



JUST FOR US

LOOKING WITHIN, LOOKING AHEAD

Vol. 14 #2
2002

FOR PEOPLE WITH LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PARENTS



MY FAMILY IS DIFFERENT

by Marina A. Gatto

Marina and her mom Ramona Gatto with fellow Nick News guest Rosie O'Donnell. Marina was one of three young people with LGBT parents that appeared on the Nick News Special Edition "My Family is Different", which aired on Nickelodeon last

My name is Marina Gatto, I'm 14 years old and I've got two moms. My family is different, not only because I've

got two moms, but because our family is filled with unconditional love, acceptance, openness, and strength.

Life is a contradiction in many ways because my moms are pretty, they're funny, they're cool, and people like them. Yet when people realize they are a couple, or that we are a family, many of those same people feel hateful and fearful of them, and of us.

My moms have taught me that you never combat hate with hate. Instead, educate, love, and lead by example. What you can't accept, you change. The greatest differences I think I make, and my family makes, are by just being who we are.

The morning I was to tape the Nick Show on alternative families, everyone was supposed to meet in the lobby of a hotel. One of my moms and I came down and immediately saw a group of families with moms and dads, some holding Bibles. We walked over, they saw us, and I think they saw the crosses we were wearing around our necks as well. Immediately, they embraced us, befriended us, and welcomed us into their circle of families. We laughed, and joked, and my mom and another mom hung out and talked. Within minutes there were invitations to visit New Mexico where they lived someday, talks of correspondence, and all

the things that our families had in common. They genuinely liked us as people, and as a family.

A couple hours later during the taping of the show, Linda Ellerbee asked me how I felt about having lesbian moms. My mom said that back in the green room, jaws dropped. That was the first time that they realized that we were an "alternative" family, and that my mom was gay. After the show, some of them didn't want to talk to us and didn't want to be around us anymore. Most of them, however, wanted to take pictures with me, talk and hang out, and that same mom and mine even hugged goodbye. Believe it or not, one of those Christian boys contacted the producer later, wanting to correspond with me. I'm sure we were the only alternative family that those people had ever met, and my mom probably the only gay person that they'd ever knew they were around. But inadvertently, accidentally, without knowing that changes were being made to their hearts and to their subconscious minds, or wanting them made, I believe they were. I think somewhere deep inside, they realized how truly *continued on page 2*

Introducing: COLAGE'S NEW MISSION STATEMENT

COLAGE engages, connects, and empowers people to make the world a better place for children of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents and families.

Read more about our new Strategic Plan on p8 & 9!



Ready or not here come Family Week Staff!
L to R: Kate, Kelly, Meredith, Katy, Beth and Jamie

Amber Davis.

HOW WE'RE DIFFERENT

by Andie Gibbs

Being the daughter of Lesbian activists in the South has never been a day at the beach! However, it is an experience I would trade for none other! I guess until I was asked to write this article I never really gave a lot of thought as to how my life was different from others...it was just my life. I began making notes a few days ago and came up with five pages on the differences and decided to stick with the things I thought would be most beneficial to other children of gays and lesbians. So here goes.

One thing I learned early on is to "size" people up. I could not join in on conversations about family without figuring out if I was in a safe situation. I learned to refer to my Momz as "my folks" or "my parents". Rarely in a new situation did I let people know right off that my parents were lesbians. I considered how these new friends or their family might react to the news. I was never real quick to invite people home with me or ask them over for the night until I knew for certain that they were not homophobes. This in and of itself is stressful. It certainly can put a damper on things from time to time. The good thing is that my friends are decent, free-thinking people who even now are still my friends. I cannot think of one who doesn't adore my Momz and who isn't from time to time envious of me.

As an adult I realized that I was much more open-minded than most of my "straight parent" friends *continued on page 6*

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear COLAGE Community,

This issue of *Just For Us* contains two subjects close to my heart: an

introduction to the new COLAGE Strategic Plan and discussion regarding the unique traits of COLAGERS.

Please take a careful look at the information on p.8 regarding the Strategic Plan. It's the blueprint of COLAGE's future, based on your input and feedback. This Plan is as dynamic and vital as the COLAGE membership; it will continue to grow and change based on you. We hope you find it as exciting and interesting as we do. And as always, we welcome your thoughts.

I have spent the better part of the last six years pondering the question of "how are people with LGBT parents different?" I've tried to answer that question for a gazillion media outlets from the *New York Times* to the local gay rag. One obvious answer is that we aren't different. We fight with our parent/s, we worry about our future, we have good and bad hair days... we face all the same joys and pains of growing up that anyone else does.

On the other hand, many of us feel that our lives have been uniquely shaped by our queer heritage. We are part of a tribe of people that are engaged in a massive movement for civil rights. We come from cultural traditions that include pot lucks, drag shows, and an enduring obsession with Judy

Garland. Our families are often formed outside of the bonds of biology -- by adoption, donor insemination, and other creative means. We learn different rules about what boys and girls are supposed to do in the household and in the world. Many of our lives have been permanently marked by the scars of the closet, whether it's our parents' or our own.

Through my experience of meeting hundreds of COLAGERS, I have found that the most commonly shared characteristic is that COLAGERS believe they are more compassionate regarding difference and more sensitive to discrimination -- of any kind, not just homophobia -- than their peers. I have found this to be true. You'll find more of these provocative thoughts by COLAGE authors contained within the following pages of *Just For Us*.

Lastly, I have major news to share. It has been my profound honor for the last six years to work on behalf of people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents and families through COLAGE. There have been so many extraordinary moments--whether they were achieving legislative victories or witnessing the inner healing of fellow COLAGERS. I have had the privilege of working and playing with so many amazing, inspiring, enchanting people on our shared journey to bring light to our experiences and fight for justice for our people.

Therefore it is bittersweet for me to tell you that it is time for me to transition to my next major role in life: being a mom. I have fallen in love with the day-in and day-out experiences of parenting. My partner and I are going to try to make it possible

for me to do this for as long as we can. This is a big transition for our family, and for my extended family of COLAGE. I will transition out of being Executive Director of COLAGE and into being a volunteer, donor, and fan during the coming months.

As you already know, a fantastic interim team have been running COLAGE while I've been on maternity leave. Beth Teper has been serving as Executive Director, with help from Cory Pohley, and Meredith Fenton has been Program Coordinator. They have all been doing a wonderful job of not just maintaining COLAGE, but leading COLAGE forward as we begin to implement our strategic plan. I will work with the interim team until a new Executive Director is hired and settled. To stay up to date with the details about the transition and ensuing hiring process, subscribe to COLAGE NetNews on our website.

Together we have changed the world: our families have never been more visible, felt less isolated, or had more rights than we do today. I am proud of that. But there is still much work to do. I will leave COLAGE knowing that it will continue to do the brave and amazing work it does so well every day.

Thank you for all you have shared with me during this journey. I will always remember you, and I will remain one of your staunchest supporters and most loyal members.

Always,

Felicia Park-Rogers
Felicia Park-Rogers

PS Keep in touch! My new email is feliciapr@igc.org.

Announcing the birth of Benjamin Jonah Park-Rogers Timoner

Born healthy at home on July 30, 2002 at 7:46 a.m. 6 pounds, 11 ounces; 20 inches long. Moms Felicia and Rachel are happy and healthy too.

In lieu of gifts, Felicia and Rachel ask you to



My Family is Different continued from page 1

small our differences were.

I like having a pride flag on our house, I like having two moms, even though life isn't always easy for us. At school I'm well liked because I try to like everyone, and befriend the people who need it most. Empathy is something I understand first hand. I like going to a parochial school and having to explain to my social studies teacher why my family tree has two women instead of a man and a woman. I like knowing that people like me or like my family sometimes before realizing who or what we are. That's when I believe people figure out what's really most important, that no matter what kind of family you are, your family is special and wonderful when it is filled with so much love, respect, and happiness. ■

Marina Gatto is a student of Mercy High School in Burlingame, CA. She has been a COLAGE member and an activist on behalf of LGBT families since age 9, appearing on several local and national news and talk shows. Her current interests are public speaking, waterpolo, soccer, crew, DJing, music, and hanging out with her friends.

COLAGE

(Children Of Lesbians And Gays Everywhere) is a nonprofit organization providing support, education, and advocacy for people of all ages of LGBT parents.

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SPEAK OUT

We asked COLAGERS at this summer's

Family Week in Saugatuck:

"Do you see yourself as different from your peers who don't have LGBT parents? How?"

Robbie, 9, High Falls Trail, California: "Yes. I have two moms and a dad. I feel lucky. One of my friends' moms is divorced like mine. My friend's mom is not gay but mine is. He thinks I am lucky. I am, I am lucky because I come to COLAGE and they don't. I also get to do fun things for a week and make new friends. COLAGE teens and teachers help out with our problems. One of my problems is my moms embarrass me in public. We talked about it and now I feel much better."

Tess, 9, Newton, New Jersey: "No, I don't feel different, I forget about it at school. I don't feel the same or different, I just feel unique."

Barbara, 14, Naperville, Illinois: "I happen to be different than most. Learning to accept my individuality was and is a long, difficult journey. Being in an environment where everything fits into a mold, I am only accepted by open-minded people. I love my dad, even though he's different than everyone thinks is normal. I love my mom, even though she fits into the

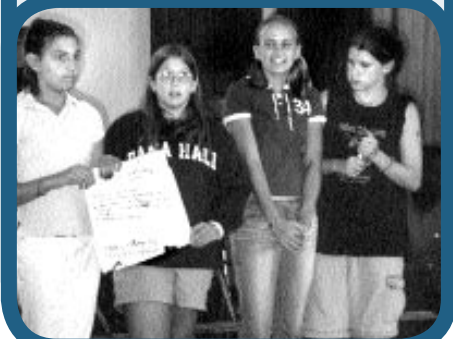
'mold'. My family situation is not only rewarding, but difficult. Living outside of the inner circle was challenging, but I learned to deal with it, and I grew to love it. At first, I didn't adapt well, but now, I'm happy I was finally able to."

Jessie, 13, Fort Wayne, Indiana: "Yes, but people are different all around us. People must learn that different doesn't mean bad, it means different. And difference should be just as fine with everyone else as it is with me and the people I see around me at COLAGE."

Morgan, 10, Orangeburg, New York: "No!! I do not feel different than anyone else. I have the same amount of people in my family. But I have one more mom, so I actually think I'm lucky!!"

Kelly, 19, Santa Cruz, California: "I know my family is 'different', but when I look around me, I notice that there are many differences in EVERY family. I think that I have learned to be more aware of injustice in all areas of society because I have experienced some of them first hand. I also think that I can see many more options that we, as humans, have in life. I know, coming from an alternative family, that there are many ways to love and be, and that is something that not all of my peers understand."

Feel like SpeakingOUT! to Just For Us on differences, or on another subject? We want to hear from you! Contact JFU Coordinator Rosanne Johnson via email at jfu@colage.org. ■



Katelyn, Lanie, Leah, and Roxy share their views

The opinions expressed in Just for Us are those of its contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of COLAGE.

CHAPTER UPDATE

Theresa Fenander, COLAGE - LA Chapter Co-coordinator, writes:

After a quiet period, COLAGE LA has been become active again. We started off with a documentary film, "Our House", featuring children talking about being raised by alternative families. The film was great and most of our COLAGERS had powerful insight about the movie. I am so proud to see how articulate our COLAGERS are!

A COLAGE picnic was our next event. Flag football, temporary tattoos and a nail polish bar were just some of the things that were at the picnic. We also had wonderful gourmet box lunches donated by Amber's dad (thanks, I think I ate twenty brownies). Marc Chambers and his partner had a backyard party for us COLAGERS. We decorated flower pots, picture frames and of course, ate. Our most recent activities have been bowling and putt putt golf. The energy from the COLAGERS has been enormous!

I am working on starting an older COLAGE group in LA that meets once a month at a coffee shop. The group will be for COLAGERS that are 18+ who want to meet and connect with other adult COLAGERS. Get involved and let me know what you think about this idea. Your comments will be most appreciated. I can be reached at 310-312-6081 or la@colage.org.



Thank you, parents, for all your support and donations to keep our chapter going. Co-coordinators Emily Gold and I, and all our terrific friends and volunteers, all look forward to seeing even more new faces from the LA area at our next event! ■

FAMILY WEEKS IN SAUGATUCK & PROVINCETOWN 2002

Once again this summer, COLAGE partnered with Family Pride Coalition to coordinate two amazing Family Weeks in Saugatuck, Michigan and Provincetown, Massachusetts. Nearly 400 families attended the two events. Almost 70 kids between ages 9-12, and 45 teens, participated in COLAGE workshops and activities.

SAVE THE DATES!

July 12-19
in Saugatuck, MI

August 2-9
in Provincetown, MA

Planning for 2003 Family Week is already underway.

Get involved! Contact COLAGE to help plan or be a facilitator.



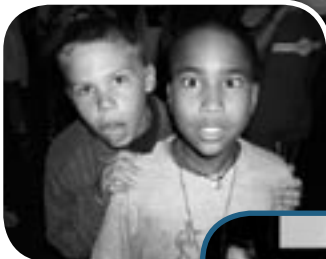
Paint-a-pot activity in Saugatuck



Saugatuck teen panel



New buddies



Brennan and Trey on stage



Provincetown teen panelists

Special thanks to all who contributed to this year's events:

FACILITATORS

Jamie Bergeron
Katy Chatel
Ruby Cymrot-Wu
Kelly Densmore
Meredith Fenton
Tracy Fogarty
Claire Knight
Kate Kovalanka
Jenny Laden, Coordinator
Kate Ranson-Walsh
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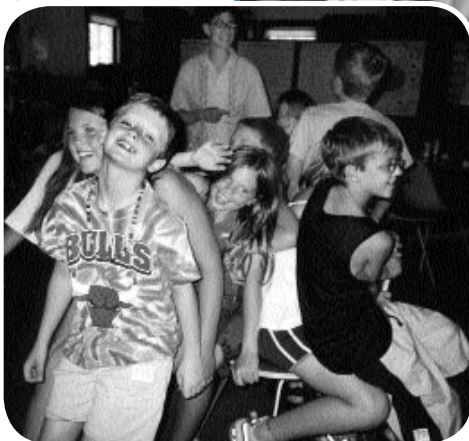
TEEN PANELISTS

Alicia Baker Tulloch, 17, VA
Cleopatra Bezis, 13, MA
A.J. Costa, 16, TX

Ruby Cymrot-Wu, 17, CA
Kelly Densmore, 18, CA
Janet Gordon, 13, MI
LaQuan Harris, 17, NY

Sarah Leonard, 16, WA
Nathaniel Obler, 14, MA
Diane Paulson, 17, NJ
Roxy Sawczynec, 13, IL
Barbara Shallow, 14, IL
Griffin Shallow, 13, IL
Max Shallow, 14, IL

Reverse Musical Chairs



FAVORITE WORKSHOPS

This year's workshops included popular favorites, like "Tools For School" and "Sex, Gender & Sexuality", and a new "DO Something" elective series which offered leadership and activism training through creative writing, drama, art, and public speaking.

CONGRATULATIONS!

In Provincetown, a new Family of Courage Award was presented to the Lofton-Croteau Family recognizing their family's determined public battle to reform the state of Florida's laws prohibiting adoption by LGBT parents. The Steinman-Iacullo family - Wayne, Sal, and Hope - received the 2nd annual Fisher-Davenport award honoring their family's innumerable contributions to the LGBT family movement over the past 15 years. Congratulations! ■

AS IF IT MATTERS

Six stories beneath the surface

Produced by Gay-Straight Alliance Network,
LYRIC and TILT

media spotlight

Nine youth wrote, directed, produced, and edited "As If It Matters", a 25 min. video intended to spark dialogue, increase the visibility of LGBT youth experiences, and inspire people to take action against discrimination and harassment in their communities and schools. "As If It Matters" deals with issues of homophobia, cultural acceptance, body image, relationships, and labels through the stories of six students.

COLAGEr Eleanor Gerber-Siff, 17, from San Francisco, helped produce and appears in "As If It Matters". Eleanor has been a member of COLAGE and spokesperson on behalf of LGBT families for several years. JFU talked to Eleanor about her experience:

JFU: What was your contribution to the project?

EGS: It was a group collaboration. Everyone who worked on it shared all the roles - creating storyboards, writing, shooting, doing sound,



Courtesy of GSA Network

and editing. We argued a lot about a lot of the stuff, but we came to a consensus about everything in the end. We decided to do a montage based on our own stories.

JFU: Your character, Jen, is a bisexual teen with two lesbian mothers. She gets rejected by another girl who "only flirts with skinny girls". Is your character autobiographical?

EGS: Mostly. I do have two moms and I am bisexual. I did have issues about my body. It's not 100% autobiographical, but definitely based on personal experience.

JFU: What was it like sharing your experience this way?

EGS: It was really scary. It was like standing up naked in front of a crowd, knowing that thousands of people across the country would see it. Especially the body stuff...but we voted on themes, and body image was one of them, and I felt that I could contribute to that.

JFU: What has the audience reaction been like?

EGS: Really, really positive! It amazes me that people are so affected by it. We put in so many hours of intensive work. We were working on it until about five minutes before the premiere! We never stopped to think about the impact it might have. But every single person has said something like, "I wish there was something like this when I was growing up." I was really surprised.

JFU: What do you hope people get out of watching the video?

EGS: I think what makes it so effective is that there are so many images of the queer youth story - it's not just one gay youth, or "the gay issue". It's not one-dimensional. My hope is that people who see it will realize that there are gay, lesbian, bi, and queer people who don't necessarily "look it" - who don't fit the stereotypes at all. And that there are many issues, not just coming out to parents, for example. Including normal teenage life issues. Being queer is only one issue.

"As If It Matters" and an organizing manual and curriculum guide are available through GSA Network. For more information and/or to acquire a copy, visit www.gsanetwork.org/freezone/aiim/. ■

SPAWN TALK

by Abigail Garner

Different ≠ Bad

"Your dad is gay? What's that like?"

I used to just say things like, "It's just like your family," or "He's like any other dad, just gay."

My family never really was "just like" families with straight parents. My gay dad was like no straight dad I had ever met. But I didn't know how to begin to explain what made my family different, nor did I think that those differences would be acceptable.

For a long time, LGBT activists have been chanting "no difference" when it comes to how children fare in gay-parent families. As I got older I learned that being different from straight families is not automatically bad. When I realized this, I began to look critically at my "just like" response. Some researchers have, too.

In the April 2001 issue of the American Sociological Review, Sociology professors Judith Stacey and Timothy J. Biblarz from the University of Southern California released an analysis based on 21 previous studies of children of lesbian and gay parents from the past two decades. Stacey and Biblarz say that contrary to previous conclusions, these children do indeed have distinguishable differences from their counterparts who have straight parents. Their interpretation of the data suggests that there is a high

correlation between children who have lesbian and gay parents and the children's tendency to challenge traditional ideas of gender roles, gender-based career choices, and compulsory heterosexuality.

Why were these findings previously downplayed? To fully understand the answer, it is important to look at why such research was done in the first place. Most research on children of gay and lesbian parents was conducted in order to build supporting evidence in defense of gay parents who risked losing custody of their children when getting a divorce from a straight spouse.

To ensure that gay parents would not be denied custody, the research needed to prove that having a gay parent would not influence the children in any way. The research needed to disprove homophobic assumptions, namely that the children would be more likely to be gay themselves (homophobic court systems were not going to accept the retort, "Why should that matter?"). And since so much of homophobia is based on notions of gender nonconformity, suspicion of not being straight could arise if daughters were reported to be less traditionally feminine or if the sons were reported to be more sensitive.

Under homophobic pressure to prove that gay families are "just like" straight families, previous researchers have diminished the gifts of liberation that children gain as a result of being raised in their "nontraditional" families. Being raised in one home with two dads and another home with a single

mother meant that I saw both genders operating outside of traditional gender roles. Did that have an impact on how I "turned out?" Yes.

I may be straight, but I'm still the Radical Right's nightmare. At 30, I'm single, no kids, self-employed, opinionated, can't cook, hate cleaning. Fundamentalists might even deem me "confused."

Or they might call me what some classmates called me when I was a kid: "weird."

"You're soooo weird."

Thanks. I call it liberated. ■

Abigail Garner is the creator of a website for LGBT families: www.familiesikemine.com. She is currently working on a non-fiction book about queer families that will be published by HarperCollins.

JFU congratulates Abigail Garner on receiving a 2002 Excellence in Journalism award from the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association. Abigail's *Newsweek* commentary, "Don't 'Protect' Me, Give Me Your Respect!", won First Place in the Written Opinion/Editorial category.



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2nd Generation

A SPECIAL SECTION FOR QUEER AND QUESTIONING KIDS OF LGBT PARENTS

How We're Different continued from page 1

and acquaintances. When you come from a family that is discriminated against, you learn to stick closer together and you learn to accept other's differences more quickly. I always knew that I had choices in this life and that my choices were not limited to meeting some guy and getting married. One day my little niece was watching TV and she said "When I get married, to a boy or a girl, I am going to have a house like that one". She was very matter-of-fact about it and didn't bat an eye. I know there is much controversy about whether you choose to be gay or whether you are born that way. Many "fundies" will say that having gay parents breeds gay children and I think that is crap. However, I do think that we grow up knowing that we have a choice and we are open to the idea of loving whomever we choose. What a blessing that is!

I spent some time recently with a straight friend's son and a few of his buddies. Being the teenage boys they are, they were always ragging at one another. Problem was, every other word out of their mouths was "faggot" this and "faggot" that. I finally asked them if that was the biggest "disser" in school these



days, and they said yes. After I explained to them that I was offended, they quit doing it around me, but I know that Monday morning back in school they were back to the same

Being a Southern girl, the worst thing you can do to me is talk bad about my parents or be mean to my dog!

old thing. Being a Southern girl, the worst thing you can do to me is talk bad about my parents or be mean to my dog! It is true. I am real quick to be offended and feel it's my "job" to hold people accountable for behavior such as this. I would like to think that those boys at least think of me and maybe they look around at their classmates and wonder if they may be offending someone in some way by using homophobic terms. Of course we don't live in the land of OZ and I am far from being naïve...but I would like to think maybe they heard me.

Last, I think that growing up with Lesbian parents I

learned to be more politically active and I learned to care more about the world around me. I have had and still have to deal with the unfairness the world deals out to my parents. It really makes me angry at times. I use that fuel to fire myself up and have become quite an activist in my own right. My Momz' examples have given me the framework to become the adult that I am today and I am very proud of my willingness to not accept things as they are and to not "roll with the flow" like so many others do. I have learned to look at the good things that the unfairness deals out. I think that knowing you can live outside of society's box gives you a feeling of empowerment! Also, I have great one-liners I can throw out too. Like: "Yes, I have two momz! Aren't I the lucky one!" ■

Andie Gibbs, 36, is the fulltime volunteer caretaker and Educational Program Coordinator of Camp Sister Spirit, a feminist education retreat center in Mississippi. Andie facilitates educational programs on issues including racism, paganism, religious oppression, feminist issues, homophobia and human rights. In 1994, Andie received an Honorary Doctorate of Law from the City University of New York honoring her civil rights work. She is working towards her Masters degree in Adult Education.

DATLINE DAN

By Dan Cherubin



Why we're different.

Many years ago, when I began the group Second Generation and before this column came about, I had a personal 'zine/newsletter/rant rag which made its way around the country and into hands and minds of various COLAGE folk. And one of those rants was about just how we are different. I wrote that by merely coming from an "alternative family" dynamic, we immediately know what it's like to not be part of the majority. We are automatically "the other" in society's eyes. As much as LGBT parents may state that their family is "just like everybody else's", they are, in fact, NOT. Other kids don't have to wonder what people will say in school about Mom and Mom, or think twice about bringing friends home, or

wonder just what kind of bizarre lesbian ritual they should expect at Thanksgiving (Tofurkey has to be one of the biggest mistakes ever developed!). But these differences should make us appreciate other groups' differences, as well. We know what it's like to be an outsider. How do we think other outside groups feel?

In that old piece (which I wrote back in 1993 or so) I had also hoped that one day, sometime soon, being a kid of an LGBT parent wouldn't be that different and it wouldn't make a difference. So, has it changed? The mere fact that this newsletter's topic is about our differences shows it hasn't.

Is this such a bad thing? In my mind, no. The mainstream media often opts for a "path of least resistance" when it comes to showing us what the world expects of us. Do we really all want to be the same? Do we really not want to think for ourselves, form our own opinions, be our own people?

Yes, it would be easier to be like the majority. My lesbian mom has said to me that it would have been easier for me if I, myself, was straight. But it wasn't a choice. I didn't choose my sexuality, nor did I choose my parents. Believe me, there are times I wish I could have, but you take what you're given and you run with it.

Enjoy your own differences. And by all means, try to educate other's to appreciate your differences. But you MUST appreciate other people's differences. You can't have it all one way. And who knows? You may not be that different after all.

How am I different? In far too many ways to count. Do I mind? Nope! ■

Dan Cherubin works as a librarian in NYC. He'll be appearing in the upcoming anthology, *Revolted Librarians Redux: Radical Library Workers Speak Out*, to be published by McFarland in Fall 2002. You can read more about his life on his website at http://www.geocities.com/ska_librarian.

FUN PAGE

for kids with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents



You Can Create a Treasure Box

An activity enjoyed by COLAGE Family Week participants in Saugatuck and Provincetown, 2002, led by Kelly Densmore, COLAGE summer intern.

Activity Time
1-2 hours

Location
Indoors (anywhere it's easy to sweep)

- Goals**
- 1 To express yourself artistically
 - 2 To create a keepsake with special meaning for you, the artist
 - 3 To have fun!

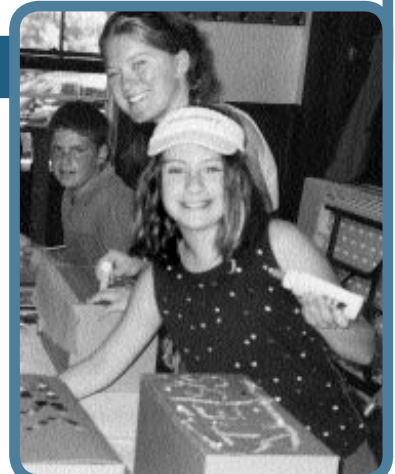
Materials You Will Need

- * Boxes (shoe box or cake box size)
- * Scissors * Glue * Glitter
- * Pictures of your family, friends, & pets (use copies or ask permission first)
- * Magazines (to cut pictures out of)
- * Colored pens, crayons, etc.
- * Colored paper * Sequins
- * Puff paints * Colored tissue paper
- * Any other fun decorative materials

Directions

- 1 Find a used, recycled, or new box. Choose a size that you like.
- 2 Decorate it in a way that is uniquely you - try pictures, drawings, and paintings of your favorite people, pictures of stuff you like, pictures of the activities you like to do, words you use, your favorite colors, etc.
- 3 Glue on any fun decorative material you have. Use the above list to give you ideas.
- 4 Let it sit to dry if you used wet materials such as glue or paints.
- 5 Show off your keepsake box to friends and family! Find a special place at home for your box and store your treasures in it.

Tess, Kelly and Max make their treasure boxes



INTRODUCING: COLAGE'S Strategic Plan

Friends: It is our honor and our pleasure to present to you the highlights of COLAGE's three-to-five year Strategic Plan. This document represents more than a year of focused attention and concerted effort by the COLAGE Board of Directors and staff, and would not have been possible without the participation of more than 300 COLAGE youth, families, and supporters. Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, YOU -- our members and supporters -- told us what you think of COLAGE and what you need from us. And we listened. Out of the thousands of pages of feedback you offered and the invaluable wisdom you shared, we have revised COLAGE's mission and vision statements. We have clarified who we are, what we do, and where we're going. We have developed a plan for our future that we think is not only truly strategic, but also reflects our deepest values and the priorities of our communities.

For the past ten years, COLAGE has worked to meet the needs of people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender parents and our families. This need has always far outpaced our available resources. On a shoestring, we have tried to be there for all of the COLAGErs who need us: for information, for immediate support, for connections to one another, for societal recognition of our families, for laws that protect us, and for school systems and other social institutions that celebrate our lives. We have accomplished so much: from

shifting the public debate about our families, to stopping harmful laws, to providing much needed support for thousands.

Yet, there have been times when your calls and emails haven't been returned, times when our presence and programming just haven't been enough. Our strengths have always been energy, great people, and an ambitious vision. At the same time, our greatest challenge has always been limited resources.

We've known this for some time. What we were surprised to learn is that you know it, too. The central message in this strategic planning process is that COLAGE cannot continue to try to do it all without greater funding and infrastructure. We have heard from you loud and clear that we are simply spreading ourselves too thin. So we have thought deeply and creatively about how to meet the greatest needs with our best assets, and how to have the greatest impact with the resources we have. And we have thought about how to leverage our resources and programs to develop greater resources. In your interviews and focus groups and surveys you have thought creatively with us. And through this thinking together, we have come up with some wonderful ideas.

Over the next few months, *Just For Us* will feature details about our six priorities and keep you informed of the progress we make towards the goals and direction we have established. By strategically clarifying our

organizational and programmatic priorities, we believe that we will have a deeper and more sustainable impact on COLAGErs' lives. We believe that the next few years represent a tremendous opportunity for the entire LGBT family movement, and for COLAGE, as the visibility, recognition, and acceptance of LGBT families reaches new levels in our society. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and feedback about our plan and to partnering with you as we implement it.

Sincerely –
COLAGE Staff & Board of Directors

WHO PARTICIPATED

329 people offered their perspectives to the planning process.

Out of 283 Survey respondents:

46% were parents

32% were COLAGErs

26% were supporters

48% (of COLAGErs) were children of a previous heterosexual union

29% were youth - age 25 and under

21% identified as people of color/mixed heritage

We also conducted targeted Focus Groups and Interviews with:

- COLAGErs with transgender parents
- COLAGErs in rural areas
- COLAGErs of color/mixed heritage
- Youth - age 25 and under
- Family Week participants
- Stakeholders (including chapter coordinators, family experts and colleagues, COLAGErs with knowledge in the field, COLAGErs outside the U.S., funders, and LGBT movement colleagues)
- Board members
- Staff members

NEW COLAGE VISION STATEMENT

We envision a world in which all families are valued, protected, reflected, and embraced by society and all of its institutions; in which all children grow up loved and nurtured by kinship networks and communities that teach them about, connect them to, and honor their unique heritage; and in which every human being has the freedom to express sexual orientation, gender identity, and self.

We envision being part of large movements to heal and transform all forms of oppression, discrimination, bigotry, and hatred in the hearts and minds of the members of our societies, as well as in school systems, mental and physical health systems, media, legislatures, legal systems, and all religious institutions.

We envision a world in which those of us with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender parents or families are connected to a broad community of peers and mentors; are recognized as the authority of our experiences; belong to respected and valued family structures; and have the

To read COLAGE's Strategic Plan and help make it happen, please visit www.colage.org or contact the COLAGE office at 415-861-5437 or colage@colage.org.

SIX STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: OUR BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

1 Funding We will intensify our fundraising endeavors in order to build COLAGE to the level of staffing that's needed to fulfill COLAGE's mission, and to stabilize the organization financially with a cash reserve.

2 Structure and Organization We will develop our internal systems so that we respond more efficiently and consistently to requests for information, support, and advocacy, thereby creating the capacity for more proactive programming.

3 Communication We will improve our communication to COLAGERS and LGBT families about what we have to offer you, and to the larger society about our unique voice and purpose, so that we're increasingly looked to as the experts we are.

4 Youth Empowerment and Leadership Development A new focus in programming will be more comprehensive training for high school and college-aged COLAGERS in leadership, media and advocacy to actively engage more youth in COLAGE's education and advocacy efforts.

5 Support Programs for COLAGERS Ages 10-14 We will work to reach and connect more youth by using our popular website and email support programs and by developing regional support programming.

6 Anti-Racism and Diversity Our sixth priority is to integrate both our anti-racism efforts and our efforts to serve traditionally underserved communities throughout all of our programs and priorities.



Board Member Orson Morrison with his "self-puppet" at San Francisco Pride 2002

COLAGE BOARD WELCOMES & WELL-WISHES

Please join the COLAGE Board of Directors in welcoming two new members:

A.J. Costa, 17, Katy, TX

A.J., a high school senior, lives with his two moms. He participates as Vice-President of his school's Spanish Club, serves as President of a community service organization, performs on the Salsa Dance team, and acts in many theater productions. He is half-Pakistani and half-white and a member of the Maranatha Fellowship, a local Metropolitan Community Church. A.J. dreams of being a teacher, actor, youth-pastor, or ideally, a combination of all three.



Jayson DiCotignano, 33, Las Vegas, NV

Jayson and his husband Jay are the proud parents of Alexander (21) and Danton (3). Originally from Staten Island, NY, Jayson is a paralegal and homemaker working primarily in family law. As a foster and adoptive dad, Court Appointed Special Advocate, and paralegal, he assists gay and lesbian individuals and couples in becoming licensed foster parents and ultimately adoptive parents.



"My thing is preventing discrimination. Down here in Texas there's still so much of it. Trying to make people more aware, to help those that don't understand to understand." ~ A.J.

And please join us in extending our best wishes for success to two board members pursuing some new and challenging opportunities:

David Jenkins-Cain, 18, Ypsilanti, MI.

David has been outspoken both within the COLAGE community and his own community, facilitating workshops and raising awareness around homophobia and LGBT family issues. David leaves the Board to serve in the U. S. Marines Corps.



Christian Harris, 30, Little Rock, AR

Christian acted as Board Secretary; he also successfully spearheaded COLAGE's advocacy efforts against proposed legislation to ban gays and lesbians from adopting in the state of Arkansas. Christian takes leave of absence from the Board in order to serve as law clerk in the Arkansas Supreme Court.



"There is an empowerment that occurs from being able to speak from one's own experience, and to try to act on that experience to make the world a better place. Being on the COLAGE board helped me find my voice and my conscience." ~ Christian

COLAGE is accepting applications for its national Board of Directors. Board members govern and support the organization through their experience, wisdom, and dedication to social justice. Interested? Contact board member Orson Morrison via email: orson.morrison@worldnet.att.net.

FROM KATE AND KATE

your COLAGE co-chairs



Dear Friends,

We are part of COLAGE because it has changed our lives, providing us with community and leadership opportunities we couldn't find anywhere else. We've seen it do the same for hundreds of others. **Won't you consider making a contribution today? Your donation makes it possible for COLAGE to work with you on creating a world that is safe, just, and celebratory for all families.**

Our families are still ignored, disrespected, and scapegoated by public officials and public policy. An ABC News poll this past spring indicated that 42% of Americans still disapprove of adoption by gay and lesbian parents. It is easy to feel like nobody cares about the very real problems and discrimination we face.

Who cares about creating a future in which kids born today grow up free from the shadow of homophobia? We do! Who cares about creating forums for older people with lgbt parents to heal from the hurts of the past? We do!

Who cares about bringing together

youth with lgbt parents to bond and develop leadership skills? We do!

Neither of us have much money to spare. Who does during these economically challenging times? We know that if we didn't help, COLAGE could not exist, and we know that the world is a better place because of COLAGE. So, we each give a monthly pledge, on top of our many volunteer hours. A monthly pledge of \$10 or \$15 will go a long way toward making a world we can all live in safely and happily. **Won't you consider setting aside the cost of a movie and popcorn each month for COLAGE?** Just fill out and return the donation envelope included in this edition of *Just For Us*.

In solidarity and gratitude,

Kate Kovalanka and
Kate Ranson-Walsh
Co-Chairs, Board of Directors

PS - There is still time to participate in the challenge grant from the Gill Foundation. Your contribution/pledge through January 10, 2003 is doubled! Thank you! ■

THANK YOU

COLAGE's work is made possible by generous donations from kids, youth, adults, families, small businesses, foundations, corporations, and, for the first time ever in 2002, government agencies. Below, we highlight recent foundation and corporate donors.

American Airlines
Arcus Foundation
Astraea Foundation, Inc.
Bears of San Francisco
David Bohnett Foundation
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City of San Francisco:
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Colin Higgins Foundation
Horizons Foundation
Jewish Community Endowment Fund
National Center for Lesbian Rights
Philanthrofund
Rainbow Endowment, Inc.
San Francisco Foundation
Small Change Foundation
Tides Foundation
Vanguard Public Foundation
Wells Fargo

Next issue: look for family and individual donors. We'd love to see your name on the list.

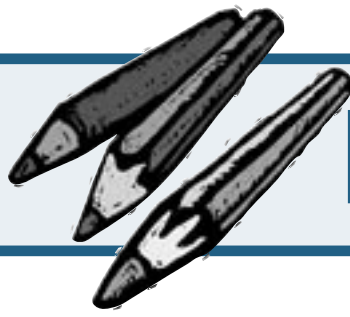
CELEBRATE ALL OUR FAMILIES

In this time of economic hardship for so many individuals, families, and nonprofit organizations, many of us are searching for ways to give from the heart. Here's one excellent way to celebrate accomplishments, milestones, and memories, while at the same time, giving a gift that makes a real difference in the lives of COLAGErs all year long: consider making a donation to COLAGE as an alternative to a material or cash gift.

We warmly invite you to consider making a gift to COLAGE on the occasion of your family's next:

- Anniversary
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah
- Birth
- Birthday
- Christmas
- Domestic Partnership
- Funeral/Memorial
- Graduation
- Hanukkah
- Kwanzaa
- Mother's Day/Father's Day
- Naming Ceremony
- New Year's
- Pride Celebration
- Quinceañera
- Valentine's Day
- Wedding/Commitment Ceremony
- Any religious, spiritual, national, or personal occasion that puts you in the giving spirit!

COLAGE NOTES



STAFF UPDATE

COLAGE's Executive Director **Felicia Park-Rogers** has been away on parental leave since mid-July. COLAGE's Board of Directors hired Beth Teper, Cory Pohley, and Meredith Fenton to lead our organization during Felicia's leave.

Interim Executive Director **Beth Teper** served as COLAGE Board Chair from 1997-2001 and joined the staff as Program Coordinator last year. Beth's focus has been day to day operations and program management, serving as spokesperson and liaison to our many collaborators and coalitions, and overseeing our individual fundraising efforts.

Cory Pohley came to COLAGE as a seasoned and respected manager in youth non-profit



Cory Pohley

organizations and as a mother of a COLAGEr. While serving as Interim Co-Executive Director, Cory focused on implementing our strategic plan, laying the administrative groundwork for our new Bay Area programs, and developing new funding and

foundation sources.

Meredith Fenton stepped off the Board to serve as Interim Program Coordinator. Meredith brings several years of expertise in youth development and social activism.

We hope you enjoy working with them and feel free to call on them at any time.

NEW FUNDING BOOSTS BAY AREA PROGRAMMING

Through ground-breaking funding from the City of San Francisco, COLAGE is able to provide valuable new Bay Area activities and resources. COLAGE's specific outreach is to 10-17 year old youth of LGBT families. We are pleased to partner with local organizations Our Family Coalition, the San Francisco LGBT Community Center, LYRIC, and New Leaf Services. Collaborative projects include:

- A monthly workshop series for youth and parents on a range of important topics,
- Continuation and expansion of our successful support and social group for middle school COLAGErs,

- Fun and exciting special events such as our annual Bowl-a-Thon, and

- Our soon-to-launch Youth Leadership Program, which will bring together teen COLAGErs to affect change around LGBT family issues.

SUMMER AND FALL INTERNS HELP MAKE IT HAPPEN

Sarah Austin, a sophomore at Hampshire College in Amherst, MA, secured a grant to fund her COLAGE internship through Hampshire's Reproductive Rights Activist Service Corps. Sarah told us, "What I liked most about COLAGE was that I felt that I actually represented and was part of COLAGE. I feel I've learned a lot and gained a lot more confidence in my ability to work on long-term larger projects."



Sarah Austin

Katy Chatel is a sophomore at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. "My favorite projects were field projects such as the 4th of July family picnic and, most importantly, my week spent in Provincetown working at Family Week," says Katy. "I met amazing families, and had the pleasure of living and working with a group of inspiring and supportive mentors who immediately invited me into COLAGE, despite the fact my parents are straight."



Nikki Cruz

Nikki Cruz is a junior at Trinity College in Hartford, Ct. Nikki writes, "My internship concurs with my main forum, 'Gay and Lesbian Community and Culture.' I enjoy interning with COLAGE because of the fun and stress-free environment. Not to say that there isn't a fair amount of work because for such a small office, there is plenty. But it is fun and I like knowing that I am working for and with children who are an integral part of this organization."

Kelly Densmore, a sophomore at the

University of California, Santa Cruz, came to COLAGE "due to my prior involvement and interest in community service and also because I have two moms." Kelly wrote, "I most enjoyed working for an organization that I know is making a large impact in people's lives, it is very powerful and inspirational to have my everyday work go towards something that is so wonderful. I hope to continue to create a safe space for all people in society and empower other children and youth who have parents who identify as LGB or T."

Danielle Turner is a student of the LEN Business and Language Institute in San Francisco. Danielle, who came to COLAGE to gain nonprofit office administration experience, told us, "I like the small office environment and that everyone does their own thing but still works together. It's great working with such a great team of people."

To intern in COLAGE's national office, applications are available online at www.colage.org/kids/internships. Due April 11, 2003.

IN THE COURTS

COLAGE submitted amicus briefs in two precedent-setting legal cases regarding our families in 2002.

One case established the right of same-gender second parent adoption in the state of Pennsylvania. This decision means that kids in Pennsylvania lesbian and gay families can get health insurance, Social Security benefits, inheritance rights, and the right to child support from two legally recognized same-gender parents. For more information on this case, visit the Women's Law Project: www.womenslawproject.org.

COLAGE also submitted a friend of the court brief in the infamous 'Sharon S.' case taking the position that California's second parent adoption procedure is, has been, and should be available to same-gender couples. This case has been appealed to the California Supreme Court in hopes of overturning a ruling that is highly detrimental to the rights of kids with same-gender parents and could possibly overturn second-parent adoptions in California. For more information on this case, go to www.lambdalegal.org.



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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.

Want to start a chapter in your community? Have questions? Please contact COLAGE at 415-861-KIDS or email colage@colage.org.