

Time Frame: 8th Grade

In 8th grade I came out to everyone (parents and school) as a homosexual. In 8th grade, I was not at all harassed by other students for being a homosexual and was fairly accepted despite a group of students who would, upon sitting down at a table for lunch, would recite "Don't Be Gay," and shake hands in a certain style they invented. Bruce Mailloux was at that time the principal of my middle school, the Troy Howard Middle School. I would also like to note that both my parents, as well as everyone else in my family have been extremely accepting and supporting of my choice to come out and be myself.

Time Frame: High School, 9th grade-10th grade

Upon reaching high school, I faced daily verbal harassment, such as "faggot", "queer", "homo", "ass-packer", and "you're going to burn in hell!" throughout the first two years (9th and 10th) of high school. During that time I did make complaints to vice principal Bruce Mailloux and principal Butch Arthers. I was only told that the students who were harassing me would receive warnings and what Butch Arthers called, "Diversity Talks." The harassment continued and I often found myself reporting three or even four people in the same day. It was very disruptive to my school work to have to keep reporting people, especially since teachers never took the initiative to address the problem themselves.

Time Frame: about two or three months into 11th grade-end of 11th grade.

I had read about "Gay-Straight Alliances" (GSA's) on the internet, student formed clubs that usually provide support and activism on issues of homosexuality (but certainly not limited to it) within the school. I made an appointment with Butch Arthers and Mr. Mailloux in order to request a formation of a GSA at BAHS. They said it would be okay, but only if I removed the word "Gay" from the title and changed it to something "less disruptive" like the "Diversity Club." I decided to get back to them after I did some research, and sure enough I discovered the Equal Access Act. I returned citing some of the legal implications of the EAA, such as the inability of a school to reject a GSA or change its name. Eventually, after about a week, they decided to allow the formation of the GSA and recognize it as a club at school. I lead it and it was quite successful in the beginning, as we had about seven students attend in addition to three faculty members. However, I soon became aware that it would not continue that way. By the third meeting, we only had three students, mostly because of parents forbidding their children's participation or conflicting sports/extracurricular activities. The announcements for meeting times of the GSA went twice ignored, and was only once read during the time of three weeks. We were provided with an alternative meeting space in the school's small guidance office. I put up posters for the GSA, though they only each lasted about half an hour before a student tore them down. I reported this sort of behavior to the office, and Bruce Mailloux suggested that I only put one or two posters up near the office, where it could be seen if someone tore down the posters. This was ineffective, so I requested that one be put behind glass, which they obliged to do. However, students would use other posters (such as driver's ed. posters) to tape over and

cover mine on a daily basis. Eventually, my poster was removed after a few months. Our meetings were continually lacking in people, and only consisted of the three students Sarah Marshall, Tracy Bantegui, and Ashley Heeter. After about three more meetings, they too dropped the GSA, and I was left to keep it going myself. At that point I decided that the meetings would be ineffective, and so I took other measures in order to promote a positive gay message at school, though I continued to make a point (through the guidance office and word of mouth) that I would make time for meetings if anyone was interested. This is when extreme resistance from Butch Arthers and Bruce Mailloux became apparent.

In Belfast, we had begun what is known as “Outright,” a separate, non-school organization sponsored by the Coastal Aids Network that supports Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning (GLBTQ) Youth. Since I still maintained the GSA, I put up several posters (about five) around school with the above message on it (“Outright supports Gay.....”) as well as meeting time and a note at the bottom that made sure people knew that the message was sponsored by the GSA. Immediately that day, my principal ordered teachers with hall duty to tear down all the posters. I went to Butch Arthers and told him that I had the right to put those posters up, yet he argued that they were too controversial. Later, however, I was able to put the posters up after the issue was discussed between superintendent Bob Young and Mr.Arthers.

At some point I decided saw on television (Ricky Lake) that a student, Natalie Young from Queens, NY was in court because her school had suspended her for wearing a sweatshirt that bore the message, “Barbie is a Lesbian.” I thought, “Hey, my posters are being torn down all the time, why not promote activism through t-shirts, which can’t be torn down. And Barbie is after all considered to be a major role model for girls...if she’s a lesbian than it’s okay for anyone to be a lesbian.” So I made a t-shirt (with iron-on transfers) that bore the message, “Barbie is a Lesbian,” along with a picture of two barbies sitting together on a picnic table enjoying popsicles together. I was called to the office about two hours into the school day. Butch Arthers and Bruce Mailloux told me that six students and two faculty had found my t-shirt to be offensive, and that I must remove it or change into a different shirt. I refused, so they called my father to come and pick me up from school and had me wait in the office. I was quite sure of my legal rights to wear the t-shirt, so I left the office and went back to class. About half an hour later, when I was in Archaeology Class (Teacher was Mr.Lagerbom) I was called back into the office, though I refused to go. After the third call to Mr.Lagerbom, he informed Butch Arthers that I was not coming down to the office. Butch Arthers came to the door and told me that he could have the class evacuated and me arrested. I responded with my legal rights, yet he then told me that he could suspend me for having blonde hair if he wanted to. I refused to come to the office, and after about an hour my father finally left the school on his own. I was called down to the office once again during the 5th period of the day (AP Biology, teacher Elizabeth Mick) (we have six periods in a day, each about 55 minutes long). I did not go down to the office, and at that point was under extreme emotional stress. I went to my final class of the day,

which was Advanced Math, teacher Mr. Vaughn. Butch Arthers came to the door during my class and told me he was giving me one last chance to change the t-shirt. I refused and so was suspended for five (5) days. During those five days I concentrated an extreme amount of energy doing legal research, including the EAA and especially the rights of students to free expression (ie: the school cannot remove a student's right to free speech unless it materially or substantially interferes with school, and they cannot discriminate based on certain messages, like "It's Okay to be Gay"). I also consulted legal advice from an attorney, and a very very good friend of mine, Gail Mackinson. Gail has helped facilitate our Outright meetings and is an employee of the Coastal Aids Network. Upon my return to school, I wore a t-shirt that bore the message, "Proud to be Gay" and dropped off a packet of legal rights, highlighted in areas I felt were most significant, in the school office. I was not called down to the office until the end of the day, in which Butch Arthers and Bruce Mailloux told me that I should make an appointment with Bob Young. Butch Arthers called the Superintendent's Office and arranged a meeting for me, which would take place the next week. It should also be mentioned that the day after I wore my "Proud to be Gay" t-shirt, and was not told to remove it, another student, Jeff Fries, wore a "Proud to be Straight" t-shirt and was told to remove it. I did not actually see his t-shirt myself, though I faced many repercussions through hate and harassment, as it was thought by many students that I now had special rights. My meeting with Mr. Young went well, and I had Gail Mackinson to accompany me. Mr. Young decided I did have the right to wear my t-shirts and so I did several times for the remainder of the school year. Additionally, I also put up about ten posters on a daily basis. I didn't do this all at once; I would have many copies of the same poster, and as soon as I saw it had been torn down, I put up another in the same location. Therefore, I would use about 10 posters per day. I faced no disciplinary action, nor was I called to the office for the remainder of the school year. Harassment was also significantly lessened by the end of the year, though my grades had suffered a lot because of the emotional stress caused by Butch Arthers and especially Bruce Mailloux. It is imperative that I mention some of the things Bruce Mailloux told me in private meetings when I was called down to the office, which I regret not having recorded.

As any person who has taken a radical point of view knows, it is very likely to lose friends. I did in fact lose many friends once I became activist, more even than in my freshmen year of high school. It was what Mr. Mailloux said that bothered me; he told me that my friends wouldn't have abandoned me, and I wouldn't have faced so much harassment if I hadn't "gone activist" and worn sarongs (which had nothing to do with my activism, sarongs were just something I chose to wear because I thought they looked nice). He has at least three times used one of my ex best friends, Tracy Bantegui to guilt trip me into "going back to being myself, to being Adam," and stop doing the activism (by activism, he means posters, t-shirts, the GSA, and the sarongs I wore). Bruce Mailloux would reiterate that "people liked me before I started activism, and [I] had a good support group. But now, [people] don't want to support me." I responded saying that I don't want to be friends with those people, as they were always what I call

“closet supporters,” those people who support you so long as no one else know they do. I told Bruce Mailloux that Tracy was a fair-weather friend, and I still have a lot of “diehard” supporters that held my activism in the highest respect, which is very true. You may read about my activism in a newspaper article that one of my local newspapers, the Republican Journal, wrote about me.

My GPA decreased from an 89.3 to an 81.6 in the course of my junior year. This is due to the harassment I faced, and I often did not want to come to school because of the extreme lack of support by faculty. You may ask any one of my teachers last year, or the years before, and they will tell you that absence played a significant role in my decrease in grades. I even failed College English 3 and American Studies 1 in my junior year, though I am currently making them up in my Senior year. I have read that other GBLTQ students have often skipped school because of fear or the hostile environment, which both existed in my case. Towards the 3rd quarter of the school year I began to get depressed and my parents and I made an agreement for me to see a psychologist, Richard Sanderson. He helped some, though the daily emotional stress at school made a huge “imbalance” in my psyche, so anything Dr.Sanderson could say would quickly be counteracted the following day.

My parents and I fear that Bruce Mailloux is trying to protect Butch Arthers from “stress.” On one occasion a student in my class, Bill Stover, shoved me and turned around and called me a “fuck-face.” I reported this event to Bruce Mailloux, and after school told my parents about it. Three days later, my father called Butch Arthers to ask him about any disciplinary action that had been taken against Bill Stover, yet Butch Arthers denied any knowledge of the happening. Three days! When I questioned them about this, they told me that disciplinary action was confidential and that they could not tell me what was done.

Time Frame: Summer 2004

During the Summer of 2004, I did a lot of reading of articles about self-esteem and self-empowerment. I also read a little philosophy and participated in a national conference for GLBTQ youth at Washington, D.C. This conference was called “Teaching Respect for All” and was sponsored by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). About 130 students from all over the U.S. attended. It was a great event for my self-esteem and through workshops, activities, and social events like “drag bingo” and dances, I regained a lot of the self-confidence that I lost during my first three years of school, as well as during my time attempting reparative therapy. It was a great experience and allowed me to return to school an emotionally stable person for my senior year.

Time Frame: second day of school of senior year (09/01/04)

Over the summer I had created some posters that I wanted to put up at school. Harassment from the students, I noticed on the first day, had dramatically declined. I wanted to start fresh after a year of controversy and extreme emotional stress. I wanted to continue to promote a positive message for homosexuals, especially since that type of message is totally ignored at school. I also wanted the freshmen, who hadn't been at school during my junior year, to know that it's okay to be gay. On the second day I wore a “Gay is Okay/Lesbians

are Okay" t-shirt. I was not called down to the office, nor did I hear any negative remarks. Actually, a lot of students, especially the freshmen thought my t-shirt was cool and were proud that I was standing up for myself.

However, on the third day of school (09/02/04) I requested that my posters I had created during the Summer be put behind glass, that way I wouldn't have to deal with the stress of continually putting up posters all day long, not to mention the cost of paper and printing. The posters bore the messages, "It's Okay to be Gay, Be Kind and Think for Yourself," "BAHS Respects Lesbians and Gays," and "BAHS is a Safe Space for Gays and Lesbians." I gave the posters to Bruce Mailloux, and he said he would look at them with Butch Arthers. Later, during lunch I checked in with them as to what their decision was, and met only with Bruce Mailloux. He originally started off my saying that the posters were discriminatory, as they only included gay issues, and not racial, ethnic, religious, etc. issues. I told him that under the purpose of a GSA is to target the GLBTQ community and promote a positive message only for them, though I made a point that the GSA in no way discriminates against anyone. Bruce Mailloux then changed his argument to say that the posters were disruptive. I told him that the rights of the GSA were protected under the Equal Access Act, and that a school cannot prevent the speech of a GSA just because the ideas are unpopular. In my opinion, I don't think he could even prove that there is a substantial disruption, which is irrelevant in the case of a GSA's speech anyway. Mr. Mailloux of course had to reiterate the guilt trips of Tracy Bantegui and my fair-weather friend support group. We do in fact have an open forum, and both Gail Mackinson and I agreed that the school must recognize the GSA and, under the legalities of the EAA, must give me the same access as other clubs have, such as the bulletin boards behind glass. I decided to make an appointment with Mr. Young myself, and this time it only took two days to get an appointment with him.

I met with Bob Young on 09/03/04 by myself. The meeting did not go as I had hoped. He believed that the GSA only had the rights of other non-school organizations, such as the Boy Scouts of America, or a Religious Club. I argued that the GSA must be recognized, and has already been recognized, as an official club of BAHS, even though we do not receive a stipend. He continued to say that the GSA only has the right to a meeting space, and not equal access to bulletin boards, etc. I think this is all hypocritical considering the legal arguments I have already gone through last school year. They let me put up posters last year, and I know beyond a doubt that I have the same rights as other student clubs, and that under the EAA, they cannot deny that the GSA the right to be an official club. All Bob Young could talk about was how "50 years ago, things were a lot worse." I replied by telling him that discrimination is wrong, no matter how it was dealt with in the past.

At this point, I considered this to be harassment from Bruce Mailloux, Butch Arthers, and perhaps Bob Young. This was blown way out of proportion by the school system. The following week I wore several gay pride t-shirts without any disciplinary action, though the environment remained somewhat hostile. Students continued to shout the typical homophobic remarks like "faggot" and "ass-packer," without any disciplinary action or correction by adult witnesses.

I felt a letter to my school staff explaining how they can promote tolerance as well as how to be more gay inclusive in the classroom would be in order. I consulted adult advisors about the wording of the letter, including Peter Rees. I emailed the letter to every BAHS staff on October 17th, 2004.

This letter was not taken well by my administration. My principal requested that my parents and I have a meeting with him and the vice principal after several teachers complained that the letter was offensive. My parents have always been more than supportive of my choice to be true to myself, and so the meeting did not go well between them and my principal. My mother reminded the principal of a previous contact with an attorney from the Maine Civil Liberties Union who was more than willing to take this to court if need be. We all left that meeting on bad terms.

I realized then that my ability to focus and succeed academically would be seriously impaired if I remained at BAHS. Through a superintendents' agreement I was able to transfer to Searsport District High School (SDHS) after my first quarter at BAHS. Searsport offers a much safer atmosphere that will allow me to focus on my academics rather than daily civil disputes.