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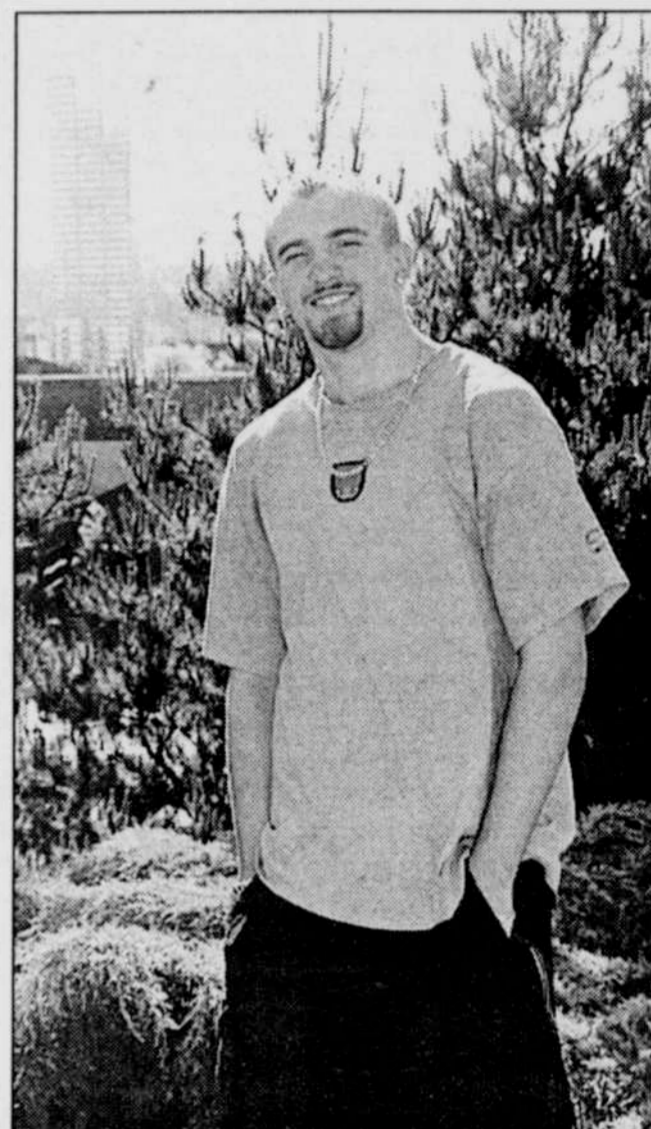
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NORTHWEST news

DANCING TO A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

Gay student banned from high school prom by Jim Radosta



PHOTOS BY JIM RADOSTA

Most high school students spend the month before graduation dealing with mixed feelings of nostalgia and impatience, preparing for college and finding a prom date.

Not David Wright. Since coming out of the closet in April, the 18-year-old has learned he cannot attend his prom with another male student and has endured taunting from administrators on a day that was intended to open people's minds about anti-gay harassment.

Wright is a senior at Thomas Edison High, a small private school in Southwest Portland. He suffers from attention deficit disorder and partial dyslexia and has severe problems reading and writing.

Edison provides individualized attention and smaller classes—about 10 kids a room—for those with special needs. The Portland Public Schools district pays for Wright's education because it does not offer a similar program.

Edison is located on the campus of Jesuit High, which allows the school to use its cafeteria, gymnasium and fields. It also lets the 68 students attend its prom, which will be held May 18 at the Tiffany Center.

Because of the shared facilities, Wright's school is at the mercy of Jesuit's rules. He says that Edison administrators have been 100 percent supportive but that their hands are tied because they don't want to get kicked off the campus.

Although Wright says he's known about his sexual orientation "for a while," he's only been openly gay at work and school since April 1. As far as he knows, he's the only out student at either Edison or Jesuit.

His problems started when he and about 10 other students participated in the Day of Silence, a protest of anti-gay harassment in schools. Thousands of kids nationwide agreed not to speak as a way of drawing attention to the issue.

"I'm working for...my rights bestowed upon me when I was born—my human rights—and they're being denied," David Wright says

While standing in line at the Jesuit cafeteria, Wright says he handed an employee a card explaining why he was not talking. She refused to serve him.

"She looked at it for about 10 seconds and looked at me and goes, 'Oh, we don't do that here,' turned her head and goes, 'Next!' to the person behind me," he says. "I just couldn't believe that she would say that to me.... She's like: 'Other people want food. You need to move.'"

Wright went to the bathroom to collect himself. He says a teacher approached him to make sure he was all right.

"At this time I was visibly shaking. I was so upset, I could barely walk back down to Edison," he says. "It was so hard for me. I had never felt that before—the total disregard for who a person is."

A teacher and an administrator then approached Wright, so he handed them the card. One of the men creased it in half.

"They both took their time and read it and were like: 'You know what? While you're on our campus you will follow our rules,'" he says. "I was just thinking to myself, 'What in their rules says I have to speak?'"

This experience got Wright to thinking, "If they freak out over this, how are they going