

PFLAG BUFFALO/NIAGARA

Parents, Families, Friends, And Allies United with LGBTQ People

**We will hold our Sharing Meeting
via Zoom.
Sunday, February 21st
2:30-4:00**



Please leave contact information at 883-0384 at least 24 hours before the meeting. You will be sent the meeting codes. Please call if you need support with Zoom as well.

In addition, outside of our monthly group sharing/support meeting, New Parent Virtual Meetings can be scheduled for those in need of support and information between monthly meetings. Call our Helpline to request a meeting. Please reach out. We are here for you.

**PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara
P.O. Box 617
Buffalo, New York 14207**

**Helpline-883-0384
info@pflagbuffalo.org
www.pflagbuffalo.org
www.facebook.com/pflag.niagara**

We meet because we have learned someone close to us is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. We try to help one another deal with this information in a positive manner. Although we do not always agree, we try to be understanding. We offer help to those who seek it, but do not force ourselves on others. We strive to maintain anonymity while sharing on a level that is comfortable.

LOVE AND WISDOM FOR VALENTINE'S DAY

A Love Letter To My Granddaughter (Who I Knew As My Grandson Until 5 Weeks Ago)

"As my thoughts and heart transition to embrace this new you, please know one thing isn't changing — I love you."

Maryann Durmer, posted in Huffington Post, December 2020

Elliot Page recently announced that he is transgender, and as the grandmother of a transgender young woman, I am grateful that he did. Elliot is the Canadian actor widely known for his title role in the movie "Juno." His coming out publicly is helping my 22-year-old granddaughter and many other trans people live openly with freedom.

My granddaughter came out five weeks ago. When I heard the news, I texted her: "I talked to your dad last night. I'm so happy you came out, and I support you 100%. I just wanted to stop by and tell you I love you. If there's anything I can do to help you, I'm here."

I spent the past six months thinking she might be transitioning, and it brought me great relief to see her reveal herself as the vibrant young woman she envisioned and was destined to be.

I am a 75-year-old, white, heterosexual cisgender woman who was raised in an authoritarian home. I attended 12 years of Catholic school in a middle-class white Bronx neighborhood. Everything seemed more clear-cut when I grew up in the '50s, because I didn't know many people with different life experiences.

I was raised to believe that I would go to heaven if I followed my faith's rules, and that those who did not follow the rules would not get into heaven. In the late 1970s, I moved to Texas to raise my family. There, I experienced, firsthand, fundamentalist conservative attitudes and a lack of acceptance of others, which I had not witnessed before (it was apparent they didn't even like "Yankees").

But a divorce led me to the theater community, and once my kids had grown, moving back to New York was the answer to my next phase — becoming a New Yorker again. Striving to understand people who are different from me is important.

Like many others, I realized that organized religion messed me up and that I needed to rethink my biases and understanding of sexuality and gender. Brainwashing takes time to undo. Often it means having (or creating) a wide enough circle of family and friends with different backgrounds to open one's eyes to our shared humanity.

I still hear my mother's judgmental tone in the back of my mind telling me I am going to hell if I accept what was once (and, by some, is still) considered "deviant behavior."

Maybe, in some cases, understanding a transgender person is easier for a non-family member. There are no emotional bonds and no history with that person to look back on and reminisce about.

But when it's your grandchild who is transgender, it's complicated. I worry that I may do or say something wrong by accident. Saying a new name after knowing a person for 20-plus years isn't easy. It's not just about my granddaughter changing. It's also that I have no "how-to" manual for processing my memories of my former grandson. All I know is that I love my granddaughter.

I have been researching, reading and watching movies and documentaries to aid me in better understanding and empathizing with what transgender people experience.

From the documentary "[Born To Be](#)," which helped me to learn about gender confirmation surgeries and other health care options for transgender and nonbinary individuals who choose to transition medically, to Susan Stryker's book "[Transgender History](#)," which helped me to understand the importance of the movements that have led to creating a space for social justice for the trans community, this new knowledge helps me to support my granddaughter.

For instance, it's key to understand that each transgender person thinks about their identity differently and uniquely, so it is always important to know which pronouns to use. Elliot Page uses both "he" and "they" pronouns.

My granddaughter uses "she" and "her." Getting it right may seem like a small detail to some people, but to trans people it means the world.

Still, no matter how good my intentions are, mistakes are made. Sometimes I slip right back into using my granddaughter's "dead name."

Most trans people never identified with the name they were given at birth (which is known as their "dead name"), so they choose a new one that reflects and communicates who they really are. If you don't understand this concept, you may not get that using their old name prevents them from being fully recognized — and you may not realize how disrespectful and incredibly painful it can be for the individual when it happens.

However, that doesn't necessarily mean it's easy to change my ways, especially when remembering the history of the sweet little child I once knew.

But I am committed to doing everything I can to embrace her as the beautiful young woman she is (including apologizing if I do make a mistake), and I want to learn as much as possible to help our whole family make this transition easier for my new granddaughter. After all, a matriarch's position should not be underestimated.

I cannot walk in my granddaughter's shoes, but I can do my best to continue reaching out with kindness and acceptance, praying that she is protected from the hate and intolerance often expressed openly by people in the state where she lives.

To be a grandparent is one of the most beautiful roles in life that a person can achieve. To accept and love your grandchildren — unconditionally — is an amazing experience. I only had one grandparent, but she showed me unconditional love every time I visited, and I can still picture those special moments we shared.

I cannot walk in my granddaughter's shoes, but I can do my best to continue reaching out with kindness and acceptance, praying that she is protected from the hate and intolerance often

expressed openly by people in the state where she lives. I hope that she can move forward in the way that is most meaningful to her.

Being a grandparent, in my final chapter of life, gives me hope to see that my wisdom is carried forward by my grandchildren's generation, who can teach us all not only about being true to one's own self, but to embrace the world and our uniqueness with new ideas and hearts.

So to Elliot Page, I say: Thank you for coming out and using your fame and visibility to help other people who are struggling to be their authentic selves — especially at Christmastime, when the birth of a new life can give hope to many.

To my granddaughter, I say: Thank you for teaching me the value of living an authentic life. I am proud to be your grandmother. And as my thoughts and heart transition to embrace this new you, please know one thing isn't changing — I love you.

Sending love to our PFLAG FAMILY. May February be good to you and yours. We are here for you and thank you for being there for us!

Officers

Julie Christiano, President Lisbeth Ball, Secretary David Barrett, Treasurer

Director

Sharon Barrett

PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara is a 501(c)(3) **nonprofit** organization.