

## FIRST DRAFT

I was born into a very liberal family living in one of the most liberal cities in the country so my political alliance was, I believe, decided from the moment I was conceived. My grandparents are the reason for this. My grandfather was the director of the Massachusetts ACLU and my grandmother founded a pre-school, that I attended, inspired by the Freedom Schools of the 1960s that were founded on philosophies of peace and justice. My fate as a socially conscience liberal was sealed with gorilla glue.

After pre-school I attended the Cambridge Friends School, a small private Quaker school. CFS forced the idea of diversity and acceptance on all of its students. There were affinity groups for all the different minorities, including gay and lesbian students. Around the same time that I transitioned to CFS my family joined the Workman's Circle. The Workman's Circle is a secular Jewish organization that was founded by Yiddish Labor Unionists. I went to Shule classes every other Sunday and learned how the Jews were a people who had always fought against injustice. I later attended Camp Kinderland, the sleep away camp of the Workman's Circle, which furthered my commitment to social justice.

My life took an unexpected turn of events when it was decided that I was going to attend Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, the public high school in Cambridge, rather than a small private liberal high school. I discovered that Rindge was one of the most diverse schools in the nation, which of course I was thrilled about because I had always learned that diversity was G-O-O-D good. Unfortunately, I was not prepared for my first day of high school. I walked into my homeroom on the first day and there were people of all different colors using words like "salted" and "heated", words that I had only ever used in a kitchen. I was completely confused and mad at myself. Was I unwilling to accept difference? It took me two years to realize that the reason I felt so uncomfortable that first day of high school was because none of the communities I was part of growing up were diverse.

A few months into my first semester I was talking to a kid in my homeroom when he told me he was a Republican. I was shocked. There were Republicans in Cambridge? He then proceeded to tell me that his religion was against gay marriage and he too did not believe in it. I was about to write this kid off when he said something that completely shocked me, "I support the legalization of gay marriage." He explained to me that everyone should be able to marry whoever they want because who was he to decide the fate of couples across America. Acceptance is not about agreement but about understanding. I would have done everything in my power in order to stop the legalization of something I did not socially agree with because I was too stubborn to recognize the importance of learning about conservative beliefs. I was a self-righteous liberal and today I am slowly beginning to become a liberal that might finally be ready to listen to what conservatives have to say even if I do not agree with them.

My most life changing experience at Rindge, that truly taught me how to accept difference, was my relationship with my ex-boyfriend. He was Latino and I am white, he believed in Jesus and I identify as a cultural Jew, and the most difficult difference was his lived in an apartment that was one fifteenth the size of my house that holds my four person family. But despite all these differences we absolutely adored each other. Then

one day it came up in conversation that he did not support abortion. This astonished me and I felt betrayed. How could I have developed such feelings for someone who did not believe in my rights as a woman? This conversation sparked many future conversations where we talked in depth about our social beliefs. His opinions on abortion soon began to change as I explained to him what the boy in my homeroom had explained to me, that it was not about agreeing or disagreeing with abortion, in this case, but supporting a woman's right to choose. My opinions on religion changed dramatically as well when he told me that God was his only explanation for the terrible losses he had experienced in his life. I do not believe in a God but he made me realize that there is something bigger than myself out there.

This past Spring my ability to accept difference was put to the test when I had two of my four classes with a girl who represented almost everything I loathed in a conservative. The thing that bugged me the most about this girl was her belief that Israel was the rightful owner of all the land the Palestinians were living on. This was infuriating to me because I have grown-up surrounded by this conflict and if I have learned anything it is that both sides deserve a share of that land. After about three months of my inner anger raging inside of me we finally began to discuss the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Five minutes into our conversation she turned to me and said "Listen, I really like you and want us to be able to be friends so why don't we stop talking about politics and agree to disagree." I was taken aback.

I thought she disliked me just like I disliked her. She didn't though; she had looked past, in her opinion, my crazy liberal views and looked for someone that she believed she could be friends with. I realized I did not know anything about her. All I knew were her politics and I had refused to look past them. I had become the person that I had been taught all of my life not to become. Then I realized that I was the person I had been brought up to be, unwilling to accept and tolerate conservatives. We did not become best friends and we never even talked out side of class so this story does not have a perfect little ending. But this girl left an impression on me. She taught me what 17 years of being surrounded by liberals couldn't. That it is ok to agree to disagree.

My entire life I was taught that difference was good, welcome difference, cultivate difference, accept difference, but only the right kind of difference. However, diversity isn't defined by purely racial diversity but it means having a lot of variety. Race, class, gender and even political variety is necessary in order to have a diverse community of people. If I had not been willing to listen to the boy in my homeroom or fall in love with my boyfriend or look past my disagreement with that girl I would still be that self-righteous liberal living in my own world. I hope to enter college with a new mind set focused around acceptance and tolerance. I am excited to meet more Republicans and learn about why they believe in views that I find preposterous.

### FINAL DRAFT

My fate as a socially conscious liberal was sealed with Gorilla Glue from the moment I was conceived. My grandfather was the director of the Massachusetts ACLU, and my grandmother founded the Dandelion School, a pre-school inspired by the 1960s Freedom Schools that educated children about peace and justice. They walked across the Birmingham Bridge with Martin Luther King Jr. and hid Salvadorian refugees in their home. As far as I'm concerned, you can't get much more liberal than my grandparents.

After attending Dandelion, where three year olds sang songs about Rosie the Riveter and dressed in authentic South African garb to honor Nelson Mandela, I moved on to the Cambridge Friends School. At CFS, diversity awareness was part of the school's DNA. There were affinity groups for Latinos, Asians, African-Americans and gay and lesbian students. My family then joined the Workmen's Circle, a secular Jewish organization, where at Shule each week and during the summer at Camp Kinderland, I learned how the Jews had formed partisan groups during the Holocaust and participated in Freedom Rides during the civil rights movement. By the end of my childhood, I thought I was the epitome of socially and politically aware.

After CFS, my parents thought it was time for a change and sent me to Cambridge Rindge and Latin, one of the most diverse high schools in the nation. I was thrilled because I had always been taught that diversity was G-O-O-D. I walked into homeroom on my first day of school wearing converses and flare jeans and discovered that I was only one of five white kids. Everyone was using words like "salted" and "heated," words that I had only ever used in a kitchen. I felt uneasy, but I was embarrassed to admit it because I thought it meant I was unwilling to accept diversity. I now see that since I had been raised in homogeneous communities comprised only of white, upper-middle class liberals, a diverse urban public school was, not surprisingly, a shock to my system.

I quickly began to adjust to the racial diversity at Rindge, but my lefty upbringing simply did not prepare me for the variety of ideas that I encountered. The first time I ever met a Republican at school was not until my freshman year. I was shocked. There were Republicans in Cambridge? When Ryan declared in homeroom that he was against gay marriage, I was ready to write him off, but then he announced that he *supported* its legalization. He believed that everyone should be able to marry whomever they wanted because who was he to decide the fate of thousands of couples? I had always been given the impression that Republicans were hard-headed and refused to compromise. Yet Ryan's willingness to put aside his beliefs because he did not want to deny a person freedom of expression shattered my pre-conceived notions of Republicans. I would have never been able to support the legalization of something I did not believe was ethically correct. My perception of conservatives was tested again when I had classes with a girl who represented everything that I politically loathed. During our Film Studies class, Lily would commonly express her view that Israel was the rightful owner of the land that the Palestinians were living on, while I was convinced that both sides deserve an equal share. When we finally discussed the conflict outside of class, Lily warmly suggested, "Listen, I really like you and want us to be able to be friends, so why don't we agree to disagree?" I had thought she disliked me just like I disliked her, but she was willing to look past my liberal views. All my life I had been taught not to reject people who were different; when the truth was, I had unintentionally been raised to be intolerant of people whose *ideas* differed from mine. These classmates taught me that acceptance is not about agreement but about understanding. I didn't become best friends with either of them, so, this story doesn't have a perfect ending, but they taught me what seventeen years of being surrounded by liberals hadn't: people should not be defined by their beliefs.

Growing up, I never had any positive experiences with conservatives; in fact I didn't have any experiences at all. Everyone around me was so upset with our Republican government at the time that they forgot to, or purposely, neglected to teach me that it was possible to form friendships with people whose ideas were different than mine. I am not

angry or resentful about my upbringing because I was ultimately given the opportunity to form my own opinions. I was sent to a high school that challenged my ideas of whom I should and shouldn't be friends with. I have always known diversity was G-O-O-D but not until I was actually in a diverse environment did I come to terms with the consequences of growing up in a bubble of lefties. I may have been raised in one of the most liberal cities in the country, but I learned even liberals, as politically correct as we are, need to be more accepting.