

Sky Westerlund

From: Pete Akers <burroughscreek@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 31, 2022 1:53 PM
To: Sky Westerlund
Subject: Senate Bill No. 276

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Dear Committee Members: As the son of a blind, single mother I can assure that the underlying "justification" for this Bill is incorrect at best. To base policy on the blanket assumption that a person with ANY disability should be automatically disqualified from parenting is immoral, prejudiced and simply outdated. With love & technology, blind parents face nothing that is insurmountable. My family - all raised by my Mother (Google "Charlotte Sanford") - went to Georgetown, became nurses, doctors, etc. and became pretty good people. I simply can't imagine that a just, kind, moral government would mandate away the love of a parent. This goes against every goal of public policy and it's not acceptable in any way.

Pete Akers
785.550.0420
810 N. Michigan Circle
Lawrence, KS 66044

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Pete Akers
785.550.0420

Sky Westerlund

From: Pete Akers <pariah420@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, January 31, 2022 1:56 PM
To: Sky Westerlund
Subject: Senate Bill No. 276

EXTERNAL: This email originated from outside the organization. Do not click any links or open any attachments unless you trust the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Committee: Charlotte Sanford would have been denied her children - and they of her - under the terms of Bill No. 276. I urge you to read her story and STOP THIS BILL.

I knew that one day I would be writing this, but I never imagined it would be so soon. And while I knew my heart would be heavy, nothing could have prepared me. I have gained an entirely new understanding of "jotting down notes" as each led to memories which led to tears which led to more memories jotted down which led to more tears...well, you get the picture. I was faced with this challenge: how do I capture Charlotte Sanford, my mother, in 500 words, 5000, or 50,000? And the answer was very simple. I can't. Anyone who knew Mom would agree. For those who never met her, I hope you'll be able to get a glimpse of her spirit and its lasting effect on those who knew and loved her.

But how do I begin? I thought about sharing stories from my childhood but what I remember most was always feeling safe and loved. I thought about compiling many different stories from many different times in her life, but how do you decide which ones are the most important, the most profound, the ones that really capture her true spirit? And then I thought of one such moment that speaks volumes about who Mom was in life. At her memorial service in Coffeyville a woman stopped me afterwards - she had something she needed to tell me. Her story was relatively short but as she wept telling me, I could see the difference my mother had made in this woman's life. When they were in first grade my mom was the only kid at school who talked to her. They were a poor family, but that never mattered to mom. She needed me to know the kind of person my mother was all her life. We parted ways at the service and I never told the woman that I already knew what kind of a wonderful person my mother was all her life and that I was certainly glad she had the opportunity to know that, too.

I contemplated writing about her as a single mom raising three kids or when she went back to college in her 40's and completed her Bachelor's degree. I even thought about mentioning the book she wrote in 1979, *Second Sight*, about her life up until the time that she had surgery and regained her sight for seven years. I also wondered about including her incredible connections to all four of her grandchildren and how her presence in their lives has shaped them in ways that will follow them everywhere they go.

While Mom lived the majority of her life in Coffeyville, she touched the lives of everyone she knew wherever she lived and wherever she went. I wrestled with writing too much about her first move away from her home town which took her to Turon where, literally months after she moved

there, she was elected to City Council. Her first contact with PILR came when, as Mayor of Turon, she faced recall from office because, among other things, she was blind. Mom won both petitions in District Court and the community is more accessible as a result. She also made a handful of very dear friends there. I wanted to be sure to write about her move to Hutchinson and becoming a Board Member at PILR. I thought about mentioning her inclusion as a Reno County Mover & Shaker for her efforts in confronting discrimination while living in Reno County. Along the way, Mom made many more dear friends.

But then I remembered that I must save room for what took her to Lawrence. She served on the Board of Independence, Inc., but what was most important to her was her family. For seven of us, she was a part of our lives from the moment we were born. And through all those years I can honestly say that I never saw her give up or give in. I watched her stand against discrimination targeting ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, gender, age, economic status and disability, as well as fighting for access for herself. I am honored to have been raised by her because she taught lessons few receive. I was fortunate – she understood me like no one else. And I think I understood her as well. Mom lived life independently and courageously. She “lived the dream” and helped others see that they could, too. She held her friendships close to her heart and everyone who knew her was somehow touched by her. And she loved her family completely, absolutely and unconditionally.

As the holiday season approaches, memories don’t need to be jotted down to evoke my tears. They simply happen. I lost my mother and my best friend when she lost her fight against cancer. It seems fitting that I close with words she already wrote – turning to the last paragraph from her book.

“I cannot remember what triggered it. Perhaps nothing at all happened. But suddenly, at long last, the tears came, great tears that flooded my face, tears of joy, of gratitude to everyone who helped and of thankfulness to God for the miracle that had allowed me to see His handiwork again.”

-Charlotte Sanford, Second Sight

Signed, a Concerned Kansas Citizen

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