

“I Want to Wake Up”  
A Speech to the National Press Club  
By Jennifer Finney Boylan

*This speech was given at the National Press Club in May 2007, on the eve of lobbying Congress with other trans people and allies for passage of the Employment Non-discrimination Act and the Hate Crimes Bill. The text is © 2007 Jennifer Finney Boylan.*

Thank you. Look at you all. It’s very cool to see all of you gathered in one spot, all these trans people and their allies.

There are a lot of things I don’t know, but I know this: Tomorrow is going to be a great day.

One night recently, my children and my partner and I were talking about the usual stuff at dinner – about whether bloodhounds drool too much, about who would win, The Incredible Hulk, or Abraham Lincoln? At one point we even fell into the classic discussion of what makes the best superpower? While I argued for super-speed, my children tried to make the case for Time-Travel, and Flying, and something they called Super-stickiness, which might be the thing that enables Spiderman to climb walls, or which might be something else entirely.

My son Sean was doing a book report on Martin Luther King at the time. And in the midst of our conversation, Sean suddenly looked up at Grace and me and said, “Why did Martin Luther King say he wanted to dream?”

And we said, well, it's good to dream.

My son said he understood that. But why, he asked, didn't Martin Luther King want to wake up? And step out into a world where those dreams are at last coming true?

As I think about all of us – transgendered Americans in this room and across the country, I can't help but think that my son is right. While our dreams give us courage and hope, it is also surely time that we all wake up, and enjoy our rights as American citizens, in a country that respects our diversity, our courage, and our strength.

And so I say to you:

I want to wake up in a country where transgendered people are seen as human, where our curiously gendered lives are seen as one more variation in the rich tapestry of experience, as something not to be shocked by, but as something to be celebrated, and honored, and understood.

I want to wake up in a country where Americans understand that transgender people come in all shapes and sizes and embodiments, where to be a cross dresser or a transsexual or a drag queen or trans man or genderqueer is seen as simply another way of being human, a person endowed by the creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these rights are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

I want to wake up tomorrow.

I want to wake up in a country where coming out as transgender is not seen as the end of the world, but as a beginning, where the lives of people such as ourselves are celebrated, where we are seen as precious, vital parts of a democracy, where we have the right to earn a living without fear of being fired for what we are, where we have the right to get married to the people we love, where the President of the United States will reach out and shake our hands and say that he is proud of everything we bring to the American experience. I want to wake up.

I want to wake up in a country where qualified, hardworking Americans will never be denied job opportunities because of the sexual orientation or their gender identity or expression, a country where every individual will have a fundamental right under Federal Law, to be protected from discrimination. I want to wake up in a country in which the thirty-three states at present where a person can be fired because of her sexuality have to change their laws. I want to wake up in a country in which the forty-two states in which a person can be fired because of her gender identity have to change their laws. I want to wake up in a country in which men and women are judged not by what they are wearing, or whom they love, but by the content of their characters. I want to wake up.

I want to wake up to a county in which crimes against transgender people will never be excused by anybody, ever, for any reason.

Tomorrow morning, when you open your eyes, you will wake up into a country which is changing, one human face

at a time. And in so doing, you will also answer for my family another one of those questions we ask around the dinner table, namely, who is the best superhero? Wolverine? Spiderman?? Thomas Jefferson? And what exactly does it mean, in the end, to be a hero?

If you ask me, the best superheroes are the transgender people in this room and all across America. In your grace, your courage, in your unquenchable desire to make this a better country, you are all heroes.

It is an honor to be here with you all, fighting this fight. With all our super powers tomorrow – super love, super compassion, and yes, even a little bit of super-stickiness--I know that in the morning, we are all going to wake up to a better country, and to a better future.

Tomorrow is going to be a great day.

Thank you.