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Yesterday had me speaking at McKinney School of Law at Indiana University in Indianapolis. And once again, I met people who are thirsty for words of hope and ideas on how to better live with each other—especially with those who are “other.”

The sense I got was that McKinney took a bit of a chance to have me—a transgender person who doesn't lecture on the law but rather shares about the need for greater compassion—speak to its students and faculty. This sense was reinforced by flyers and announcements that adorned the law school lobby advertising speakers on topics like copyright law and “the heart of the Constitution.”

My talk combined parts of my Gray Area Thinking® human inclusivity training with Transgender 101 (each a two-hour talk) into a single one-hour presentation. Somehow, I made it work, as evidenced by almost all the 70+ people in the room seeming to pay attention throughout. (Many thanks to Wende' N. Ferguson, Senior Associate Director for Student Affairs and to Lambda Board President Trevor for helping to make my visit a reality—both answered my cold call in December asking if I could speak at the law school.)

A part of my talk referenced a growing group of transgender humans—trans kids and youth who early in their lives identify in a gender that is opposite the gender they were assigned at birth. I spoke of how the internet was critical to this group since it allows parents to understand that other parents have such children (meaning they aren't alone). The internet also proves that their kids aren't “crazy” and offers information about support groups, therapists, doctors, and other resources to help with the challenges their child will face. I also referenced the mothers of trans kids/youth and said, “Those moms are ‘lionesses’ who will never take ‘No’ relative to their child. Just don't even try to fight them because you will lose.”

Unbeknown to me, in the audience was just such a mother. After I finished, she approached and said, “Ellie, I'm one of those lionesses you spoke about.” The woman, Jami Sayeed (I have Jami's permission to use her name), explained that she put her career on hold to do what was necessary for her transgender son as he was growing up. Once her son entered college, Jami resumed her education, which now involves being a first-year law student at McKinney. I was so very impressed by Jami's dedication to her son—it's not easy living in Indiana with a transgender child and that's today, compared to even greater marginalization ten years ago.

Other students approached after my talk to express appreciation for my words and mere presence on campus (which took the work of Wende', Trevor and others). It was clear that my message about compassion for others and for self really hit its mark, as intended.

The drive from Indianapolis to Minneapolis was interrupted by a snowstorm that forced me to spend the night at a hotel in rural Illinois. It was still snowing lightly this morning when I set off again (lending to a few white-knuckle moments) but eventually, I made my way home to sunny Minneapolis. After ten days of traveling, 3,287 miles and countless fast food stops along the way (I know, but McDonalds is one of my few remaining vices), I made it home.

My trip taught me so much—good stuff—about humans and our collective struggle to survive the Human Condition. I'll do a final blog post with thoughts and reflections once I unpack and have a chance to simply be planted in one place. It feels good to be back!

ellie

#elliesroadtrip4hope #connecthumans

