

The Monologue Project: LGBTQ+ Voices 2023

Produced by the Newton Theatre Company
Directed by Allen Flint and Valerie Goldstein



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Directors' Note

By Allen Flint and Valerie Goldstein

Welcome to the Monologue Project: LGBTQ+ Voices! This show is very important to both of us as queer people, and we're grateful to share it with you today.

(Valerie) I had the amazing opportunity senior year at Newton South to tell my story in a play I wrote and directed called Lia's Love Story, which was inspired by my struggle to figure out my bisexuality. Because I did not have many, if any, queer stories growing up, I felt alone while trying to figure out this important part of my identity. The goal of the play was to show just one person in the audience that they are not alone, to provide the support and visibility that I did not have growing up. I am so excited to continue to provide a platform for queer stories through this show, and I hope again that just one person in the audience tonight sees a little piece of themselves in one of these monologues and feels less alone.

(Allen) Valerie's play is the reason I ever got involved in theatre tech. She's also the one who introduced me to and then got me hooked on the idea of media representation. Now, those are two of my passions, and I'm psyched to get to mix them in the creation of this production. As a young trans and aroace person, representation is so crucial to me. My feelings of gender dysphoria and lack of romantic and sexual attraction aren't things I ever saw represented growing up, and I didn't know I was experiencing them until I could name them. I hope that by sharing our stories tonight, we are increasing the odds that lgbtq+ folks will be able to figure out what they're feeling, and won't be so scared when they do. One of the difficult things we as lgbtq+ people have to do sometimes is explain ourselves and what we are experiencing, so I also hope that the non-lgbtq+ people here are able to take away some knowledge tonight, to make a queer person feel seen when you can say "Aromantic? Oh yeah, I know what that is!"

We believe that we need to hear more LGBTQ+ stories, which is why we are putting on this performance today. We want to amplify the voices of LGBTQ+ people in our very own community so that we can celebrate our identities, learn about the obstacles we've had to overcome and are still overcoming, and figure out where we go from here.

Right now in our country, LGBTQ+ rights are being threatened, especially the rights of trans youth who face legislation preventing them from receiving gender affirming care and from coexisting with their peers in places such as bathroom stalls or sports fields. It is so important

that we continue to have these conversations about LGBTQ+ topics because that's the first step of change, and there is a lot of work that needs to be done here and in the rest of the country.

We hope this show is continuing that dialogue that will lead to change, but the work is not over after tonight. We hope you continue to engage with LGBTQ+ stories and issues, and we hope you do your part to make Newton a welcoming place for all queer people, by providing a safe place like this one for people to share their stories.

We want to thank everyone who has helped us share our stories and put on this production: Melissa Bernstein for guiding us through every step of this process; the Newton Theatre Company for producing this show; our wonderful tech people Bernie Bernstein and Natalie Ottaviano, our stage manager; our logo designer Marissa Wandrey; our marketer Abby Strayer; Hattie Kerwin Derrick and the Pride Coalition; and John Rice at the Hyde Community Center and Ellen Meyers at the Newton Free Library for hosting our performances and for your technical support. And thank you all for coming and supporting this project! We hope you enjoy the show!

A Kaleidoscope Within

By Phoebe Anthony

Middle school! Ah, yes, the time when my style was more awkward than my attempts at flirting. Some people call it the worst years of their life, and I agree -It's a literal battleground of hormones, cliques, and self-discovery.

When I was in middle school, around 7th grade, I started to like a girl. I was confused for a while, confused about whether I liked being friends with her, wanted to be her, or liked her. It took me a while to realize that I was just lying to myself; I was scared to admit to myself that I did, indeed, like her.

I never really had a “coming out” moment; I simply told my friends that I was dating her, and I guess all my friends simply assumed that I was “exploring my sexuality.” I’m really lucky to have supportive friends and family because almost no questions were asked when I told them.

There was this one moment, though, when I heard someone talking about me and that girl being together. I vividly remember this conversation because they were talking about the new jeans that I had bought, and I was so excited to wear them to school. That person mentioned my name, then proceeded to say how my jeans make me look like a lesbian.

From then on, I told all my friends that I was gay. Not lesbian. Gay. I had this thought in my head that there was a stigma against the word “lesbian.” I didn’t want to be labeled as that; no, I preferred to say I was gay. I felt as if being lesbian was a “bigger commitment” for me than being gay. In fact, it almost feels that gay is more of an umbrella term and more common, while lesbian has negative connotations attached to it.

It went on like this for a while, but my journey of self-discovery was far from over.

Middle school was simply a stepping stone to figuring out my sexuality. I came out as gay to my friends and family, even though the majority of them already knew or suspected it, and my understanding of both myself and the world around me shifted. Friends stood by my side, some questioning, most supportive, and others unfazed. To be completely transparent, I was most grateful for my friends who remained unfazed, not in the sense that they didn’t care, but rather that they accepted me and didn’t see a need to say anything further than that.

But throughout high school, my understanding of my own identity began to shift, like pieces of a puzzle rearranging themselves into a different picture.

I began to like: *drumroll please*... A guy.

I couldn't believe myself! I remember texting my friend: "How can I like a guy when I'm literally gay??" In some ways, I felt like I was betraying my middle school self, or was I just seeking attention?

I had to know if I really liked this guy, so, of course, I decided to take the best evaluation possible: an online "Am I bisexual?" quiz. It didn't end up giving me any clarity whatsoever simply because those quizzes are unhelpful, but the act of taking the quiz told me more than what the quiz results could have.

It constantly feels like there is some outside pressure to figure things out about yourself, but this pressure shouldn't exist. People shouldn't feel rushed to figure things out because sexuality, like life, is fluid – it's always evolving.

As I'm standing here, I still don't know for sure what my sexuality is because there are so many different colors and shapes swirling around me, and I can't strictly put a hard label on it, and none of you should feel pressured to do so either, because in the end, aren't we all just kaleidoscopes within?

We Don't Have a Problem Here

By Bob Parlin

So much has changed for the better in recent decades for the LGBTQ+ community, but we are now faced with attacks throughout the country which put many of those advances in jeopardy and put the lives of many young people at risk. Newton, however, has led the way in modeling how to provide community-wide support for the LGBTQ+ people who live and work here.

I came to work as a history teacher at Newton South High School in 1987, when it was legal to fire someone in Massachusetts if you learned that they were gay. Coming out as gay as a public school teacher was virtually unheard of at the time. I was born in the 1960's, when same-sex relationships were actually illegal in 49 states, and I grew up with no positive role models. As an incoming teacher, therefore, I wanted to be open about being gay, but I was absolutely terrified about what might happen. The handful of teachers I knew who had come out had all faced harassment and threats of dismissal. Nearly all of my colleagues counseled against coming out. When I raised the issue of how queer young people were isolated and unsafe, and at a higher risk for taking their own lives, I was initially met with fear and denial.

One colleague said, "You know, I don't think this school is ready to deal with homophobia. Newton may be a fairly liberal suburb, but I don't think the parents will approve." Another claimed, "I've been a guidance counselor at this school for more than twenty years, and I don't ever recall a student coming to me and telling me that he or she was a homosexual. I don't think we have any gay kids here." What finally drove me to come out was when a third colleague suggested, "I'm not sure that having a program on homosexuality is all that relevant to us here. Maybe communities in other parts of the country — say in California — are struggling with this, but we don't have a problem here."

The setting for those comments was a meeting of Newton South's Respect for Human Differences Committee in the spring of 1991. In prior months I had gently pushed the committee to address homophobia, but now my quiet efforts seemed to be coming undone. I knew I could not stay silent any longer, and I made the fateful decision to confront my own fears and share my experience with the members of that committee. I knew I might be putting my job on the line, that I might come under attack from all all sides, helpless to stop responses ranging from hurtful comments to malicious destruction of my property. I anticipated outraged calls from parents,

who would demand the removal of their children from my classes. I imagined students running by my room, yelling, “Faggot!” through the open doorway. I expected to one day find my car in the faculty parking lot with its tires slashed. Even worse, I feared losing my effectiveness as a teacher, with my relations with students becoming awkward and difficult, as they avoided looking at me or responding to my questions with sincerity. Would it be worth it to come out?

It was that final comment — that we didn’t have a problem with homophobia at Newton South — that prompted me to speak out. I knew that it was simply not true, and my anger allowed me to overcome my fears. “Let me tell you why we *do* have a problem,” I began. “I am gay and I have never felt truly welcome here at this school.” My colleagues sat at rapt attention as I opened the floodgates of personal experience, sharing with them what it had been like to grow up gay, feeling profoundly alone and isolated. I told them what it was like to feel that who you were was sick and disgusting, and how I was taught to hate myself. I described how painful it was to not be able to envision a life in which I could be happy and whole. I shared the tremendous pressure of being closeted at work, afraid that one day I might let something slip, feeling that I could never be fully honest with the people around me.

As I spoke I could feel the fear slipping away, being replaced by a sense of self-confidence that I had never before known. It was a turning point in my life, and, as it turns out, a turning point in the life of my school. When I finished talking, I looked around the room to discover that everyone was crying. I particularly will never forget the look on the face of my principal, the late Van Seasholes, as he gazed at me sadly with tears streaming down his face. Clearly, my words had made an impact. Afterward, many of the faculty came up and hugged me. One colleague even told me, “I felt like standing up and saying: ‘And I am a lesbian!’ - But I’m not.”

What happened in that room that day was that fear was replaced by hope. The good intentions and sincere good will that had always been present were given the chance to rise to the surface and overcome the fears, anxieties, and denials that our society had forced upon us. We have never looked back.

A series of faculty trainings and student programs on homophobia were begun, and we ended the year by forming the first public school gay-straight alliance in the country. As Newton South moved forward on fighting homophobia, my personal odyssey also continued. I came out to the entire faculty in September, announcing my plans to come out to my students soon. How

exactly to do this, however, eluded me, and I procrastinated for several months. My hand was forced when Van Seasholes arrived outside my classroom door in the middle of class with an urgent question. In a senior elective he was teaching, a girl raised her hand and asked, "Is Mr. Parlin gay?" He told me that he had not known how to answer the question, so he said, "Give me a minute," to his students and left the room to find me. As he related this series of events to me in the hallway, all I could think was that his students thought that he had left to find the answer to the question. The comic nature of the situation was not lost on either of us, but the principal was still left with the tricky issue of how to respond. I told him to say, "Yes," but then to ask why the student wanted to know, and to try to discuss with the class the potential ramifications of my coming out of the closet. The principal later told me that the ensuing conversation was remarkably sensitive and thoughtful, and that the students had reacted very positively.

Of more immediate concern to me, however, was my desire to talk to my classes before rumors spread around the school. The next day I bit the bullet and announced to each of my classes that I had something serious to discuss with them. I explained that I wanted to be honest with them, that I wanted to help fight ignorance about homosexuality, to challenge the predominantly negative and harmful stereotypes of gay people, and that I wanted to provide them with a role model of a gay person who was happy, healthy, and successful. It was a frightening day, but also an exhilarating one.

My students did not let me down. They reacted with thoughtful curiosity, compassion, and sincere respect. "Do you want to have children someday?" "Do you have a boyfriend?" "How did your parents react when you told them?" Their questions revealed an open, caring attitude that I have now witnessed in young people around the country. Many came up to me after class and later that week to tell me how much they admired what

I had done. It had changed their way of thinking about gay people. The reverse of my fears occurred. I actually became *closer* to my classes as a result. From that day onward, the level of thoughtful participation in class discussions was noticeably deeper. Students began to take risks and share personal concerns in a way that had a remarkable impact on their classmates and their own lives. One small step led to leaps that continued for years.

Even the parents of my students did not live up to my fears. When I arrived at school the next day and found seven calls from parents waiting for me, I automatically anticipated trouble. But the parents were not calling to complain. They were calling to thank me. One told me that

my announcement had sparked one of the best dinner-table conversations her family had ever had. Another told me that he felt that my coming-out talk had been the single biggest learning experience in his son's life. Each parent wanted me to know that they appreciated how much courage it took to come out, and that they fully supported me. Since that day I have certainly heard murmurings of discontent from some people in the city, but I have continued to receive expressions of support from students, parents, former students, and alums who are grateful that finally the school was beginning to fight the homophobia and transphobia that made their adolescent years so miserable.

I will never again let fears rule my life. In the spring of 1992, after a momentous year at Newton South, I was invited by the senior class to attend the senior prom with my partner. As we slow-danced on the dance floor that night, surrounded by hundreds of heterosexual couples and one other gay couple (two amazingly courageous young men who had also overcome their fears), I wondered why there was so little reaction to our presence. I realized that the students truly did not care. They were there to celebrate their school years. Hatred had no place in such a celebration. The barriers that divided us were, at least temporarily, dissolved. For one brief night, I had a glimpse of a world where being gay could be valued, and where fear was not welcome. This vision guided me throughout my 35-year career at Newton South, and I retired last year confident that here in Newton, at least, we have started to build a world in which LGBTQ+ young people will want to live — and *thrive*.

Faith

By Valerie Goldstein

My grandparents have a cute little piece of art hanging
In their bathroom.
I look at it everytime I wash my hands after petting their dog Vinny
Who is so sweet and playful
And makes me want a dog
But my mother doesn't like them.
Anyways, despite the fact that Vinny is adorable, I always have to wash
My hands after I play with him
Because I am paranoid that the dog hair or saliva or general germs
Will end up in my mouth.

So back to the bathroom-
It says something like
 She leapt
 And knew she would grow wings
 On the way down.
How did she know?
How did she have the faith to trust that she would grow wings
If she never had grown them before?
I don't even trust my hands to be dog germ free
After scrubbing over and over in the sink
Staring at that picture.
Did she have any doubts at all?

I took an accidental leap
On Facebook, which, at the moment,
I had forgotten could be seen by my grandparents and everyone I know.
I posted a video for a city council campaign - well

It doesn't really matter why
Because I had basically outed myself to the internet.
My grandparents called me on the phone a day later
To tell me that they loved me and were proud of me
And I was confused.
Then, they mentioned the facebook video
And how Uncle Alan had sent it to them
And I was mortified.

They didn't outright address the elephant of my sexuality
But the whole fall down felt turbulent
Knocking the wind out of me.
Where were my wings?
But really, the drop was not so bad.
Some people shatter bones or even die from a jump at that height
And I only sustained some minor bruising of my ego.
Maybe I could try to leap again.

I brought my girlfriend to my grandparents house
And introduced her as such.
They loved her almost as much as she loved Vinny
Who took a nap stretched across both our laps.
I was too caught up in the thrill of the fall
To worry about washing my hands after
But I wish I had told the girl in the painting
That I had finally grown my wings too

Words That Define Me

By Jesse King

There are many labels that can and have been used to describe me. Autistic, Jewish, and many more. And when I was 18, a new label was added. Bisexual. The realization kinda came out of nowhere, but it was one of those things where you look back at small moments in your life and go “oh yeah, that makes sense now”. I still prefer women, but I could see myself being intimate with any gender. I was so sure of it.

Then, shortly after I turned 20, I got another realization out of nowhere. I realized I might not be a cis man. I started going by he/they pronouns and claiming the label of demiboy, and it felt right... at least for a time.

See, here’s the thing. Throughout my whole life, there haven’t been any labels that felt 100% accurate. For being autistic, what that looks like for each autistic person is so different, that I used to often question if I’m actually autistic since I don’t fit a lot of the stereotypical definitions, despite actually being diagnosed, not to mention ADHD and anxiety making it more complex.

As for being Jewish, yes I am Jewish, but I don’t believe in any god. I never even had a bar mitzvah. I just consider myself Jewish because it’s how I was raised, I’m ethnically Jewish, and my strong morals align with Humanistic Judaism.

But I often had a feeling that I was lying to myself. Am I really autistic enough to claim the label of autistic? Am I Jewish enough to claim the label of Jewish? And what started happening with the labels of bisexual and demiboy was the same thing.

I started doubting it, thinking I was lying to myself. I’m much more attracted to women than I am to men, to the point where I don’t see myself ending up with a man in the end, and they don’t really do it for me even half as much. So can I really call myself bisexual? As for being a demiboy, that’s even more confusing. I had made a big deal of the realization and my friends helped me figure things out, but then I realized I didn’t actually like people calling me they instead of he, and that I was actually just more of a non-conformist.

But for so long I didn’t want to go back to using he/him pronouns because it would mean I was “lying” all that time, claiming a label that wasn’t mine. Only recently did I go back to using he/him pronouns, but who knows, maybe that’ll change again someday.

And I really juggled being bi a whole lot. I knew that if I stopped calling myself bisexual and started calling myself straight, I would just go back to questioning if I was bisexual. Not to mention, and I don't know if this counts as irony, but the vast majority of my friends are queer and I was honestly afraid of being outcasted by them if I was straight, even if they aren't the kind of people to do that. Because the sad truth is, even within the queer community, there is bigotry. A lot of gay people are actually biphobic, and believe you have to either be gay or be straight.

I once had a co-worker who didn't believe I was really bi ask many intrusive questions including insisting I was asexual, because I didn't talk about sex, y'know, at work... in front of all of my co-workers and the customers. And I've heard friends judge other people on if they think they are really queer. I've even heard multiple people say that I MUST be more into men just because of how I dress and carry myself. Which is ridiculous, the definition of gay isn't "he wears colorful clothes and does jazz hands."

But I know I'm not straight. I'm at least a little bit attracted to men, and I can totally see myself ending up with a non-binary person. But the amount I'm attracted to women is just so much higher than men that it sometimes feels like I may as well not like men at all. You see the spiral?

Now I just call myself queer, and it works for me, but things really shouldn't have to be like this. My understanding is that the whole LGBTQ+ movement is supposed to be all about the freedom to be yourself. But at the same time, just like with so many other aspects of my life, I feel forced to try to define who I am based on labels that I can check off on a list.

The point I'm trying to make is, labels can be useful, they help us discover who we are by attaching a word to our feelings and experiences. However, people are complex, and too often people are pressured to try and fit a label's definition. People should have the freedom to define their identity however they like, not the other way around. In the end, for me, I'm a lot of things, but there are three words that best describe me. Jesse Alper King. And I'm the one who decides what that means.

Totally, Finally Happy

By Allen Flint

I've used many labels throughout my life and have come out so many times as one thing or another. I once spoke on a panel in high school about the experience of realizing I was pansexual. Little did I know, I am not pansexual. I knew I felt the same about everyone, and couldn't imagine how someone's gender would affect me liking them or not. Turns out, that's because I'm aroace. Aro being aromantic and ace being asexual, meaning I don't feel romantic or sexual attraction towards anyone.

I knew I was ace first. When I thought about sex, I just didn't get the appeal. My asexuality is a big deal to me, but it was relatively easy for me to accept. It didn't scare me so much to realize it in high school because it didn't really change my perception of my future.

Aromanticism, though, was another thing. The culture we live in is so heavily constructed around partnerships. Especially straight ones, and especially romantic ones. Growing up, I always believed I was going to get married one day. That was just, in my head, the rule of life, and I knew I wanted to follow that rule to fit in with others and experience the immense joy that I heard came from marriage. Maybe you can start to see why realizing I'm aro was a problem for this imagined future. How was I going to fall in love and get married and live this perfect life if I don't actually feel romantic attraction towards anyone?

There's a book chapter that captures this feeling near perfectly for me, and it comes from the only piece of media I have ever seen that has an aromantic character in it, because aromantic representation is incredibly rare. This book is titled *Loveless* and is written by Alice Oseman, and I want to read this chapter to you now. For context, the main character tested the waters of attraction by dating one of her friends, only to realize that she's aroace. The chapter's only a page, and it's called Fantasy Future.

It wasn't just that I'd hurt Jason. It wasn't even having to accept that I was some kind of sexual orientation that barely anyone has heard of, that I would have to find some way to explain to my family and everyone else. It was knowing, with absolute certainty, that I was never, ever going to fall in love with anybody.

I had spent my whole life believing that romantic love was waiting for me. That one day I'd find it and I would be totally, finally *happy*.

But now I had to accept that it would never happen. None of it. No romance. No marriage. No sex.

There were so many things that I would never do. Would never even *want* to do or feel *comfortable* doing. So many little things I'd taken for granted, like moving into my first place with my partner, or my first dance at my wedding, or having a baby with someone. Having someone to look after me when I'm sick, or watch TV with in the evenings, or going on a couples' holiday to Disneyland.

And the worst part of it was—even though I'd longed for these things, I knew that they'd never make me happy anyway. The idea was beautiful. But the reality made me sick.

How could I feel so sad about giving up these things that I did not actually want?

I felt pathetic for getting sad about it. I felt guilty, knowing that there were people out there like me who were *happy* being like this.

I felt like I was grieving. I was grieving this fake life, a fantasy future that I was never going to live.

I had no idea what my life would be like now. And that scared me. God, that scared me so, so much.

Reading that chapter for the first time brought me to tears. Reading that chapter for the second time brought me to tears. Writing about this chapter for my monologue, brought me to tears. And now, reading it aloud to you, I am fighting back tears.

When I first realized I may be aromantic, I fought it, because that realization made me feel lost and out of place. I didn't want things to change, or for my future to be so uncertain. These thoughts swirled around my head, for me alone to deal with.

So seeing the same exact thoughts that had been in my head written on a page of a book by a best-selling author, was overwhelming. Completely astounding. I could not believe that it was real. That my experiences were worth putting in a book. And it was scary, because it meant that while reading this book I had to confront these thoughts, which made them feel more real to me. The self-doubt and the sadness and the longing. And that made me cry.

But. I was also crying, because reading those words on a page meant they *weren't* only in my head. They meant I wasn't alone in the fears I had. I wasn't the only one who had planned for a life that is no longer possible for me to live. I wasn't the only one influenced by society into valuing romance so highly that I convinced myself I wanted it, when I really, really don't.

I love being aromantic. I can honestly say that now. It's something that affects my entire worldview, and I wouldn't wish to change that. Time certainly helped me get to this point, as did this book. And so did my close friendships, because being without romance is not the same as being alone, and I still have strong, intimate, platonic, connections with people. There is nothing wrong with being aromantic.

But there was a lot of pain in the process of getting to this point. We are not yet at a time in which, culturally, we have made space for aromantic people. So yes, it does get a whole lot better, but it's really hard for it to get better without being able to visualize what "better" even looks like. *Loveless* did that for me. I think a lot of people could benefit from more stories with themselves as the main character. We all deserve to see ourselves reflected in the stories that we read. And regardless of what we may feel as queer people, none of us are broken or out of place.

Where are the Gay Presidents?

By Valerie Goldstein

Where are the gay presidents? I don't mean speculating about Abraham Lincoln, though that is fun to do. No, I'm talking about the movies, and TV shows, and books too- all the ways we communicate and entertain ourselves. Because even in the magical world of film and TV and literature, it seems more likely for us to see a president as a vampire hunter than a homosexual.

And we have gotten some representation in the past couple of years, of course, who could forget about Brokeback Mountain, but at the same time, I wish I could quit all the tired tropes: the gays that die first, the weird power dynamics, the cheating, the lesbian film directed by a man that has no substance and is just a series of unrealistic sex scenes, and it seems that all of these gay characters are conventionally attractive and white.

Right now, straight cis characters are the default, so as soon as a main character is gay, that movie becomes a gay movie, instead of just simply a movie. And if there's a gay side character, that's forced diversity, and you can forget about them having a multidimensional personality. There seems to be just a handful of stories circulating around our media, saying that this is which queer stories can be seen, that this is what queer people can be, when we know that the LGBTQ+ community is an ocean of diversity.

So many of these stories that we do have are focused on gay love, which excludes part of our community and is only a fraction of our stories, and yes, there is some satisfaction in seeing same-sex attraction, if it's done right, but that's not the only beautiful part of who we are. The stories so far are focused on young gay able bodied, cis white love, and yes, love is love, but that isn't enough.

There are stories beyond coming out and facing discrimination, stories beyond the miseducation in conversion therapy, beyond the isolation of being the only gay kid at your school, beyond restricting a character to just their LGBTQ+ identity, or that are called a gay movie and nothing more.

And that's not to say that some of these stories aren't wonderful and truthful. I personally have watched *The Half of It* on Netflix 13 times and counting because there is a girl who looks like me and likes another girl, and it's a story about a friendship more than anything else, which reminds me of my childhood best friend and makes me want to call him, but anyways, the

coming out and young loves stories are nice, (when they're not directed through the straight male gaze) but there are so many better ways to represent all of the queer experience.

Because for queer people, sometimes our sexuality or gender is the least interesting thing about us. We are artists, siblings, teachers, activists, lawyers, parents, we have bad days, we have good ones, we come in all different shapes, colors, and sizes, we have hopes and dreams sometimes completely unrelated to our genders and sexualities, we're full of surprises - and there is so much more that deserves to be seen, so why not put us, all of us, up on the big screen.

So let's not bury our gays or have weird age gaps or be dismissed as a woke movie. Let's just have a gay president. Or a trans astronaut, or a lesbian mafia boss, or an ace intergalactic hero, or a pan wall street guy who doesn't repress his sexuality and just happens to have a husband while he deals with some drama about stocks and stuff and I think if we try hard enough, we can get life to imitate art. If we have a gay president movie that isn't a stereotype, isn't a ploy, isn't dismissed, who has a full story and just happens to be gay, then I think, all those young kids that are watching, will see it's okay, and maybe then we'll have a real one in the white house some day.

Queer Representation for Youth

By Mia Cohen

When I was in sixth grade, I went to a required assembly at my middle school. Unsurprisingly, it was another “don’t bully people” assembly, but this one was specific. It wasn’t just “don’t bully people”, it was “don’t bully gay people.” I remember walking out of that assembly, having been alive for a whole 11 years, with my mind absolutely blown by the concept of homosexuality. It’s not like I hadn’t been exposed to anything that may have clued me in. My uncle’s second marriage was to a woman who had just split up with her wife. I’d seen the episode of Good Luck Charlie where they meet a lesbian couple. It even went as far as my mom, sister, and I having “movie boyfriends,” aka celebrities we really liked, except mine was a woman. Despite all of that, no one had really laid it out clearly for me that it didn’t always have to be a man and a woman, so when I was told not to bully people who identified as gay, I was not only confused but amazed. I spent weeks thinking “Wow, that sure sounds cool. It would be so awesome to be gay. I *really* wish I was gay. Too bad there’s just no way.” Until I realized that maybe there was a way and maybe straight people don’t usually desperately wish to be queer. I came out to my sister pretty soon after I came out to myself, and after her 9 whole years of being alive, she had no idea what I was talking about either. At school, I started testing the waters of tolerance because, at the same time as finding out about queerness, I also found out about homophobia, and shockingly, I was met with homophobia. It’s been a good while since all of this, almost 10 years. Times have changed a little. I had the good fortune of having to teach my friend’s 8-year-old sister about homophobia recently. She concluded that it sounded “rude to gay people.” Nowadays, there’s all this rhetoric about children being indoctrinated with queerness by learning of its existence, but queerness is a truth of life and it’s certainly better to always be aware of it than to be shocked by the concept when you’re 11. Kids do often reflect what they’re told. The kids I was raised around either hadn’t heard of being gay or had been told it was bad and promptly spread that idea. The kids I’ve met more recently who have been told about queerness approach it much more maturely. Kids are information sponges, so why would we want them to soak up hate from such a young age? And more importantly, the average Barbie fan has more Barbies than Kens and it’s much easier to couple them up when you know the Barbies can be a couple too.

Drag Queen Dad

By Jean Chandler

@QueenJeanChandler (Instagram)

In corset and pads, I take the stage,
As Jean Chandler, I'm all the rage.
But behind the glitz, glam, and noise
I am also a dad to three teenage boys

As their parent, I stand out in a different way
My high-pitched voice screams loudly "I'm Gay"
Friends have teased them because I wear heels
Trust me, I answer, I know how it feels

As a Drag Queen dad I parent with flair
Now they are used to it, and don't really care
I strut in stilettos, sashay and twirl,
They roll their eyes, "our dad, the IT girl"

When they bring home friends, I worry a bit
As a parent I'm nervous they won't think I'm legit
"Dude, your dad's a Queen? That's so rad!"
Surprisingly, they are impressed by their dad.

Being Jean Chandler, a drag queen dad true,
Brings challenges for sure, but love pushes through.
I teach them lessons, both bold and kind,
About love and acceptance, expanding their mind.

I don't like sports and can't change a tire
But my love for my boys couldn't get any higher

I'm there for their laughter, their cries, and their fears,
I am their rock, wiping away tears.

So here I am, a drag dad, proud and free,
Spreading laughter and love for the world to see
My boys may cringe, but deep down they know,
Jean Chandler's their superstar, stealing the show.

So let the sequins shimmer, let the laughter ring,
In this unconventional family, we do our own thing.
With teenage boys and Jean dreams galore,
We embrace the unique, and we ask for more.

In a world where hate takes the wind from our sails
It's love in the end that truly prevails,
We're a family of love, beyond societal norms,
And with laughter and joy, our bond reforms.