

A Dream Derailed

In 2009, Jackie Gill realized her lifelong ambition to teach college. But then her boss told her Texas and the institution where she taught "didn't like homosexuals."

I have always been a big believer in the American dream. I felt that I could achieve success by working hard and furthering my education. Because I've seen education change so many lives, I not only wanted to ensure my own education, I wanted to educate others. When I met my partner in 1999, we had both completed some college but had not earned our degrees. So in 2000, we both decided to go back to school.

I finished my degree in 2001 and began teaching high school English and journalism, eventually becoming the English Department Chair at the Fort Worth Independent School District. Although I enjoyed teaching high school, my dream was to be a college professor. In 2006, I was accepted into a doctoral program. We moved to a new city, excited about our next adventure. Every day for three years, we went to our teaching jobs at 6 a.m., left work together to go to the university, where I attended class—and she waited for me, grading papers in the student union—until 10 p.m., and started it all over again the next day. The routine was exhausting, but we both said it would be worth it when I was a professor.

In 2009, I learned Tarrant County College in Hurst, Texas was hiring new English professors at its Northeast campus. After a long interview process over a two-month period, I finally received the call that I had been waiting for: I was a full-time professor! Even though the position was not permanent, my division dean, who was eager to hire me, told me it was customary for full-time instructors to be hired on a temporary basis first.

I still remember my first day of work when I was given my office key, instructor's books, and class schedule. I was absolutely thrilled. When I left work that first day, heading for the new home that my partner and I had just bought, I thought, "I did it, I finally made it!" All the late nights, working and going to school full-time, and all of the sacrifices that my partner made had finally paid off. I was a professor. I had achieved my American dream.

I spent that year teaching and absolutely loved it. I enjoyed working with



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my students. Throughout that year, I received positive feedback and was complimented on my syllabus and the creative projects that I assigned my students. My department chair had told me, "We are very happy to have you with us. Everyone who has been working with you speaks most highly of you." By the end of that year, I had created an online course and was teaching extra courses to help the college meet its growing enrollment. I had found the place where I was going to build my career.

When my department posted seven permanent positions, I was happy to apply. But one student in my class, whom I'd reported for stealing an exam, filed a complaint claiming that I had flirted with female students in class. Not only was this a lie; such interaction with any student would have been impossible, as I was rarely the only instructor in class. But when my department chair met with me to discuss the complaint, he told me that Tarrant County College and Texas "don't like homosexuals." I feared that regardless of my hard work, I wouldn't be given my job back. Indeed, my chair's secretary informed me that I would not be granted an interview for any of the permanent positions.

All of the colleagues who had known me and my work expressed shock. I appealed to the college's two highest-ranking officials, but neither responded. I was devastated.

Since Spring 2010, I've been unemployed and have been looking for work. Although this situation has been difficult for me, my partner, and our family, we have much to be thankful for. We still have our house, my partner has her job, and, of course, we have each other. And I have Lambda Legal. I contacted them and told my story. Now they are making it possible for me to share that story and take a stand so that one more example of homophobia doesn't get swept under the rug. **L**



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