



She Proves Excellence is the Antidote to Intolerance

Saline, Michigan, just outside of Ann Arbor, is a typical, conservative small town. The football players and cheerleaders are the school heroes and few challenge the status quo. But Colin Higgins Courage Award winner Rosemary Linares is not your typical Saliner.

Rosemary, an 18-year-old bisexual, began the coming out process during her junior year of high school, telling only her closest friends at first. That summer, she attended a Leadership Training Institute sponsored by Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN). On the way home from the airport, she mustered up the courage to come out to her mother. Though she's still learning, her mother's initial reaction was supportive.

The community on the other hand has not been quite as understanding. "Before I was even out -- just vocally supportive of the LGBT community -- many people mocked, teased and criticized me," said Rosemary.

The discrimination Rosemary experienced was subtle yet powerful. During her junior year Rosemary was assigned to do a presentation on a twentieth century social protest for her social studies class. She chose the struggle for equality for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people.

Her teacher opposed her choice and tried to force Rosemary to either switch out of the class or drop it entirely. Going to the Principal of the high school was little help. He sided with the teacher, claiming her project would create division in the classroom. But Mom put the pressure on the Superintendent of the Saline Area Schools and eventually Rosemary was allowed to give her five-minute presentation to the class. There was no division, just applause.

"This example of discrimination was a monumental experience for me. In the end, my success showed me that I have a lot of inner strength and power that I never acknowledged before," said Rosemary.

For the final class project, each student had to prepare a two-minute speech on his or her hardest assignment of the year. Rosemary spoke about her ordeal over the social protest project. While slightly exceeding the two-minute limit, she captivated the entire class who had no idea what she had gone through. Though she received the longest and loudest round of applause, she received only a B+ on the project.

Braced with newly found confidence, Rosemary set her sights on starting a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) in the school. When word got out, the teacher who agreed to sponsor the GSA was threatened and her classroom vandalized.

This made Rosemary even more determined, but time had passed and the students helping her graduated. Flying solo, Rosemary went ahead with her plans and was thrilled when thirteen people showed up at the first meeting. The numbers continued to grow throughout the first year.

“I was so happy, but a little shocked,” said Rosemary. “I had no idea Saline High had so many people interested in the rights and issues of the LGBT community. I just kept hoping that my work would pay off and it turned out even better than I imagined.”

At the end of the summer Rosemary will be attending Antioch College, a small liberal arts school in Ohio. She hopes to take advantage of the special co-op program where she will have the opportunity to travel, studying and working in other countries.

Eventually, Rosemary says she would like to go on to graduate school and possibly get her doctorate. She said, “My dream is that when I’m towards the end of my life, I will have won some victories for humanity.”

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To arrange to interview Colin Higgins Courage Award winner Rosemary Linares, contact Paul Cates at Pro-Media Communications at 212/245-0510.