Trans Models Fashion Issue – pp 11-22

Monthly
Open Doors

May 2019 | PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois Newsletter opendoors@pflagillinois.org

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President’s Column

YOU are the Key to an Outstanding PFLAG Chapter

Every month I marvel at the impact of our PFLAG chapters as I witness members: helping new and returning visitors navigating new waters; volunteering in the community; and fostering constructive dialogue at work, at school or in their church... With PFLAG, people create profound moments of impact.

Sometimes those moments are obvious, often they are absorbed silently by the recipient un-noticed by others. It’s these profound moments of impact that create the bonds that build our chapters and communities.

I like to tell people that PFLAG helps build inclusive and affirming environments. Moments that help open hearts and minds is the best way I know to inspire people to: maintain loving and affirming families on a foundation of pride, create engaging places of work, worship and community where people can bring their whole-self without hesitation or fear.

Creating and reinforcing inclusive and affirming environments is not only a good thing to do to improve the quality of life for everyone, it is a necessary thing to do because it saves lives.

Whether you came to your first PFLAG meeting looking for support, trying to learn more, or just wanting to help out, I hope you keep coming back. Because, it is the diversity of our chapters and our network that is so powerful. Sharing your story, your insights, your sorrows and joys can make a lasting difference, even when it is not always visible or obvious. Often, it’s the little things we say that will click with someone and make an impact in their outlook and make a difference in their life. Many times we will not even know it happened. But, it does. That breadth of experience that comes with a diverse group helps to create a space rich in insights and comfort. Everyone’s participation is impactful and valued. As it says in our opening statement: “We earnestly welcome new members and encourage everyone to attend as many meetings as possible for the benefit of each individual as well as that of the group, because it is when we no longer feel the need for PFLAG, that PFLAG needs us the most.”

If you’ve been to a PFLAG meeting or event recently, pat yourself on the back. If you haven’t, please think about going soon. It can make a difference in your life and in the life of someone else.... Engage in PFLAG and create moments of profound impact. Believe it, YOU are the key to an outstanding PFLAG chapter!

In Love and Solidarity,

John
Registration is now open for the 2019 PFLAG National Convention! Join PFLAG members and supporters from across the country at the Kansas City Marriott Downtown from October 25 – 27, 2019 for two full days of skill building, networking, and preparing for 2020.

Visit [https://pflag.org/2019nationalconvention](https://pflag.org/2019nationalconvention) to register and to learn more.

PFLAG has extended the early-bird registration discount through Mother’s Day. Register now to participate.

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**PFLAG Chapter Opportunities!**

We start 2019 with some positive initiatives for growth in Northern Illinois. If you or someone you know is interested in getting more involved, please reach out to one of the folks listed below.

**Calling for PFLAG Volunteers to help continue our Aurora/Fox Valley Location**

**PFLAG Aurora/Fox Valley**- is looking for folks who want to help strengthen the chapter and build on their proud legacy of support for the LGBTQ community and allies in Aurora / Fox Valley. **If we are unable to locate PFLAG volunteers to help continue support our Aurora / Fox Valley meetings, the chapter may need to close.**

If you or someone you know is interested in helping make a difference please contact Carmi Frankovich at PFLAGaurorafoxvalley@pflagillinois.org. Special thanks to Carmi for leading the charge with her positive energy.

**PFLAG Chicago Español**- There are preliminary discussions about interest in starting a PFLAG Chapter to primarily support Spanish speaking members. If you have interest in helping form this chapter in Chicago, please contact John Hickey at info@pflagillinois.org.

**PFLAG Romeoville**- Kris and Peter Shulman are making progress toward initiating a PFLAG Chapter in Will County. It looks like we may have a location in Bolingbrook. Stay tuned for more information! If you are interested in helping to help start or participate in a new Will County Chapter, please send an email to Kris and Peter at PFLAGromeoville@pflagillinois.org.

**PFLAG West Dundee**- There is a small core of folks looking to add volunteers to help start a PFLAG chapter to meet at St James’ Episcopal Church, located at 516 Washington St, West Dundee, IL 60118. Thank you Sharon for leading this initiative. If you have interest in helping form this chapter, please contact Sharon Fu at PFLAGwestdundee@pflagillinois.org or attend the planning meetings being held on the second Sunday each month at 1:30 pm.

It is really great to see PFLAG chapters becoming accessible to more families. We would love to see PFLAG more accessible to ALL families. If there is not a PFLAG chapter near you, and you are interested in forming a chapter in your community, please contact John Hickey at info@PFLAGillinois.com

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Click [here](https://aws.amazon.com/smile).
**From PFLAG National**

**TAKE ACTION**

Have you signed on to support the Equality Act? Visit [pflag.org/equalitystartswithme](http://pflag.org/equalitystartswithme) to personally endorse this crucial piece of federal legislation, and to share your story about what it would mean to have these protections for yourself and your family. For more information about the Equality Act, including FAQs and helpful PFLAG talking points, visit [pflag.org/equalityact](http://pflag.org/equalityact).

**FEDERAL MATTERS**

**HHS announced intent to halt data collection on LGBTQ+ foster youth and parents.** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced on April 18th that it intends to cease data collection on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) of youth in foster care, as well as SOGI information about foster parents, adoptive parents or legal guardians. This was required under a 2016 HHS rule. PFLAG National opposes this preliminary rule request and signed a statement to that effect as Co-Chair of the Every Child Deserves a Family Campaign and Coalition. Stay tuned to be asked to write a public comment at a link that HHS will provide on April 19th, which will be open for 30 or 60 days.

**Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.) introduced legislation on April 9th for the first-time ever that seeks to protect LGBT kids from child abuse.** The Protecting LGBTQ Youth Act, which PFLAG National endorses, seeks to prevent the mistreatment of LGBT youth. Co-sponsoring the Protecting LGBTQ Youth Act is Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), the first out lesbian elected to the U.S. Senate and a founding Co-Chair of the U.S. House LGBT Equality Caucus when she was a Representative.

**COURT MATTERS**

**The Supreme Court of the United States declined to hear King v. Murphy, a challenge against New Jersey's ban on gay and transgender conversion therapy for minors.** The Supreme Court’s decision to deny a hearing ensures New Jersey’s law remains in effect and protects bans in 16 other states across the country, as well as Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico.

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**PFLAG Gives Away “Kisses”**

If you haven’t volunteered yet for PFLAG’s amazing Mother’s Day fundraiser, there’s no time to waste!

We will meet at the Sidetrack Bar in Chicago, a favorite LGBTQ gathering place, on Sunday, May 12th to ask for donations in exchange for chocolate Kisses and REAL hugs from NI Council PFLAG parents, friends & families.

It is a great opportunity to feel the amazing outpouring of love and appreciation for the work we do in support of our own LGBTQ loved ones. It also allows volunteers from different chapters to meet and spend time together.

This fun and emotionally gratifying event is also rewarding financially. Proceeds from the fundraiser are split; 50% goes to Council and the remaining 50% is divided amongst the participating chapters.

The first two shifts are filled already, but please lend your support and participate either from 6:00 - 7:30 PM or 7:30 - 8:30 PM.

**PLEASE: contact Coordinator Marcia Prichason via e-mail at:** [mprichas@gmail.com](mailto:mprichas@gmail.com) **or telephone:** 708-602-4543

- Provide your name(s), how many people will be participating, your chapter, email address, contact telephone#, and preference for the 6:00 – 7:30 PM or 7:30 – 8:30 PM shift.
- You will receive a confirmation e-mail and additional information as we get closer to the event.

THANK YOU!
PFLAG Supports Crone Middle School GSA

Making buttons for their Day of Silence celebration

PFLAG Hosts an Informational Table at Oakton Community College Pride College and Resource Fair

April 17, 2019 in DesPlaines

Volunteer table hosts: Carole Abrams, John Hickey, Ron Whitfield and Laurie Leibowitz (not pictured)

2019 Pride Calendar:

- May 18: Springfield Pridefest
- June 1: North Shore Pride Fest
- June 2: Buffalo Grove Pride Parade
- June 6: Woodstock Kid’s Pride Fest
- June 8: Pride Fest Mokena
- June 9: Aurora Pride Festival & Parade
- June 9: Woodstock PrideFest
- June 16: Chicago Pride Fest
- June 22-23: Chicago Pride Fest
- June 29: Pride in the Park Chicago
- June 30: Chicago Pride Parade
**News from PFLAG McHenry**

by Toni Weaver

PFLAG McHenry was delighted to welcome Dr. Shelley Fisher, a social worker at Cary Gove High School, to our April meeting.

Over the last five or six years we have sponsored a series of workshops for school personnel and have relied heavily upon presenters from Illinois Safe Schools. However, we are now building a local team of professionals to provide the content at future workshops. Shelley has graciously agreed to be part of the team, and we are thrilled to have her.

Five PFLAG McHenry members attended the Lake Forest College annual drag show. Karen Graham and her spouse Bill staffed our resource table. In addition, Karen was invited to speak to the audience about PFLAG, what it stands for, and what it has meant to her. One of the drag queens, Selena, also spoke glowingly about PFLAG, thus educating a younger audience about the work that we do in advocating for the LGBTQ+ community.

Mary Genzler and I staffed a resource table at an activism fair held at Dundee Crown High School. The Activist Club at the school sponsored the event, and teachers were invited to bring their students to the Media Center to learn about organizations that promote the welfare of the community. We included a list of ways that students could get involved in making their school and their community a more welcoming space for everyone.

McHenry County College will be staging its annual drag show at the end of the month, and we will staff a resource table. Everyone’s invited to attend: Friday, April 26, 7 PM, at the Luecht Conference Center, 8900 West Route 14, Crystal Lake.

A newly formed group, Woodstock Pride, is hosting a Pride Fest on Sunday, June 9, with the parade set to kick off at 11 AM. Please come out and support their efforts to spread the PRIDE on the historic Woodstock Square.

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**Dr. Fisher presented her recently defended dissertation entitled "What about the parents? Exploring the experiences of parents of transgender adolescents regarding their interactions with their child, school: A qualitative, phenomenological inquiry."**

For her research, Dr. Fisher interviewed six families who have a transgender child attending (or recently graduated) a public or private middle or high school. Through these interviews, Dr. Fisher identified the themes of love, grief, and fear, that emerged from the question "tell me how you learned your child is transgender and "professional responsibility versus personal beliefs" that emerged from the question "tell me about your experiences with your child’s school."

"The intent of the study," Dr. Fisher explained, "is to support transgender students in the academic setting, by first understanding their parents’ perspective and experiences." Dr. Fisher concluded with recommendations for school social workers as well as suggestions for parents regarding how to effectively advocate for their child with school teachers, staff members, and administrators.

Dr. Fisher completed her doctoral studies at George Williams College of Aurora University and received a Master, degree in Social Work from Boston College. She is currently employed as a school social worker in the Northwest suburbs of Chicago and is available for consultation and speaking engagements. Please contact Dr. Fisher directly at mmf623@comcast.net for more information.

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**Drag Queen Story Hour**

Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH) is when drag queens read stories to children in libraries, schools, and bookstores. DQSH captures the imagination and play of the gender fluidity of childhood and gives kids glamorous, positive, and unabashedly queer role models. In spaces like this, kids are able to see people who defy rigid gender restrictions and imagine a world where people can present as they wish, where dress up is real.

www.dragqueenstoryhour.org
**Note received by Toni Weaver from the drag queen who heavily promoted PFLAG at the Lake Forest College Drag Show in April:**

Hello Toni,

It was such an honor to be able to host this pride event with dignity and respect to an organization that is trying to make a difference in my community. I really just wanted to motivate and encourage our new generation of LGBTQ brothers and sisters and our supporters to be involved and know that they can make a difference. Not everyone is able to enjoy going to a pride event or drag show because of the worries of what their family will think or say.

Nowadays with all that is corrupt in our world, we have to make sure as individuals we are doing our part to support. Not everyone has had an easy transition to be able to express and be who they are.

As an entertainer, I strive to use my position to set the example for my community.

PFLAG deserves all the support they can get to be able to continue to do the diligent work that is done. This ensures we have the support of our families to assist us with finding out and specifically LOVING & ACCEPTING who we are.

Thank you so much for all you do, and I hope to be able to participate again next year.

Best Regards,

Serena Fiierce / Sergio Nieves

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**News from PFLAG Hinsdale**

by Barb Medley

Our April speaker was LaSaia Wade, the founder and executive director of Brave Space Alliance, the first Black-led, trans-led LGBTQ center located on Chicago’s south side. It’s designed to create and provide affirming and culturally competent services for the entire LGBTQ community of Chicago. It was such a pleasure to meet LaSaia, an engaging, enthusiastic and thoughtful advocate for her community.

Brave Space Alliance works to help the young people they serve live thriving, healthy lives. It is the only Black trans organization in the Midwest. They do consulting and policy work and also work with Trans United nationwide. They help those they serve find livable resources within the community and help with transitioning.

LaSaia calls herself a mother in the community and has been providing support for over 10 years. She’s a ballroom mom – if you watch Pose on FX you’ll see ballroom moms and dads. The show deals with building alternative families, primarily consisting of Black and Latinx gay, gender nonconforming and transgender youth, and are meant to be safe spaces.

LaSaia mentors/mothers over 60 kids by counseling them about safe sex, providing resources and educating about the laws throughout the country. Most of the people Brave Space Alliance works with are still marginalized. For those looking for resources, a lot depends on where you’re located. Visibility can be dangerous, or even deadly for some. The best places in the world right now to live safely and productively are California, New York and Illinois. In these states, Medicaid covers medical costs associated with transitioning. LaSaia related that for her, transitioning was freeing, and despite the difficulties she faced being authentic, it brought her happiness and peace.

LaSaia’s partner was as interesting as she was. He grew up on a farm and is working in community supported agriculture, forming a rural farming community on the south side, to promote self-sufficiency. They work with other non-profits to do things like grow their own food and organize food pantries.

Our May speaker will be Julie Dennis, who will present her talk, “Faith and Sexuality: the Bible and LGBTQ Inclusion.”
News from PFLAG Oak Park
by Nancy Johnson

Our date for the bake sale at the Farmers Market is August 31! We’ve got plenty of time to recruit more bakers and bake up a storm!!

The gay-straight alliance at Oak Park River Forest High School had a fund-raiser, Out and Loud at the High school on April 12. Phil, Sandy and I volunteered to staff the information table. Phil brought the button machine, and we gave away quite a few. It was a lot of fun. There was a raffle for some very nice prizes, and a cake walk with donated cakes. I bought a cute crocheted bear that someone’s grandmother had made. There were several different games to play. People bought tickets to buy various things: soda, popcorn, raffle tickets, merchandise, etc. One ticket was 25 cents. Next year, we may sell buttons for a ticket each to help with the fundraising.

We’re getting geared up for Day in Our Village on The first Sunday in June. We’ll be giving out buttons and pins there as we did last year.

We are planning on having some sort of event to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Stonewall. The library is interested in co-sponsoring with us. We may show "The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson" who died under mysterious circumstances and was one of the original protesters at Stonewall. She was a trans woman and also an activist for LGBT rights.
News from PFLAG Ottawa
by Ken Brown

At our meeting in March, a very attentive group listened to Rev. Dr. Mary Ann Dier-Zimmerman share her journey as a transgender woman. Mary Ann spoke very openly of the difficulties of living much of her life parading as a man, which included marriage to a woman and raising four children. She also shared her joy of transitioning to living openly as a female later in life.

Mary Ann is currently a counselor with the Interfaith Center for Counseling and Psychotherapy in Bourbonnais, Illinois. She counsels numerous parents of transgender youth. Mary Ann spoke of the common issues these parents face — grief and loss, guilt, depression, and discrimination. Mary Ann works with the parents and their transgender child to bring understanding and healing.

Mary Ann can be contacted at the Interfaith Center, 201 Park Place, Suite 2, Bourbonnais, IL, 60914; office phone 815-933-8178; email at interfaithcenterbbk3@gmail.com.

Our April 28 meeting is still in the planning stages. Our Board secretary, Jordan Johnson, is working on a presentation about LGBTQ+ persons and the media. Jordan is hoping to have the presentation ready for the April meeting.

Our May meeting will be held on the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend. We look forward to a supportive conversation and, to stimulate discussion, we may engage in an activity we refer to as “Fishbowl.” That activity involves writing an anonymous question on a slip of paper and placing it in a fishbowl. The questions are then randomly drawn, and a discussion in response to the question or concern follows.

Rev. Dr. Mary Ann Dier-Zimmerman

News from PFLAG Deerfield
by Sue Ginsburg

We were so fortunate to welcome Gearah Goldstein to speak at our April meeting. For those of you who attended our fall conference, you will remember that Gearah is a nationally recognized expert helping bridge a deeper understanding about gender and its impact on community. Gearah is the founder of “Gender Cool”, an organization founded and designed to address those outside the LGBTQ community. She will go into Fortune 500 Corporations accompanied by young people who are trans, introduce them so these companies can get to know them on a personal level. In this way, companies can understand what diversity and inclusion are, so the future step is to get these young people into the executive suites! A really great reminder of the positivity of these corporations is that many of them refuse to be in states where the LGBTQ community is discriminated against.

Gearah reminded us that when someone comes out, acceptance comes from love, NOT from understanding. Understanding is not required; tolerance is what we need. So the question is, how do we have these conversations regularly without being fearful of what we don’t understand? That’s where Gender Cool comes in. It transfers an option to an actual meeting with a real person, changing the perspective. It’s important to remember that a person’s identity is not defined by his or her gender identity or sexual orientation. Before we say our child is gay or trans, we can say a million other things about them that describes them to others.

Every community that experiences marginalization seeks empathy and with that comes tolerance. From tolerance, every marginalized community can move forward to progress. It is our job to replace opinions with experiences. For example, when you know a trans person, if you hear something negative from another, you must ask that person what experiences they’ve had that leads them to their opinion. Most often, you’ll never have an answer, so you can supply YOUR answer, since you come from experience!

It’s important to remember that we don’t have to understand, it’s impossible. Even Gearah admitted that she doesn’t understand. But we can be positive and supportive, because with awareness and positivity, we can go forward.

We finished our two hours, with Gearah’s permission, as she answered our questions. It was a great meeting!
Midnight in Paris: Queer Prom for LGBTQ Youth ages 13 - 24

Center on Halsted • Fri., May 10 • 5 - 8 pm

Center on Halsted is proud to partner with American Airlines for the 2019 Queer Prom. The annual Queer Prom is an opportunity for LGBTQIA youth between the ages of 13 and 24 to celebrate all parts of their identities without feeling silenced or alone. This year, we present to you a night to remember:
Midnight in Paris.

RSVP HERE >

LGBTQ Women on the Ball at Diversey Bowl

Diversey Bowl • Sat., May 18 • 5:30 - 8 pm

Women’s Action Council at Center on Halsted would like to invite you to SPARE a night out for a PRE-Pride bowling extravaganza: “Women on the Ball”! We are committed to creating spaces for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, genderqueer, non-binary, and gender-non-conforming women, and our allies.

RSVP HERE >

She Wolf
Ancient Wisdom Meets Modern Innovation

Center on Halsted • May 23, 25, 26

SheWolf Sacred Movement is a global purpose movement to venerate the embodied feminine soul. Through interdisciplinary artistic mediums, we create a platform for stories of resilience and strength. All are welcome; come as you are.

RSVP HERE >

National LGBTQ Health Conference

Emory University, Atlanta • May 31 - June 1, 2019

The 6th National LGBTQ Health Conference is back! Hosted at Emory University in Atlanta, GA, this conference is an interdisciplinary forum that provides an opportunity for presentation and discussion of current health research and programs for LGBTQ adults and adolescents with the overall goal of addressing health inequities.

RSVP HERE >
On April 4th, FashionBar Chicago, in a partnership with Howard Brown Health Clinic, presented the nation’s first fashion show featuring all Trans Models.

The show took place in the Water Tower Place, Chicago. It was a powerful affirming celebration of elegance, style, grace, and confidence of transgender people. Many of the show participants are not professional models or may be only at the start of their modeling careers, but their presentation and modeling work was exceptional and extremely well-received by the audience.

Two of the models – Justine Janosko and Amelia Rose – are daughters of members of the PTI McHenry chapter. They have graciously answered a few questions for Open Doors readers - see page 22.

I must make a disclaimer: a journalist is expected to be impartial while reporting events, but I couldn’t adhere to that high standard (besides, I’m not a professional journalist, so perhaps it gives me some flexibility here). I was very proud of the models in the show, as if they were my children. If you share my feeling that PFLAG is one big family, then all of these kids are our kids, and each one of us - parents and other family members and friends - would step up to protect them and support them and would treasure their accomplishments. So, on behalf of our large PFLAG family, I thank FashionBar Chicago and Howard Brown Health Clinic for organizing this beautiful show. My wife and I loved it and we hope that more shows like this take place in the future.

Fashion is certainly easier to show than describe in words, so photos on the following pages will take you to the enigmatic world of trans fashion.
“...tell them to watch out for me in the media soon”
– Justine Janosko, model

We are so proud of you!
– PFLAG
Interview with models Justine Janosko and Amelia Rose

OD: Do you want to be a professional model?

JJ: Yes, it is one of the careers I’m seriously considering in the future.

AR: Yes

OD: Was participating in the show more work or fun?

JJ: I’d say it was probably an equal mix of both. Modeling is something I really love doing and although it may technically be work. I thoroughly enjoy it and find it immensely fun.

AR: Both work and fun, everyone was giving me hugs.

OD: Did anything curious or unexpected happen that you would like to share?

JJ: I think I made a lot more new friends than I expected to. And I’m really happy about that.

AR: Unexpected? Yes – I wasn’t scared or nervous.

OD: What was the most difficult part?

JJ: Probably keeping my composure on the runway as not to show my true anxiety.

AR: Difficult? Nothing, oh wait the part where I had to wear my Mom’s coat to hide my outfit so I could use the restroom and the coat zipper was stuck.

OD: What kind of clothes would you design if you were a fashion designer?

JJ: If I were a fashion designer, I’d probably design more evening wear garments, as those are the pieces that interest me the most.

AR: Fashionable dresses, maybe skirts and cannot forget about chokers.

OD: Is there anything else that you consider important about fashion modeling and would like to share with the readers of Open Doors?

JJ: I’ve just started modeling and I truly feel it is the path for me. I’d just tell them to watch out for me in the media soon.

AR: Having Fun, walking down the runway, the experience and it’s inspiring. Meeting new people.
Lobbying in Springfield
by Bob Chikos

My son Martin and I volunteered to lobby on behalf of Equality Illinois, an organization dedicated to advancing LGBTQ rights in Illinois. In particular, we were advocating for House Bill 246, the Inclusive Curriculum Bill, which would include teaching about the contributions of LGBTQ people in history classes, a bill to protect LGBTQ seniors in housing equality, and a bill supported by, but not started by Equality Illinois House Bill 2665, which would include people under 18 to have preventative care in order to prevent HIV.

The day was frenetic. Our host, Mike Ziri, gave us a glimpse of what a day is like for him. We followed him as he went to many legislators’ offices. If they were in their office (which was about half the time, as they’re very busy with being in session or in a committee), their staffer would usually say we had “five minutes” with them. We would meet with the legislator, Mike would speak about the bills, and we would give our own story to them, to give a real-life example of someone who could benefit from the legislation.

Our first meeting was with Lamont Robinson, the sponsor of House Bill 2665. Lamont is the first openly-gay African American in the Illinois Legislature. Although Lamont’s assistant said he was stacked with things he needed to do, he welcomed us into his office and had a very dear conversation with Martin, asking him about his life and giving him encouragement to continue to get involved. We spoke for about 20 minutes and as we were about to leave, he shook my hand, looked me in the eyes and gave me the most heartfelt gratitude for supporting my son.

Our next meeting was with a new legislator. As a newer member, she hadn’t yet developed a relationship with Mike, so she asked Marty and me why the legislation was so important. Fortunately, I had researched how inclusive curriculum is cited by researchers as an important tool to create an affirming school for LGBTQ youth, as well as to educate non-LGBTQ youth to be allies. In the end, she said we were very helpful.

We were able to speak to Senator Terry Link. Interestingly, Senator Link used to sit behind us in church every week for years, until we moved to Cary.
I didn't know we were planning to see him, and I doubted he'd remember me (I never really spoke to him in church; he was a quiet guy). As soon as I walked in, he remembered me! He was so gracious. He gave Mike his 100% support for Equality Illinois's initiatives. He then encouraged Martin to get involved and even had Martin sit in his chair to "try it in for size" so maybe he could be a legislator someday, too.

Next, we spoke with our state Senator Dan McConchie. Senator McConchie does not have a strong record of voting for LGBTQ issues, but he is our Senator and we thought it was important he hear from his constituents. Martin did most of the talking and I was very proud of how he spoke about his support of the bills. He fielded questions the Senator had for him and we had a great conversation. Senator McConchie then presented Martin with a book about the Illinois legislature.

We were also able to meet with Representative Anna Moeller from Elgin, a strong supporter of LGBTQ rights, and Senator Toi Hutchinson, who championed House Bill 1785 a few years ago, which allowed for gender changes on birth certificates. When I told her we were some of the first people who benefitted from the law, she said, "Awww" and almost teared up. She said it means so much when she meets people who benefitted from the things she's worked for.

I had a few takeaways from the day.

The first is that these legislators are very, very busy people. When they’re not in session or in a committee, they’re constantly barraged with lobbyists, trying to get their attention about something. The lobbyists come from everything - LGBTQ rights, cancer associations, immigrant rights, pharmaceutical companies, gun owners, seniors, educators, etc. There’s no way the legislators can be experts on everything. That’s why it’s crucial that someone like Mike build a solid relationship with them. By building their trust, they can rely on him for feedback on a bill. If he were to ever violate that trust, they could never trust him again. We are very lucky to have a passionate and ethical person like Mike to advocate for us.

The second is that it is indeed important for us to get involved. When a legislator sees an actual person who benefits or is hurt by a law, they can’t ignore that. They can still choose to vote against a bill, and they often need to due to how parties work, but they cannot remove that personal meeting from their memory.
There are pros and cons to meeting in Springfield. The pros are: 1) It's really cool to see your government in action. 2) The state house is gorgeous! 3) When you tell your legislator that you drove 3 or four hours to meet with them, that shows some dedication on your part 4) If you tag along with someone like Mike, it's not just him doing his job. The legislators see a real person and it's more than "just a bill. The con is that they just don't have a lot of time to meet with you. Our representative was in a session that went on for hours and hours. He was never able to meet with us. You might be more likely to have an unrestricted conversation in their local office.

Equality Illinois has an Advocacy Day of Action on May 15th. You can go to the Equality Illinois website www.equalityillinois.us to learn more or contact Mike Ziri at mziri@eqil.org.

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Tomorrow Will be Different
Book Review
by Sam Nelson

Tomorrow Will be Different by Sarah McBride is titled a story of love, loss and the fight for trans equality. Sarah McBride, currently Press Secretary for the HRC (Human Rights Campaign), eloquently tells her story of coming out as a trans femme person to both the student body of her college where she was president and to her parents/family where she finds acceptance.

Sarah then goes on to become an intern working in the White House under Obama. It is at the White House annual Pride Dinner where she meets and falls love of her life and her future husband Andy Cray. Andy like Sarah has the shared experience of being transgender and he has the same passion for advocacy and change. They have both have worked on passing bills in to laws surrounding
SUBSCRIBE to Open Doors

Most of our readers have been receiving this newsletter through leaders of their respective PFLAG chapters. We have decided to offer direct subscription to everyone to simplify and expedite delivery. Subscribing is easy – just send an email with the subject line “SUBSCRIBE” to opendoors@pflagillinois.org.

PFLAG membership isn’t required for subscription, although we encourage every ally to become a paid member.

We will never share your email address with advertisers or use it for non-PFLAG purposes.

SUBSCRIBE now so that you don’t miss any future issues and get them without delays.

Please also send us your stories – sharing our experiences doesn’t have to be limited to PFLAG chapter meetings, we should do the same through this newsletter and reach more people with our love, support, affirmation of LGBTQ+ people. We should celebrate their accomplishments and creativity. Send us art, photos, essays, poetry, movie or book reviews, and anything else newsletter-worthy by, for, or about our LGBTQ+ loved ones.

Andrew Zanevsky, Editor

SUBSCRIBE!

LGBTQ and specifically Trans Equality. Andy focuses on health care making sure that under ACA all trans and LGBTQ people have access to healthcare more specifically transition healthcare. Sarah worked on Non-Discrimination laws and policies as it relates to gender identity.

The story goes on to describe the budding relationship between Sarah and Andy and the bonds both of their families have with each other. In a terrible twist Andy is diagnosed with throat cancer, is treated and goes into remission only to later to find out he is terminal and has weeks to live. Andy asks Sarah to marry him and with the help of their family and community they are married on the rooftop overlooking DC where they worked so hard on changing law and policy.

Sarah goes on to take care of Andy in his final days and continues to this day to be inspired by the love of her life to continue to fight for trans Equality. While the story may sound sad it is actually quite beautiful. It is story of love Sarah has for the community, for politics, for family and especially for Andy the love of her life. I recommend this book to parents of trans children, to those looking to get into advocacy/politics and to those who appreciate a good love story.

The Starfish Story

An old man was walking on the beach one morning after a storm. In the distance, he could see someone moving like a dancer. As he came closer, he saw that it was a young woman picking up starfish and gently throwing them into the ocean. “Young lady, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?”

“The sun is up, and the tide is going out, and if I do not throw them in they will die,” she said. “But young lady, do you not realize that there are many miles of beach and thousands of starfish! You cannot possibly make a difference.”

The young woman listened politely, then bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it into the sea. “It made a difference for that one.”

~Adapted from the original by Loren Eiseley

Life’s a Dance