

Letter From Massachusetts

by Eugene Narrett

Our Mr. Brooks



Hometown of John F. Kennedy, Brookline, Massachusetts, blends small-scale charm with a shabby urbanity. Plugged like a weak rib into Boston's west edge, Brookline is laced with picturesque trolleys and dotted with quaint buildings. Its citizenry is an odd mix of recent immigrants from Russia and the Caribbean, college students, seniors, a tasteful dollop of minorities on welfare, and hip singles battening on rent-controlled apartments. Brookline is home base for Planned Parenthood and for gaily proud Congressman Barney Frank, famous for dancing with his husband at Beltway balls. All in all, the town boasts a ferocious political correctness rarely seen outside Cambridge, Berkeley and Ann Arbor.

My primary example of Brookline *chic* concerns a lifestyles initiative at the Runkle School, a K-8. It was a sort of unofficial pilot project, a counseling program not yet packaged for national distribution. As of this writing, the story hasn't spread much beyond the boutiques of Beacon Street. And no wonder; the key players prefer it be a secret, for in its small, ugly way it exposes the heart of our contemporary darkness. Perhaps similar initiatives are at work in your neighborhood.

In fall 1993, about a year into Bill Clinton's term, Craig Goddard was surprised when his kids came home from school talking about how a woman could turn into a man. The mommy of one of their classmates was becoming a daddy, they said. The school guidance counselor was telling them all about it. Goddard asked around and learned that other parents were hearing similar stories. Alarmed, several of them contacted school principal Martin Sleeper for further information. "We weren't challenging them at first," Goddard said. "We

were just trying to get information."

Sleeper verified that Brenda Stern, Runkle school guidance counselor, was speaking with first-grade students about the sex-change. The physical appearance of the parent in question was much altered. She was dressing like a man ("like a teenage boy," Goddard recalls) and developing facial hair. Her voice was cracking.

Principal Sleeper confirmed to parents that the transsexual had been meeting regularly with himself and Stern to lobby for the meetings with the first graders. The transsexual had insisted on being present when the children were counseled so that she could answer their questions directly. Sleeper refused to provide concerned parents of other children in the class with any verbal details or written notes on the contents of these meetings. He did confirm, states Goddard, that "they were trying to convey to the kids that the sex change was just another type of normal experience."

"Counseling" was deemed necessary partly because the lesbian was often at the school, "helping out" four or five days a week in the kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. So her mutation was on display as a kind of show-and-tell. Why not make it formal counseling? Guidance counselor Stern defended her talks with the children. "We wanted them to hear it from one source," she said. "Not from 18 sets of parents."

Goddard recounted that parents asked Stern whether she had any professional experience or training with this kind of counseling. She acknowledged she did not, but said she felt it necessary to be "sensitive" to the concerns of the transsexual parent and "to any questions the kids might have."

While Stern and Sleeper were attentive to the transsexual's urgent agenda, they were less sensitive, though not less curious, about the other kids' families. In the course of discussions with the principal that continued into spring 1994, Goddard learned that not only did Stern and Sleeper counsel the first graders on the normalcy of the sex change, but that they solicited information about the personal lives of the other parents. "In my son's case," said Goddard, "they wanted to know about my divorce." Religion and other "lifestyle"

topics were compared to the sex change as examples of cultural diversity.

Principal Sleeper and guidance counselor Stern may have been diligent in pursuing their therapeutic mission and curious in soliciting personal data about the students' families. But they were not thorough in all matters. For one thing, they had failed to alert parents to the latest item on the public school erotic agenda. Little surprise, perhaps, but like many schools in Massachusetts and elsewhere in these days of expanded lifestyle counseling, each grade at Runkle has a parent designated to act as intermediary between families and administrators. In this case, however, the parent was kept in the dark. When finally alerted to the situation, the intermediary's response was instructive, for it was strictly a procedural one. While critical of the school for failing to contact parents in advance, she refused to criticize the fact or content of the counseling itself.

After several months of largely fruitless meetings (the transsexual continued to work several days a week at the school as a volunteer), the story leaked to the press. A couple of cable stations picked it up and it briefly was a small media event. At this point, Brookline's Superintendent of Schools ordered Sleeper to apologize to parents. He did so, for failing to notify them in advance about the counseling. The limited nature of the apology was neither an accident nor an oversight. At a Parents and Teachers Organization meeting, the treasurer, a member of the state teachers' union, stated that his primary concern was to "protect the Brookline public schools" and to "get it [the controversy] out of the media."

I received a similar message when researching the story. Counselor Stern failed to return my calls. When I finally got through to Martin Sleeper and asked if I could have his view of the events, he said brusquely, "I have no comment. That situation is finished. I have nothing at all to say. Nothing." Then he hung up.

But perhaps the matter is not finished. I asked Goddard whether he and the other parents had sought redress beyond the partial apology. Had they consulted a lawyer, I asked. Had they requested the dismissal of the principal or guidance

counselor? “We did talk to a lawyer,” Goddard told me. “And we were informed that unless we could show that the kids had been harmed, we were told we couldn’t sue.” Although million-dollar suits now are filed for falling off a toilet seat, the legal establishment seems to feel that no harm is done by counseling six-year-olds about transsexualism. As for dismissal, Goddard states that parents sought disciplinary action against Sleeper and Stern but were received coldly by the school board. “We heard from other parents that the school now considered us troublemakers,” Goddard said. Another parent commented that the principal’s message to them was that they should “get over it.”

This was not quite the end. Early in 1994, after a program about the case on a local cable station, concerned parents found the transsexual in class the next morning interviewing the children for their response. She was soliciting their questions and talking about the media coverage. “This time Sleeper did ask her to leave the class,” Goddard reports. “But just for the day. Then we were informed that she wanted the other kids to refer to her as “Ben’s daddy.” Sleeper was “supporting this request but I refused,” Goddard says, adding, “I asked him if he would let a parent come into school and proselytize about religion. He wouldn’t answer me.”

We know what the answer to that question is. Prayer and positive comment on Western religion is prohibited by current transgendering of the establishment clause. Multiculturalists are intent that children learn the correct lessons about the oppressiveness of our religion, history, and gender roles. Nothing must get in the way, not European history, not even parental concerns about transsexual tutors in first-grade classrooms.

We probably should not be surprised by the little ruckus at the Runkle School. It’s not unique. Fourth graders in Ashland, Massachusetts, have been led to role-play homosexual couples eager to adopt a child. Seventh graders are quizzed in “Health Ed” about the link between penis size and sexual pleasure. High schoolers are taught 19 methods of birth control. (I’m told that abstinence was not mentioned). Self-styled AIDS educators present eighth graders with condom-puppet shows enacting safe sex for every type of intercourse. It’s a veritable rainbow of options.

Those who protest such curricula are termed homophobes. Robert Murphy, President of the Massachusetts Teachers Union (MTA), recently labeled as “wacky” any parents who wish to be notified in advance of such agendas. He derided them as “members of the Christian Coalition of Pat Robertson fame.” He dismissed as “a bureaucratic boondoggle” a bill in the state legislature that would require ten days’ advance notice to parents before presenting students with information on “homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexualism, drug use or suicide.” Then Murphy concluded his diatribe by claiming that he wanted “to rebuild the trust between the schools and the community.” I wrote to ask him whether we could rebuild this trust by counseling six-year-olds about sex-change operations. There was no reply. In the gay 90’s, trust is a curious thing.

And so the story ends, losing itself in the pathways of our culture. But as with all stories, there is a footnote. Runkle School’s sexual monster is still there several days a week, giving the kids a living demonstration of diversity. I told Goddard I was amazed that after all the commotion the school had not required her to pursue other work. He made clear that the problem is not just the administrators, the principal, guidance counselor, and teachers’ union. “We were running into a majority of very progressive parents who even if they had concerns were bending over backward to support this transsexual,” he told me. “When I complained, they labeled me as Christian Coalition. That’s their standard accusation,” he said.

I asked Craig Goddard if he thought he and the other concerned parents had gotten through to the school, if he thought they would now desist or reflect on their attitudes. “I’m not convinced they won’t do it again,” he replied. “If an issue like this slips by the coordinator, what happens with less bizarre issues? They could be going on as we speak.”

When I wrote about this story for my local daily paper, I was denounced as a homophobe at the college where I teach. Like feminism and homosexuality, transsexual advocacy is apparently beyond reproach.

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Letter From England

by Derrick Turner

The British Buchananites



The present long period of Conservative Party rule in Britain, which has now endured for almost 16 years, has fooled many into believing that we live in a right-wing, conservative country. Even moderate leftists sometimes declaim against the “Tory regime,” the fascistic conspiracy they believe deliberately excludes or discommodes their various pet minorities. The white, middle-class, old Etonian, pinstripe-suited, chub-going male who allegedly controls Britain is still Public Enemy Number One, in many people’s eyes, and is still someone definitely worth hating.

The truth, of course, is rather different. The old “ruling class” has long been eclipsed (although it persists in corners), and British unity and culture is still threatened. Many conservatives understand this, and survey the smoking ruins with sadness and disgust, thinking, with the hymn-writer, that “Change and decay in all around I see.” Just as in the United States, a small minority of these truly conservative conservatives actively campaign for a dispensation that might afford greater protection to our heritage. These assorted campaigners differ greatly in kind, resources, and aims, and rarely work in tandem. But they have certain things in common—an implicit or explicit belief in the principles of hierarchy and historical legitimacy, romantic patriotism, and a sense that there is too much liberalism in daily life, which they feel exacerbates crime, overinflates egos, rewards bad behavior, and lowers all kinds of generally accepted standards.

In Britain, according to J.R. Jones in *The European Right*, “The task of the Right has not been to formulate new principles or develop new political systems, but to try to ensure that the Tory Party followed and practiced those it had inherited from the past, but which its leaders tended to neglect or evade.” Even new right-wing ideas are usually couched in conservative language and launched from within conservative groupings—from Disraeli’s “On Nation” and Joseph Chamberlain’s “Imperial