



GIRLS ATHLETIC LEADERSHIP SCHOOLS

Hello.

My name is Liz Wolfson and I am the Founder with Nina Safane of the Girls Athletic Leadership Schools.

My middle school and high school self would've thrived at GALS because I would have found my voice decades earlier, and had I found my voice decades earlier, I am sure that I would've run for public office, and I spend a good amount of my personal reflection time these days thinking about that...

But I am very proud to say that I currently serve as the Chief Visionary Officer of GALS inc., the national 501c3 that oversees the vision of all GALS schools and is working to successfully replicate our model in other cities.

I'd like to recognize the GALS National Board present in the room led by the terrific Barbara Wagner from Los Angeles. Our board members have come from near and far to be here today. Please stand and be acknowledged.

GALS Inc. also enjoys international participation in our working with the Starfish Foundation and their groundbreaking school in Guatemala. Hannah Bick from Starfish is with us today. GALS is working with the brave Hadas Reis from Israel and her vision for an all-girls school in the south of the country. Hadas is in the room today. And GALS is participating in a Women Win trip to Pakistan this April. Women Win equips adolescent girls to exercise their rights through sport all over the world.

- watching a video of two all-girl skateboarding groups in Bangalore, India is a sight to behold and cherish in today's world's reality. Our GALS Denver Executive Director Carol Bowar will represent GALS Inc. in Pakistan this April. Sarah Murray from Women Win is here with us today as well.

The honoring of Jennifer Evans and Jack Tankersley is so near and dear to my heart. Their dedication and commitment to living their ideals individually, and as a couple is astounding to me. They seem always to have time to spend with me, time to share with GALS, and time to allocate to literally everyone who asks. I deeply respect both of their intellects, senses of humor, their passion for learning, their fashion senses, their love of good food and really good wine. They have real class. I have learned how to be a practical visionary from Jack in ways that my head had not known previously. I have learned how to listen and experience newness with Jennifer. How to make new friends and be vulnerable - How to believe in second go-rounds and to laugh at our lessons learned. Jennifer stole my heart from the moment we met. I realize that she came to Denver to be with Jack, but there is absolute

truth in also knowing that Jennifer came to Denver to lead GALS. I want to say thank you to you both for allowing today to be your day. It was great fun convincing you. It has been a true honor being a part of your love story and your lives. GALS, Denver is deeply indebted to you both.

For those who know me, it is true that I like to share so how could I not take this opportunity to let you in on some of my thoughts today...

This is the quote on the back cover of a book I am reading. It stuck like super glue in my mind from the moment I read it.

“Because for all that people have tried to abuse it and disown it, feminism is still the word we need.”

Feminism for me, is ensuring the security of girls and women – and ensuring equal right and equal access to financial and political power. It is from this platform that Nina Safane and I created GALS.

It is also from another platform that GALS has emanated, the one that keeps us all moving, healthy, clear, sweaty, smiling and laughing, willing to risk, willing to try, bonded as a team and community....we are coining this ‘embodied education’.

The incomparable Ta-Nahasi Coates writes in his book ‘Between The World And Me’ “This is your country, this is your world, this is your body, and you must find some way to live within the all of it.” I think this book should be required reading for every person. It drove home for me so much about our communities of color that I did not relate to previously, and this book drove home for me the depth of this concept of embodied education – learning and growing from within your skin, leading from within your skin, loving from within your own skin, making choices and decisions from within your skin, being free from within your skin. In my opinion, there is no way that any student or any school can be fully successful without tackling these issues – this type of whole child embodied teaching and learning can not be a bullet point in a plan or an after thought, it must be fully integrated into our systems and assessed each step of the way, similar to current day academic standards and assessments.

I feel urgency around the issue of Feminism more than I have felt ever before in my lifetime, and I feel clarity around the pursuit of Embodied Education more than I ever have since starting this venture.

From the beginning, GALS envisioned a world where students from all backgrounds would have access to this socially and academically empowering model. At its core, GALS schools are about individualization, which is defined as all students being fully recognized and seen by the adults in the building and by their classmates. GALS is not about the separation of genders – it is about creating sacred space in which all genders can fully become themselves and better navigate the world that still includes the gender stereotypes of our current societal norms.

While GALS embraces the notion of 'choice' in education –where families have the opportunity to choose a school model that best fits their student; GALS defines choice as a two-way street. Once a family and student enter into a school community, it is the responsibility of the school to meet the needs of the student, not the student's responsibility to fit the model.

From the beginning, GALS has stood tall in its understanding that all youth are amongst those who are vulnerable as they journey through maturation into adulthood and that in order to optimize learning, all need access to proactive counseling and support. And that those most vulnerable stand with targets on their backs, but not at our schools. We stand strong and proud with Denver Public Schools in our access to accommodations for all students, we are a sanctuary within the doors of our facilities and we have no intention of changing this...we will engage vociferously to keep it that way now and always.

But I would argue that today, it is not just the students who are most vulnerable, we all are.... For who amongst us today is not feeling vulnerable about something going on in this world of ours...I am absolutely feeling sensitivity, fear, helplessness, overwhelm, the deep need to barricade my own family from the public sphere...

And it is so easy to focus on the other 'he did this' or 'she did that', 'they want this' and 'we want that'...

At GALS, for those who have toured and experienced the beauty and the challenges of our diversity and inclusion, you know that the GALS series curriculum focuses on relationship building, emotions and coping strategies, identity and community, leadership and fellowship. And this is the opposite of focusing outward or blame – it is about responsibility and ownership agency and activism - what each of us can do to live an embodied life every day, to own our feminism.

Because we are not successful at getting all that we want and need, though we continue to push, we must continue to exist and thrive with the external hardships that GALS endures too, like not having transportation for our students, not having a long-term facility for The Boys School, not having enough funding to run a full high school extracurricular program, or travel learning program that ensures all of our 8th graders go to Washington DC, or enough support for our special education program which serves nearly double the percentage of this population than a typical school, or computers for every classroom, or enough funding to support a back office that isn't also running the day to day of three schools at once, and so on...but we can focus on ourselves, and we can express sincere and great gratitude for the culture of dignity we do embrace...

So I thought I would put together a top ten list of those things that we can all do moving forward that makes our GALS way of life more prominent day to day and continues to first and foremost push ourselves... Because if we all don't start looking inward, and changing our own behaviors, than we will continue to be divided. And I don't accept this....for as a descendant of the innocent Anne Frank – I too wonder sometimes why I haven't abandoned all

my ideals, they seem so absurd and so impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything that people are truly good at heart.

But to make a difference for students of this city, for the students of GALS and The Boys School, we will need to be better than good...so here are my baseline suggestions...

1. Once a month, share a meal or a walk with someone from a different race, or a different religion, different political persuasion...or a different sexual orientation or gender identity than you...Or once a month, share a meal with someone who lives on different side of the socioeconomic spectrum
2. Make a list of five people with whom you would like to have an improved relationship, and tell them that you are seeking to repair your relationship with them.
3. Keep a journal of courageous conversations you participate in whether you initiate them or simply are a recipient ...make a note to end every month by reading your entries and seeing what you learn about yourself...ask someone you trust to read your journal as well, and hear what they have to say....
4. Ask for acknowledgement when you do something that you are proud of – big or small...and then stand for 5-10 seconds with your eyes closed and repeat the acknowledgement to yourself 3 times so that your heart is sure to take it in...
5. Let your closest friends and colleagues know how much you appreciate them – just in case it hasn't been said in a while
6. Many of us like to host dinner parties, so set the date for your next one and ensure that the people in the room are of diverse backgrounds...

The world is shifting beneath our feet day by day – and there is no better definition of embodied living than that is there...irrespective of backgrounds, its hard to feel steady.

At GALS, our end game is a competitive one and we aim to win. We believe that by teaching the skills of inclusion not separation or segregation, that by empowering all students to know themselves well and therefore be capable of building and coveting and restoring relationships when necessary, that those students who graduate from all of our schools, the staff we employ at our schools, the people like yourselves who support our existence and thriving, we all will have more than a leg up on others, we will not only succeed academically, we will lead confidently, we will live very boldly and we will thrive physically.

And by looking around this room and seeing all of your faces, knowing so many of you, and seeing us all return year after year in larger and larger numbers, I believe that you all actually agree with me. And that makes all of you feminists – you believe that ensuring the security of girls and women through the gender continuum to boys and men is of utmost importance.

So given that you agree with me, now would be the perfect time for me to ask you to take out your checkbooks or credit cards, cash and loose change, whatever you want to contribute...there are envelopes in your programs and a few extras on every table in the bowls provided. At GALS, while it is the dream of Jennifer Evans' that we have an endowment, we are not there yet. Every penny we raise today will go to the current year operating budget. We absolutely need your support to end our fiscal year in the black.

Please give thoughtfully, get up and do a handful of jumping jacks or pushups, maybe a few sun salutations if you need to as you decide what the right number is...that would be embodied giving...

I want to thank you for being here...Nine years ago, Nina, Carol and I had no idea we would be here today with over 700 of you at our luncheon for the Denver Schools. But here we are and we are deeply grateful to all of you.

Thank you for your consideration of a donation right now. There is a \$10k match for funds contributed today, so thank you for helping us to maximize this gift. If we all give something in this room, no doubt we will succeed our fundraising goal for the day...

And while you fill out those checks and envelopes, please also be sure to fill out the card that asks about your middle school and high school self. Your answers will be highlighted on GALS social media...

...and please don't leave just yet...the girls around the room are coming to say hello, maybe take a selfie and tweet #GALSDenver2017

... and then we have final words from the brilliant Rosalind Wiseman.