

Level I

Honorable Finalist

Morgan Way

(Grade 6: Rocky River Middle School, Rocky River. Sponsor: Therese Konrad)

Letter to Donna Gephart concerning her book, *Lily and Dunkin*

Dear Donna Gephart,

Why is it that the word ‘boy’ belongs to people who have short hair and are athletic? Why is it that girls are people who care only about looks, have long hair and wear makeup? Why is it that we make people feel as if they are one or the other, expecting them to conform to stereotypes, so much that they start believing it? So much that they feel that being themselves, is a mistake?

It’s a problem so many of us face, yet so little of us acknowledge. This makes these people, transgenders, feel so much more alone in this world than they really are. They are people too, people just the same as any of us, yet we see the need to give them a title that will forever change their life, both in bad and good ways-one that they don’t even want. We see the need to make them feel out of place.

But these seem to be the rules: A person is a girl or a boy, determined by other people at birth. Sadly, I know every person in this country has looked or will look at a person and based on their looks, will decide if that person is worth their time or not. So when they look at a girl who looks like a boy, they’ll walk around them, not offer to sit with them at lunch.

It seems that in this world, we are ruled by words, simple words that limit our life to one path.

Some people can’t even afford a dress, while we just stand around contemplating who has the rights to wear a dress and who must wear a suit. People are dying around us, and we just wave it off, because, hey, they are girls or they are boys, and they played by the rules. We are spending our time on words when we could just accept people as they are, because that acceptance makes them strong, makes them feel the love of family.

Some people just want to choose. They want to determine what life they have and who they are. So they switch genders. And most people have no problem with that, in fact, some even admire transgender people. But some just don’t see it right to want to change who you are. Even if your own skin feels like a cage.

This goes way beyond transgender. It also has to do with the stereotypes we put on people, for example: sports. Take sports, for example. When people think of football players, they probably conjure images of men or boys wearing shoulder pads and jerseys tackling each other; when they think of cheerleading, they probably imagine girls in short skirts shaking pompoms. But can a girl play football is she wants to? Can a boy be one of the cheerleaders in the squad? So long as people are capable of doing something, like a girl who is strong, fast, with excellent hand-eye coordination, or a boy who can dance and move a crowd to its feet, are there any real reasons for stopping them from doing what comes naturally?

I know that by writing this letter I will probably not make a difference in the world, but I will try to open the eyes of our community by raising its awareness to this issue. A favorite quote of mine: ‘I was human, I am human now, being transgender doesn’t make me any less human.’

(Anonymous) We are people, they are people, we are resolute, they are brave, and that's all that matters.

Lily Jo McGrother is stronger than all of us combined. She is the main character in '*Lily and Dunkin*'. Even though her father does not accept her true self, she does not let that get her down. This book travels through the 8th grade life of Lily. When she stands up to people, she is standing for those who can't, for those who are bound to their chairs by words, pelting them and hitting them until they are too weak to ride against the current. Lily, born Timothy, stands up for what she wants and persists until she is heard. This is a feat in itself, but she also listens. She gives everyone their say and opens her mind, even though so often she must be silent. But even in silence, Lily Jo McGrother shouts a message just by being: we cannot be controlled by mere words and ideas, and by being controlled by ideas and words, life tells us that we aren't doing things right, because everyone has a place.

Sincerely,

Morgan Way, age 11