

AFTERMATH



CONNOR HOLLINGER



SUBMITTED



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Top photo, three K-9 units walk toward Lancaster Public Library during an evacuation order due to multiple bomb threats Saturday, March 23. Left, Christopher Paolini, 38, of Berks County, who performs as "Miss Amie Vanité," reads a book during a Drag Queen Story Hour in this undated photo. Next, a Lancaster city police officer tapes a section of North Queen Street near the intersection of West Orange during the evacuation order.



KAREN CARNABUCCI
FOR LNP | LANCASTERONLINE

As play-acting experts, kids recognize the joy in drag

Some people are getting their boxers in a bunch, all because a man dressed up in women's clothing and a big-hair wig was supposed to read stories to children at Lancaster Public Library on Saturday, March 23.

I understand that the dressed-up man sometimes plays the guitar and (horrors!) sings cute songs.

Because of this, some people assert that the library is corrupting little children and the civilized world as we know it is about to end. Worse yet, this point of view is being promoted by people in certain leadership positions — such as Lancaster County Republican Commissioners Josh Parsons and Ray D'Agostino and the GOP members of the East Hempfield Township Board of Supervisors. They have suggested that tax dollars should stop going to the library because of this kind of event.

If people took a moment to take a deep breath and visit the library — an institution of information — they would dis-

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JAMES P. SENFT
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Sadly, hate does have a home here

I've seen a hashtag used all over social media by Lancaster County residents over the past week, and I've seen the slogan on signs in front of homes, churches and businesses. The message is simple: "Hate Has No Home Here."

As much as I appreciate the ideal, however, hate clearly does have a home here, and it's lived here longer than any of us.

If hate didn't have a home here, there wouldn't have been bomb threats over a story time event at a public library. If hate didn't have a home here, local preachers and their congregants wouldn't show up to Pride festivals annually to tell attendees that they're going to burn in hell. If hate didn't have a home here, our local public officials wouldn't continuously fan the flames of division with their rhetoric and double down on it when asked for contrition.

Hate has lived here for a long time, probably before 1763 when the Paxton Boys, a vigilante group, murdered unarmed Conestoga Indian men, women and children who were being

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Carnabucci: *Kids recognize joy*

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cover that there are time-honored traditions of men wearing women's clothing, going back to the tragedies and comedies of the Greeks and the Romans, when men actors dressed up as women characters on stage.

In Shakespeare's day, boys and men in female clothing played the female roles. That's right — the classic characters like Desdemona, Juliet and Lady Macbeth that we study in high school were portrayed by males.

Today we find the highly respected Kabuki, the Japanese theater form that originated at the beginning of the 17th century, employs men for all roles, and the male actors who portray women even have a special name. During the Christmas season in Britain, whole families attend hugely popular shows known as pantomime — or "panto," for short — in which men garbed in over-the-top costumes and silly hats play out well-known children's stories such as "Aladdin," "Cinderella" and "Sleeping Beauty" with generous amounts of slapstick and lipstick.

That's not to mention the classic 1959 movie comedy "Some Like It Hot," in which the characters played by Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon dress as women to hide out

from gangsters. Also consider Cpl. Maxwell Klinger (played by actor Jamie Farr) in television's long-running "M*A*S*H," Robin Williams' character in the 1993 movie "Mrs. Doubtfire" and Tyler Perry's title character in his "Madea" films.

Through the centuries, people have gotten married, reproduced the next generation and carried on with life without the crumbling of civilization when men dress up as women. That's because this dressing up is entertainment, folks! Drag is an art form, and people who dress up in drag are performers. They're pretending!

The people who know most about pretending are children. Children are experts at pretending, whether they are playing "house" or dressing up as pirates, princesses or astronauts. Give any child some dress-up items — funny glasses, scarves and the like — and they know exactly what to do with them. They know they are play-acting, and they are more intelligent and perceptive than many of us give them credit for. They know when a man is playing and wearing a woman's dress, dolled up with sparkly makeup and a big wig — and when he is not.

Play is essential to human development

and well-being. Read up on play and you will find that it stimulates competency and creativity as children's brains grow. Research shows that our brains become activated during play, developing important neural connections in the prefrontal cortex and supporting emotional regulation and problem-solving. Play releases chemicals in the brain that aid in memory, motivation, attention and mood. In fact, play is the preferred form of psychotherapy for children who are struggling with anxiety, depression and trauma.

For the final stop on our library tour, I direct you to the science section. Although there are many who will say that males are males and females are females, it's rarely that simple. A prime example is the seahorse, the creature that lives in the ocean. In the seahorse world, it is the male of the species that becomes pregnant and incubates the mass of eggs that will be birthed into baby seahorses. And that's just one example of the countless varieties of gender expression in our universe.

Being attracted to the same gender is not a mental illness. Not identifying with one of two binary genders — male or female — is not a mental illness. People who feel that they have been assigned the incorrect gender at birth are not showing signs of

mental illness. People who perform in drag are not necessarily LGBTQ+ and dressing in drag is not a sign of mental illness.

One thing, however, is for sure. Fearmongering about people in drag greatly harms our neighbors and friends in the LGBTQ+ community. Fearmongering exaggerates situations to the point of misinformation, creates prejudice and condemnation, and manipulates people into reacting with high emotion rather than rational judgment.

We need our teachers and our libraries to educate our children about the facts of our world, so that all of us are equipped with the knowledge and the skills of rational thinking and perspective to deal with the inevitable complexities of life. If libraries can instill a love of learning and reading in whatever creative and playful way they can, all the better.

Now, some questions: Why is it that when children see a person dressed in drag, they see someone dressed in a costume like for school dress-up day, Halloween or a class play? When some adults see a person dressed in drag, they respond with curiosity, friendliness and openness? And when other adults see someone dressed in drag, they think of sex? Reflect on that, look inside and find the answer, if you dare.