

Folks, keep a handkerchief handy. When I heard this testimonial at our November 06 meeting, I cried. When I read it in our newsletter, I cried again. When I reread it prior to posting this, I wept again. This is such a heartfelt sentiment that I wanted to share it with all of you. It makes PFLAG's work so worthwhile. Susan Pollack, referred to in the writing, is PFLAG Houston's transgender coordinator. – Sue Null.

### **TESTIMONIAL by Rose Suenram**

PFLAG: Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transsexuals.

It means:

- Supporting Families
- Educating the Public
- Advocating for Equal Rights

This really didn't mean much to me when I read it on the Internet a year ago. My daughter told me about PFLAG when I told her I needed a support group to help me handle the situation I found myself in. At that time I needed help for me.

You see my story actually began 3 years or so ago. My youngest son Chris came over to my apartment and told me he had always felt like he was a she. We talked; everything seemed okay. We met every Sunday and drank coffee and talked for the next 2 years. I kept calling her Chris, because that was who she was to me, and she seemed to understand that this was going to take a little getting used to. I really never acknowledged her as a her. You see, she was always different. She never fit into society's view of how one should look or act. She wore her hair in pigtails on top of her head and wore weird clothes, crazy socks. I was used to it and the stares she got.

She was changing, but I wasn't. I just went on like things had never changed, just knowing inside. Tim, my husband now, knew (we weren't married at the time). He was and is my best friend, so it was not really so hard telling him.

Well, last year about this time, Suzi called and told me she had been seeing a doctor about becoming a woman and that now she was taking hormones. It stopped me dead in my tracks. It took me a month before I could tell Tim. I can't explain why. It was at that moment of her telling me she was on hormones that it all became REAL. This was nothing I could deny, nothing I could hide. This was real. Suzi was becoming, really Suzi.

I was scared! I was scared for Suzi because I didn't know what these hormones would do to her. I have always been scared for her (as far as being accepted by

society) because she had already had confrontations with the police who would stop her on her bike and ridicule her for looking the way she looked. And there were other people who would not or could not accept her being different. I was scared for myself, because now I had a daughter, not a son. I really didn't understand what that meant to me. This was real, I couldn't deny it or hide it any more.

So a year ago everything seemed to be changing. But I wasn't. I was experiencing feelings that I couldn't understand. And not only was I having a hard time dealing with my own feelings; there were these questions: "How will I tell my family about this?" (which I haven't yet done). "If I'm having a hard time with this, how will it impact them?" "How will I introduce Suzi? Or can I?" "What will people think?" "What about people at church?" "What about people at work?"

This is where PFLAG came in. I needed help. I needed to be with other people who had gone through and were going through the same sort of life-changing experiences I was. I had a hard time finding a support group, so eventually I just asked Suzi for help. She led me to PFLAG. She had been going to PFLAG in Memphis, TN for some time. So that is what led me here. I asked Tim if he would go with me and he did; how thankful I was he even wanted to. I was absolutely terrified. When Susan Pollack greeted us and asked if we had a gay, lesbian or transgender child, I couldn't say anything. It was Tim who confessed. I know "confessed" is a hard word, but that is how I felt at the time. I was completely withdrawn and in shock at Susan's excitement that we had a transgender child. I was also in awe of her reaction and enthusiasm that someone had finally come. She also had a transgender child and had waited so long for other transgender family members to come. That opened a door for me that couldn't have been opened if it weren't for Susan and if I had not come.

On our 3rd visit, when we went to a regular group meeting that was not all about transgender, I began the first part of my healing. One of the parents said, it was like going thru a death, the death of the child you gave birth to, and now the birth of the child you have now. I couldn't hold back the tears. It was so hard. But it was important for me to understand that these feelings I was experiencing were similar to grieving. This is something only another parent would understand. Even though our situations are different, they are the same.

Support, yes, PFLAG is like a life thread that has helped and is helping me through the different stages of this journey that I now go thru with my daughter. Also, I have found I am not the only one, I am not alone. PFLAG doesn't judge me; it's a place I come once a month to be with family to talk about my family if I choose to.

I don't have the right words to say about the Education PFLAG provides. Each month I have learned more and more from the great programs we have had. Education is key. But I still get sad because even with education, people have to listen and have an open mind.

Advocating for Equal Rights : I never knew how hard people worked in this area and how hard this job will continue to be.

So I guess I am learning that there are different stages that I, we, go thru in this journey together.

I am now on this journey with Suzi. I love her. I am proud of her courage, proud she always has been able to be herself no matter how painful it can be and has been at times. That she is able to be the one who is REAL.

Thankfully Suzi has been the one who has allowed me to take things slowly. So I talk to her and to Tim, my husband, honestly about all my concerns. Tim is the one who keeps me grounded. Suzi reminded me that it took all her life to get this far; she is now 29. She said I've only had 3 years to deal with it, so I shouldn't feel so bad. But it is hard. Even though I am slow, through her and others like you, in PFLAG, I am learning how to become REAL.

There is one more thing PFLAG has shown me. I came here for me. But I have found that our children need us. They need to know we are here wanting to support each other and them. I have found out that coming here is not just for myself, or Suzi, but for all of us. It is not just about me anymore.

– Rose Suenram -----