



general gayety

by leslie robinson :: *qnotes* contributor

The fabric of our lives

We Americans like to express ourselves with our chests.

I'm not speaking of Jane Russell or even Arnold Schwarzenegger.

I'm talking about our proclivity for wearing T-shirts with slogans on them. Americans have been human billboards for decades.

The slogans on T-shirts celebrate, advocate, advertise, unify, decry and polarize. Americans have lots to say — on shirts made in Honduras.

So, it makes sense that one part of the gay story in this country is being played out in cotton/polyester blends. Over the past years high school students and younger kids on both sides of the gay issue have been wearing their hearts on their sleeves. And, getting sent home for it.

The latest shirt-skirmish is still unfolding at a middle school in DeSoto Parish in Louisiana. Student Dawn Henderson wore a shirt reading "Some Kids are Gay. That's OK." Principal Keith Simmons ordered her to change her shirt or go home.

It occurs to me that any kid aiming to get out of a test at school doesn't need to fake

the flu — just don a controversial T-shirt and in minutes you'll be back home watching "Judge Judy."

According to the ACLU of Louisiana, DeSoto school officials claimed the shirt was "distracting." The ACLU sent Simmons a letter arguing that Henderson has a First Amendment right to express her opinion across her chest, as long as the school allows clothing with slogans.

If the school decides to forbid clothing with slogans, it might be hearing from Nike.

In another T-shirt to-do, which actually began back in 2006, the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled a month ago that students at Neuqua Valley High School in Naperville, Ill., could wear T-shirts saying "Be Happy, Not Gay."

The court maintained a "school that permits advocacy of the rights of homosexual students cannot be allowed to stifle criticism of homosexuality."

May the judges' T-shirts ride up with wear.

On Nov. 2 last year, Election Day, senior Kate Cohn made a pro-gay statement at Falcon High School in Peyton, Colo., by wearing a shirt reading "Marriage is so gay." She said Principal Mark Carara told her the shirt was offensive and violated the dress code forbidding clothing potentially disruptive to the academic environment.

I'm guessing that means fish-nets are out. At least for guys.

Cohn's mom said Carara later likened the T-shirt to apparel promoting alcohol or drug use.

That increasingly well-known arbiter of fashion, the ACLU, sent a letter to school administrators demanding Cohn and others be allowed to wear the shirt and the two-week ban was lifted.

Perfect. Two weeks gave her enough time to wash her shirt and make it all pretty for its re-debut.

I can say with certainty that T-shirt tizzies haven't been limited to the younger set or the recent past. Back in the mid-'90s I covered a protest by adults in Hampton Beach, N.H., outside a T-shirt store that peddled a couple of anti-gay shirts. One read "Silly faggot, dicks are for chicks" and the other said "Aids Kills Fags" or something of that ilk.

What I remember best is a teenager pointedly buying one of those shirts during the protest, then sheepishly returning it afterwards because he needed the money to get home.

The other day I spotted a different T-shirt twist to the American LGBT story. Openly gay veteran political consultant Fred Karger, in Washington, D.C., to file for the Republican presidential nomination, met with the Republican National Committee chairman.

Karger — completely unknown to the public and, to repeat, openly gay — told "Roll Call," "We had a great meeting. I gave him one of my T-shirts."

I'd like to know what slogan is on that shirt. Maybe "Karger 2012: No, Really." ::

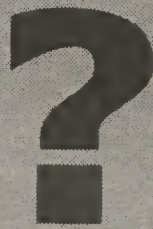
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VIEWMS

qpoll

Federal courts have ruled consistently that students' rights to free speech and expression while at school extend to their wardrobe. LGBT students have benefited from these rulings, but should other students be allowed to wear clothing with anti-LGBT messages?



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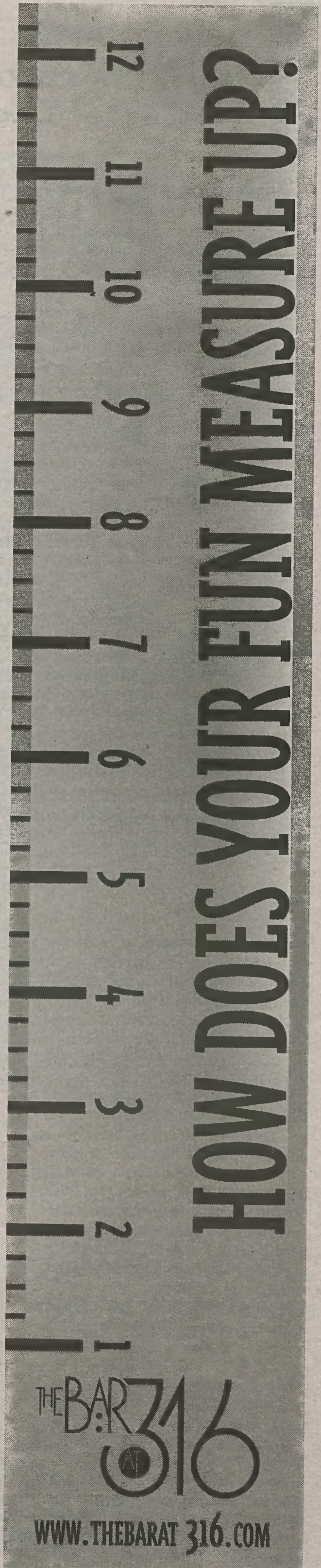
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