

TALK AROUND TOWN

Yes, Karen, gay kids exist

Learning can be uncomfortable — especially when you learn things that challenge your core beliefs.

I remember learning in school about some terrible things committed by enemies of our country. The Death March of Bataan; Nazi concentration camps; Stalin's purges; China's Cultural Revolution; Japanese sex slaves in Korea, known as "comfort women."

Some of our country's own atrocities — the extermination and indoctrination of Native peoples; internment of Japanese-Americans who were treated worse than German prisoners during World War II; firebombing of civilians in Vietnam, for example — were either not mentioned at all or were given a paragraph or two in textbooks. It wasn't until later in life that I learned the uncomfortable truths about what our own country has done. Those truths made me rethink my own world view.

That word — uncomfortable — was at the heart of a recent attempt by some Ashland parents to have local teacher and tennis coach Bob Graf fired. Graf, an open supporter of LGBTQ+ students, made some kids "uncomfortable," according to those parents.

About 100 students, parents and supporters attended the school board meeting at which Graf's contract ultimately was renewed. Some of those kids told the Daily Press in passionate detail about how Graf's words and care had helped them through some of the most trying times in their lives.

Ashland — and every district — needs more teachers like that, not

fewer.

(A similar effort in Washburn, where some parents want a teacher disciplined for using the district's email to send a post about the local Queer Prom, remains unresolved.)

Apparently, some parents think that most everything should be done to keep their kids safe and comfortable from challenging ideas — such as the fact that gay kids and teachers even exist.

Setting aside the fact that Graf very likely would have had a compelling discrimination case to be made had the district

let him go, we should be most concerned that this vocal minority of parents is trying to enforce their own moral code — to dictate what other kids can and can't learn. It's not just about Queer Prom or support for non-binary kids. Parents across the country are trying to have books removed from libraries because they discuss — not celebrate or promote — the fact that gay people are in the world (and that the United States has done some truly horrible things in its history.)

They like to use words like "grooming" or "indoctrinating," code for their belief that any gay teacher is a sex predator trying to turn kids gay or molest them. (If a teacher were capable of such a thing, wouldn't the vast majority of binary teachers have turned all the gay kids straight by now?) And they spread malicious rumors, such as one that even made its way to the Bay Area, that kids who identify as cats had demanded that litter boxes be put in school bathrooms.



PETER J. WASSON

More KIDS | A20



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Zupke unresponsive to constituents

EDITOR: Under the last administration, I was told one cannot just stop in to see the sheriff — you need an appointment. I was then told I have to see the sheriff to make an appointment. You see the problem here, right?

I sent the sheriff a couple of letters requesting an appointment, to which I got no response. Only after the honorable Judge Eaton got involved did the former sheriff, Mick Brennan, meet with me, where he told me he does not respond to letters, nor does he serve anyone who criticizes him.

Today we have a different sheriff, Sheriff Brian Zupke. For the last two months, all attempts to contact have gone unacknowledged. Does the new sheriff's policies match that of the previous sheriff? It seems so. Why aren't our sheriff and other public officials making themselves available to the public they willfully ran to serve? Where has integrity gone here in the Northland?

Sheriff Zupke, I still await an appointment to discuss a safety issue that affects your officers and myself.

Anthony Thorp,
Butternut

What do you think?

Email Letters to the Editor to pwasson@ashlanddailypress.net

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View/from A12

There's a fantastic new trail cabin about a mile from the trailhead that would be snug at any time of year, complete with a little wood stove. There are also two other older trail cabins further along the longer segment.

Before you leave the area, make sure you don't miss out on Corrigan's Lookout. A great snowshoe and fall-color destination, this gorgeous overlook doesn't get enough credit for its spring beauty. The different shades of green from atop the hill are remarkable and contrast nicely with Upson Lake tucked into the surrounding hills. There are several comfortable spots to hang out

and enjoy the view on the rock face. And it's a fantastic spring birding spot. Just sitting in one spot, I heard or saw ovenbirds, black-throated green warblers, common ravens, rose-breasted grosbeaks, hermit thrushes, American redstarts and two more rare sightings: a brown creeper and a bold, bright-scarlet tanager. The drive there on Highway 122 might be a little hard on your vehicle's suspension, but the walk uphill is only a quarter mile, so it's easy on your personal suspension. Get there before the bugs do!

Sarah Morris is a bird-watcher and outdoorswoman who explores northern Wisconsin from her home base in the town of Gingles. She can be reached at [morisoutsideside@gmail.com](mailto:morrisoutsideside@gmail.com).



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY SARAH MORRIS

The Uller Trail system in Iron County offers some spectacular views and a range of different-length loops for hikers and snowshoers.

Kids/from A8

Meanwhile, teachers like Graf — a courageous and inspiring teacher if ever there was one — are saving lives. That's not just rhetoric; almost half of all LGBTQ+ kids have considered suicide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — a number sure to go up as these small groups of parents are demonizing those kids at every turn. A 2017 CDC study found that LGBTQ+ kids are two to seven times more likely to take their own lives than their heterosexual counterparts.

That's the ultimate danger in all this: Kids are being exposed to real, life-threatening danger by parents who are "uncomfortable" with non-binary kids in their midst.

Those parents should face facts: Their kids are going to learn that all sorts of different people exist in this world.


I just hope they don't learn to hate first.

Peter J. Wasson is managing editor of the Ashland Daily Press.

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