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OPINION

All I Want is Equality for My Child

And for other children and adults like her

BY KAREN DOLAN

What mother on earth doesn't want equality and health for her child? I certainly do.



I gave birth nearly two decades ago to a healthy, beautiful, intelligent child, who cried more than I thought she would and whose tutu-wearing terrible twos persisted into her tiara-wearing terrible threes. This willful nature turned out to be both her most challenging and her finest quality.

She skipped kindergarten because her mind was so sharp. She built fairy houses during recess and enlisted the whole school in creating a moss-covered, magical twig town. She wrote poems about springtime and belted out preteen pops songs about cute boys. She was popular among her girlfriends.

But she wasn't allowed to use the girls' bathroom. She had shoes thrown at her head when

she wore leggings and lacy tops. She endured public school teachers making the sign of the cross and running off when she walked between classes.

All because my daughter was born transgender.

In high school she became part of the solution. She became an advocate for transgender youth, who suffer discrimination and violence at alarming rates.

With the help of her mentors, she eventually brought her advocacy to Obama White House, where she helped Education Secretary Arne Duncan craft guidance making sure Title IX included nondiscrimination against transgender and gender nonconforming students.

Then came the Trump administration — and the equality that she and so many had fought for was cruelly ripped away. Almost immediately, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos rescinded the very guidance protecting her that my daughter had helped to craft.

My willful child was able to meet with DeVos. She explained what this would mean for children like her who would again be denied the use of the bathroom — and who would continue to

be hit, suspended, and bullied by students and teachers alike.

But DeVos and Trump don't care about my daughter's welfare. They want her very human and civil right to exist in public spaces to disappear.

At the National Prayer Breakfast on May 2, Trump told an audience of right-wing religious leaders about a sweeping new rule that will allow medical professionals and employers to deny health care to transgender children and adults for so-called "religious reasons."

He's already banned transgender soldiers from serving in the military. He's already rescinded protections for transgender students in schools. And he's already stricken the very word "transgender" from any publication by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

However, a beacon in the storm came a day before the ominous Prayer Breakfast announcement: The House Judiciary Committee passed The Equality Act, and it's expected to pass the full House.

This could be a historic victory — not only for my child and the LGBTQIA community, women, and people of color, but for prin-

ciple of equality for all that must stand in any democratic society.

The Equality Act amends the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and many subsequent civil rights-related acts so that they will explicitly and consistently, across all states, provide equal protection against discrimination for the categories of gender identity and sexual orientation.

So that my child can have the same health care as your child. So that my child can have the same right to education, housing, transportation, credit, employment, and existence as your child. So that my child may live freely and equally to others.

My child continues to use her voice loudly and effectively. She is not bowed. But her very right to exist is threatened even more now than when people were throwing shoes at her head.

All I want us equality for my child — and for other children and adults like her. Is this any different from what every mother wants?

Karen Dolan directs the Criminalization of Race and Poverty Project at the Institute for Policy Studies. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

My Goal is for People to Stop Killing Each Other

What does it mean to teach peace?

BY ELLEN BIRKETT LINDEEN

Depending on your age, people associate peace with protesting the Vietnam War, songs, movies and marches of the 1960's, the time before 9/11, quiet getaway retreats, or their yoga class. So what does it mean to teach peace and how would one do it? I think the why is obvious.

I have been teaching all my life — first more than a decade at the high school level and after that, college students. Most of my courses were writing, composition and literature, but at a certain point in my career I heard about the field of Peace Studies, and I wanted to learn more.

I went back to school, completed the most meaningful coursework I have ever undertaken, and began teaching peace. People frequently ask me what it means to teach peace, or even what specifically I teach. Here's the short version.

Conflict is not bad; conflict is

necessary for all people to have a voice, but conflict is not the same as violence. Violent conflict is not inevitable. Just as people can be taught to kill in the armed services, they can be taught to use other methods of interaction. Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution includes concepts, history and strategies so that people can learn to stop being violent. My

goal is for people to stop killing each other. Humans likely do not come from such violent beginnings. This is a well-entrenched myth, but one that is easy to maintain by those whose plan is to perpetuate armed conflict.

Conflict is expected. Most political science courses focus on war, not peace, but courses in peace studies do not necessarily focus only on historical peacetimes.

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Peace studies and conflict resolution coursework uses Harvard Negotiation Project concepts, which delineate roles for individ-

manity. We read, discuss, listen, analyze, agree and disagree, reach conclusions, and discuss more.

A crucial goal within the course is to learn nonviolent ways to bring about needed change in people, societies, communities or countries.

Conflict is expected. Most political science courses focus on war, not peace, but courses in peace studies do not necessarily

focus only on historical peacetimes. Peace does not mean the absence of war; that is called negative peace.

Positive peace is based on eight factors, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace: Acceptance of the rights of others, low levels of corruption, free flow of information, high levels of human capital, good relations with neighbors, sound business environment, well-functioning government, and equitable distribution of resources.

To work for a sustainable peace, people focus on factors to generate positive peace, rather than simply to avoid violence. A more peaceful world, or at least a less violent one, seems like a dream worth envisioning to me, and my students agree.

What if peace has not been achieved only because people thought it was unattainable? Why do I teach peace? Because I believe it is possible.

Ellen Birkett Lindeen, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is an Emeritus Professor of English at Waubesa Community College where she taught Peace Studies & Conflict Resolution and Human Rights & Social Justice.



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