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PostEverything Perspective

## My 7-year-old daughter Henry is transgender. She'd change Trump's mind.

Gender isn't complicated if you actually get to know transgender people.



By Jen Aulwes February 24

Jen Aulwes lives and works in Minneapolis with her husband and three children.

MINNEAPOLIS — Last spring, when I heard [Donald Trump say that Caitlyn Jenner](#) could use whatever bathroom she wanted at Trump Tower, I breathed a sigh of relief. There weren't many things Trump and I agreed on, but this was one. Surely, I hoped, if he became president, he would extend the same courtesy to my 7-year-old daughter, Henry.

That hope was destroyed Wednesday night, when Trump's administration [rescinded the federal order](#) that protects kids in public schools so they can use the bathroom that fits their gender identity. We had told Henry that she could use whatever bathroom she wanted [because the president said so](#). Well, the former president said so. The new president said no.

The first time we knew that Henry was different, she was 2. When she found her cousin's Barbie doll, she lit up like a Christmas tree. "The hair, Mama," she cooed. "Look at her looong hair!" Henry continued to show us, in every way she could, that she wanted to live as a girl. This was new territory. What do

you say when your 3-year-old boy asks to be Rapunzel for Halloween? In our house, you say yes. So began a long journey: Elsa socks one day. A sparkly shirt the next. Soon, she was growing her hair out and loving nail polish and tutus.

One day, she asked me if she could get “real” girl clothes — not just costumes but clothes a “real girl” would wear. So I took her shopping before her first day of kindergarten, and we invested in her first girl wardrobe. Parents are usually anxious about their kids’ first day of school, but this added a bizarre extra layer of panic for us. We met with administrators and contacted her teacher. She needed to be herself, but we wanted to make sure she was safe, too.

Fortunately, she would be. We live in Minneapolis. [Our school district](#), our city and our state have some laws and policies [on the books](#) to protect Henry and her rights. Minnesota is probably one of the safer states in the country for kids like Henry.

By this point, it was clear to everyone who knew Henry that she had no interest, or comfort, in being a boy. She was a little girl and determined to live as one. She had no political agenda; she was 5. She had no idea that there *were* political agendas concerned with who she was. She only knew that she had to be who she was.

We did the research. We got on board. We asked her about using different pronouns, and she said, “Yes, PLEASE.” She wanted her parents to affirm who she was, to honor it. She’s decided to keep her name, Henry (“It’s my *name*, Mom”), although that could change. It’s up to her.

Bathrooms are a big deal for Henry, a point of clear anxiety and worry. She always searches for a family restroom in public places, or one where she can lock the door and avoid other people. “I *looove* this bathroom,” she’ll say when

she finds one of those. But Wednesday night, I told her that President Trump “took away the rule” that said all kids could use the bathroom they felt most comfortable in; I told her this only to explain why I was asking her permission to share her story. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have burdened her with a politically motivated move in a far-off city that wouldn’t change her life here. And what did she say, my somewhat shy, people-pleasing kid? She said: “I don’t care. I’m going to use the girls’ bathroom, anyway.”

“Rise up,” I whispered under my breath.

I quickly made sure she knew that she could still use the girls’ bathroom at school and nothing had to change right away. But even so, I have my own new fears — fears I can’t bear to put on her shoulders yet. I worry that this reversal will give an underhanded, whispered permission to discriminate against trans kids like her. If we move across the state line to Wisconsin or Iowa, is Henry any less a person? What will happen to children in rural, conservative towns across the country? Will school administrators have to make a choice between getting state and federal funding or treating all students with dignity and respect?

Even against all those fears, though, I found something that gives me hope. Last year, in neighboring South Dakota, Gov. Dennis Daugaard (R) had a bill on his desk that would have banned students from using the bathroom that’s right for them. Many people spoke out, and at one point, Daugaard admitted that he had never met a transgender person. The local transgender community invited him to meet with them. He did. A few days later, [he vetoed the bill](#). It’s almost impossible to deny a person’s humanity after you’ve shared a cup of coffee with them. Most people in our lives, people all across the political spectrum, had never met a trans person before they met Henry. But after they spend a little time with her, learn a little more about her, not a single one would insist she use the boys’ bathroom.

I would welcome Trump if he wanted to visit Minneapolis and meet Henry. He'd probably get a kick out of her "big league" My Little Pony collection. After he met her, I can't imagine he would think she belongs in the boys' bathroom, either.