



Notes from a PFLAG Parent

By Sarah Hay

With the recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court it seems everyone is now openly talking about equality for the LGBTQ Community. It is a welcome sign of how far we have come in understanding and acceptance.

It certainly wasn't this way when I first encountered the issue some 35 years ago living here in Muskoka. I grew up in Toronto knowing almost nothing about homosexuality. It just wasn't on my radar. What opened my eyes was my daughter deciding to do a project for her sociology course in high school. She came home loaded with books from the school library and set about informing herself and her class about the topic. I think I learned more than anyone.

I was delighted and proud of her for having the courage to tackle such a controversial topic. She always did seem fearless.

During the course of this project she off-handedly asked what I would do if one of my own kids was gay. Being totally unaware of the importance of this question I said it wouldn't matter to me but I wouldn't want that for my child based on how our society treated the LGBTQ community. My answer did not make her feel safe and only shut down further discussion.

She got an excellent mark on the project and went off to university while I put my blinders right back on. It took a couple of years to slowly come to the realization that she had something she really wanted us to know. Both her dad and I had figured it out and she was quite relieved to hear that we were both OK with who she was. We just wanted her to be happy.

She was not ready to come out to the world and certainly not her home town so I was reluctant to talk with anyone outside the family.

It was difficult and awkward keeping silent especially when I was faced with homophobic slurs passed off as humour in the staff room at the school where I taught. I became aware of other parents in my situation but there was such a climate of silence that no one seemed comfortable in sharing that knowledge.

Although we supported her through relationships from here to Yellowknife I would have been so grateful to have some way to share my feelings and experiences back then. It has taken many years to get where I am now.

The biggest change came when our daughter, Heather, moved back to live in Gravenhurst. She got involved with Muskoka PRIDE and has done so much to raise awareness in our community. We proudly stand with her at flag raisings and attend the annual PRIDE picnic. We have attended the two Muskoka PRIDE conferences where we continue to learn about the LGBTQ community and how we can support them.

Once I became aware of the PFLAG organization I decided to become involved with the local chapter. PFLAG originally stood for Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. It now includes the whole spectrum of the LGBTQ community. Its aim is to head up peer support groups where fear, concern, anger and shame are met with knowledge and compassion. We are currently developing a file of resources and creating opportunities for people to find the support they need. Meetings have been held in Gravenhurst but we are looking to expand throughout Muskoka.

Happy PRIDE Week to all of Muskoka.

You can find us on Facebook at PFLAG Canada – Muskoka ON
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