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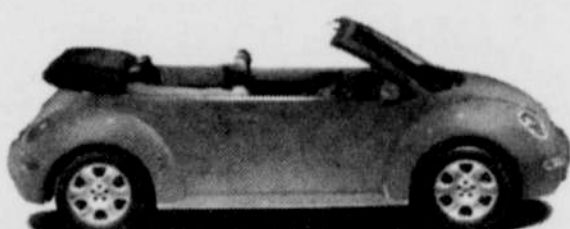
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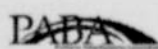
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Expelled from
Brokeback HighStraight ally to sue school district for expulsion
over queer-themed film

by Jaymee R. Cuti

A well-spoken teen with an independent streak has become an unlikely queer rights champion. Brandon Flyte, who is in a fight for his diploma with West Linn High School, believes he has been singled out by administrators after showing a gay-themed film he made for an English class.

After posting a saga of forced transfers and suspensions on his blog, thousands have contacted Flyte, offering messages of support and admiration and personal stories of homophobia.

"In a way, it's mispainting me," said Flyte of his activist's image. "The film was never made to be a platform for gay rights, but I'm totally in support of gay rights."

Flyte, who is straight, springboarded off the mainstream success of the film *Brokeback Mountain* in making *Brokeback High*, which he wrote, directed and starred in.

The film, about a stereotypical high school jock coming out after developing feelings for an openly gay student, was well-received by students and teachers—earning Flyte an A-minus along with awards in class for acting and directing.

According to Flyte, he followed assignment guidelines of creating a modern tragedy within PG-13 parameters and conceded when his teacher asked him to cut what he calls the pivotal "cuddle scene." The scene shows the two male characters in bed, sans shirts, embracing and talking about their mutual attraction.

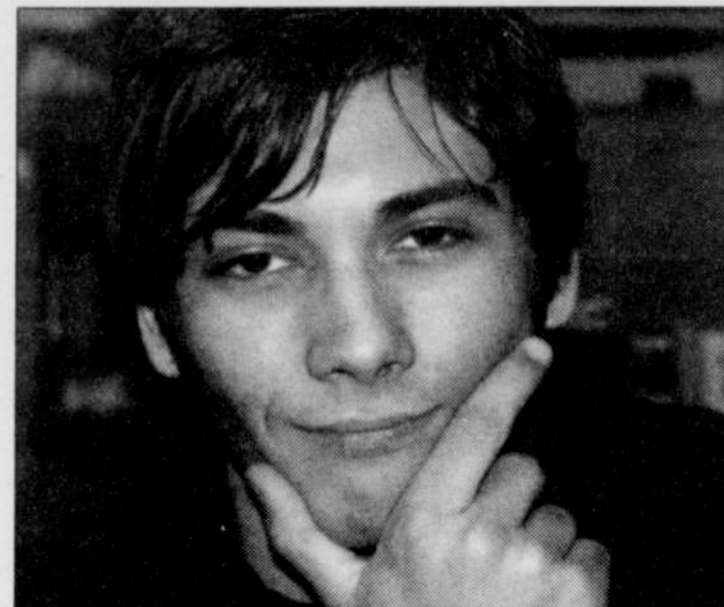
"The scene isn't about sex. It's the scene where my character says he isn't going to hide who he is anymore. I think it's crucial to the story...[but] I wasn't going to get into a battle over it," said Flyte.

At the request of students and with the approval of Flyte's marine biology teacher, he showed the film, in its entirety, in that class. The next school day, March 6, he was called into vice principal Tim Fields' office, facing what amounted to a suspension. Flyte said he was told it was mandatory that he transfer to a community college. Fields did not return calls seeking comment.

After 3 1/2 weeks of suspension and a meeting with school officials, his mother and lawyers, Flyte returned to West Linn High. Though his record was free from behavioral problems, he showed spotty attendance. Flyte agreed to have perfect attendance for the remainder of the school year, insisting he wished to graduate with his friends.

The teen kept his promise, with the exception of two excused tardies—one from his guitar teacher, who called the tardy an oversight, and one due to a nosebleed, which his mother alerted the school about.

Fast-forward to the day before the senior prom. Flyte and his girlfriend had planned to attend. The limo had been reserved, a dress purchased, a tux rented. Tickets set the teen back \$50. Although Flyte said he had been cleared by Fields to attend the



Brandon Flyte says he took heat from West Linn High School administrators for a gay-themed film project.

prom, he was called into the office April 28 and told he would not be allowed to go. He was threatened with arrest if he showed up on the premises.

"There's a whole load of things I missed out on," Flyte said. He was suspended from school again, allegedly for an "outburst" upon hearing that he was barred from the prom. Flyte said he demanded a reason for the change but did not raise his voice or use profanity.

Before the five days of Flyte's suspension passed, he received a letter informing him that the school would initiate expulsion proceedings. He was offered an administrative hearing, but his attorneys waived that right, instead asking for an expulsion notice, which he has never received.

Attorney Patrick Angel, who represents the Flytes, called the series of events with the school administration an "unattractive power struggle" and said: "It was becoming evident...that West Linn administrators decided to demolish what they perceived as Brandon's willfulness, audacity and noncompliance. To be candid, this was a petty and mean-spirited reaction to what was instead Brandon's expression of autonomy, self-assuredness and individuality—traits that one would expect a learning institution to strive to foster."

Flyte was never allowed to return to school. While he made up assignments and prepared to take math and English exams at the West Linn-Wilsonville District office by a June 14 deadline, his lawyers prepared to file a lawsuit against the district. They are waiting to take action until Flyte receives the diploma but expect to file a \$150,000 lawsuit this month for First Amendment and equal protection violations and a breach in process.

Flyte, who was on track to graduate before his film was shown, believes he would have cruised through his senior year had the "cuddle scene" been between a male and female. "We're led to believe that diversity is encouraged in schools," he said, "but when a 17-year-old straight kid makes a serious gay love story and is expelled for it, it just begs the question of exactly what kind of policy was the administration following?"

Flyte, who would like to work in film production in some capacity, is planning to start community college in California this summer. 19