



Gender & Sexuality Advocacy and Education Program (CGSAEP) – Parent On-line Group

“A Good Day for the Human Race”

Hello fellow parents:

I haven't posted much to this list, but want to share the most recent chapter of our story since this chapter has a good ending. It gives me hope and a vision of how community can be when people commit themselves to the idea that all are really truly welcome, and are willing to do the work that needs doing to make that true. As a dear friend said, it was a good day for the human race.

My child Nathaniel has been gender nonconforming since about age three. He has never insisted that he was a girl, but like many boys on this list he has always been deeply committed to having his hair long, sparkly jewelry, beautiful gowns, and though he has conformed for school there is always a necklace under his shirt and his hair is now below his shoulder blades.

Yesterday was a momentous day for Nathaniel because he went to school in a dress for the first time. The freedom to dress in the way he likes in public has been something he has wanted since he was about three years old. He is now in the 6th grade. I have not said yes to wearing dresses to school until now for fear of his safety and lack of acceptance and support in the school environment. Since the beginning of sixth grade this school year he has been at an alternative public school in our city, and I am delighted to report that, at least in this case, it has lived up to its' reputation for openness, compassion, community, and a solid dedication to making sure that all members of their community are welcomed.

When I talked to them, Nathaniel's teachers did not bat an eye but sat down and made a plan of how to talk with the two sixth grade classes. They so wonderfully made the discussion about gender and individual expression in general, a topic of interest to all, and how to create safety and welcome for Nathaniel in particular. Rather than see this as a problem to deal with, they embraced the topic as a learning and teaching opportunity that ultimately enriches the community. We decided not to talk to the whole school and make a big deal of it, and the teachers told me that Nathaniel would have a cohort of sixth grade ambassadors to the rest of the school. Nathaniel's teacher told me later that it was "the best teaching day of my life" and that he if he died tomorrow he would feel satisfied. They said the sixth graders were amazing. Nathaniel wasn't in on the discussion. Nathaniel has not changed his name or his pronouns and is showing up at school as himself. We realized that to go "as a girl" was to also hide a part of who he was. Right now he is a boy who is "49% girl, 50% in between, 1% boy", and he doesn't want to give up his name.

Walking into school with Nathaniel Monday morning was just about the hardest thing I have ever done. He was terrified but determined. He got a wonderful welcome from staff but walking down the hallway to his locker was like running the gauntlet - everyone was looking at him, but with curiosity, not hostility. I could see Nathaniel put on his haughty hairy eyeball look and reminded him to stay open and not create the response he was afraid of. When we got to the classroom almost immediately a girl came up to him and said "hi Nathaniel, I like your dress". At that moment I started to well up and almost lost it when a second girl did the same thing, so I left to have a big cry in my car. This day was the culmination of nine years of work on my part, of educating myself and others, of saying no to him to keep him safe, of moving cross country to find a school and community where my child would be safe and welcome.

Later I learned that a transgender teenager in the high school had lunch with Nathaniel, and was with him when a kid made a comment about Nathaniel being a "dude". The teen and a bunch of other kids

jumped on the kid and told him he was not being cool - and later that kid came and apologized to Nathaniel! The kindness, compassion, and generosity of the kids and the staff was so incredible after all this time - years and years - of his feeling so alone and different. Nathaniel has a pack of sixth graders on his side who understand more about acceptance than many adults in the world. Today I sent Nathaniel in with a bouquet of flowers from our garden to his teachers. I owe them a debt of gratitude a thousand bouquets could never repay.

When I went to pick him up in the afternoon I saw a kid who has Autism from Nathaniel's class who Nathaniel was afraid would not understand. Nathaniel has befriended and defended this boy this whole year. When Nathaniel did talk with him last week this boy struggled with the idea for awhile and then said "you are my friend and I will stand by you no matter what". Yesterday on his way past me he volunteered that "Nathaniel seems happier now that he has the chance to express himself". Then Nathaniel skipped by in his little white sweater dress and white shoes with a big smile and a thumbs up. He had had a great day. As one of our fathers on the list serve has said about his child, he's the bravest person I know.

This list serve has sustained me through many doubts, fears and tears. It has been so helpful to hear all the creative ways we raise our kids and seeing the room we have for the various paths we and our children take as we break this ground. Nathaniel counts all of you on his list of people who are on his side, as do I. It gives us both strength. Thank you all for being with us on this amazing journey. Keep it coming because we're going to need it.

The mother of a 12 y.o. boy

This touching and inspiring real life story is about a boy expressing himself and defying an arbitrary rule that we often take for granted. It is also about an extraordinary group of peers and school staff. Nathaniel is both courageous and lucky. Although probably there are other schools and other groups of peers that are as fair minded and respectful, the sad reality is that there are many others who are not.