



COLAGE

JUST FOR US

FOCUS ON RELIGION, FAITH, AND SPIRITUALITY

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2009

PEOPLE WITH A LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, OR QUEER PARENT... UNITE!

A HAPPY BALANCE: MY FAMILY AND CHURCH

BY BRITTNEE GAUTHIER



I was born into a religious family. We spent most of our free time in the church or around the church people and as a result the church

family became our family. My dad was training to be a deacon and sat in the pool pit each Sunday; my mother was always involved with activities with the other church women; and my brother, sister and I were always in children's church.

Then after a few years, several moves and my parents' divorce I found myself living with my father and siblings in

Florida. Here we were heavily involved in a new church; my father was in the choir therefore my siblings and I were always in some type of children's programming at the church. A similar pattern happened everywhere that my family moved: my father would get involved in the church resulting in my involvement in the church.

However all of our involvement in church stopped when we moved to Massachusetts. I didn't quite understand why but then again I never really questioned it. The next year my siblings and I lived with my mother in California. There she was very involved with an Apostolic church and as a result we were forced to be involved too, however this church environment had a different feel. Instead of preaching about God's love they would try and discourage people from partaking in certain things such as

homosexuality, drinking, or anything that they didn't think to be "godlike". Being forced to be apart of this church for 3 years sort of turned me off from religion, so when I got the opportunity to stop attending church I took it. I didn't want to be involved with something that only made people feel bad about their decisions, and when my father came out to me about being gay I definitely felt that I could no longer be involved with something that demonizes my father for being the person that he was born to be.

For several years I decided that I didn't really need religion, until one day I visited my friends' church in college. Right away I fell in love with the church and they felt the same way about me [I think]. This church is so perfect for me, they give me support and advice when I need it and they truly welcomed

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LEGACIES OF FEAR AND LOVE



I have a silver ring, inlaid with hematite, a great heavy black winter cloak, and the memory of two photographs left of my grandfather. I never met him, and I cherish dearly these pieces of connection to him. But far greater than these, I have been left with his story, which is my moms' story, and which is now my story. His name was Henry Kuizenga and he was a well-respected Presbyterian minister and theologian. He had a wife and four children, and was gay and closeted his entire life. A decade before I was born, he was murdered because of his sexuality.

I don't believe my grandfather could have imagined that ten short years later his daughter would be having children using a sperm bank in an openly lesbian relationship. And had he imagined that, I don't think he could have possibly imagined that her partner would eventually be ordained as a Unitarian Universalist minister by a church that celebrates her sexuality. But beyond anything else, I cannot believe he could have imagined my mothers getting legally married in that short, blessed, window of equality in California.

I don't know how my grandfather felt about his sexuality, but I'm sure that in holding his identity as a member of the protestant clergy and his identity as a gay man, he was no stranger to guilt and shame. I am inspired to think of how powerful his faith must have been to celebrate and dedicate his life to a religion that marginalized and despised such a great part of him. May I always have the eyes for the beauty of religion that he did.

I begin seminary this fall, embarking upon the development of my own Unitarian Universalist ministry. As I follow in the footsteps of my mother and my grandfather, it is clear that they, and many others like them, through their lives, through their deeds, and often through their deaths, have created new and greater space

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



I attended my very first COLAGE conference in New York City in 1994. Starting then and since, I've heard and witnessed hundreds of stories about the importance of religion, faith, and spirituality in the lives of people with a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer parent. Many embrace or are embraced by this part of their life while others are rejected and therefore reject it. Although COLAGE published an earlier edition of Just For Us focused on this topic in the spring of 2002, we return to this theme because of the significant

ways religion, faith, and spirituality impact our daily experiences, both personally and politically.

As I write this, the Jewish New Year is upon us and I am reminded of and reflective of my own religious and spiritual upbringing. I was raised in the United States Reform Jewish tradition. In my elementary years, I sang with honor in the choir during the Friday night Shabbat or Sabbath services and earnestly attended religious school every Sunday morning through secondary school. While I felt sufficiently welcome at temple, I also felt like an outsider within this minority community.

Since my lesbian mother was a single (income) parent, the rabbi's wife and my religious school teachers insisted on inviting her to singles social events in order to set her up with a man to date. While their intent may well have been sincere, this was not simply awkward but a loud signal to me that my mother and our family was neither understood nor holistically supported by our religious home. Taken independently, this may seem like a small slight. But this and many more differences in how we and our families are treated add up - and can make us feel like our families are not valued.

According to current public opinion polls, the most commonly-cited reason people oppose LGBTQ equality is religious belief. Over the past two to three decades religious conservatives have used and abused religious belief and organizations to promote homophobia and discrimination. Members of LGBTQ headed families have certainly felt the brunt of this organized and coordinated religious attack not only from our own relatives or spiritual communities, but also at the voting booth and in legislative halls. Remarkably, at the same time, we have seen effective resistance and real progress achieved within several denominations, a few of which now, for example, ordain LGBTQ leaders or perform religious wedding ceremonies for lesbian and gay couples.

In the following pages, you will read stories of belief and non-belief, welcome and rejection, hurt and celebration- the many ways we are affected by peers, parents, extended family members, as well as political, religious, spiritual or faith-based, community leaders. You will also find useful tips, information and resources necessary to become a strong advocate for yourself and your family.

My hope, prayer, and commitment are to achieve with you the rights, recognition and respect that all families deserve. May it be so!

Beth Teper
COLAGE Executive Director

COLAGE

MISSION: COLAGE is a national movement of children, youth, and adults with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ) parent(s). We build community and work toward social justice through youth empowerment, leadership development, education, and advocacy.

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WISHING FOR THE PREACHING OF LOVE

BY CHRISTINE WOLFE

I do not believe in God. My disbelief does not come from a horrible event in my life. It does not come from feeling alone, or the feeling that God could not exist because God would never allow people to starve, allow wars to occur, or allow people to hate so fiercely. I simply have never believed.

However, I respect others' beliefs in a higher power. What I've come to disrespect growing up as a child of a lesbian parent and being raised by loving gay people is organized religion. I believe that the powerful hate that puts down my family and its culture stems from organized religion. These are the people who hinder the rights of all gay people with the fear that they spread throughout our country. Not only do the heads and members of the hostile religious groups stop the gay community from attaining their rights, but they also disrespect the people I love so much and attempt to destroy the legitimacy of my family's love. So frequently in the news I see or hear a religious figurehead calmly but illogically discussing the way my family lives, and how it is immoral and damaging.

Almost all of the important people in my life, everyone who has given me support and unyielding love, are gay. My biological father, whom I met recently through the Donor Sibling Registry, is a gay man living in California. He and his partner are two of the most wonderful, loving men I have ever met. I truly have only become a better person through knowing them. For someone to say that their love is tainted is so incomprehensibly wrong.

My mother has raised me, usually on her own, for 16 years. She is unfalteringly dedicated to me. She is a much better mother than a few straight women that I have met, and she is a lesbian. I hear ministers and other people in their positions talk about how

being raised by gay people is damaging to the children, that the kids will be insecure and messed up. While I'm not claiming to

be perfect, I'm an above average student, I have lots of friends, and have the average confidence of a teenager (which is not to say much). Being raised by gay people has only made me stronger; if anything. I believe being exposed to diversity is an integral part to becoming an intelligent adult. I understand the pain of discrimination but I also understand the strength of pride and the power of love.

In my life, I have seen organized religion preach incredible hate. While many religious groups are welcoming, it is the others who act politically and socially to stop our community from being accepted that get the most attention and the most threatening followers. My heart has been broken so many times reading an article about the immorality of gay people. I only wish there were some way to tell the members and heads of those religious groups who hate so tenaciously that the love of all of our families is so much stronger and more meaningful than any hate could ever be.

Christine Wolfe, 16, lives in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, with her lesbian mother, Anne, but has been raised by many loving straight and gay family members and friends. The gay community has always been a huge part of her life and has vitally helped make her the person she is today.



SELF DISCOVERY IN FAITH

BY ADAM BROWN

I am not one to claim that my religion is best. I believe that each of us needs to find our own path through life with our own sets of beliefs. I have taken this set of ideals into my new role as the Worship Coordinator of my youth group, and am planning on basing my entire year's worth of spirituality programming on the idea of self discovery.

As the child of lesbian mothers, self discovery is important. When my mother came out to me it did feel as though my world was turned on its head for awhile. I found that by understanding myself I could learn to live in this different situation.

I personally found myself to be an agnostic and I found that I do not believe in heaven or hell or any kind of after life, However I do believe in the power of faith, if not faith in god or a higher power then faith in humanity and in love. I have built my beliefs on faith in humanity and faith in love. I found these faiths encompassed many religions but also allowed for flexibility in there practice and acceptance of traditions and people who are different than me.

I feel that this is a cornerstone of life as the child of gay parents,

acceptance and love are important to everyone but the acceptance often takes time because while people claim to accept all people they often do not as quickly

as others. I have found companionship in my youth group not just from members who are LGBT but from several who are children of LGBT parents. I also first learned of COLAGE at my youth group and feel that with out it I would never have known about this organization.

I have found that spirituality need not be part of a mainstream religion, or even within a group, I believe that faith must be discovered and that the proper faith, and spiritual path will comfort them and make them feel safe not alienate or make them feel like they need to change.

Adam Brown lives in West Hartford, Connecticut with his moms who were married earlier this year (see photo; Adam is to the far left). He enjoys reading, social action and youth ministry and is 17 years old.



CHOOSING JUDAISM: TWO QUEERSPAWN EXPERIENCES

Fun COLAGE Fact: both of our former Executive Directors, Stefan Lynch and Felicia Park-Rogers are bothies (COLAGers with lesbian moms AND gay dads) who converted to Judaism as adults. Diana Castillo interviewed Stefan and Felicia on behalf of *Just For Us* to explore this coincidence and themes of choice, faith and family.

How have your experiences as COLAGers and bothies influenced your religious and spiritual views?

FELICIA: I was born in the 70s to parents who were counter culture and politicized in such a way that made religion unattractive. They thought of religion as dogmatic, unscientific, and not empowering for people or for social change. That continued even more as they were coming out in the 70s, since religion wasn't an accepting place of being queer. I had no real reason to question that, except that I fell in love with someone who was drawn to spirituality. And, in her exploration, she went back to her Jewish roots that she grew up with, by which point I was the Executive Director at COLAGE.

STEFAN: I had a really similar experience as Felicia; my parents were counter culture in the 70s and out, and what that meant for them was just as it was not until the late 80s that there was a sense that you could be both queer and a parent, in the 70s there was a sense that you could definitely not be both queer and be involved in religion. Unfortunately, there was a lot of conflation between religion & spirituality, so that I grew up in an atheist identified household, which for my dad, especially, meant no real discussion of the spiritual life and certainly no involvement in organized religion.

How did you choose Judaism?

STEFAN: My partner is Jewish, like Felicia's, so that got me in the door. I certainly was not on a religious or spiritual journey. I was along for the ride at first. What kept me coming back was my belief that Jews have established really powerful traditions for maintaining personal and community integrity in the face of an oppressive dominant society. As I grew up, in my family, we were trying to do that in our home and here was a system, an entire group of people who had spent 5000 years creating this system.

FELICIA: The pillars of Judaism are study and prayer, faith in the face of enormous odds, justice, and charity. Those values



Stefan and Felicia in June 2006 when Felicia acted as a witness for the signing of Stefan's Ketubah (Jewish partnership/marriage contract).

were values I grew up with in my queer social action oriented home. And as Stefan said, having thousands of years to study and have life cycles, it all came together.

How did your parents react to your choice to convert to Judaism? choice to convert to Judaism?

S: She was super excited. My mom sort of regretted that I hadn't grown up with a sense of spirituality and she saw it was a really vibrant community and I think very generously saw what a good thing I was a part of, even though it meant an additional barrier for her, cause she's not Jewish. It also introduced a whole lot of new connections with my Jewish family of choice. So my dad's boyfriend from when I was a teenager came back into my life and was my Jewish role model and now we're really close.

F: Well, my parents definitely support me in making choices that make me happy and that are life-giving for me. They also, like Stefan, really support anything that feels like it's supporting my sense of community and family in my life. Even though I'm connected with the most liberal edge of organized Judaism, I think they still struggle with organized religion as a concept and it's not a choice they would make.

In what ways does your religion influence your everyday life?

S: I would say that it's given me a language for understanding and reinforcing things

that I was largely already doing, for instance giving charity to the poor. In Judaism it's a commandment to give charity to the poor, not because you want to, not because you particularly like the person, even if you have reservations, you are still commanded to give. And this is something I already believed, and Judaism talks about it. It's given me an understanding & a reason for what I was already doing.

F: My life is completely different. I keep Kosher, I work for a synagogue, I have a modified reverence of Shabbat. I attend

services nearly every Friday. My life is structured from Jewish life from how I eat to what I do with my money. Like Stefan said, how I try to walk my way through the world, how I raise my children, how I experience time & history.

What words of advice to you have to COLAGers who are struggling with issues of faith and spirituality?

S: Nobody knows what God wants except for God. So, don't get too caught up and try to figure that out. But figure out what brings you closer to your conception of God. For me, that means getting closer to other people.

F: There's a concept in Judaism that all of us are made in God's image. It's not about referencing one religion, we are all made in God's image. Like Stefan said, that God you don't believe in doesn't exist, so stop arguing with him. I know there are kids who have people knocking on their door talking about sin and hell, because the people who live there don't fit what they think God wants. I hope in our lifetime that ends and I hope that those kids know that they're strong & beautiful and that God loves them.

Stefan Lynch is a nurse, biker, gardener and cook extraordinaire who lives in San Francisco, CA. Felicia Park-Rogers is the Executive Director of Beth Chayim Chadashim, the world's first LGBTQ Synagogue and lives in Los Angeles with her wife, Rachel and their two sons.

A CROSSROADS OF FAITH

BY AJ COSTA

As a youth, life can be challenging on its own with no external influences or pressures, just growing up is difficult. As a young boy with two moms, I faced similar situations to most of our COLAGE family. As I grew older, life became more complicated as it tends to do and I was faced with my identity beyond my family and beyond my peers. I came to a crossroads in the realm of religion.

You see, I was born a Muslim and converted to Christianity in 1994. My conversion had little to do with my own mother's identification as a Christian, much less her new partner's. However, that was not how the other side of my family saw it.

My father, being a native of Pakistan and lifelong Muslim, was very insulted by my choice and my faith journey; his ignorance hindered the depth of our relationship. It's actually quite similar to the ignorance displayed by opponents of LGBTQ persons and families. Their misunderstanding and unwillingness to broaden their minds by being in relationship with people of differing backgrounds limits them. They do not get to experience the fullness that is a diverse community of friends and peers.

I had to find a place inside myself, which took much time, where I could reconcile my own thoughts and perceptions to this aspect of my life. My conclusion has become more clear and simple as I get older: that God loves all His children and my only place on this Earth is to allow Him to work through me to ensure that all feel His love. To those lost in hatred and malice between, I can only hope they can see love for all before they no longer have that chance to do so. This life is precious and I am simply grateful to be here and helping His people.

AJ Costa, a native of Houston, TX is a 23 year old graduate of Texas Lutheran University and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. He now resides in Dallas where he is an area coordinator for after school tutoring programs. AJ was raised by his two moms and is a long time member of the COLAGE community. Who recently returned to the Board of Directors.



A HAPPY BALANCE, continued from page 1

me like a family member. I attend this church faithfully while I'm at school. However the interesting part about being a member of this church is that I have to hide a major part of my life from them. Although the church loves me, they may not love the fact that my dad is gay, which is a fact that I have accepted. As a result I don't tell anyone from the church about my father. It is hard on me at times since my father is such a big part of who I am, however, my religion plays a major role in the person that I am; and who I wish to be.

In a perfect world no one would care about my father's sexual orientation, however in this world that we live in I have a choice, and in order to keep my loving accepting church family I must keep a part of myself safely hidden in my heart and mind where no one can judge. I pray that this will one day change.

If you ever find yourself in a similar situation then you should decide what you need in your life. Realize that no one has the right to make you feel bad or uncomfortable about your family so if you are in a church situation like that it might be best if you find a more comfortable church home. However if the church is giving you what you need then keep in mind that you only have to share what you want them to know. If you don't feel that you want to share every detail of your life with them then that *is ok*.

Brittnee is a rising senior at Spelman College where she majors in Psychology with a minor in Child Development. She lives in California with her mother but spent most of her life moving around with her older brother and sister, and her gay father who served in the Air Force. She is honored to have worked with COLAGE and its youth as a summer intern.

LEGACIES OF FEAR AND LOVE, continued from page 1

in modern religion. Space not only for queer people to be out in churches, but for out, queer clergy, for trainings on creating safe space for LGBT folks throughout many denominations, for progressive religious activism, and for the children of queer parents to have their families witnessed and celebrated by community in a way that people like my grandfather could never have dreamed of.

My faith is deeply rooted in the hope that my life, my ministry, will contribute to creating a world that I cannot imagine. What space will be opened for my grandchildren that I cannot yet dream of? I pray that all religious institutions, which offer so much community, support and spiritual nourishment to so many people, will one day recognize and make amends for the great deal of harm they have also caused to our people. I have faith that one day our churches, temples, synagogues and mosques will be known as places of acceptance and love for all of us. May it be so!

Marcus Liefert was lucky enough to grow up in the Bay Area with lesbian moms. He is a proud Unitarian Universalist, and is currently studying in Berkeley at Starr King School for the Ministry. He looks forward to a ministry that will enliven and inspire radically inclusive, multi-cultural, and social justice-focused spiritual communities.



SPEAK OUT

What impact does having a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer parent have on your relationship to religion, faith or spirituality?

CRYSTAL, California: I go to church sometimes with my friends and I hear them talking about being gay as a sin. It's hard to hear because that's my mom they are talking about and I don't think she is bad or wrong. It makes me feel like I have to pick sides or something.

GUAPO, Massachusetts: About church and having a Daddy and Papa embarrasses me. I can talk about my family at church but I don't like to talk about it except at COLAGE.

JEFF, Oregon: Unfortunately, having lesbian moms has exposed me to what I perceive as the more negative side of religion. While I was raised by a mother who identifies as Christian and took me to church on regular basis, it is hard for me to escape the mass amount of hateful rhetoric directed at my family by fundamentalists in a variety of religions. Being a child who had the opportunity to witness the awesome power of religion, and understand the positive and negative affects it has on people, has caused me to become fascinated with religion.

MORENITA, Massachusetts: I don't like to talk about having gay parents sometimes. At our church, I have friends who know our family pretty good so I can talk to them okay.

LEXI, Virginia: I used to belong to the United Methodist Church and the lady that I went to church with used to pray for my mother. I decided to adopt an atheist lifestyle.

RAVEN, California: Having an LGBTQ parent doesn't have an impact on religion, faith or spirituality because I am given the freedom to explore and decide for myself. I was never forced to go to a church or anything of the sort.

SAM, Illinois: There aren't very many Jews in my town so having a lesbian mom is just one more way that I am different. But I feel glad that my Jewish synagogue and many others are pretty welcoming to LGBTQ people and families.

COLAGE YOUTH ACTIVITY

"MY FAMILY" BRACELETS

Materials needed: String or yarn, scissors, beads



Create a bracelet that represents your family! Who is in your family? Choose one bead that represents each member of your family. Don't forget your pets! String each bead onto the string, then cut the string to fit around your wrist. Share your family story by talking about each bead. You can add beads or charms that represent your faith or religion, activities that your family likes to do together or other images that are important to you. Wear your family bracelet to show how beautiful your family is.

A TRUE FAMILY

The words...
They are small, yet everywhere.
Creeping up behind me,
Destroying who I am.

Whispering anger
Clearly spoken
Unknown power
The power to hurt,
To bring sadness.

"That is so gay"

I hear, I hear it everywhere
Casually used
To tear my heart,
To disregard who my family is
Who my father is.

Those words...
The people who speak them are cruel
Unsympathetic
Uncaring
Knowing nothing of a true family,

A family that looks different.
We love each other,
No matter whom my father is
Or loves.

Still, those words...
"That's so gay"
It destroys a girl with a gay father.

-Anna Stanley



Anna Stanley lives in Seattle, Washington with her dad and his partner Brian. They love going hiking together, watching late night movies, and playing croquet in the park (see photo). Anna's greatest joy is reading, she also enjoys skiing, summer camp, and listening to country music.

COLAGE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

COLAGE is excited to announce the recipients of the 2009 Lee Dubin Memorial Scholarship for undergraduate students with LGBTQ parents. This year we had a tremendous response from students all over the country. All of the candidates demonstrated that our COLAGE community is diverse, talented and committed to causes that matter most to our families. A huge thank you to our volunteer committee for their work in reviewing each application and choosing the outstanding recipients below.



Elizabeth Elmore began her third year of college at the Kansas State University this fall, in Manhattan, Kansas where she hopes to achieve a Bachelors of Science in Agronomy and Environment Sustainability. At a young age she faced adversaries when members of the Fred Phelps Congregation picketed the church where she

and her gay father attended. Since then she started a GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) at her high school, and got involved broadly in the LGBT social justice movement. Most recently she has been fighting for same-sex partner benefits in the workplace.

this when in her junior year of high school she helped fight a discriminatory action at her school placed on a transgender student. She stood up for the student in hopes that someday the school could be tolerant.



Cara Cerise is starting her freshman year at Westminster College in hopes of an undergraduate degree in Social Science. She grew up proud of her gay dad and in high school started a club called BOND (Building One New Dream) which focused on breaking barriers and creating a safe environment. Cara spent last

year in Paraguay where she studied Spanish, taught English and worked with HIV positive teens at a local AIDS outreach center. She has been featured in the *Just For Us* publication and founded the COLAGE Salt Lake City chapter which she still coordinates, as well being a member of the COLAGE's Speak OUT program.



Melissa Goette is a freshman at Columbia College Hollywood, in Tarzana, CA where she hopes to pursue a BA in Screenwriting. Growing up as a daughter of a transgender parent in an intolerant part of Texas has opened her eyes to injustice. Since then she has funneled her energies in getting the word out about LGBT issues. Senior year of

High School she campaigned to get a GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) at her school. Melissa recently has moved to California where she especially focused on the No on 8 campaign and being visible in and around LA.



Olivia Parker will be starting her freshman year at Columbia College in Chicago, IL. She grew up in Minneapolis, MN with two families including her moms and her brother and sister. While in high school Olivia helped to start a group, Alliance for Racial Equality to address racism she and friends saw and

experienced in school. She has also been active in her church and the local LGBT community. She says her family helped teach her to accept people and stand up for her rights.



Elizabeth Warren recently started her freshman year at the American University in Washington D.C. where she hopes to pursue Political Science and History. Growing up with gay parents has taught her to not allow injustice to pass on by. Elizabeth showed

COLAGE EVENTS SCRA



COLAGers enjoy Ice Cream on a warm Michigan night at Saugatuck Family Week



COLAGE Crew Friends at the Family Week Dance



The COLAGE Drag Workshop Super Stars pose before their Family Week performance in Provincetown



COLAGE Bay Area youth and families led the march from San Francisco City Hall on Tuesday May 26th, in response to the California Supreme Court's decision to uphold Proposition 8



The COLAGE Closing Celebration at Michigan Family Week



The COLAGE Voices Raised Kick Off Party in Oakland, CA

UPCOMING COLAGE EVENTS

COLAGE SPEAK OUT CAMP

Join COLAGE for our first-ever Speak OUT Camp! November 5 - 8, 2009 At the Cherokee Outdoor YMCA Camp in Woodstock, GA (30 minutes North of Atlanta) More information on page 15.

IOWA LGBT FAMILY SUMMIT

DES MOINES, IA SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21ST, 2009 Join COLAGE, One Iowa Family Equality Council and Lambda Legal for the first ever state wide gathering of lgbt families in Iowa.

NORTHEAST REGIONAL CHAPTERS GATHERING

January 16th- 18th NYC, NY For youth and adults involved in northeast based COLAGE chapters, this weekend will offer a unique chance to meet and have fun with members of other chapters in the region.

RAINBOW FAMILIES NJ

7TH BIENNIAL FAMILY CONFERENCE

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14TH, 2009 Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey

Join COLAGE and Rainbow Families New Jersey for a day of family programming, community building and fun.

www.rainbowfamiliesnj.org/what/programs.html

For more details and information about upcoming COLAGE events, visit our website at www.colage.org



The Facilitators in Training and Mentors at Provincetown Family Week



An intergenerational group of COLAGers unite at Provincetown Family Week



Youth from COLAGE Cincinnati celebrate their chapter's first Pride



Fabulous COLAGers at the Rainbow Families Minnesota Conference



COLAGE New York City celebrates Pride with their first-ever Parade float!



A group of COLAGers unite at the Upstate New York Pride and Joy Conference

EDUCATION &

RESOURCES: Finding an Accepting and Affirming Faith Community



These organizations and religious organizations are a great starting place for finding a faith community that is welcoming, affirming and celebratory for LGBTQ people and families.

Metropolitan Community Churches were founded specifically to meet the spiritual needs of Christian

LGBT people. www.mcccchurch.org

Unitarian Universalists - UUs "affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person." A liberal, non-creedal religion, UU embraces not only LGBT people but people of diverse backgrounds and belief systems. www.uua.org

DignityUSA "envisions and works for a time when Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Catholics are affirmed and experience dignity through the integration of their spirituality with their sexuality, and as beloved persons of God participate fully in all aspects of life within the Church and Society." www.dignityusa.org

American Baptists Concerned provide support, education, and advocacy for LGBT Baptists, families, friends, churches, and clergy. "We envision that the day may speedily come within Baptist Churches when no one shall feel excluded from God's love in Jesus Christ because of their sexual orientation and gender identity." www.rainbowbaptists.org

Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons "serves the needs of gay Mormon women and men, as well as bisexual and transgender LDS and their supportive family and friends, through social and educational activities." www.affirmation.org

World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews: Keshet Ga'avah "Our vision is an environment where Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Jews worldwide can enjoy free and fulfilling lives." www.glbtejews.org

Al-Fatiha Foundation "is dedicated to Muslims of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and questioning or exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (LGBTIQ), and their families, friends and allies." www.al-fatiha.org

Lutherans Concerned "works for the full inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their Church and congregations." www.lcna.org

Jewish Mosaic "partners with Jewish organizations, communities, and individuals of every denomination to create a world where all Jews are fully included in communal life, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity." www.jewishmosaic.org

Nehirim: GLBT Jewish Culture and Spirituality "is a national, nonprofit, and nondenominational organization which builds community for GLBT Jews, partners and allies." www.nehirim.org

Soul Force This organization's purpose is "freedom for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from religious and political oppression through the practice of relentless nonviolent resistance." www.soulforce.org

The National Black Justice Coalition sponsors a Religious Affairs program dedicated to lifting the theological chains of oppression from Black LGBT community. www.nbjc.org

ALL IN GOD'S FAMILY: CREATING ALLIES FOR OUR LGBT FAMILIES

All in God's Family: Creating Allies for Our LGBT Families is a joint project of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Institute for Welcoming Resources, COLAGE and Family Equality Council. Debuted in May 2009, this multimedia curriculum will go a long way in providing the necessary tools to make faith communities affirming of LGBT people and their families.

All in God's Family includes concrete tools to educate faith leaders, including a step-by-step guide to supporting LGBT families of faith and tools for facilitating group learning, community dialogue, Bible study and community action planning to highlight LGBT families in our communities. Additionally, the curriculum includes Families Like Mine, a book about adults with LGBT parents written by Abigail Garner, whose father is gay; and two COLAGE visibility resources - the youth-produced documentary In My Shoes: Stories of Youth with LGBT Parents and a CD containing the phototext exhibit "That's So Gay: Portraits of Youth with LGBT Parents."

"For youth and adults with LGBTQ parents, finding a faith community where your family is respected and reflected can be a challenge," says Meredith Fenton, COLAGE Program Director. "COLAGE is pleased to be a partner on All in God's Family: Creating Allies for our LGBT Families and invites your faith community to use these tools to move beyond acceptance to full inclusion and celebration of LGBTQ families."

All in God's Family: Creating Allies for Our LGBT Families can be acquired for a suggested donation of \$50.00. All in God's Family: Creating Allies for Our LGBT Families can be ordered at www.WelcomingResources.org.

COLAGE is currently continuing this collaboration and working with Jewish Mosaic to adapt the curriculum for Jewish audiences. Stay tuned for the debut of a new resource for synagogues and Jewish faith communities.



ADVOCACY

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Exploring and Expanding Your Own Spirituality

(The original version of this article appeared in *Just for Us*, Spring 2002 and was written by Roseanne Johnson)

Every human being is born with an inherently spiritual nature. Most people express this nature and reflect upon life's deeper questions from within a religion or practice of faith. However, because of doctrine, custom, prejudice, or all or the above, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer people have often been targeted by and excluded from faith communities. As a result, many of us struggle to find or create a spiritual path that allows us to be true to ourselves.

Drawing upon the wisdom of COLAGERS from across the country, *Just for Us* offers advice and resources designed especially for COLAGERS who experience internal and/or external conflict in their spiritual practice.

HIT THE BOOKS

Nothing can replace the experience of studying, reflecting on, and coming to your own understanding of what the holy books, scriptures, and canons hold. Lots of other books are also out there to help answer your questions about spirituality, with perspectives from conservative to radical to everything in between.

INVOLVE YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Open communication will help your family and friends understand what you're seeking. Initiating conversations about your spiritual journey may also open the door for friends and family to share their own insights with you.

BE A GUEST

If you're curious about other faiths, practices, denominations, or congregations, check them out in person. You can find information and referrals on the Internet (see Resources below) or even in the phone book, though the best method is through word of mouth from someone you trust.

CREATE CHANGE FROM WITHIN

Perhaps you are comfortable with your current spiritual practice, but the congregation has not yet openly welcomed LGBTQ families. Some people find that an excellent way to fight oppression and invisibility is to stand up and do something about it. If your church/temple, youth group, or religious school are disappointing

of - or simply silent about - LGBTQ families, you might want to let them know you're there. Speak to your faith leaders and peers about your family and answer their questions. Your place of worship might be full of potential allies.

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Not all of us find an organized religion that works for us. Some of us find our own unique ways to express our spirituality and develop our own personal or family traditions to celebrate our beliefs. Spend time in nature, being creative, singing, cooking or meditating and you may find a mix of ways to express your faith and beliefs.

RESPONDING RESPECTFULLY

You may be challenged by those who seek to deny you and your family the right to express your spirituality. Confrontations with people who use religion to attack gay people and allies can be frustrating and disheartening, particularly when you're still wrestling with spirituality yourself. You have the option to excuse yourself from any unwanted debate. "I respect your right to your beliefs. Please respect my right to believe otherwise," is an example of a brief and dignified response to charged remarks about sex, sin, and h-e-double-hockey-sticks.

EXPAND YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Not everyone practices the same faith throughout their entire lives. Many people experiment with and follow different traditions at different times. Nor do you have to practice an "established" religion - or any religion - in order to live a peaceful and ethical life. Many people cultivate their own unique and meaningful connection to the divine, nature, and their fellow human beings.

Spirituality is a complex, deeply personal, lifelong journey. Some people find joy in sharing their spiritual lives with a community, while others prefer a solitary path. There are those who are comfortable in discussing their inner lives and those who treasure their privacy. Don't rush... you have your whole life to discover what works for you. In the meantime, know that as a COLAGER, on your journey, you will always be in very good company.

FACTS ABOUT RELIGION, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY FROM AROUND THE WORLD

- In Iran, it's illegal to be a homosexual. The state does, however, uphold that the right to change genders is a basic human right that all Iranians have the right to access. This also allows for Islamic clerics to study transsexuals in ways that they cannot study homosexuals.
- On July 3, 2009, the Indian Supreme Court decriminalized gay sex. India, a secular Hindu country, has had that law on the books ever since British colonial times.
- In 2003, Gene Robinson was confirmed as the bishop of New Hampshire for the Episcopal Church. Robinson, a father of two, is the first openly gay bishop in the Anglican Communion, a global denomination based in England.
- In 1990, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) issued a resolution stating that all rabbis, regardless of sexual orientation, be accorded the opportunity to fulfill the sacred vocation that they have chosen" and that "all Jews are religiously equal regardless of their sexual orientation."
- The Christian denomination The Religious Society of Friends, more commonly known as the Quakers, are set to extend marriage services to same-sex couples later this year. The organization, which already welcomes same-sex commitment ceremonies, is also expected to issue a statement urging governments to legalize same-sex marriage.
- In 1973, the Unitarian Universalist Church formed the Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns. The Office provides materials about LGBTQ issues for ministers, couples, and those who wish to learn more about the issues. The UU Church, which prides itself on its inclusivity, voted in 1984 to allow ministers to perform same-sex ceremonies.

(Sources: HRC & the BBC) ; Compiled by Diana Castillo

COLAGE POP CULTURE ALERT!

We are excited to share just a few of the newest books and media that share the stories of people with LGBTQ parents.

GLEE

This new television show quickly became the buzz after the pilot screened last spring. Returning for a full season this fall, one of Glee's main characters Rachel is the daughter of two gay dads, born through surrogacy. With a sound track of popular hits retooled for glee club presentations, Glee may be one to watch!

SAY THE WORD

Jeannine Garsee

17 year old Shawna Gallagher is a perfectionist (no COLAGERS can relate, I am sure!) who dates the right boys, gets the right grades and obeys her single father. When her estranged lesbian mother dies, Shawna must confront her feelings about her mom as well as navigate new definitions of family. Told in an extremely relatable and relevant voice, this young adult novel will strike a chord with teen and adult COLAGERS.

MY MOTHER'S LESBIAN JEWISH WICCAN WEDDING

A new musical comedy by David Hein
Though we haven't had the chance to see this new musical in person, we can't resist letting you know about this new work from an adult COLAGER. After debuting as a hit in the Toronto Fringe Festival, the musical will be relaunched on the mainstream Toronto stage this fall. Hein, an award-winning singer-songwriter, wrote the title song as a gift to his mother, about her real-life wedding.

WHO YOUR DADDY? AND OTHER WRITINGS ON QUEER PARENTING

Edited by Rachel Epstein

This new collection of writing brings vital and refreshing insights into current discussions about LGBTQ families, donor insemination, parenting and more. The diverse essays and articles include contributions from COLAGE members Melissa Harts, Jamie K. Evans, and Tobi Hill-Meyer, as well as academics, lawyers, parents, and activists.



COLAGE IS EXCITED TO WELCOME FOUR NEW MEMBERS TO OUR NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

A.J. COSTA, 23, Houston, TX. A.J. is a native Houstonian and proud Texan who was raised by his two moms for the past 15 years. He is elated to be re-joining the Board, as he was a member as a youth 7 years ago. You can learn more about AJ on page 5.

BRETT WEBB-MITCHELL, 54, Chapel Hill, NC. Brett is a writer, a scholar, a pastor, and a dad and partner. Brett has studied and written a great deal in the area of people with disabilities in faith communities, religious education, pilgrimage, and on being a gay parent in articles, essays, sermons, and books. A former professor at Duke Divinity School, Brett is the Director of the School of the Pilgrim, taking people on "outward bound" pilgrimages to help individuals find their "inward bound" path. Brett has been



ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament for over 25 years, pastoring several churches in many states. And Brett is a dad of two amazing young people, Adrienne and Parker, and is in a partnered relationship with Dean Blackburn for over 14 years.

MORGAN FALKENRATH GREEN, 24, Oakland, CA. Morgan grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area with a lesbian mom, a female-to-male transsexual dad, and a younger brother. She has been a member of UC Santa Cruz's LGBTQ student organization CLUH and has volunteered for Triangle Speakers in Santa Cruz and the Pacific Center in Berkeley. Morgan graduated from UC Berkeley in 2007 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and has been employed as



a Senior Program Associate at Out & Equal Workplace Advocates, a non-profit focused on attaining LGBT workplace equality, ever since.

CRYSTALLEE R. CRAIN, 26, Flint, MI. Crystallee has a Bachelors in Political Science from Northern Michigan University and a Masters of Arts in Social Sciences from Eastern Michigan University. Just recently Ms. Crain has finished a Visiting Instructor position at Lake Superior State University where she taught Races & Minorities, Cultural Diversity and Sociology of the Family. Outside of her academic achievements Crystallee has been a freelance journalist for 10 years and a strong advocate for LGBT rights and equality.



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We also wish to thank the more than 250 donors who gave up to \$100 during 2009. Thank you! We sincerely appreciate your generosity. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this list. Please contact Jack at 415.861.5437 x105 or jack@colage.org to make any corrections. In addition, you'll notice our amazing new database has changed the way information is stored. If you wish to change anything about the way you are listed, please contact Jack.



COLAGE

PEOPLE WITH A LESBIAN GAY BISEXUAL
TRANSGENDER OR QUEER PARENT

UNITE!

COLAGE BRANDING PROCESS

In this issue of *Just For Us* we are pleased to share with you the brand new logo of COLAGE. Over the past 5 months, we've been working with the nonprofit branding experts at Mission Minded to strengthen our communications and visual identity. We hope to help COLAGE to be easier to understand and more accessible to COLAGERS around the country. In upcoming months, we'll roll out our complete new logo and newly designed materials, and you'll notice that we'll be using clearer language to describe the COLAGE mission and programs!

In the meantime, we are excited to share the design the new COLAGE logo- from afar you might see a starburst, a flower, a pinwheel... all appropriate images to represent how dynamic and powerful COLAGE and our movement can be! Look closer and you'll see that we are made up of vibrant and diverse individuals who come together to build a network of peers and to secure the rights, recognition and respect that we and our families deserve! People with a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer parent... Unite!

We'd love to hear your thoughts about our changing new look! Stay tuned as we convert to the new COLAGE Brand in upcoming issues of *Just For Us*, on our website and in all our materials and resources.

VOICES RAISED, A PEOPLE OF COLOR (POC) LED PROJECT OF COLAGE IS SEEKING MEMBERS FOR THE VOICES RAISED ADVISORY COMMITTEE!

The mission of Voices Raised is to seek, celebrate, and reflect the unique voices and experiences of COLAGERS of color who have/had one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer parent or guardian(s) of color. Members of the advisory committee will launch conversations aimed at making COLAGE more accessible, affirming, and relevant for families of color.

We would love to have your voice and vision as a part of the steering committee!

This committee will be a space to have conversations and strategy sessions about:

- What a more inclusive and diverse queerspawn community could look like?
- What are some of the unique programmatic needs and resources that COLAGERS of color and their families may need or want?
- How can we mobilize the voices of COLAGERS of color to make our families visible and our stories heard?

How can COLAGE shift its outreach to increase accessibility?

The advisory committee meets monthly by conference call and we ask for committee members to make a commitment of at least 9 months. Discussions and surveys may also be done via an online email group. As a member of this steering committee, your voice, vision, and personal perspective will help to shape future COLAGE programming and help to build our community and collective voices to reflect our unique stories and families. This will also be an opportunity to share ideas and build community

with other COLAGERS of color from around the country!

Interested in participating? Have a question or an idea? Know someone else you think would be interested in this committee? Contact National Program Coordinator, Bethany Lockhart by emailing bethany@colage.org or call 415-861-5437 x103.



COLAGE NOTES

THIS SUMMER COLAGE HOSTED FOUR FABULOUS SUMMER INTERNS:

ROSALEA (LEA) BROWN grew up in Detroit, Michigan and recently graduated from Central Michigan University as a Family Studies major and Youth Studies minor.



While at school she was involved with the LGBT speaker panel, CMU Dance Team, and the Family Relations Council. After her parents divorced Lea was raised by her mother, her mother's partner, her father, and her father's wife. She recently began as the Activities Coordinator at Affirmations Center in Ferndale, MI.

DIANA CASTILLO grew up in Davis, California before moving out east to attend Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Her mother came out and moved in with her now-wife when she was nine and Diana has been involved



with the gay rights movement ever since. Diana served as a treasurer for her high school GSA, where she helped plan events for Transgendered Day of Remembrance, Ally Week and Day of Silence. She also participated in her high school debate team and Model UN. Diana interned with COLAGE through the Hampshire College Reproductive Rights Service Corps.

E. COOPER was born and raised in Dallas, Texas. He is entering his last year at Utah State University where he sits on the Advisory Board for the GLBTA Services Center. He is also a committee member of the annual Out and Greek



Conference for national sorority and fraternity LGBT members, a Programming board Advisory Member for the Associated Students of Utah State University (ASUSU), and President of the Council of Student Clubs and Organizations (CSCO) for ASUSU.

BRITTNEE GAUTHIER grew up in several different places due to the fact that her father was in the military. However she claims California as her home. She is currently attending Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia where she is working towards the goal of attaining a BA in Psychology with a minor in child development. Learn more about Brittnee in her article that begins on page 1.

WE ARE EQUALLY EXCITED TO WELCOME TWO NEW MEMBERS TO OUR TEAM:

CHIAH CONNOLLY- INGRAM will be COLAGE's fall intern. She is a COLAGER raised by lesbian moms in San Francisco. She is a film student at San Francisco State University who has completed the San Francisco Youth



Media Arts Project and made a You Tube film last fall about Proposition 8. She has been a long-time camper and counselor at Camp It Up, a Northern CA camp for LGBTQ families and worked at the Mission Cliffs rock climbing gym.

JEFF DEGROOT will spend September 2009- May 2010 with COLAGE for a Fellowship on Donor Insemination. Born and raised by his two moms in



Corvallis, OR, Jeff graduated from Whitman College with a degree in US Policy Studies. He has broad organizing experience including with the Bus Project which increases civic participation among young people. Over the next nine months, Jeff will be doing assessment, resource and program development and community building by and for COLAGERS born through donor insemination.

COLAGE DEBUTS BRAND NEW EVENT-SPEAK OUT CAMP

This November, teens and adults with LGBTQ parents will come together for a weekend of community building, leadership skill building, political education and fun at the first-ever COLAGE Speak OUT Camp near Atlanta, GA.

Very rarely are there opportunities for young adults with LGBTQ parents to come together as a community and to bask in the power of our voices. Even as we respect and support our parents, we know our families are discriminated against and the realness of oppression in our lives give us the experience of being or feeling different. By coming together as a vibrant community, we realize that our differences are our strength and can use our voices to speak truth to power and to create the world we want to see.

Participants in the Speak OUT Camp will join COLAGE's national network of youth and adults who engage in media activism, public speaking, chapter leadership, and advocacy. Campers will develop action plans to take all the passion and skills from Speak OUT Camp back to their school, local or state communities. As the applications roll in from youth and young adults interested in the camp, we are even more excited to host this fun and transformative event this fall.

Learn more at www.colage.org/programs/events/speakoutcamp/!



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Chapters are autonomous local groups that affiliate with COLAGE and are self-run. We strive to keep updated on local contact information. If you have difficulty reaching the contact listed please let us know. Thank you.