



JUST FOR US

FOCUS ON QUEERSPAWN AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Vol. 17 #1
2005

FOR PEOPLE WITH LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND/OR TRANSGENDER PARENTS

BLAME IT ON MY MOM(S)

by Becky Johnson

My mother tells me (in a very martyred tone of voice, mind you) that I was a naturally outspoken child. She remembers taking me to pro-choice rallies when I was a pre-teen and watching me get into shouting matches with the counter-demonstrators who insisted that I was brainwashed. She remembers counseling me to "pick my battles" when I stood up in the middle of my Ohio Studies class in 7th grade to tell my teacher that he was a "racist, sexist pig" for referring to Native Americans as "red-men" and "savages." She remembers proudly taping the news program when I was interviewed by a local TV station at a walk-out protesting the disruptive police presence in my high school.



What she may not realize, however, is that while she sheltered me from the personal injustices she experienced in my childhood - the parents who didn't want their kids to play at the lesbians' house, the teachers who would gossip about my mother's "lifestyle," and the many other slights, threats, and insults she never told me about - my mother also opened my eyes to the reality of injustice in the world and our responsibility to do something about it. So much of that "natural" outspokenness that she tells me about is a direct result of her modeling and teaching me about what is important.

Seven years ago I was a new college student, proud of my independence, and ready to follow

the motto of my school - "Do you think one person can change the world? We do." I was also learning about the US government's sponsorship of the School of the Americas (SOA).

The soldiers who train at the SOA participated in massacres, assassinations, torture, and other terror tactics on behalf of U.S. backed governments. Looking back on that moment, I realize that I was not nearly as independent as I had thought; my mother's influence provided the impetus for me to act on my conscience and participate in the fight to close the SOA.

Over these past seven years I have participated in the annual SOA Watch demonstration in Columbus, GA six times; I have fasted at the gates of Fort Benning (where the SOA is located) for one month; I have participated in eight actions of nonviolent civil disobedience to close the SOA; I have spent six months in prison as a result of that civil disobedience, and I have lobbied, vigiled, written letters, led trainings, stuffed envelopes, organized legal support, made telephone calls, and organized events - and I blame it all on my mother. She provided me with the confidence and the conscience to act for justice. She also provided me with the comfort of living slightly outside the mainstream in a queer household - a perfect vantage point from which to view the world's problems as well as its beauty. So when the right-wing proclaims that children are deeply affected by their queer parents, I wholeheartedly agree. And I wouldn't have it any other way. ▲

Becky Johnson is a 26 year old Unitarian Universalist seminarian in Berkeley, CA. Her work for social justice is varied but constant; including: supporting School of the Americas Watch activists on trial for civil disobedience, hanging an anti-Bush banner at the Republican National Convention, and attending a 16-week Challenging White Supremacy workshop.

NEIGHBORHOOD ORGANIZING



Hector "Leo" Tellez, age 18, has been working with Little Village Environmental Justice Organization since the summer of 2004. He lives

with his lesbian moms in Chicago, Ill, where he grew up. He is a member of the Board of Directors of Mountain Meadow, a summer camp for youth with LGBT parents. JFU sat down with Leo to discuss his work to promote racial and environmental justice in his neighborhood.

Let's start by talking about who is in your family.

OK. First off my mom is a lesbian. For awhile I lived with both my biological parents, and then my mom had decided that she was a lesbian and no longer wanted to live with my father. She and my other mom have been living together since I was 14.

We are interested in how and why queerspawn do social justice activism, and if it's related to their families. You work with an environmental justice organization. Can you tell JFU readers a little bit about this organization?

The organization is called Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO). It is an organization that is committed to making specific improvements in the neighborhood where I live in Chicago. All of the people who work there are from the neighborhood, they are all community members. It came from people talking about the issues that they felt strongest about in their neighborhoods and doing something about them. They said, "If we can get this many people, we can cause this change to better the neighborhood."

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear COLAGE friends and family,

This edition of *Just For Us* is about social justice. While

eating brunch with a fellow COLAGE member after the elections last fall, I was challenged to describe what I thought these words "social justice" mean and explain why COLAGE is committed to social justice. After all, if social justice is something I and COLAGE are striving to achieve, she argued, we should know what it is—what it looks like, sounds like, and even tastes like, why it's worthwhile, and how we're going to get there.

Thus began a personal and organizational reflective process that is now expressed in this edition of *Just For Us*. We wanted to hear about the activism, organizing, and education that COLAGERS are doing to change the world and better their communities. While many of us are involved in the fight to end homophobia, other issues are important to us too. Every day COLAGERS work to end injustice in all of its forms. Many of us care deeply about our relationship with the environment; we want to foster anti-racism in the institutions and communities we're part of; we seek to challenge health and education policies that put profit over people; we oppose war and promote peace. We also work within

the LGBT community to broaden people's ideas of what "our" issues are.

We asked COLAGE activists to tell us about their vision for a just a world and what they're doing to make it happen. Our call for submissions and editorial conversations included questions like these:

- What did you learn about social justice from your family?
- What issues, causes, or communities are you passionate about?
- What kind of activism are you doing now, and how did you get connected?
- What does social justice mean to you?

As a result, these pages contain many different explorations of how having or being raised by LGBT parents influences our beliefs about right and wrong and informs our actions and convictions. The articles cover a range of topics and survey a variety of approaches to and definitions of social justice. Some address global issues, others focus on local problems. What they all have in common is being committed to social justice as the child of one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender parents.

COLAGE's central mission is support and activism by and for people with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender parents. We have done this work for fifteen years, guided by a vision statement that is much broader:

We envision a world in which all families are valued, protected, reflected, and embraced by society, and 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 tools and support to create a just society."

Thank you for helping COLAGE bring about our vision.

In peace, with gratitude and for justice,

Beth Teper

COLAGE

MISSION

COLAGE ENGAGES, CONNECTS, AND EMPOWERS PEOPLE TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR CHILDREN OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND/OR TRANSGENDER PARENTS AND FAMILIES.

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BACK TO MY NATURE

by Marilyn Smith



I'm writing this article as I sit perched in a tree just like I used to do as a child. My back rests against the rough bark of the trunk as I sit with legs dangled, straddling its sturdy limb. Even as I've grown the branch still holds me, rocking me gently as the wind rustles through the leaves and brushes my cheek. It's easy to forget this feeling of connection, of being held and supported by the tree and the Earth. I'm reminded of my childhood when Nature was my playground, building forts with Her branches and earth and creating mazes and piles for jumping with Her fallen leaves. I remember taking walks in Nature with my family where we would discover "hidden treasures" of all kinds - a special rock, a feather, shed skin from a snake and countless other delights. Yet even with such wonderful exposure to Nature, growing up I never really gave a thought to where the food on my plate came from or how the clothes I wore or the electronic equipment I used came into being. If I looked at a label on a food package it was usually just to read the caloric and fat content. Rarely did I notice the amount of ingredients that I could hardly even pronounce, or how far the food had to travel to reach my plate. My survival, or so I thought, did not depend on where my food or clothes came from and therefore those questions never entered my consciousness. So, you may ask, how did I become a tree-hugging, organic food eating, faux-hippie with an earth-based spirituality and a newfound passion for environmental activism and natural building?

Some would say I've been in San Francisco too long and they're probably right. It is true that here in San Francisco is where I began to evoke my deeper primordial connection to all things, yet I would argue that the seed of longing for that connection with the Earth was planted way back when I was that little girl climbing the tree. It was a seed that took root when my parents divorced and my father came out as gay. It began to sprout as I was introduced to a new definition of family, one that altered my perception of what was "normal" and opened my mind and my eyes to different ways of being. As I witnessed the harshness of people who refused to understand or accept my family or families like mine, I was drawn to take a stand, to rise up and speak against injustice of all kinds. It was this calling that brought me to San Francisco and to COLAGE where I miraculously and gratefully landed in the company of another queer family about to bring a baby girl into the world. Thus, my sprouted seedling of connection began to

grow and blossom as I was offered vast amounts of information about the condition of our Earth and I began to question the way I lived in this world.

My journey back to Nature, while beautiful and amazing, was also painful at times. It was difficult and overwhelming when I began to realize that practically everything I was used to could actually be damaging the very world I lived in. Every time I threw something "away" because it was out of my way to recycle it, every time I said "plastic" instead of bringing my own bag to the grocery store, every time I drove my car when I could have walked, and every time I bought something from a company that

the environment, every little bit of trash, and every molecule of hazardous chemicals that seeps into our groundwater or pollutes our air.

Everything is connected. Every glass of water I drink contains molecules from all over the world. Every breath I take contains atoms from a breath I took a year ago not to mention atoms from other people's exhalations. Everything we do to the Earth and our environment, we do to ourselves. Just like any living being, the Earth deserves to be treated with respect. It is possible to live a more sustainable existence. One where our interdependence with all living beings is celebrated and where what we give back to the Earth is equal to if not better and healthier than what we take. Every other species does it!

As I sit nestled in this tree with its roots dug deep down into the Earth and its branches continuing to reach towards the sun, towards hope, I look out over the city of San Francisco and I find my own strength to stand tall. This piece is an environmental act. It is my hope that sharing my story and my journey back to Nature will inspire others to question those things we take for granted. Is this food, thing, or clothing promoting a more sustainable community? The task ahead sometimes seems great but it starts with small steps. Simply committing to buying locally grown food or eating meat-free meals at least one day a week can make a significant impact in our environment. Eventually we will all have a beautiful awakening to our underlying connection to each other and our Earth. Humans are an intelligent species and we ALL have the power to rethink the way we design, make, and use things that instead of being destructive, contributes to our survival as a global community of all species. It is after all, in Our Nature.

Marilyn Smith has a Bachelor of Architecture and works for an architecture firm in San Francisco. She is actively pursuing a career in green architecture where she can devote herself full-time to saving the world one building at a time. In her spare time she doubles as "database diva" for COLAGE. She is the daughter of gay dads and a straight mom.

Take the Nature Challenge:

David Suzuki, a Canadian environmental activist and educator, worked with the Union of Concerned Scientists to discover the ten most effective things we each can do to reach sustainability within a generation.

- 1 Reduce home energy use by 10%
- 2 Choose energy-efficient homes & appliances
- 3 Don't use pesticides
- 4 Eat meat-free meals one day a week
- 5 Buy locally grown and produced food
- 6 Choose a fuel-efficient vehicle
- 7 Walk, bike, carpool or take transit
- 8 Choose a home close to work or school
- 9 Support alternative transportation
- 10 Learn more and share with others

did not respect other humans, animals, or the Earth, I supported the destruction of the environment. I began to realize that perhaps a shattered illusion is better than living in ignorance. I could no longer perpetuate an illusion of separateness or have anything to do with the outdated belief that Nature is something to be dominated. It was clear that so much oppression and discrimination is due to our lack of a meaningful connection to each other and our Earth.

Our society, here in the United States, has become so fragmented and we are so far removed from the consequences of our actions, particularly those related to basic human needs of food, clothing, and shelter that we don't even have to think about where things come from. It is through this unintentional ignorance that we hurt our Earth. Because, the truth is, EVERYTHING we do has an impact on



SPAWN TALK

by Abigail Garner

Lessons from my First Protest

I was in seventh grade the first time I officially took a risk for something I believed in. I walked out of class to join a protest in solidarity with the "punks." The principal had sent home a letter to parents saying that certain "distractions" would no longer be acceptable at school. The list of forbidden distractions included: mohawks, spiked collars, face piercings, make-up a la Boy George, and ripped jeans.

Even though my wardrobe never got edgier than pin-striped jeans and monogrammed sweaters, I was outraged by the injustice of the policy. I had never skipped school before, but I wasn't about to sit in algebra class while a third of the student body bravely faced the administration and media crews.

Protests are tough enough for grown-ups to orchestrate, so it was no surprise that 300 teenagers had not thought far beyond a start time and coming up with the coolest chant ever: "We don't need no dress code!" (It made for a catchy sound bite on the evening news, and no doubt made English teachers everywhere proud.) For the first

ten minutes, I was thrilled to be a part of this event. It felt like something had shifted; we, the seemingly powerless students, were creating our own counter-power.

Unfortunately, some students were involved just for the adrenaline rush. That fact, along with short-sighted planning resulted in chaos, vandalism, suspensions, and a few arrests. That day was a disaster, but in the long run, it was declared a student victory. After a couple weeks of public debate in the editorial pages in our city's newspaper, our school rescinded the dress code.

Okay, so walking out of math class to defend my classmate's right to have a pierced nose isn't exactly social justice. Regardless, the personal insight I gained from that day is the root of why I have been so strongly aligned with social justice throughout my life. When I recognize a situation that seems unfair, I can't disassociate myself just because it doesn't directly affect me. The justification for targeting one group over another is arbitrary since it is based only on the prejudices held by the institution or individual in power.

That's what really pushes my buttons: power. More specifically, the abuse of power by those who have it against those who do not.

I've discovered that not everyone has this drive to take action when they know something is unfair. If it doesn't concern them, then why bother? People who don't understand my convictions dismiss me by labeling me "too sensitive." This sensitivity comes from questioning authority at a very young age as I witnessed the senselessness of a certain kind of hate years before I knew there was a name for it: "homophobia."

I can never dismiss injustice with "that's just the way it is" or "that's how it's always been," because that is the rhetoric that is used to erase and invalidate my family every day. When I hear those tired words that those in power typically use, I know I can't be silent.

For years, I let other people convince me that my sensitivity to struggles that weren't "my" issues was a weakness. I just had to toughen up, get over it and stop internalizing other people's problems. I've since learned to appreciate my sense of interconnectedness. I've also learned to accept my so-called weakness as an asset by renaming it: accountability. ▲

Abigail Garner is author of "Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is," which has been named a finalist for the Lambda Literary Awards. The paperback edition will be released in April 2005.

Neighborhood Organizing, continued from page 1

What are the main issues or causes that Little Village addresses?

One of the biggest issues that we are working on is that in my neighborhood there is a coal power plant that spits out an immense amount of pollution. It's unnecessary and could be changed but it's making money so they keep it here where we live. There's also a lack of open green spaces, like parks. There is a need for more schools. Buses take our kids to other schools in other neighborhoods. There is a social bias because my neighborhood is mostly, 95%, Latino. These social injustices don't happen in other neighborhoods in Chicago.

How did you get involved with Little Village?

My mother knew the board members and she was able to free up time to work in a leadership group there. She had me participate in a Saturday group that's part of Little Village's programs. It's called PUDDJ: People United for Dignity, Democracy, and Justice. I got a summer job with them, working as an intern, and I enjoyed the stuff I did with them so they hired me as full time staff member.

It sounds like your mom is involved with community issues as well. Do you think that you learned about social justice and

other political values in your family?

Absolutely, I think I learned from my family about what is justice. We always talk about the different issues that surround us, how in some places better opportunities arise more often than where I live. Equal rights and things that affect our community are always a topic of discussion in my household, a big chunk of what we talk about with each other, while we are eating dinner, when we are together.

What kind of projects have you been involved with at Little Village? What do you work on there?

We have a youth group and some of the youth formed a newsletter, written by and for youth. I am the youth group organizer and helped edit the newsletter. They take the issues that they feel are the most important and make it into a theme. We make a newsletter and educate the news readers (from different high schools) so people can make better decisions about what is happening around them and they can get involved. Some of the themes we have done so far are one about giving, different kinds of giving and why people give and volunteer; the military and high school youth; as well as the current state of Little Village, both the organization and the neighborhood itself.

What do you see as the biggest obstacle to the work you do at Little Village?

The biggest obstacle is getting people involved and keeping them involved. Not all changes happen immediately. It takes more time and effort than people had expected. So keeping the interest is a challenge. There may be periods of time where not too much is happening and there might be times when there's so much extra we need to find volunteers, so retaining interest is big. People do get really frustrated when things aren't going ahead, and it seems like there is no change happening. As long as people are really passionate and really want the cause, then after awhile they will begin to see the differences. And people like to see the change that's going on.

What is the best thing about working at Little Village?

The organization is really diverse. They have different issues and they're not afraid to add on another issue that's important to them. Just recently they have a situation where the neighborhood is wanting a new park and the alderman was on board but right now, the process, this new park, is being put into action. So Little Village got involved. They really step in and take charge and try to be helpful.



FUN PAGE

for kids with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents



5 Fun Things You Can Do

to Change the World

1 Put the FUN back in FUNdraising! Organize a car wash, bake sale, carnival, or game tournament and donate all the money you raise. Community organizations are almost always in need of more money.

2 Create public art! Murals, graffiti, art, installations, exhibits, even snow sculptures or gardens - are all forms of public art. Use your creativity and talent to tell the world what's on your mind. Your self-expression will inspire others to tell their stories as well.

3 Give a performance! Whether it's music, drama, or even public speaking, performances can be great ways to get a message across at the same time that you strut your stuff. Poetry slams, DJ contests, and plays are all ways to get large groups of people working together.

4 When life gives you lemons, make lemonade! If there is a rally, speech, or other event in your community that supports prejudice or hatred, you don't have to waste your energy arguing or even worrying about what they will do or say. Instead, hold another event at the same time where EVERYONE is welcome. Get people to pledge that they will donate a dime, or a dollar, for every minute that the other event is spreading hatred. Donate the proceeds to an organization who is spreading love instead. The longer the other event goes on, the more money THEY will have earned for YOUR cause.

5 Volunteer! Whether it's photocopying or designing a website, filing or writing a grant, most organizations will have more things that have to be done than they have people to do them. By lending a hand you can get to know other community members, and make friendships that will last.

QUEERSPAWN FAMILY VALUES



Josh Connor grew up in Oakland, and then Richmond, CA, with his lesbian mother. He met COLAGE Program Director Meredith Fenton at a rally in support of reproductive rights. JFU asked Josh to talk to us about some of the organizing work he has done since moving back to the Bay Area three and a half years ago.

Let's start out by asking, who is in your family?

My mother raised me as a single parent. She is an out lesbian. She has had different girlfriends and now has been with same woman for the last 12 years (through my later childhood). Both of them are my parents, but for me my mother is definitely my primary parent. I also have six siblings who are all step and half siblings and I am close with my dad and his side of the family.

Do you feel that you learned political values in your family?

I did, definitely, and my politics have built on the political lessons I learned as a kid, although I've had moments when I thought I ended up more radical than my mom. She took me to anti-war protests during the first invasion of Iraq and a protest against the 500 year anniversary of Columbus in 1992. And from those early experiences, I feel like it's been a continuous process of learning for myself and deciding what I think is effective.

What organizations do you work with?

Currently the main work I do is with three different groups. The Childcare Collective does childcare for racial

and economic justice organizations in the Bay Area. Global Intifada formed to protest the build-up to the most recent invasion of Iraq and we have worked to make connections between the occupations of Iraq and Palestine. I also work with the Heads Up Collective, which is an anti-racist, anti-imperialist group of white folks. We are building alliances and collaborating with other racial and economic justice groups in the San Francisco.

A lot of the work you've done has been as an ally, for example as a white person working for racial justice or a middle class person working for economic justice. Why do you do work as an ally?

For me it has to do with, as a white person, analyzing the privilege I have in society and recognizing racism as a societal structure that must be abolished. Racism and white supremacy have historically been one of the major roadblocks in building multiracial movements for collective liberation. So, as someone who aspires to be part of a multiracial movement, it is my responsibility to act in solidarity with those who are most affected by the organized systems of domination in our society. Coming from a queer family, part of my goal is to build solidarity and make connections between queer folks and movements working for racial and economic justice.

Where or how do you see those connections?

There are a lot of pillars holding up the current power structure and homophobia is one of them and structural racism is one of them, and there are many

others. So if we look at the people who are most affected by all of those pillars and find potential for people to really stand together and work with each other, then that's the power of solidarity.

Is there a connection between your experiences growing up with a lesbian mom and your decision to work for social justice now?

Yes, and I'm especially thinking about the Childcare Collective. There is a strong connection for me between how I was raised and my view of childcare as a revolutionary act. Queer folks are criminalized for raising children. Immigrants and poor folks are also criminalized for raising children. Because I was raised with a certain political consciousness, I see families as a central part of political struggle. A lot of people have a political struggle and part of that means they push their family away. For me I don't see how political struggle can happen without having families involved, whether that's LGBTQ families or single parent families or low and no income families. The Childcare Collective does the much-needed work of watching people's kids so they can do the daily work that creates resistance. And part of my motivation to do that work is that I was raised with queer family.

That seems like a very different kind of "family values" than we are used to hearing about. What are your family values?

People kept saying in the last presidential election that they had been pushed out of conversations about morality. Everything I do is about moral values and family values. That structural racism is wrong and that all children should have food, shelter, quality education and love— to me that is morals and that is family values. ▲

Promote the Peace!

Peace means many things. On a world scale it might mean the end of war and violence. Around the neighborhood it might mean clean air and safe streets. At school, it might mean no more bullies or unfair rules. In your family, it might mean less fighting. Whatever kind of peace you are trying to create, here are some steps that can help.

- 1 Get to know your neighbors. It's hard to reclaim peace without a sense of community.
- 2 Make friends with someone of another race, ethnicity, age, ability, or sexual orientation. Appreciating and embracing diversity helps to promote peace.
- 3 Listen more. Really listen, without giving unsolicited advice. The validation of being heard is often more important than solving the problem.
- 4 Learn to say I'm sorry. Learn to mean it. These two simple words can prevent violence and save relationships.
- 5 Involve yourself in family groups that protect, nurture, support and empower children and youth.
- 6 Explore your prejudices. Find out what's behind them, how they started, & how they influence your thoughts and actions.
- 7 Find your own inner peace. Set aside a few minutes or more each day of quiet, peaceful time.
- 8 Join a study circle. Self-education is a fast track to empowerment toward peace.
- 9 Learn another language. Being able to communicate in a foreign language helps you participate in diverse cultures.
- 10 Support organizations and/or campaigns that fight for basic human rights for all people. Social justice promotes peace.

SPEAK OUT

We asked COLAGERS at the Family Conference in Texas and in New Orleans what they do to make the world a better place:

"I pick up the environment." Stephen, 10

"I stand up for my family." Sierra, 9

"I recycle." Samantha, 11

"I listen to people." Emily, 11

"I volunteer." Mariannah, 7

"I help other people." Marco, 11

COLAGE IN TEXAS... YEE HAW!

COLAGE proudly participated in the first-ever one-day LGBT Family Conference in Texas on February 26th, 2005. Over 50 families from Texas and Oklahoma came together in Dallas for a day of community building, workshops, activities and more. COLAGE provided an exciting slate of youth programming for 35 youth ages 9 and up during the event. In the 9-12 group, Whitney Moses, an adult COLAGE Facilitator, led games, art activities, drama and discussions allowing the group to explore their families, school, creativity, bullying and more. In a separate, teen track, Meredith Fenton, COLAGE Program Director presented workshops on topics such as coming out, sex, gender and sexuality, and leadership and activism with 19 youth ages 13 and up.

For most of the COLAGE Youth, this event was their first opportunity to engage with others who have LGBT parents in a fun and supportive space. One youth began to introduce her family by talking about her "mom and her mom's friend" until she realized that with COLAGE she could finally be more open and share about her mom and her mom's partner. One kid leaving at the end of the day commented to their parent, "This was the most fun I've had in forever!"

With the leadership of Family Pride Coalition, the support of many Texas-based LGBT groups and the dynamic youth programming of COLAGE, this event was a rousing success!



JOIN THE SUPPORT OUR COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN!

Ask 15 people to donate \$15 to COLAGE!

Raising money is a vital part of keeping COLAGE a great resource.

You can help us offer friends and family the opportunity to support our work and celebrate COLAGE's 15th anniversary!

There are two easy ways to get involved. First go to www.colage.kintera.org/supportourcommunity

1) To donate to the campaign, click on "General Donation"

OR, take it a step further and become a campaigner!

2) To become a campaigner, click on "Campaign Registration." Fill out the easy online form, and use your new website to tell your friends and family what COLAGE means to you and ask them to support our work.

All fundraisers receive COLAGE membership, and recognition in JFU. Every who raises or donates \$15 x 15 people (\$225 total) can get their own COLAGE t-shirt - for FREE!

Questions about the campaign, or to get involved, email jcarr@colage.org, or call 415-861-KIDS and ask for Jesse.

2nd Generation

A SPECIAL SECTION FOR QUEER AND QUESTIONING KIDS OF LGBT PARENTS



CONNECTING THE DOTS

Whitney Moses

Long before she had considered putting a condom on anything in particular, Whitney Moses was showing classes of adults how to put them on bananas and conducting HIV/AIDS peer trainings. She has worked on diverse social justice issues, from disability rights to anti-war activism. Herself biracial, Moses has also participated in organizations addressing issues of race and racism, as well as issues facing mixed-race people and families. JFU asked Whitney to spend some time talking with us about herself and her work.

Who is in your family and what makes you a COLAGER?

My mom is a fairly standard straight, white woman, upper middle-class business school New England Mayflower type. And my dad is a Black Native-American southern bisexual. They had an open marriage, which was a cultural trend at the time

in which gay/queer men married in part because of interest but more so because it could give them a normal front. My sister and I both identify as queer, my step-brother identifies as queer and my step-sister is trans. My step-dad recently came out as questioning (at age 47!). Mom is the only straight one in the bunch and she's pretty weird.

Do you feel that you learned political values from your experiences with your family?

Initially I started doing AIDS peer trainings after my father passed away from AIDS in 1991. I worked at every AIDS marathon, I did the Boston-NYC AIDS ride, and other AIDS events through most of my adolescent years. In 10th and 11th grade I started volunteering at an AIDS hospice. I don't know if you would call that social justice, but it was definitely something that came from my social conscience.

When I started working on disability rights stuff, my experience with my dad's illness and with hospice

put me in a position to be more comfortable with and aware of the issues that come with illness and disability. We were able to arrange for my dad to be at home, even at the end of his illness, which at the time was rare. Witnessing illness up close definitely gave me a perspective where rather than simply fearing it, which is what a lot of folks do around illness and disability there was a lot more sympathy and empathy and compassion.

You have worked on what many people would see as vastly different issues: racism, war, disability rights, AIDS, LGBT rights... do you see these issues as connected?

When I first started out I didn't see the connections. I didn't really think about it at all. But the more my concept of the world around me evolves, the interconnectedness of all the various systems in place definitely came though pretty quickly. I can remember

continued on following page

DATELINE DAN

By Dan Cherubin



My Enduring Social Activism

It seems every time the topics for JFU are given to us columnists, I can't help but feel like the "old man." Will my memories of [fill in the blank] be pertinent to those over two decades younger? Has what I've done made a difference to those joining in now? Will they care?

I'm not expecting those questions to be answered, really. What I am hoping is that everyone can look at their lives as a series of interconnected events. What you practice and deliver in one aspect of your life usually affects other aspects. I think much of my social accountability has been based (as corny as it sounds) in practicing what I preach. I can't say that EVERY event was a turning point. When my mom took me to the first Earth Day (in 1970) did either of us foresee that I would be working with

the sustainable agriculture movement today? I doubt it.

But I can see how other acts led me to improve myself and my surroundings. I can also see how I discovered many parts of myself that I may not have known existed or COULD exist, without a background in social activism. For example, my work as a teenager in anti-nuclear groups led to voter registration, which led to Students for a Democratic Society, which led to being active in NYC political actions, which led to AIDS activism, which led to participating in National Coming Out Day, which led to...Second Generation. That's a very broad timeline, but it shows how becoming involved in one cause may lead to others you also believe in.

I should also add that my activist work actually helped me in getting non-activist jobs. My employers knew from my activism that I had experience in grant-writing, fundraising, media relations...even marketing. You can learn a lot doing something you feel strongly about.

I have also learned one very important rule: SPEAK UP FOR YOURSELF. Would Second Generation exist

as it does today if I hadn't started it? Perhaps. Perhaps not. But I didn't even know about COLAGE when I began any sort of LGBT activism. (I know those pre-internet days may be hard to fathom for the younger set.) COLAGE found me because I was making noise. I found Queer Nation because they held demos where like-minded people hung out. My librarian pals and I connected to other groups by getting out there. You can't be an armchair activist and expect change.

I will end this column with this thought: By reading this newsletter, you are making a socially relevant statement. You know there are others out there like you. But this is only the tip of being active. If you want to make a difference, you need to get up and make the effort to take the next step. Connect with these others. Find the ones around you and fight for the changes you want to happen. Whether you're for same-sex marriage or against genetically modified foods, you can't make change unless you get involved. In the end, no one can really do it but you.

Dan Cherubin is a gay man with multiple moms. He lives in New York City where he continues to be a noisy activist.



PROFILE OF A COLAGER IN ACTION

Growing up, Martin Brown had two homes - one with his dad and the other

with his mom. Both his mother and father were first-generation college students, bringing perspectives on money, work, and education that were different from Martin's mostly middle-class surroundings. After his parents divorced, Martin's mom, a musician, got a job that paid only \$6.50 an hour. Despite the hardships this meant, Martin took a formative lesson from his mother's sacrifice: "She chose to reject the privilege of marriage because it wasn't real," he reflected in his interview with JFU. When he was 12, his mom came out and his mother's new partner was an influence also, as an attorney who has worked for numerous social justice causes, as well as the LGBT civil rights and advocacy organization HRC (Human Rights Campaign).

After graduating from high school, Martin spent a year in a small working class community through the Americorps program, where privilege (and the rejection of privilege) continued to be a theme for him. That is when, as Martin put it, "I started to step outside of my own life and see somebody else's life - this isn't what I grew up with, but it exists, too." After his year in Americorps, Martin enrolled at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he began to

explore race, class, and privilege through classes, internships, and other kinds of work. As his knowledge increased, so did his commitment: "People who are in the position to be able to work for justice in that way and be able to try to shop locally have something of a responsibility to do so. We have a responsibility to the people around us and the environment," he said.

When people hear the word "activism" they often think of marches and demonstrations (and Martin has in fact participated in demonstrations against globalization and the war in Iraq). However, Martin reports that, "Right now younger activists are questioning the effectiveness of large protests and demonstrations in America because it feels kind of like it's a display of privilege and then you go home... I try to acknowledge that everything I'm doing I can do because I'm in a position to, and other people might not be. Everything that we can do as [privileged] activists is based on that privilege, working for somebody else's cause - and working for somebody else's cause is kind of alone to us. NAFTA isn't taking away my job, it's taking away someone else's and I want to understand that person too."

Activism on a local level is one way that Martin is exploring work that he is personally connected to and impacts the communities he belongs to. He currently works for a local food co-op. The food co-op connects people to local farmers, which supports a number of things that Martin sees as positive alternatives: environmentally friendly farming

practices, local economic improvement, support for small farms and family farms, and ethical treatment of animals. At the same time, he is promoting the planet's health in the culture at large by interning for Utne magazine, a bimonthly, national publication, which educates about cultural movements, social issues, environmental causes, and international events.

Martin has found that as he develops a worldview that can deal with the complexity of these issues, it is harder to find effective strategies for change. Working on a local level is something that he can do relatively consistently and effectively. It's also a place where he can acknowledge his privilege and remain connected to the consequences of his actions.

When speaking to Martin, his serious commitment and thoughtfulness to issues of privilege, oppression, and accountability are clear. He reflects that, "[It is] hard not to develop a top-down approach, especially if you're raised in a top-down society, which we all are. Sharing across class or race lines is difficult for most people. I try to acknowledge that everything I'm doing I can do because I'm in a position to, and other people might not be." He is excited to continue his search for meaningful solidarity and effective strategies for change. ▲

Martin Brown grew up in Northfield, MN. His family consists of one brother and three step-sisters, his mom and her partner, and his dad and his wife. He is currently a second year student at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, OH.

Connecting the Dots, continued from previous page

having frustrations about that in high school, there would be these groups that were like "let's be friends and not have racism." And I would bring up other things, or think it was more complicated, but I didn't know how to connect the dots.

What experiences helped you connect those dots?

One of the ways that I started to see that is from my family. In trying to understand who my father was and why he carried certain patterns of anger towards the world, it was easy to see that being mixed and being darker at a time when that meant his sister could drink out of a water fountain and he couldn't, and being a queer Black man in a world that doesn't like queer Black men...those [race

and sexuality] combined to give him struggle. I imagine if he had been one and not the other, he wouldn't have been so intent on proving something, he wouldn't have had to work so hard to fit in. Getting to see that in such an intimate way made me more aware of both when it happens to other people and how folks who are privileged are totally unaware that that is happening. Those who have singular oppressions often think of things only in those terms.

Do you have a vision for social justice?

The combination of analysis with action is what's really important. I think working with organizations is great, and there's also a personal level of how you live your life. Right now I live with my sister

and we are struggling to deal with issues around gentrification and where class and social status come into play and trying to integrate into the communities we live in. I'm thankful to be doing that with her because we both want to get to know our neighbors and encourage our neighbors to get to know each other. People talk a lot about how to live, but actually practicing it is a different thing.

Do you have ideas for how to put these things into practice?

Get involved in things that are very specific to the neighborhood like the community garden and local elementary school. Getting to know your neighbors, and bringing canvas bags grocery shopping - these too can be political acts.

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We look forward to acknowledging the many gifts we receive in our next issue of Just For Us. To make a donation in support of COLAGE's ongoing work for equality and justice, please use the enclosed envelope or donate on-line at www.colage.org/join.

COLAGE NOTES

COLAGE CHAPTER UPDATE:

South Bay COLAGE Kids Share the Laughter by Erika and Kyle Weaver

South Bay COLAGE, the newest COLAGE chapter in the San Francisco Bay Area, hosted their 'First Annual Kids JokeFest' in February. "I liked performing as a stand-up comedian and learning new jokes from the other kids," said Kyle Weaver, age 11. "I also learned a lot about the other kids' personalities from the kinds of jokes they told." The JokeFest took place during one of the group's regular monthly meetings. The kids had most of the meeting to rehearse and parents were invited to come back for the last half hour and enjoy the live comedy show.

Kids from the South Bay COLAGE Middle School Group came prepared with at least 5 jokes each and were encouraged to use costumes and props. Along with adult moderators Sarah Doty, who also judged the event, and Erika Weaver who acted as "MC", the kids helped create special introductions for themselves. Not only did the kids create their own intros, they also developed a song and dance half-time show! A lively version of, "We Are Family," was accompanied with dance moves from the Macarena, making a truly original - and somewhat comedic - intermission! "I couldn't believe how ambitious the kids were," said Erika, Kyle Weaver's mom and the founder of the South Bay Chapter. "Creating the intermission show was completely their idea and they pulled it off in an hour and a half!"

Nervous energy built to a frenzy as the parents began to file in for the performance. One by one, MC Erika introduced the young comedians who each took the stage with confidence and flair. "It was fun watching the kids interact and work together on such a fun project," said Fran Bennett, one of the audience members and Kyle's step-mom.

Sarah Doty admitted that judging the performers was a tough task, but everyone walked away with a prize that seemed to be a great match for their jokes. Awards were given for Grossest Joke, Best Monster Joke, Best Animal Joke, Best Political Joke, Best Blond Joke and Best Overall Comedian. The event was such a success that the kids are already starting to plan "JokeFest 2"! "I can't wait to do it again," said Kyle. "It was a lot of fun!"

The South Bay COLAGE Group was started in Fall 2004 by Erika Weaver. She was looking for a way for her son to connect with other kids in the Silicon Valley area who also have LGBT parents. "It's important for him to know there are other kids out there in unique family situations," said Erika. "It's not easy to bring to the subject up with casual friends at school because he's never sure what reaction he'll get. COLAGE provides a safe environment to talk about the joys and challenges of living in a special family." The group runs with the help of adult COLAGEr volunteers Sarah Doty and Kelly Densmore who provide mentorship and facilitation to the 10-14 year old members of the group.

The South Bay COLAGE Middle School Group meets the third Saturday of every month from 1-4pm at the Billy DeFrank LGBT Community Center in San Jose. For more information, and to see photos from JokeFest, visit http://groups.yahoo.com/group/COLAGE_southbay/

FALL 2005 COMING SOON

August 7 - 20: Mountain Meadow Country Experience: Program Director Meredith Fenton will travel to Mountain Meadow, a progressive summer camp for youth with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender parents, to provide dynamic COLAGE programming for campers age 9 - 17. For more information contact meredith@colage.org, or visit www.mountainmeadow.org

September: Boston area COLAGErs will host a party to celebrate COLAGE's 15th Anniversary at a date and time to be determined. To get involved as a host or volunteer, contact jcarr@colage.org.

October 15 - 17: COLAGE's annual fall board retreat will take place in New Orleans. Aided by COLAGE New Orleans, one of our newest and most active chapters, local board members will also host a 15th Anniversary reception and party during this exciting weekend. To volunteer or attend, email jcarr@colage.org

October 22: Program Director Meredith Fenton will travel to New Jersey to participate in the Lamda Families Conference. For more information, go to www.rainbowfamiliesnj.org

November 9 - 13: The National Gay and

Lesbian Taskforce will be holding their annual "Creating Change" conference in Oakland, CA. Former COLAGE board member Kate Ranson-Walsh is on the planning committee for the conference and COLAGE looks forward to contributing workshops, programming, and events for queerspawn of all ages throughout the weekend.

WELCOME NEW STAFF

COLAGE is thrilled to announce that we have brought two new full-time staff members on board.



Jesse Carr, our new Membership Coordinator was raised in rural Pennsylvania by lesbian mothers. A graduate of Oberlin College, Jesse is a former member of the Board of Directors of Mountain Meadow Summer Camp and volunteers for Community United Against

Violence. Jesse first got involved with COLAGE as an intern in June 2004. In his new role, Jesse will oversee COLAGE's many membership programs including the Just For Us publication, membership support and resources, fundraising, information and referral and more. Say hello to Jesse at jcarr@colage.org.

COLAGE also has a new Program Coordinator for the Bay Area- **Ember Cook**. Through funding

from San Francisco government agencies and foundations, Ember will be focusing her work on support, education and advocacy programs in Northern California. She was raised in a Mormon

family which was shaken up when her father came out at the age of 10. After appearing in the documentary *Our House*, Ember became hooked on activism on behalf of youth with LGBT parents and has been an active member of COLAGE ever since. Welcome Ember to her new role at ember@colage.org



We look forward to working with Jesse and Ember to grow and strengthen COLAGE's dynamic programs.



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