

## **Generation Equality; A Report from the Old Dominion**

My reasons for attending the Generation Equality convention at Roanoke College, a gathering of GLBT student groups from all around Virginia held in Salem, Virginia this past weekend were simple; I want to learn, or, to be more accurate, I need to learn. I've come to the realization that if I am going to be more effective as an advocate and activist for the transgender community I not only have to learn about all aspects of the transgender community, which includes a growing number of young people who are beginning to explore their gender issues at an earlier age, I also need to learn about the GLB community, its organizations and its issues since we are allies in a most difficult struggle for some very basic civil and human rights. Like many things in my life, things did not work out exactly as I planned. Instead of being a wallflower, I wound up being an active part of the program.

You see, upon reviewing the schedule in my registration package I noticed that the session entitled "Understanding the Gender Rainbow," slated to be presented by Mary Jones had been cancelled due to illness. Being the sort of person I am, I volunteered to stand in and present my "TG 101" presentation, a canned pitch I've given before. It didn't take a great deal of talking on my part to get the folks from Equality Virginia and Roanoke College who were running the convention to agree. I am almost sorry they did.

You see, as fate would have it, my session came on the heels of Donna Rose's keynote address to the convention. In theory that should have been a good thing since my speil was a natural follow-on to her presentation. However, as I listened to Donna's impassioned discourse on what it means to be transgender, a speech that was punctuated with Donna's usual charm, wit and poignancy, I realized that even if I were at the top of my game, anything I said during my follow-on session would come across as very second rate. Anyone who has ever had the privilege to hear Donna, a self described reluctant activist, speak knows exactly what I am saying. Needless to say, I did soldier on as is my wont, doing the best I could under the circumstances. Fortunately, I was ably assisted by a TG from the Roanoke area named Erin who added some of her own personal insights and thoughts on the subject as well as helping me get around some the potholes I came across as I staggered along the road to enlightenment. For that, I am thankful.

At the end of the presentation something most wondrous happened. A young college student, and to me they're all young regardless of their age, came up to Erin and I and announced that he suspected that he had issues regarding his gender. Since he lives in the Fredericksburg area, not far from my humble abode, I invited him to contact me and perhaps attend a meeting of the local support group I work with. I hope he does. And even he doesn't that brief brush with a troubled soul and providing him with an opportunity to open his private closet door to another made the entire trip well worthwhile.

As to my original purpose, that of learning, I dare say I managed to accomplish far more than I expected. I find every time I have the opportunity to spend time at a GLB event I learn something new, just as I hope members of the GLB community do every time one of us makes the effort to step forward and is afforded the opportunity to put a face to the "T" in GLBT for them. And while it may be true that we have many issues that are unique to our community, concerns and problems that many GLBs will never be able to fully understand, civil rights and human rights are not the sort of thing you can enjoy à la cart. We must all go forward together.

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