



A personal journey: my “daughter” becomes my son

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Last spring, the Legislature broadened our nondiscrimination statutes to unambiguously cover discrimination on the basis of sexual identity or expression (PA 11-55). Thus the law now provides that those who are transgender or who have different gender identities are protected with the same rights as others. So, Connecticut has now taken the same step as at least 13 other states which have made the decision to provide the same protection afforded to those who are not trans-gender.

I am proud that CABE has long included in its sample policies language that students who are transgender have the same rights as any other students. All students, no matter their gender or sexual identity, should be protected against harassment, bullying or discrimination due to who they are.

I have written before in the *CABE Journal* about our child who announced to us in tenth grade that she was gay. A year and a half later, he told us he was transgender and had always thought of herself that way — a boy in a girl’s body. And, he wanted to be called “Dustin”, not his old name, which he now hates so much he asked me not to include it.

Dusty told me that as a student in the Glastonbury Public Schools, he never faced harassment. On the contrary, teachers and students made his school experiences comfortable.

Though I personally strongly support the new law, the truth is that, like any other kind of discrimination, in a perfect world, there should be no need for a law. And, I think that as the students of today become the adults and parents of tomorrow, there will be less discrimination and a better, healthier understanding of both differences and diversity.

As a parent, the years since Dusty first came out

have led to some unforeseen situations. As my friends have told me, you really can’t foresee what will happen as your child announces he’s/she’s gay. Imagine if your child then says, she is really a boy!

For my wife, Megan, and I, it has truly been a time of testing our beliefs and emotions. For instance, seeing my blond-haired daughter go to the prom in a tuxedo with a girl, watching him go through the changes brought about by testosterone and surgery have not been easy.

I have been at support-group meetings with parents who recently learned that their child was gay or transgender. They have the “deer in the headlight” look. They have no idea how to deal with their new reality. Like us, they want to be supportive but are still going through the shock of what this huge change means. While perhaps not admitting it, they are often confused and feeling guilty, as if something they did must have caused the change. They want to be supportive of their child — they just don’t know how.

Often, there are psychological issues that the parents and the child have to work through. You can imagine the effect of a child keeping a personally important secret until he or she felt they could be open about it with their parents. Some never will reach this point — there is huge fear about how their parents will react. Picture a man of 50 still not having talked about this with his parents. I’ve seen it.

I have had friends who have said that my wife, Megan, and I are “brave” or “courageous” for so openly talking about Dusty and how we are so supportive of him.

I just don’t see it that way. Brave is what my son is for being so open about this whole area. And, we would not be so open, except that Dusty approves and has been a leader and very helpful to other people with gender identity issues.

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How can you not be proud of a child like that?

Don't get me wrong — it has not been easy. Your dreams of walking your child down the aisle at a traditional wedding or of her giving birth are now changed into, well, we'll see what the future brings. That's because Megan and I don't know exactly what to expect.

But, when you see your child so happy, so certain that the physical changes allow them to be the same on the outside as they are on the inside, the parent's uncertainty, queasiness and fear disappear. The happiness just sort of takes over and the love you have for your child kicks right in. You can foresee success and more important, happiness for him.

It just feels right to him... and to us. We are lucky to live in a country where people can be who they are even if they are not traditional. As more people have come forward on these issues, more people now understand that gender identity is not a choice, for who would choose to go through what those who are transgender have?

This issue is more about protecting the basic value of a human being and providing the nurturing any person growing up deserves.

And, I am proud that the State has now seen to recognize these basic civil rights for all citizens — even if they are different.