is PFLAG membership month, and we reminded people to vote November 6!

October 12 was the 20th anniversary of Matthew Shepard's death. We started our October meeting with a short, 13-minute video "Matthew Shepard's Story". It was informative and showed how Matthew's parents tried to keep a positive outlook. They worked to support Hate Crime Laws. They tried to show the public who Matthew was to promote understanding and equality for LGBT people. We lit a candle to symbolize our hopes for equality for LGBT people.

We had a lively discussion after the video that evolved into talking about transgender people coming out. The first part of the discussion was specifically from a parent's point of view. Some parents shared that after overcoming their initial surprise and dismay, they were glad. They were glad to see the positive impact their child's coming out had on the child's moods and outlook on life. Their acceptance of the child's gender identity had a positive effect on their family dynamic. Another parent expressed dismay at some unhelpful, negative advice a close friend offered.

As our discussion continued, we talked about how difficult it can be for some transgender people to come out, how lonely and isolating it can be to not have the acceptance of friends and family. We concluded our discussion with sharing information about transgender support groups available in McHenry County; our McHenry PFLAG PTI (Parents of Transgender Individuals) and Odyssey, a support group for transgender people that meets on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7:30PM at Tree of Life UUC, 5603 Bull Valley Rd., in McHenry.

**In preparation for November's Transgender Day of Remembrance, we recommend previewing the video "Why is there a Transgender Day of Remembrance?"**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pak97DSL4Cw>

I'd also like to thank Cate Becker, Bob and Aileen Chikos, and Karen Graham and her son Tony for staffing a PFLAG information table at the Cary Grove High School's theater production of the Laramie Project. Participating in activities like this help to put a personal face on PFLAG and the work that we do.

## MOVIE REVIEW

### 90's Film *Boys on the Side* — My Revisit by Shelly Van Derveer

When I was a young woman in college at SIUC, longing to go to the LGBTF meetings ("F" meant friends), but trying to lead a straight life, I saw the movie *Boys on the Side* in the theater, three times. I loved the movie and longed to move to Tucson, AZ, where the women of the film ended up living for a period of time— where there was a gay bar full of accepting people. It became my fantasy to live there, but it turned out I didn't have to go to Arizona to lead an "LGBTF" life.

I recently rewatched this movie with my lovely wife who hadn't seen it. It was dated in some ways, and with some of the character's comments, but the love story in this movie is about a friendship between a lesbian woman and a straight woman, and it is very affective.

Within the movie, there is a conflict that results in a court room hearing. During it, the lawyer asked the women questions about being gay as if was a crime in itself: "Are you one of these gay women we read about? Or do you prefer 'lesbians'?" It's no wonder that I stayed safely in my closet.

Watching *Boys On The Side* during my early 20s when I was struggling to be a straight girl to now watching it as a proud LGBTQ+ adult made me reflect on our cultural changes. Despite on-going problems with the world, and that there is still a long way to go, in our area I feel comfortable being me.

This is a film you need to watch until the end, because it's the last 10 minutes that is the payoff. But you will not appreciate it unless you watch their journey. Decades later, I still count this ending as one of the most memorable and touching I've ever seen.

*Boys on the Side* was released in 1995, starring Whoopi Goldberg, Mary-Louis Parker, Drew Barrymore, and a bit part by Matthew McConaughey. It has an R rating which would likely be PG-13 nowadays. Currently streaming on Netflix.

[Editor: After reading Shelly's review, my wife and I watched *Boys on the Side* for the first time and loved it!]

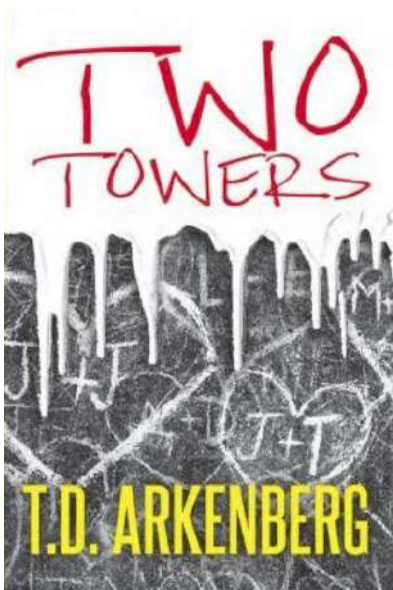


## News from PFLAG Hinsdale

by Barb Medley

We were happy to welcome author Todd Arkenberg along with his husband Jim to our meeting. Todd spoke about his book, *Two Towers*. The memoir recalls several life-changing moments in Todd's life that happened within a short period of time. In the memoir, Todd recalls the painful experiences of 9/11, when he was a United Airlines executive and eighteen colleagues were killed. Only weeks later, his father succumbed to cancer and his mother died unexpectedly shortly after that. Todd came out in his mid-thirties, and his partner and now-husband Jim supported him through accepting his sexuality and revealing he was gay to his parents. He was at Todd's side during the tragedies of 9/11 and the deaths of his parents.

Todd read a chapter of his book, followed by a lively discussion. He was an interesting speaker, as was Jim. We enjoyed their visit. On the way home, I went right to Anderson's to buy the book. They were out of stock so I ordered it online. I can't wait to read it. He publishes his books under the name T.D. Arkenberg.

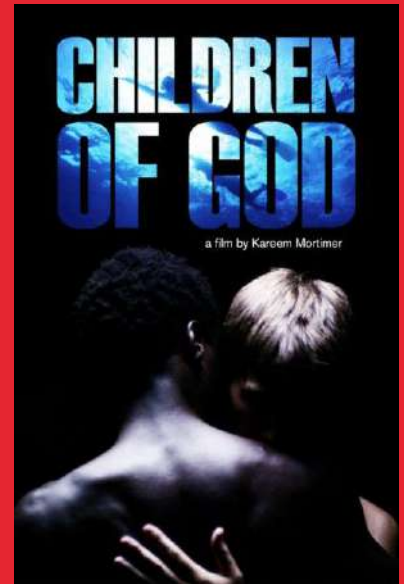


On November 4th, Scott Ammarell will speak about Chicago House, where he is the CEO. Chicago House is helping the LGBTQ community impacted by HIV/AIDS. Scott has an extensive background in housing services and development. Our December meeting is our annual potluck holiday celebration, when we also fill stockings with toiletries, cold weather accessories and gift cards for the young adults at The Crib.

## News from PFLAG Oak Park

by Sandy Jefferson

Oak Park PFLAG has had two great 5th Sunday potlucks/meetings. One, where we showed a movie, *Children of God*. Secondly, we had a guest speaker from Pinwheels. A parents' discussion group and a children and teen play group. We also had a table at the Barrie Park festival. 4th Sunday, we are having a speaker from Youth Outlook. We also attended the scholarship gala from OPALGA.



## News from PFLAG Deerfield

by Sue Ginsburg

We kicked off our membership drive this month, reminding our members how important numbers are, in that paid members make a difference when PFLAG National is lobbying Congress for the rights of all in our community. So, if you haven't paid your dues as yet, you can mail them in, go on line or wait until next month to hand your check directly to Jim Levie.

Our speakers this month were two students from Deerfield High School, (DHS), talking about the importance of their GSA in high school, but also how important it was to have one in their middle school as well. We were educated that "GSA or Gay Straight Alliance" is not inclusive anymore. Now they are known as Gender and Sexuality Alliance. Their GSA, called Spectrum, has a mission statement: to provide a safe space for students who are questioning their gender identity, and for those who are sure of their gender identity, to get together to raise awareness and acceptance in the school. To be a club at DHS, you must have a sponsor and be approved by the administration. While their numbers range around 20 members, they did share that their group found it difficult to attract allies. Spectrum was instrumental in designating a gender-neutral bathroom at DHS! They did explain that they were invited to speak at a faculty meeting, so as to get all faculty on board. DHS also has another group called Alliance, which is hosted by the counseling department at the school. An invitation is required to attend these meetings. Thanks to Lauren and Minal for educating us!!!

It is our mission this year at Deerfield to contact and visit as many middle schools who will have us. We have sent out 50 'invitations' to our November Conference, offering to pay the \$5 fee, especially to hear the panel discussion on GSA's in the middle school. We are hoping to get some response.

## New Chapter Opportunities

On Sunday, November 4 at 2 PM, there will be a PFLAG organizational meeting in West Dundee at St. James Episcopal Church, 516 Washington Street, West Dundee IL 60118. This is part of a continuing effort by the Council to promote formation of new PFLAG chapters.

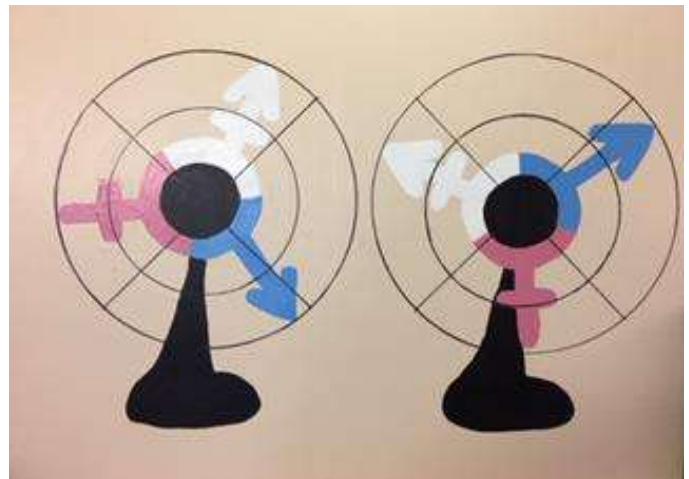
## News from PTI McHenry

by Marya Flynn and Bob Chikos

Thirteen people attended the October meeting, and four of them were new. The group had a very good discussion and was happy to support new members.

PTI McHenry will be having a guest speaker at the next meeting on November 28th at 7:00 pm – **Gale Harris** who is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with a counseling practice in Woodstock IL.

PTI McHenry will NOT meet in December due to the Christmas Holiday.



Trans Fans – graphics by Bob Chikos

## News from PTI Chicago

by Jo Peer-Haas, Historian/Librarian

Our group had a guest speaker this month, the renowned Marie Newman. Newman, of LaGrange, ran for Illinois congress and has 20 years of LGBTQ experience. She authored the book "**Solutions for Bullying**". Ms. Newman's direct personal experience comes from having a high school age trans daughter. Her focus was on the difficulty of transitioning for the transgender person. She graciously took questions after speaking.

Additionally, we collected socks for the homeless trans youth closet at the Center on Hasted. This project is ongoing and adds hats, scarves and gloves during the winter months.





## News from PFLAG DuPage

by Bernadette & Ron Whitfield

We are grateful for a visit by Dawn Higgins and Kay Kopricki of Travelers Insurance. The title of their presentation was LGBT & Diversity in 21st Century Corporate America. Dawn is an HR Director for Travelers Insurance. She acts as the company's Diversity and Inclusion Liaison to the Field Operations across the United States. Kay is a Senior Technology Account Executive for Travelers Insurance. For the past several years, she has also served as the Field Champion for the Naperville branch LGBTQ Diversity Network. Kay is the proud parent of a transgender son and a lesbian daughter, and an advocate for LGBTQ rights. Dawn and Kay gave us an insider's view of a company in a business commonly perceived as conservative, and the steps it has taken to support its LGBTQ+ employees and prevent discrimination in its workplaces. A lively and informative Q&A session followed their presentation.

## RESOURCE

A valuable resource in Chicago is The Legacy Project, The Legacy Walk, The Legacy Wall — The World's Only Outdoor Museum Walk, Traveling Installation, and Youth Education Program Dedicated to Combating Anti-Gay Bullying by Celebrating LGBT Contributions to History. Information about this

## FREE MOVIE SHOWING

On Thursday, November 8 there will be a showing of *The Ripple Effect* at 6:45 PM at the Woodridge Library, 3 Plaza Drive, Woodridge, IL 60517. The event is hosted by the Youth in Crisis Coalition (Lisle Township) and the Prevention Leadership Team (PLT). This film is part of a global mission to help reduce the number of suicides and suicide attempts around the world. Through sharing stories of survival and recovery we are creating significant awareness of this health crisis, while helping people find the support they need to stay alive, heal and

**#BeHereTomorrow!**

Learn more at: [www.suicidetherippleeffect.com](http://www.suicidetherippleeffect.com)

Register for the free event at

<https://events.r2o.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07efotofaafb392815&oseq=&c=&ch=>.



TERRENCE MCNALLY'S

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Starring

SARAH HAYES

CODY JOLLY

WILLIAM MARQUEZ

MARIKA MASHBURN

JEREMY TRAGER

KEVIN WEBB

CHRISTOPHER YOUNG



On the cover page and the next two pages we present:

## **Artist and Musician**

### **Jennifer Spektor (Red)**

Jennifer Spektor, nicknamed Red, is a trans woman artist, musician, and live painter of Jewish ancestry who grew up in Illinois. She creates with love for nature and all people, for her own healing, and that of her ancestors and other trans people. She is an art therapy and counseling student. In addition to solo musical work, she also makes klezmer-influenced dance music with her love Sasha Mannequin under the name Tsuzamen (Yiddish for "together.") A true devotee of modular synthesizers, she loves bass music and nature. You can find info on her at [www.redsgarden.me](http://www.redsgarden.me) and her music at [redsgarden.bandcamp.com](http://redsgarden.bandcamp.com).  
Instagram: @redsgarden  
Twitter: @redsgarden\_



*Portal of Forgiveness (2015) Ink on yard-long canvas*



*Across Goddess (2015) Ink on canvas*



*Serpent (2014) Ink on paper*

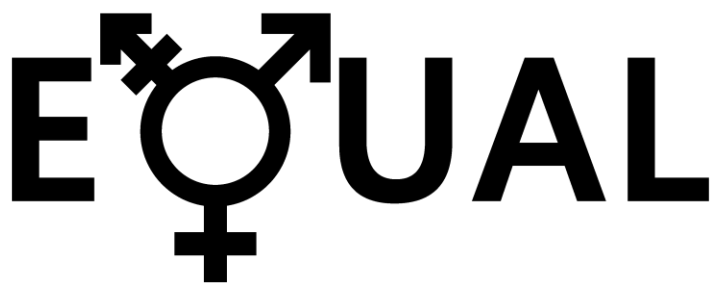


*The Imaginary (2016) oil paint*

## Transgender Rights

On October 21, 2018, The New York Times published an article [‘Transgender’ Could Be Defined Out of Existence Under Trump Administration](#), which has caused strong reactions in the community served by PFLAG. The PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois (PCNI) has issued the following statement on behalf of its members:

The memo mentioned in the New York Times article is reportedly a draft of a proposed policy, written by someone in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) a year ago. It is not the officially declared policy of the Trump Administration. The article does not offer enough information to estimate the likelihood of this memo being implemented. We call on our members to continue monitoring this story and react to the facts, not opinions or emotions. We must prevent this draft from becoming policy. Write to government agencies and your elected representatives, write to the media, make your position known on social media and in private conversations, speak up, and vote for politicians who support the rights of LGBTQ people. State facts accurately, stay civil, avoid exaggerations and speculation, because then your message will have more weight and credibility. And if this HHS memo ever becomes policy, then PCNI will work with other LGBTQ advocacy organizations and state legislators to block it in courts. Most importantly, allies should keep telling and showing to transgender people that we are standing with them, that we will continue defending their rights, and that there are many people who are on our side. The future is on our side - the side of human rights and dignity, respect and support.



Graphic design by Andrew and Katrin Zanevsky

*Gearah Goldstein, a prominent transgender rights advocate and the Keynote Speaker of the PCNI Fall Conference has written the following memo in response to the NYT article:*

♥ A memo to my community and all that love and embrace people like me who identify as transgender:

Today is another beautiful day because we have each other. We can talk about, expand, experience, touch, and share the love that is present in our lives. We support each other, lift each other up, and remind ourselves that every moment is precious and important.

Regardless of those that call for our restrictions and spew hatred, lies, fear, and ignorance, we will always have the freedom to give love to each other.

Governments do not and will never have power over love. A government can choose to ignore love, or not show or share love, but it can never take that power away from us.

Yes, it is tragic when people spend precious time trying to restrict or debate our own lived experiences and they are simply losing out on their own opportunities to enjoy life. So while they create and eventually crumble under the failures of hatred, lies, fear, and ignorance, we will still be here.

We were here from the start and we'll be here always because it is our love that they truly fear the most.

Always remember that creating fear in people, and offering to protect those same people from that fear, is how cowards gain power. It is simply not sustainable because fear is the result of living without love and nothing can take our love away. When you push against love, it only makes it stronger.

# Metamorphosis

An essay by Marcy Formigoni

Look closely at the picture. Think about it. What do you see? Put a pin in that.....



We sit eating Tikka Masala and discuss baby names. Boy names. The Italian family tradition of names ending in an "o". Mateo, Leonardo, Leo? We immediately decide on Leo, it's perfect. Marco admits he was secretly hoping for a boy. I would have been

The day I found out I was pregnant was one of the happiest days of my life. I always wanted a baby. I loved children. I was a teacher of young children and already knew so much. It wasn't easy for us. Marco changed his mind at the last minute. He was afraid. It was risky. What if there are challenges, what if he failed as a parent? We went to therapy and compromised. We would have only one. The therapist told us one was a lot easier than two. I was sad to be denied a bigger family. Not big like the one I came from, (6 kids), but at least two. A sibling to fight and get annoyed with when you are young but to enjoy and reminisce with when you are older.....

I order a burger at the drive through speaker. "No mayonnaise please." A four-year-old Leo in the back seat, "Marcy, what's mayonnaise?" I describe it, the ingredients, and Leo quickly responds, "well then, I certainly don't want mayonnaise either". Early on he was smart, verbal. Called us by our first names despite our requests not to. He was strong willed, funny, constantly making us laugh and smile. We read together, all the Harry Potter books. He had a Gryffindor robe, from Marks and Spencer, and he ran around the house casting spells and ruling his little universe. We spent long hours on the beach in Michigan. Eating wild blackberries on the way, exploring the dunes, looking for lucky stones and beach glass and making sculptures out of the clay that eroded off the cliffs into the lake. Leo was baptized with the waters of Lake Michigan by an African Shaman with close friends and family in attendance. I wasn't working. We slept with the windows open, took long naps during the afternoons and went to get Blue Moon ice cream at Sherman's Dairy.....

Leo is 14 and very sad. He is having trouble at school and at home. Everyone tells me - all teenagers are like

*I hold her hand and tell her  
I will support her with everything I have.*

happy either way but am secretly mourning not having a girl - just a little bit, but ultimately thrilled.

this, but this doesn't feel like that. He is so unhappy and angry and difficult to be around. He finally agrees to go to therapy. Words like self-harm and suicide are

part of our vocabulary now. In addition to a therapist our primary care doctor and a psychiatrist are involved with multiple appointments weekly. One night, in a rare and calm moment, he tells me he's transgender. I am supportive but secretly don't believe it. There were no signs, no indications. He

picture was taken in the pool on a sunny, hot day full of hope and anxiety and happiness. Together we swim, laugh, and soak it all in. At one point we are both underwater, curled up in fetus positions, holding hands. The water is so warm. We are in the womb together....

## *“I need to have surgery, and it needs to be in Thailand”*

must be wrong. This can't be. I remember thinking years ago I would be fine if my child was gay but trans would be hard. I don't tell anyone, not even my husband, but it doesn't go away. He (she) is consistent, persistent and insistent (as they say). I hold her hand and tell her I will support her with everything I have. And so, the journey begins.....

I get a frantic call at work. “Mom, I can't do this alone! You have to come home right now.” I battle Chicago traffic and head home. Stressed and sad and annoyed and afraid. I pull up to the house and call Lynn to come out. Lynn was going to take the El to our second teen transgender support group at Lurie Children's Hospital Adolescent Gender Program, and I was going to meet her there, but she was overwhelmed. She ran to the car wearing my lavender trench coat, her lips bright pink, her teary eyes smudged with black mascara.....

The night before we ventured out to “Walking Street” - the notorious sex district. Right before leaving Lynn said, “maybe we should go to a temple or something instead?” The taxi drops us off and tells us to follow the alley. It's dark and desolate and then it isn't. Lights, people, crazy busy, women everywhere, gesturing for us to come inside for the “ping pong” show. We hesitate but we are both curious. A Swiss man we met in the elevator of our hotel sheepishly told us “you must do it once.” It's dark, smoky but also somewhat touristy. Chairs surround a stage and women take turns performing. A few minutes later Lynn holds a balloon high above her head. A few feet away a woman is on her back, legs spread and high in the air. Lynn's balloon pops from a dart she just shot out of her vagina. Of course, I felt awful for the young women and for a world that continues to exploit women in this ugly way. As we walked back to our hotel I also felt kind of like a bad

## *“Please, don't ever do things like that with your vagina”*

“I need to have surgery, and it needs to be in Thailand”. She has done her research and wants the best in the world. There are so many things I don't like about this plan, the first being that I hate flying. Ultimately, she wins me over. It's her body, that she has to live with for the rest of her life. And now we are here. The two of us (Marco left a couple of years ago). A few days before the surgery we found ourselves in Pattaya, a beach town made popular by US soldiers on R&R during the Vietnam war. A couple of days to relax and enjoy the beauty of this country. The above

mom, it was like a sleazy bachelorette party, 3 days before gender affirming surgery. I tell her: “Please, don't ever do things like that with your vagina”.....

I see her for the first time after the surgery. I am so relieved. She sees me and smiles. Her face so full of contentment and happiness. “Mom, I have a vagina”. I hold her hand and together we wait for what will come next.....

Email Open Doors: [opendoors@pflagillinois.org](mailto:opendoors@pflagillinois.org)



# PFLAG Northern Illinois Chapters

