

# My Son and Gus Walz Deserve a Champion Like Tim Walz

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Damon Winter/The New York Times

By Tina Brown

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The sight at the Democratic convention on Wednesday night of Tim Walz's 17-year-old son leaping to his feet, with streaming eyes, a hand to his chest with a cry of "That's my Dad" was heart piercing.

As the mother of Georgie, a 38-year-old on-the-spectrum son who still lives with me, I recognized him immediately as one of "ours," a sweet, unfiltered, slightly bewildered-looking young man who wasn't quite sure what was expected of him in this epic moment of political adulation.

Gus Walz has, according to his parents, a nonverbal learning disorder, A.D.H.D. and an anxiety disorder, all of which they [regard](#) not as a setback but as his "secret power," that makes him "brilliant" and "hyperaware."

I know exactly what they mean. One of the joys of my life in the social churn of New York is living with a son whose inability to read the room makes him incapable of telling anything but the truth. Once, as my husband, Harry Evans, and I left a pretentious social gathering in the Hamptons, Georgie told the host sunnily: "Thank you very much. No one spoke to me really, so it was a very boring evening. The food was OK. I doubt I will come again."

"I have never been prouder of you in my life!" shouted my husband in the car. How many times have all of us wanted to say that as we gushed about the fabulous time we just hadn't had? Then there was the moment he went up to Anna Wintour at one of my book parties and asked if she was Camilla Parker Bowles. And the time at the intake meeting for a supported work program, when the therapist asked Georgie, "Has anyone ever molested you?" "Unfortunately not," he replied. Georgie teaches me every day how much we depend on social lies to make the world go round. His sister — his forever best friend — and I feel so lucky to have him in our lives. So did his dad, who died in 2020.

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And yet for people who are different and have no support, the world can be bleak. Their loneliness can be agonizing. Some people assume the school days are the hardest, but it's the years after that are the social desert. Having a friendly, forgiving workplace to go to is critical. It's often their only taste of community and what makes them such reliable and rewarding employees. The work from home movement has been a killer for people with special needs, often depriving them of the only social connections they have.

There's something of a trend at the moment for certain businesses to say they encourage the hiring of people who are neurodivergent. Sadly, it can be just virtue signaling. Employers like to think that a person who is neurodivergent is some secretly brilliant introvert who writes code in their apartment all day, not the more likely candidate: an awkward kid with a gentle smile who takes time to get the hang of things and talks too much about the same subjects.

One of my son's quirks is that he likes to wear bandannas and nail polish, and tends to say so in the first five minutes of every job interview. More often than not he's told that no, that would not be "appropriate." Appropriate? Being inappropriate is the very definition of Georgie's condition, and for his family, his most treasured trait.

The most painful thing for a parent is to pick up on the scorn of strangers that their child often doesn't notice; the whispered insults or titter at the next table. Remember Donald Trump Jr.'s sneer at the 2023 Conservative Political Action Conference? Referring to Senator John Fetterman's struggles to recover after his stroke, Mr. Trump said that Pennsylvania had "managed to elect a vegetable."

"I'd love for John Fetterman to have, like, good gainful employment," he continued. "Maybe he could be, like, a bag guy at a grocery store." Is it possible to go any lower than that?

But how could Don Jr. be any different than his father? The elder Donald Trump has never missed the chance to denigrate people with disabilities, and already the MAGA crowd is mocking Gus Walz's emotional embrace with his dad. "Talk about weird ..." the conservative media ghoul Ann Coulter posted (and later deleted).

If the Harris-Walz ticket wins, will parents of people who struggle with being different at last find a powerful advocate in the White House? This voiceless community is in desperate need of a new, mighty champion. Coach Walz, you who have been such an inspiring role model to kids all your life, and were caring enough to offer your own credibility to the role of faculty adviser of a new high school gay-straight alliance. I urge you: please make this your cause.

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