

LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL
A Testimony Regarding HB-5723

I began as a little suburban girl in the town of Madison, Connecticut. I would like to mention that although this is not a testimony on the existence of God (which I could so easily write), I will be referring to religion as a central, if not positive, part of my upbringing. I was put into a Lutheran nursery school, and then into a private Catholic school until the end of third grade. I say this because, unlike many transgendered people, I was almost completely consciously unaware of my disjoint body and mind. I was a good little Catholic, as were my family. This meant that I had no exposure to the GLBT world, or if I did, it was not explained to me. However, as I came to realize later, there is a gross injustice to this little Catholic box into which I was brainwashed. As Richard Dawkins so plainly puts it, “Even without physical abduction, isn’t it always a form of child abuse to label children as possessors of beliefs that they are too young to have thought about?”

Even though I had such a little idea of what GLBT meant, I still remember traces of my alter ego showing though. For instance, I had a very good friend called Marshall, and he and I used to pretend to be robots and destroy imaginary enemies. We also, and I smile back at my revealing innocence, would play the “Tomb Raider” video games and, amidst shooting at things, comment on how Lara Croft had very triangular breasts. I loved cars and playing veterinarian when I was on my own, and I loved playing spy games with my older brother.

When my grandfather moved in with us from East Haven, we moved to a different house, in Guilford. The summer passed with me spending my time playing Indian in the forest, smashing rocks, and digging in the dirt. Then came a little brother. Now, I already had two older siblings, and to perform such a maneuver at the age of nine was a bit much. I had a new school, a new dress code, a new brother, all rolled into a totally new way of life.

Fourth grade was when I first met the man whose family I now call closer than my own—my friend Christopher. A few years later, when I’d established myself as an avid writer and thespian, I found that I had a crush on one of my best friends, a girl. Not long before, I’d performed as Erik, the Phantom, in a stage adaptation of Gaston Leroux’s novel *The Phantom of the Opera*. I discovered that I truly loved being in the skin of a male when, ironically enough, we were performing in our Catholic church’s basement. The empowering feeling of masculinity that I’d felt onstage burrowed underground as I tried to “fit in” freshman year, having been cast in *The Importance of Being Earnest* as a governess. The next year, I realized that I should stop trying, because none of the styles that I tried on fit me. It was then that I began to remember my lesbian/male feelings, and I became president of our school’s Gay-Straight Alliance.

A day came when I find the following quote in my journal, in regards to the same girl that I mentioned having liked: “She won’t even look at me. I’ve got the plan, though. As soon as I’ve saved enough money, I’m going in for gender reassignment.” That’s it—I

just said it. I had watched Rent before as well, and I commented on Angel, saying, "Transsexuals are usually pretty cute." Not long after that, I attended the True Colors conference, where I first came to understand the saving word "transgender." My scraps of knowledge came together, and the idea fascinated me. "I can take a pill and change all that?" I thought. At True Colors, I spoke to two transmen, and later that year, I declared myself to be one of them, first to Christopher, then in an emergency to my choir director, then to my GSA.

I ran away from home twice that summer, having been absolutely and totally rejected by my parents when I'd come home without my fourteen-inch locks of hair. Both of my parents cried, yelled, were furious. I found refuge in my friends, and in the middle of the woods with my writing. In August, when it was time to go back to school, I e-mailed all of my teachers and explained to them the situation, telling them to call me by my preferred name. I named myself Erik, after my original inspiration, the Phantom. Most of my teachers were in agreement and carried through with my wishes, but one of my teachers told me he'd "have to check."

Later that week, I got called into a meeting. The school had gone ahead and contacted my parents (without even telling me), and now my parents were filing an order with the school. It said quite expressly that I was not to be called "Erik" by any teacher, and the school refused to hear a word against it. I simply could not argue my case, all by the base fact that I was only 16 and still under my parents' jurisdiction.

If HB-5723 passes, I will have legal backing to fight the document that still prevents me from being who I wish to be. This document causes the school to commit, at the very least in my mind, a hate crime against a student who just wishes to exist. Being known by any other name, although my teachers have been mostly compliant, is disruptive to my working atmosphere, and there have been tests and assignments failed because of this. We need this law to be put into place because the only people it will hurt are those with closed, bigoted minds.

After all, we don't say "liberty and justice for some."