



PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara

Parents, Families, and Friends United with LGBTQ+ People

We meet because we have learned someone very close to us is LGBTQ+.

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 strive to maintain anonymity while sharing on a level that is comfortable.

We want all to attend meetings for their own benefit as well as that of the group.

It is our hope that when each of us reaches a point of understanding and acceptance, we realize that this is when others need us the most.

May Sharing Meeting

Sunday, May 15th, 1:00-2:30

Zoom Meeting Code 555 112 0003

Passcode 700



PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara

P.O. Box 617

Buffalo, NY 14207

Helpline-83-034

info@pflagbuffalo.org

www.pflagbuffalo.org

We generally meet on the third Sunday of the month.

We are virtual now but look forward to in-person meetings. If you would like help outside of our sharing



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PLFLAG BUFFALO/NIAGARA NEWS AND UPDATES



TIME IS RUNNING OUT!

Applications for PFLAG Buffalo/Niagara scholarships must be received BEFORE May 1st. Time is short but we hope that people will use this last week to submit applications for one of our three \$500.00 awards.

Information can be found on our webpage www.pflagbuffalo.org by following the "Scholarships/Grants."

Please pass the word to graduating seniors and nudge those who may have started the application but need to finish and submit.

Applications must be received electronically or at our mailing address BEFORE May 1st. No submissions received after that date will be considered.

We look forward to awarding three outstanding students these scholarships to help ease the financial burdens of post-secondary school but also to acknowledge each winner for contributions to the LGBTQ+ community and commitment to continue contributing in the future.



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HOMECOMING!!!!



This year's Pride Week is entitled "Homecoming" and yes, the events are in person! For the first time since 2019, people in Western New York can celebrate Pride Week and the Pride Parade outside and with thousands.

Pride Week will run in Buffalo from May 31st to June 5th, culminating in the Pride Parade on Sunday the 5th.

The parade will begin at Elmwood at Bidwell and at Elmwood and Allen, with the festivities continuing at Canalside.

The parade begins at 11:00. If you would like more information, use the following link:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/buffalo-pride-week-2022-parade-registration-registration-90327980421?utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=listing&utm-source=cp&aff=escb>



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A PARENT'S VOICE

In these days when the news is often dark and foreboding, we hope to bring some light and positivity to our readers with stories by parents about their children. This piece originally in www.pflag.org, resonates with love throughout and we hope it lifts your heart.

By Dr. Marilyn Willis

You never know how much love you have for your child until you're challenged. Being a southern Black woman from a traditional background prepared me to raise my children well, but when one of my children came out to me as gay, and then later trans, I encountered a different experience than I was expecting.

For my child, growing up free of negativity from the outside world was going to be the challenge.

My concern was rooted in news reports referencing the LGBTQ community, centered around ignorance, violence, death, and a portrayal as if they were other people, and not our people.

While I grew up in a strict and structured home, I wanted more for my children. I wanted to provide them with a home that had less stress, less fearfulness, and the freedom to express themselves. This meant encouraging them to make decisions that were right for them. I wanted my children to feel good about themselves, and that being different was ok, which was not what I experienced growing up.

I really felt the impact of being different in high school. Through the '50s and '60s in Jacksonville, Florida, I was accustomed to living in a predominantly Black neighborhood, church and schools.

Things changed for me in the early 1970s, when several schools were forced to integrate, and race riots broke out—not only in my hometown, but all over the United States.



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I went from being one of many, to being one of only a few Black girls in high school. It was not until I discovered the marching band and started to build a community there, that I truly felt like I belonged. The aftermath of these times had its effects for years, and over time, I had to adjust and figure out how to navigate my new environment and I learned to appreciate the qualities and differences we all possess.

When my youngest child bravely revealed one of the most important aspects of his life, I didn't believe my 14-year old son knew what he was saying. Of course, it didn't take long for me to realize I was wrong, and that I needed help with understanding it all, and how to move forward in a positive way.

Admittedly, I didn't know much about people who weren't heterosexual and even less about transgender people, and I certainly did not have the language to describe it at the time.

So, we started family counseling to learn more about LGBTQ identity, mental health, and how to keep my child safe. After months of counseling, we decided to end the sessions, because we became dissatisfied with the counselor manipulating our family's understanding of "homosexuality" (as he called it) with his personal understanding of the Bible.

Also, the counselor wasn't interested in my child's assessment of his truth, but in judging and shaming him, and causing more disenchantment for us all. Of course, this ordeal weighed heavily on our child's viewpoint of his future, because we had a strong Catholic faith. We decided to depend more on each other as a family unit, rather than outside of it. Our goal was to have a loving and harmonious home environment, to focus on our parent-child relationship, and for us to be more respectful of each other.

In Fall 2009, my child started undergraduate studies at the University of Georgia. He was happy to go off to college, even if he had to settle for staying closer to home. I was pleased that he was getting a good education, was having a great social life, and that he was expressing himself comfortably in the LGBTQ community that he had found. It wasn't all easy, at this point.

I noticed that my child really had a double life—one that was freer at school than the one he had to live when visiting home.



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One Sunday morning, my husband and I discussed our son's new look: blue hair and shaved sides, a vibrant hot pink sweater vest, and Black skinny jeans. Of course, this was contrary to the traditional Sunday attire for a Catholic Church.

I didn't see a problem, because all three of our children did their own thing when they went off to college. They had new experiences, made new friends, and learned new words, expressions and habits - and yes even came home with different colored hair.

I counseled my husband that it was truly no big deal, and we all went to church that morning, and it was completely fine.

My child's initial coming out as gay, and later coming out again as transgender did not test my love, it strengthened it. He struggled with how he would tell me, "I'm not gay, I'm transgender!" I was open and receptive to my 21-year-old child's declaration and saw that she was ready to be true to herself and tell the world.

I realized that it was not just his (now her) life, it's our life, and I wanted to be supportive of my child in this process—not just in words but in action. I made a point to offer my support every step of her transition, from mental and emotional, to spiritual and physical. And wow, it was amazing to see her blossom into the person she was meant to be.

I never felt like I had all the answers. In fact, I still don't. While the journey was winding at times, my daughter's identity and experience was never about me, my husband, other family members, friends, the Church, or even society. It was about how she could be her fullest self and live her life on her own terms.

I believe there is no such thing as loving your children too much. When it comes to your children, "Don't hold back, give them all you've got."

My daughter's success is a testament to the power of love that she has had around her throughout her journey. Today, at 27 years old, she is an activist, public speaker, and writer. She is a former national organizer for the Transgender Law Center, and now the executive editor of Out Magazine. She uses her voice and talents to inspire and uplift marginalized individuals, particularly trans women of color.



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As you can tell from my beautiful Black transgender daughter's life, she is just getting started. I will continue to be a loving and supportive parent by championing my daughter's good works and standing strong beside her.

As I reflected on this journey with my daughter, I uncovered that I had always had an openness and willingness to accept and love those who were different from me and from society's definition of what they should be.

Growing up, my sisters and I were good friends with a neighborhood boy — who did not act like a "traditional" boy, though we had no reference for the label at the time. He was our friend, we had lots of fun things together, and it didn't matter to us that he was different. While attending Morris Brown College in the early 70's, one of my best friends was a young man who was also different.

We never talked about really personal details like him being gay, but it didn't matter, because we enjoyed each other's company and enjoyed our extracurricular activities together. We became such good friends, that I was honored when he agreed to be a part of my wedding as a groomsman.

Unfortunately, as often happens with childhood and college friends, we lost touch, but I reflect on the impact they had on my life and channel that love into the work that I do today.

You couldn't have told me 40 years ago, when I started my journey of parenthood, that I would today be a staunch advocate for the LGBTQ community. As a mother to now two daughters and a son, and a grandmother of five beautiful little ones, my love for my children is wider and deeper than I ever knew could be possible.

This love now extends to the broader LGBTQ community, which is how I first became introduced to PFLAG. By serving on the National Board of Directors, I can be a voice and advocate for other parents, particularly parents of color. So, parents please get involved, speak up, be visible, and stand tall for our children.

Let us help PFLAG achieve LGBTQ equality through changing hearts, minds, and laws. We all deserve a world where diversity is celebrated. If this appeals to you, then get involved right now!