



# JUST FOR US

FOCUS ON MEDIA AND POP CULTURE

Vol. 17 #2  
2005

EQUALITY AND JUSTICE FOR PEOPLE WITH LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND/OR TRANSGENDER PARENTS AND OUR FAMILIES

## BEHIND THE SCENES OF IN MY SHOES

INTERVIEW WITH LILY DONOVAN-SEID



*Lily Donovan-Seid's family consists of her gay dad, straight mom, and little brother. A senior in high school, she has been participating in COLAGE's Bay Area Youth Leadership and Action Program for two years. Lily appears in the That's So Gay photo-text exhibit, wrote for the Focus On MY Family Anthology, and worked behind the scenes to help produce In My Shoes. Lily agreed to talk to JFU to let COLAGERS everywhere know what it takes to make an award-winning documentary film.*

**JFU:** *In My Shoes* features five young people talking about their families and their views on same-sex marriage. How did the YLAP group decide on this topic?

**Lily:** We had some different ideas. We knew it would be about COLAGE people, but there's a lot of different aspects you can focus on. So we wrote all of our ideas, brainstormed, and then went through a voting process to decide which ones we thought were important enough to include.

We thought our stories would have an impact on the gay marriage debates because our perspective might be overlooked. A lot of people look at partner rights and they just look at the marriage without considering third parties that might be involved. People might feel more sympathetic because there are children involved. It might compel them to protect the child's rights.

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## INVISIBLE MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY

BY TINA FAKHRID-DEEN

Being invisible is sometimes just as harmful as receiving negative press. I have always felt invisible as a poor Black girl raised by a lesbian. Whenever I saw other LGBT families on television, at pride parades or LGBT conferences, they seldom looked like mine. We don't all have the same racial, cultural, and class backgrounds or experiences and we are all unique and equally important. In my own family, my mother was always the black sheep because she was lesbian. Other family members tried to pit me against her. I often heard anti-gay remarks in school and in my family, but usually, I said nothing. I just cowered in the background, hoping no one would realize how much they were hurting me. When you are not seen by the larger community, or even in your own family,, it is easier for people to ignore discrimination or pretend they know what is best for you.



and/or Black children living in LGBT households (white, mixed-race, or Black) -- and political leaders continue to demonize our parents. I am no longer willing to sit in the background while people speak for us and against our families. We can't afford to be an invisible minority any longer.

One of the most invisible family structures within LGBT and Black communities is the Black LGBT-headed household. Based on a 2004 report published by the National Black Justice Coalition and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, three in five Black lesbian households (61%) have mothers raising children, almost the same rate as Black married opposite-sex couples at 69% and twice the rate of White female same-sex households (61% vs.38%). Black male same-sex households also have a high rate of parenting at 46% vs. 69% for Black married couples. They also parent at twice the rate of their White male same-sex counterparts at 46% vs. 24%. Translation: There are a whole bunch of Black kids and adults out there with a gay parent.

I would like to open this conversation a little wider and show more representations of Black children with LGBT parents. It is time for this population to stand up and be heard. If you want a voice and an opportunity to share what your life is really like, your visions for change, and your views on family, I am working on a book about the experiences of Black children growing up with one or more LGBT parents or guardians.

This book will fill a huge gap in the existing media about our families. If you are interested in being involved in this empowering project, please contact me today.

We will be the tellers of our own stories, one family and one voice at a time!

**LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD**

I seek to interview 40-50 Black and multi-racial individuals ages 13 and up with one or more gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or same-gender-loving parent. (Individuals under age 18 will need parental permission.) I will conduct interviews via phone, in person and/or e-questionnaire. Interviewees can opt to be anonymous. If you are interested in being involved in this empowering project, please e-mail me at [tinatfakhrid@aol.com](mailto:tinatfakhrid@aol.com) or contact me at 773-398-2086.

The Black community has not even begun the discussion about inclusion and acknowledgement of Black LGBT families



# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear COLAGE community

Last spring we decided to focus our next issue of JFU on COLAGERS in pop culture and media.

We were dismayed when three youth with lesbian parents had their family banned from PBS during the now-infamous "Episodes with Buster" incident. While corporate television stations frequently endorse shows that perpetuate homophobic lies and stereotypes, our own tax-funded PBS channel refused to broadcast a show that might portray a more realistic picture of our families. We chose our focus because we knew that for every instance of censorship or stereotype, there was another example of a young person from an LGBT family using their creativity and leadership to promote or create accurate portrayals of our families and our values. In this JFU, we hope to highlight how our community uses media to make a difference; we also provide a forum for insight, commentary, and analysis of how our families are (or aren't) reflected in popular culture.

The earliest mentions of LGBT parents in the media mostly took place on somewhat sensational afternoon talk shows, where young adults had to answer questions like, "Does it sometimes seem like your whole life has been a lie?" The youth and adults coming out about their parents were breaking new ground and fighting a silent and stereotype-ridden media industry, which often

turned our families into that day's sleazy 'hot topic.' For those of us who grew up in the 70s, 80s, and 90s seeing little or no representation of "families like ours" in television, newspaper, or print media, increased visibility was an important early tool of COLAGE and COLAGERS to find each other, build community and gain visibility.

Through the nineties, COLAGERS continued to use media to promote visibility of our lives and experiences. A major turning point was in the year 2000 when Meema Spadola debuted *Our House* - the first, full-length documentary made by a COLAGER about COLAGERS that still airs every June on PBS, the Sundance Channel and other gay-friendly stations. The film steps into the homes and lives of five lesbian and gay families and tells their stories through the eyes of the youth.

As the surge of attention to our families due to the same-sex marriage developments of the past two years has hit COLAGE like a tidal wave, so has an increased desire from the media to interview youth with LGBT parents. The COLAGE office receives calls from a range of media outlets, from international documentary makers to cable news shows; from community-specific newspapers to *The New York Times*. We continue to work with the diverse members of our *Speak Out* program to fulfill these media requests by connecting journalists with youth and adults who have LGBT parents who will speak powerfully and truthfully about their own experiences. I encourage any youth or adult who has one or more LGBT parent to consider joining COLAGE *Speak Out*- your voice can

make a difference in the debates about our families, the attacks on our rights, and our continued efforts to promote positive, realistic images of COLAGERS and our families.

In 2005, COLAGE celebrated another media milestone with the debut of our own youth-produced documentary, *In My Shoes: Stories of Youth with LGBT Parents* - which you can read about in this issue of *Just For Us*. We look forward to working with our members and allies over the next year to use this film for raising awareness and promoting social change.

The voices of COLAGERS affect the hearts and minds of people of all ages. Our voices provide the only authentic expertise on the experience of having LGBT parents. Continue to use your voice- feel free to contact COLAGE for support, training and opportunities to do media activism- whether by becoming a media activist, or creating your own media!

Thank you to everyone who made this issue of JFU possible, and to the countless numbers of you working for equality and justice for all families.

In solidarity,

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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# CONFESSIONS OF A QUEERSPAWN POP CULTURE JUNKIE

by Meredith Fenton

Last night I was astounded to discover yet another reference to queerspawn in a piece of pop culture I was consuming. Not because it's surprising that children of LGBT parents are indeed, everywhere, but because lately I seem to have some strange talent for stumbling across queerspawn in unlikely places on a fairly regular basis. In the last year alone, there have been countless times that I have excitedly revealed some new discovery of queerspawn in the media to folks in the COLAGE office. While I am aware and appreciative of the more reputable media coverage of youth with LGBT parents, I have a secret soft spot for the kitschy, fictional and sensationalized appearances of queerspawn.

Perhaps I should be embarrassed to admit that reading about a teenage daughter of a fabulous gay father in the *Gossip Girl* series still excites me. Or more accurately, maybe I should just be embarrassed that I am an adult who indulges in this series of bubble gum teen chic-lit. Somehow though, I am comforted by the knowledge that teen girls everywhere reading this mostly vapid series about rich teens will also be exposed to MY people. Who knows if this type of exposure truly makes a difference in the larger scheme of fighting homophobia, oppression and injustice? However, many of the youth I meet in COLAGE think that any and all opportunities for visibility of kids of LGBT parents is a great first step in countering

homophobia and ignorance. In that case, even visibility in the form of trashy teen novels can change the world.

Most shows and movies I've found seem to focus on the moment of discovery by a child that their parent is gay and the experience of moving from shock and rage at a parent coming out to a place of acceptance. Luke on *The OC*, for example, upon stumbling upon his father en flagrante delecto with his business partner, runs off in a fit of fury and embarrassment. By the end of the season, however, Luke has resolved his love for his father with his prior demonstrations of homophobic machismo and has decided to relocate to Portland in order to live with his newly out father.

In the somewhat underrated comedy *Blow Dry*, Brian, the young adult son of a lesbian mom and straight dad, has spent years estranged from his mom and her partner, though scenes of him longingly gazing at their apartment demonstrate that under his shame remains love and a desire to accept his mother for who she is. Luckily for everyone, by the end of the film, the whole family, straight former husband, son, mother and her partner have re-united to upset the National Hair Cutting Competition and live happily ever after.

At first, these accounts seem to reinforce that finding out your parent is gay is Strange! Shocking!



Meredith (center, bottom) with YLAP youth at the San Francisco premiere of *In My Shoes*

Cause for teenage moodiness! However, by the end of the episode, there always seems to be a major turning point where the fact that love makes a family wins out over confusion and homophobia. In some ways Luke and Brian are perfect role models for young COLAGErs because they pave the way for working through the whole kit and caboodle of feelings that can accompany a parent's coming out to a place of acceptance and pride.

Few of the gems of queerspawn appearances in such media feature youth whose parents were out at the time of their birth. The short-lived sitcom *Its All Relative* featured a daughter with two dads, (despite the fact that her age made it virtually impossible that she would have been legally adopted at birth by both dads nor did the show ever explain how her family came to be), but it was cancelled so quickly that I only saw one episode. Last spring, my brother and I went to see *The 25th Annual Putnam County*

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## SPEAK OUT

Colage asked our members to tell us about a television show, movie, book or magazine you have seen that talks about children of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender parents. Tell us whether you liked it or not and why! If you have never seen anything that showed kids of LGBT parents, tell us why you wish there was more media that had kids of gay parents in it or what kind of tv show or movie you might create.

It is important to show GLBT families in the media, so that children with heterosexual parents can become used to the idea of children with gay parents, and are able to become more accepting of them in life.

**Lily, Cambridge, MA, age 14**

I haven't seen any but I have heard of one. I would make a show for kids with lgbt parents like me. It would have members from a COLAGE family to act in it, just so that they know that they are not alone and so I know they know how I feel.

**Mionne, Chicago, IL, age 9**

I have only seen 1 play on LGBT parents and their kids. I liked it alot, but I think that the media is trying to "cover-up" the LGBT society to the rest of the U.S. It's not fair because, what are the children to think..! Oh! Betty has a straight family, and Suzie does too, so being gay is bad, right?" WRONG. We need to get the media more open to whats around them.

**Kyra, San Francisco, CA, age 12**

I was in the movie *Daddy and Papa* which featured 4 families all with gay dad(s). It was at several film festivals and I attended a few and participated in a question and answer to help a few gay men who wanted to have kids. I have two gay dads who are divorced and I live week on week of with them. It is a great movie that shows so much love.

**Fanny, Los Angeles, CA, age 13**

I don't think that I could pick one show or movie in particular, however, I think that the media is becoming more and more comfortable with the fact that there are gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender people. When the media is comfortable with something then the world is. I think that it is making more people accept gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender people. When people grow up hearing about it everyday it is normal for them. However, children in this generation didn't if they weren't raised by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender people. With all the media I think that one day it will be as normal to have gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender parents as it is to have straight parents.

**Brenna, Vicksburg, MI, Age 14**

I don't think that I have seen anything that showed the kids of lgbt parents. I have seen *Will and Grace* some and parts of *Queer As Folk* and *The L Word* before, but none of those shows has kids in it, really. I would like to see a show on tv that was about the kids and not the grown ups. I don't think it is weird or anything to have gay parents, but sometimes it is hard to tell your friends. If kids watched a show that had kids on it that had gay parents, it might not be so hard to talk about.

**Maggie, Oklahoma City, OK. Age 9**

**JFU:** Did you and the other youth involved have a lot of experience making movies?

**Lily:** Not really. [Filmmaker] Jen Gilomen let us use her equipment; she taught us how to use the cameras, and showed us where we should put the mics and the lights.

**JFU:** What part of the project did you help out with?

**Lily:** Everyone got to try a little of everything. I did some of the interviewing, I was an extra in some of the locker scenes, and I helped with the planning of it. I was also involved with deciding what we wanted to focus on, and the editing process.

**JFU:** Looking at the finished product, who is your intended audience? What do you hope the average viewer who isn't from an LGBT family, takes away from it?

**Lily:** The film appeals to the high school and middle school age group. Most of the people we focused on were in those age groups - we wanted it to be more peer to peer.

I know it would be useful for my peers to see, because although I haven't encountered discrimination personally, at

### Did you know that DOROTHY DANDRIDGE is a queerspawn celebrity?

**Dorothy Dandridge (performer)**

African American actress, singer, dancer Dorothy Dandridge, the daughter of stage and screen lesbian actress Ruby Dandridge, began performing professionally in the song-and-dance duo "The Wonder Children" with her sister Vivian at age four. They toured the South, performing at churches, schools, and social gatherings. Dorothy performed in the Marx brother's comedy *A Day at the Races*, in the group the Dandridge Sisters, and the films *Going Places*, and *Sun Valley Serenade*. She was the first Black actress to receive an Oscar nomination. Dorothy Dandridge died in 1965 at age 42.

my high school people always think they know who the gay kids are. My high school isn't that bad, they don't try to purposely bring people down, but they don't see anything wrong with making comments.

I hope it makes them more aware that people in our situation exist, because for a lot of people, when they use certain terminology and offensive language, they don't think that they're hurting anyone. Really it's impossible to know if someone is offended by it. The film raises awareness. The more people who are exposed to this sort of thing in general, the better it ends up being.

**JFU:** How did you feel when you found out the film had won an audience award at the

**San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival?**

**Lily:** It felt awesome. I was really surprised because I remember looking through the [film festival] catalog and seeing hundreds of movies. I had no idea that our youth-produced movie would do so well.

**JFU:** Are you excited to be back with YLAP and working on another visibility project?

**Lily:** The more awareness and publicity the better it will end up being. YLAP is a fun experience and I'm really glad I am able to participate in it.

### MY MOTHER LIKES WOMEN A FILM REVIEW BY JESSE CARR

A Film by Ines Paris and Daniela Fejerman  
Starring Rosa Maria Sarda, Leonor Watling, and Maria Pujalte  
Language: Spanish with English subtitles

Most of the television shows and movies that have included LGBT families have focused exclusively on the dilemmas, feelings, and journeys of gay and lesbian parents. *My Mother Likes Women* is a welcome difference - and it's funny, too!

*My Mother Likes Women* features three sisters (Sol, Elvira, and Gimena) who are surprised when their mother introduces them to her new lover - a woman! - without even a token coming-out discussion or announcement. Their mother's

non-chalant manner leaves her daughters to make peace with the change on their own. Along the way, there is some scheming to destroy the new relationship, a little sexual experimentation, and a few other awkward moments and outrageous plot-twists that should keep you laughing.

This movie has attracted some criticism from LGBT reviewers who express discomfort with the movie's frank portrayal of the homophobic and manipulative reactions of the daughters to their newly out mother. During one memorable part, the youngest daughter, Sol, who is the lead singer of a pop band, invites everyone to a concert in which she debuts her new song, featuring lyrics such as, "I wanted to kill myself when I found out she likes women to lick her belly."

However, it is a reality of queerspawn experience that many of us do have to challenge our own internalized - and homophobic - stereotypes that we may have had before our parent came out to us. Just like the daughters in the film, many of us wonder, "does this mean I will be gay too?" And more than one of us has contemplated a new lover or "special friend" with some degree of resentment or contempt. One of the great things about this movie is that it focuses on this process from the viewpoint of the three daughters, instead of dealing only with the experience of the lesbian parent. The film pokes fun at their dramatic reactions while at the same time taking seriously the daughters' attempt to reconcile their own ideas about who their mother is with their desire for her to be happy.

### Did you know that MALCOLM STEVENSON "STEVE" FORBES JR. is a queerspawn celebrity?

**Malcolm Stevenson "Steve" Forbes Jr. (editor and publisher)**

Born July 18, 1947, is the son of gay father Malcolm Stevenson Forbes Sr. and the editor-in-chief of business magazine Forbes as well as president and chief executive officer of its publisher, Forbes Inc. Forbes Jr. entered the Republican primaries for President of the United States in 1996 and 2000, primarily running on a campaign to establish a flat income tax. He was adamantly opposed to abortion and supports prayer within the public schools. He has, however, said that he is not biased against gays.

## From *Secrets to Sundance*: An Interview with Katherine Leggett

*Small Town Secrets* is only 8 minutes long - but those eight minutes are packed with emotionally provocative narration, original music, and high quality film production. The autobiographical documentary explores Katherine Leggett's childhood in a small mid-western town with closeted gay parents. It captures perfectly the experience of secret-keeping that is so familiar to those of us with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender parents. As a short documentary, it is perfect for educational settings. Leggett's film has earned awards at film festivals across the country, including Ann Arbor, MI, Wisconsin, Nashville, TN, and Sundance. JFU caught up with Katherine at her home in Wisconsin to find out more about this promising filmmaker.

**JFU:** *Could you give me a little background about why you made *Small Town Secrets*?*

**KL:** The film was part of a school project. I just finished my graduate degree in documentary film at Stanford University. *Small Town Secrets* was the third film of my first year.

**JFU:** *Have you ever made any other pieces about your family?*

**KL:** *Small Town Secrets* was the only film I made about my parents. It showed at Sundance, which was a great experience, and people wanted to know if I would make it into a longer piece. Maybe later I will go back and expand it, but not now.

**JFU:** *How did you go from feeling so much pressure to keep your family a secret to working with seven other people on a documentary and showing it at film festivals?*

**KL:** When I made the film I was 31, so thank god I was not keeping it a secret anymore, and I hadn't been for 10 years. It would have been a much more difficult process if I was still keeping that secret, or if my parents were still keeping that secret. But it's been long enough that I could make it without it being too emotional. It was based on memories, not on how I am feeling at this moment.

**JFU:** *What changed so that you stopped keeping your family a secret?*

**KL:** When I left high school it coincided with my mom and her partner meeting more and more lesbians in Madison, Wisconsin. Before that they were very isolated in this small town twenty minutes south of Madison. So it all happened at the same time. They were becoming more open, meeting more people, realizing they weren't the only other lesbians. And I was going to college, meeting more diverse people, and realizing it wasn't something to be ashamed of. I met



A still from Leggett's film

one person who was very proud, very open, and I remember thinking I wish I could have been like that in high school, instead of ashamed - or not ashamed exactly, but not talking about it. Mirroring my mom, who wasn't talking about it.

**JFU:** *Who was this person you met?*

**KL:** He was from Wisconsin also, and had a gay mom, and we became very good friends because we had this bond. I had never met anyone else before who had a gay mom. Even though I had a brother and my mom's partner had children and we all lived together, I had this idea that I was the

only one. It wasn't until college that I met someone. And then it's funny because in college I met someone who was from my high school but he was five years older and I told him about my parents and he said, "yeah, I know." So everyone in my town knew, it just wasn't talked about.

**JFU:** *It can be very hard to keep a secret like that, especially in a small town where everyone knows everyone. What was that like for you?*

**KL:** I did my best to completely deny it and the only time it would come up is when my mom and I would argue. Over things being normal or not normal. It is strange to have to cover up something so obvious, especially about your family. There's a lot of energy spent trying to prevent questions being asked, or things looking suspicious. I had good friends but we were so ignorant, we didn't have the language. We didn't have any guidance. If there had been guidance or people going through the same experience I would have latched onto them and it would have just completely changed my whole experience.

**JFU:** *Do you have advice or anything to say to youth now who are growing up isolated and/or in small towns?*

**KL:** If I had known about COLAGE I think my experience would have been totally different. Just being able to talk with people, or even read, just be connected with other people who have a similar experience. It just opens doors. Even now when I meet someone else whose parents are gay and lesbian we just have this great bond. We can relate to each other without having to go into all of the details.

**JFU:** *Did you show the film to your parents?*

**KL:** They loved it. They laughed saying that the web cam isn't very flattering, but we talked about what it was like. In the process of making the film, we talked a lot, and that was what I most cherished. Having those conversations with my mom and with my dad. To have that opportunity to ask my parents all of these questions, that's normally not something kids do with their parents. "Tell me about before I came, what were you thinking, why did you live here, who was that person, and how did you meet, and tell me about your relationships." [In the interviews] I felt that our conversations were really open. So the making of the film was the most rewarding. Watching with them was great, and I was happy to show it to them. They were both really proud. In fact, my mom came to Sundance with us and was there when we

### Did you know that OJ SIMPSON is a queerspawn celebrity?

#### Orenthal James Simpson

Considered one of the greatest running backs in American football history, OJ in 1994 became a household name, after he was charged with the murders of Nicole Brown and Ronald Goldman. Once known only for his talent on the football field, OJ's name soon became one that sparked controversies across the United States on race, wealth, and fame. Eunice Durden Simpson, OJ Simpson's father, was a well-known San Francisco drag queen.

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*Spelling Bee* and laughed at the inclusion in this musical of an over-achieving queerspawn daughter of gay dads. Her desire to win the spelling bee, in part, to prove to the world that her dads were indeed capable parents, also spoke to one of the common queerspawn narratives.

One of my favorite queerspawn culture discoveries is the character of Harrison on the now-cancelled, but readily available via DVD, teen television show *Popular*. Harrison is the somewhat nerdy, sensitive boy who hangs out with a crew of liberal girls. Well into the first season of the show it is revealed that he is hiding the fact that his mom is a lesbian. After a bit of the good old stretching the truth (no that's just our roommate) act, Harrison comes out to his close friends who not only support but actually revel in his mom being a lesbian.

Several episodes later Harrison's mom has lost her job due to discrimination, plunging her into an ice cream-eating, tv- watching fit of depression. When a teacher at the Popular high school comes out as transgender, Harrison leads a small activist revolution to save the teachers' job. In the end, the school board still fires the teacher; however in the process Harrison's mom gets a job, and Harrison finds his voice. Both of these episodes honestly capture the experiences that I hear from COLAGers all over the country- the fear and danger around coming out, the need for acceptance from peers and community, and the empowering moment when they found their voice and decided to stand up for themselves and their families.

In all of these examples there are, of course, some glaring problems. I can not remember any recent examples of queerspawn who are people of color in tv or film. Reinforcing the racist idea that gay people are white and that gay families are white families clearly misrepresents the reality of our communities. Furthermore, our families are often quite complex with extended families, blended families, multiracial families all a vibrant part of the community, yet even the news media often rejects such stories because they are too complicated. Fictional mediums don't even bother trying to portray our family diversity.

I don't forgive the media for these grave shortcomings; nor do I fully endorse the media's portrayal of most LGBT issues. However, the part of me that knows that youth in COLAGE are excited and validated when they see someone like them on television, and the part of me that hopes that with our increased visibility will continue to come increased justice for all children and families, is the part of me that will continue to react with glee each time I stumble upon my fierce queerspawn comrades, fictional though they may be, in the world of pop culture.

*Meredith Fenton, the COLAGE Program Director, is the adult daughter of a lesbian mom and straight dad who doesn't really spend that much time watching television and reading young adult fiction.*

## COLAGers USE *THAT'S GO GAY* TO RAISE AWARENESS

Last spring, COLAGE member KL Moscato was proud to incorporate media featuring youth with LGBT parents at the Princeton Friends School, her independent school (PK-8). She worked with her moms, teachers and the school so they featured COLAGE's poster series, "That's So Gay", in the school's spring 2005 curriculum program on family.



Family is traditionally a topic for the middle school grades at Princeton Friends School. While sessions usually reveal diverse family structures, this year's program added homophobia to the family life discussions. School advisors Nancy Wilson and Dave Gibson agreed that the family topic provided a meaningful context to explore personal identity issues which can often lead to name-calling and labeling in these age groups.

The COLAGE posters, however, presented a unique opportunity to link those discussions. Wilson was enthusiastic: "I knew immediately that we had to use the COLAGE posters with our sessions on family!"

Wilson and Gibson began by having students write about their own families. Each student's writing was combined with photographs to make individual posters similar to the "That's So Gay" posters. Next, Wilson and Gibson printed the COLAGE posters from the compact disk resource, and then interspersed them with the students' posters to mount an exhibit about families in the school's central meeting room.

The middle schoolers viewed the exhibit with the assignment to make notes about similarities among their families and the COLAGE families. This was their first encounter with the COLAGE posters.

Gibson noted the value for students: "It's important for our students to understand that they are allowed to be themselves, to be the individuals that they are. Combining the COLAGE posters with their own writing and images for the exhibit 'normalized' the situation for the

students. They saw the common elements of families - being caring and supportive."

Reaction to the exhibit was overwhelmingly positive. Besides the middle schoolers, other students and school community members were impressed by the posters and the message the exhibit conveyed. The school's weekly bulletin encouraged families to visit the exhibit. The exhibit's hub location allowed parents and school visitors to experience the students' writing. Wilson and Gibson laminated the COLAGE posters with the expectation of using them in future programs. The posters will also be available to advisors of younger students for similar discussions about family and homophobia.

Responding to the talk show program and the poster exhibit, one school family offered the middle schoolers "gay? fine by me." t-shirts from a national organization, Fine By Me. That many students chose to wear the shirts to a public event the next day was one measure of the program's success.

KL noted that the response from her classmates was overwhelmingly positive. "They really liked making their own posters, and people reacted well to the exhibit. The people at my school are very open and accepting."

To learn how to display *That's So Gay* or other COLAGE produced youth-made media resources, visit the newly updated COLAGE website [www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org).

## Did you know that JOE VALENTINE is a queerspawn celebrity?

### Joe Valentine (baseball player)

Joe is a baseball pitcher for the Cincinnati Reds. Valentine, from Long Island, N.Y., was the subject of a lengthy article in *Newsday* about his two moms, Deb Valentine and Doreen Price, who raised him since his birth in Las Vegas in 1979. The couple has been together for 30 years. Said Valentine, "It's no different than having a mother and father. These are the two women who raised me, and they are wonderful people. It's just not a big deal to me. Why should it be?"



## SPAWN TALK

by Abigail Garner

Winning this Media Game

Until very recently, the lack of LGBT families reflected in "mainstream" culture created a perception that such families did not exist. And for queerspawn who cannot find their lives reflected anywhere, they often believe they are the only ones. Media coverage of LGBT families is not only instrumental in shaping public opinion, it also has a direct effect on how queerspawn feel about themselves.

While I was in college, the Boston Globe ran a story featuring long-time COLAGE members Anna and Molly Heller. The article painted these sisters as neither cheerleaders for "the cause" nor products of a social experiment gone wrong. What made this article so remarkable to me was how unremarkable it was. Two grown daughters influenced by growing up in a different kind of family, but obviously not brainwashed or damaged. This article resonated with me, making it possible for me to think of myself as part of a community of "kids" with a shared culture and experience.

I am but one queerspawn who read one article. Multiply that by millions of "kids" across the country by the number of newspapers and radio stations and TV shows, and the potential for making

a positive impact through media is intoxicating. But since intoxication has the tendency to blur decision-making, here are some things I encourage any person with LGBT parents to seriously think about before taking the media plunge.

First, the decision to participate should be yours and yours alone. Only you can assess the potential consequences - what it might feel like to return to school or work in the days following media exposure about your personal life. Pushy producers might question your hesitancy as a strategy to talk you into it. One producer, for example, challenged me after I declined an interview by saying, "Sounds like you have something to hide. If you're so well-adjusted, why won't you come on TV to tell us about it?" Oooo, them's fightin' words. But I held my ground and didn't participate, since her comment only confirmed my hunch that I would be entering an abrasive situation that would drain my energy.

Even if your parents are really excited about a certain media inquiry, you always have the right to say no. I am really troubled by queerspawn who tell me they were uncomfortable about doing a media interview but agreed to it anyway because they were concerned that declining would make their parents wonder if their children were ashamed or homophobic. Participating in media is not right for everyone, and you don't have to do it to prove anything to anyone.

Secondly, pace yourself and have realistic expectations. I know there are a lot of queerspawn out there who, as Debra in *Families Like Mine* says, "want to change the world one article at a time." Be gentle with yourself, and trust your participation is indeed contributing to positive change, even though you won't see it happen overnight.

Finally, remember that so much can happen in the "spin" of your story which is out of your control. Media usually determine ahead of time what the angle will be and then try to squeeze you into that angle. You could be painfully misquoted, or your most stellar interview responses could get deleted in the final cut. Accepting the possibility that you might be misrepresented and doing it anyway is part of the risk that comes with working with media.

While more kids of LGBT parents are speaking out in mainstream media, I am also excited about the emerging media created by queerspawn themselves. From *Just For Us* to *Our House* to *Queerspawn Diaries*, our peers are no longer just the subjects of media, but also the creators. This gives me great hope as we work to ensure no child from with LGBT parents will be led to believe s/he is the only one. Thanks to those who are playing the media game, future generations of queerspawn will see their lives truly reflected in the world around them.

*Abigail Garner, 33, is the author of Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is, which was released in paperback earlier this spring. Her website is [www.FamiliesLikeMine.com](http://www.FamiliesLikeMine.com).*

## BE A COLAGE MEDIA ACTIVIST!

*As many of the articles in this issue of Just For Us demonstrate, using your voice as the child of LGBT parents can be monumental in creating a more just world and raising awareness. Here are just five ways that you can become a media superstar:*

- 1. Join the COLAGE Speak OUT Program-** One of the easiest ways to let your voice be heard is by joining the COLAGE Speak Out Program. By joining the program, you'll be notified of opportunities to participate with the media (newspapers, television, magazines, etc), be a part of press conferences, and speak on panels and at public education events. To start Speaking Out visit <http://colage.org/programs/youth/speakout.htm> or contact Meredith Fenton, COLAGE Program Director at 415-861-5437 x102.
- 2. Stay informed through COLAGE Net News -** When news and legislation that affects our families occurs, COLAGE Net News will let you know- giving you up-to-date information about current events and steps for taking action- from contacting your legislators to writing letters to the editor. To subscribe, visit <http://colage.org/programs/advocacy/netnews.htm>.
- 3. Let Your Voice Be Heard-** Don't be afraid to speak your truths loud and clear. If you are a writer for your school newspaper, a contributor to an online blog, or a slam poet- you can incorporate content about your family into these mediums for creative expression. Or you can become a contributor to this very publication and submit an article to *Just For Us!* (Email [jfu@colage.org](mailto:jfu@colage.org) to get involved). Many COLAGERS have used blogs, books, editorials and zines to be heard- join them!
- 4. Make Your Own Media!** Whether its writing a book, making a movie, or scripting a play, COLAGERS have long used creative mediums to express themselves. Pick up a camera and start documenting your life, grab a pen and start composing a memoir, or simply find inspiration in the stories of COLAGERS in *Just For Us* who are using the media to make a statement.
- 5. Get Creative-** If there is something you would like to see in the media- make it happen. Case in point- the *Queerspawn Diaries*. Frustrated by the conversations they heard in the mainstream media about LGBT families, Nava EtShalom and Chana Joffe-Walt created this independent audio documentary project about young adults with LGBT parents to address a lack of self-produced narratives by and about kids of queer families. To learn more about this project and listen to excerpts, visit [www.queerspawn.org](http://www.queerspawn.org).

# COMICS

Special Thanks to Alison Bechdel and PlanetOut for letting JFU re-print this episode of "Dykes to Watch Out For." The full archive of the series, which includes many queerspawn youngsters, can be found at PlanetOut.com





Human i am

i breathe

I eat

and

sleep

i have hot blood

and skin that

bleeds

when cut

So human i am

I cry, laugh and scream

run jump and dance

fall and get right back up again

because Human i am

I am cruel, loving, understanding and  
ignorant

I perpetuate consumerism and  
less than minimum wage

And still human i am

But because i believe act or live  
differently than the "norm"

Human I am not?

because i have 2 dads and no biological  
mother

Human i am not?

I have many mothers many brothers and  
sisters

and opinions about many things. I have a  
"different" family and ideas

So human i am not?

I love and am loved

i help and am helped

i hug and am hugged

Human i am

and

Human i will be

Human i will be

and

human i am

By Isabel Rieser,  
age 12



## COLAGE GOES TO CAMP!

This summer, Meredith Fenton, the COLAGE Program Director spent a week in the woods of New Jersey at Mountain Meadow Summer Camp. This two-week, sleep-away camp offers programming for children from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other non-traditional families and their allies. COLAGE partnered with Mountain Meadow to increase the programming for campers that addresses the specific issues for youth with LGBT parents in addition to an ongoing partnership with the organization which is sponsoring the COLAGE Philly chapter.



Almost 80 youth ages 9 - 16 participated in COLAGE programs during Mountain Meadow including art workshops, drama exercises, viewings of *In My Shoes*, a *Queerspawn* and the Media workshop and drag performance. Meredith enjoyed meeting many youth with LGBT parents including both youth who are members of various COLAGE Chapters or past participants in Family Week events, in addition to many youth for whom this was their first chance to participate in COLAGE activities. See p.16 for Mountain Meadow/COLAGE Philadelphia contact info.

## Did you know that VANESSA REDGRAVE is a queerspawn celebrity?

### Vanessa Redgrave (actress)

Vanessa, known for her roles in *The Trojan Women*, *Mary Queen of Scots*, *Howards End*, *Wilde* and *Deep Impact*, is the daughter of distinguished bisexual actor Sir Michael Redgrave. Vanessa Redgrave is widely regarded as one of Great Britain's finest modern dramatic actresses. She is perhaps the most internationally famous of the Redgrave dynasty of actors that includes her father, mother, and siblings. Redgrave won an Oscar for best supporting actress for her role in *Julia* (1977). At the Oscar ceremony, the actress generated considerable controversy during her acceptance speech by using the ceremony as a forum for her tireless campaign for Palestinian rights in Israel.

# Family Week 2005

Once again this summer, COLAGE was thrilled to be a part of two exciting Family Week events. During these fun-filled weeks, COLAGE provides extensive social, recreational, educational and leadership programming to youth ages 9-18 from diverse LGBT families. With a volunteer staff comprised of adults who share the experience of having one or more LGBT parent, Family Week is a time that is inspiring, empowering, and most importantly fun for everyone.

2005 was a year of change and growth for Family Week Saugatuck, MI. Under the leadership of the volunteer-run Rainbow Families Great Lakes, over 50 families came together in the Midwest for a week full of community events and COLAGE programming for 26 youth ages 9 - 16. During the week the COLAGE schedule was packed with old favorites such as youth workshops, tie-dying and our Show and Tell as well as new highlights such as the Family Kickball Game, lunch chats for teens, and the Art Extravaganza.

In Provincetown, COLAGE was excited about being able to work with Family Pride Coalition the host of Ptown Family Week during the event's 10th anniversary! Over 200 youth participated in COLAGE programming throughout the week which featured new events such as the 9-12 COLAGE Olympics and old favorites such as the Youth in Action Day, the COLAGE Teen Panel, and the end-of-the-week highlight, the COLAGE Show and Tell. We also celebrated

COLAGE's 15th Anniversary with Family Week attendees at a special family-friendly performance by the Kinsey Sicks and an Anniversary ice-cream social. In honor of our anniversary, two families combined their resources to make a \$15,000 challenge to their fellow attendees. COLAGE is happy to report that we did meet that match, raising a combined \$30,000 to support our work throughout the year.



COLAGE girls celebrate their new friends



COLAGErs proudly march through Provincetown



A young COLAGEr models his new tie-dye



Saugatuck COLAGE Bowling Party



The 9-12 Actors Perform in the Show and Tell



The winning Scavenger Hunt team celebrates



Diamond, Kyle, Ray and their Dads enjoy the Family Dance



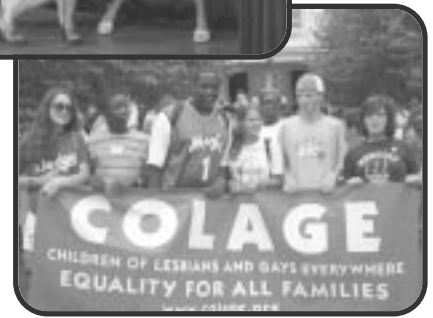
COLAGE boys kick off a great week



Teens demonstrate their new Drag Skills at the Ptown Show and Tell



A COLAGEr Rocks the Olympics Hula Hoop Contest



COLAGErs show their pride at the Family Week Parade



An excited Scavenger Hunt Team



Ray shows off his COLAGE book



The Saugatuck Teens Enjoy their Summer Nights



Robert shares his skills in the Teen Poetry Slam

### SPECIAL THANKS

TO OUR FACILITATORS AND VOLUNTEERS;  
Without you, Family Week would not be possible!

- ✦ Amanda Kelly, CA
- ✦ Andrea Wachter, CA
- ✦ Bennett Goldstein, MO
- ✦ Chester Densmore, CA
- ✦ Christine Bachman, MA
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- ✦ Sol Kelley-Jones, WI
- ✦ Whitney Moses, CA

### MANY THANKS

TO OTHERS  
Whose donations and contributions made our 2005 Family Weeks a success!

- Kinsey Sicks
- Crown and Anchor, Provincetown, MA
- Fisher-Davenport Family
- Clem and Ursies, Provincetown, MA
- Vittles and Hooch, Saugatuck, MI
- Subway of Saugatuck, MI

## SAVE THE DATES!

It's never too early to start planning for an amazing family vacation during Family Week 2006!


FAMILY WEEK IN SAUGATUCK, MI:  
**JULY 8TH - 13TH, 2006**

FAMILY WEEK IN PROVINCETOWN, MA:  
**JULY 29TH- AUGUST 5TH, 2006**

## DATELINE DAN

By Dan Cherubin

### Pop Culture and Second Gen



There's a great quote from the beginning of the anthology *Generation Q* (Alyson 1996), a collection of essays from LGBT folk born during or after the Stonewall era. A 40 year old gay man says to a 15 year old lesbian that Melissa Etheridge must be great role model for her. The young lesbian replies no she's not a role model because, "I don't like her music." The gay man is incredulous. But when I read that page back in the day, I felt an immediate connection to the girl.

Why is it that certain pop culture references have to be associated across an entire demographic? As a gay teen growing up in New York City in the 80's, I preferred to spend my time stage diving and getting bruised at CBGB's Hardcore Matinee, instead of dancing at the Saint, the huge gay dance club around the corner. Was I not pop culture correct? I would

also buy my lesbian mother "womyn's music" from the Ladyslipper catalog, but I certainly didn't identify with it myself. Nor did she really enjoy Pansy Division or Agnostic Front. Were we not following the rules?

There wasn't really a lot of LGBT pop culture out there that I liked. And what about being a Second Generation guy? Was there any popular culture reference for me? I never thought so. It wasn't until I saw SG author Jennifer DiMarco on an afternoon talk show that I realized I wasn't the only one. I started the SG group soon after that. Years later, I found *Generation Q*, which not only was the first book that referenced LGBT people my age, but also SG folk (including Ms. Dimarco). My first thought was, what took them so long?

But then I realized that I couldn't wait to find popular culture that referenced me; I had to use what was out there to fashion my own cultural statement. Instead of waiting for crumbs, I had to make my own bread.

And you know what? It really was out there. It turns out there were a lot of queer folk in that sweaty pit with me at CBGBs. And enough of us were around for a queerpunk movement to emerge. I began to find

more pop culture that I identified with AND had SG mentions! There are comics by Tony Arena and Robert Kirby and the wonderful Alison Bechdel. There were movies like the *Last Language of Cranes* and *The Sum of Us*. And for people like me who roll their eyes at the Indigo Girls, there was more music than I ever knew existed. And then the internet began...

Now, none of this stuff was solely SG oriented. But I found it because I realized I couldn't just look for iconography I thought was supposed to represent me. I found it when I looked for things I liked and discovered that I shared a cultural reference to these creators.

I don't think there will ever be an "official" SG reference in popular culture. But do we want that? I think we each need to make our own pop culture reference for ourselves. Each SG person has a different story. Embrace that story and you'll find what you need out there.

---

*Dan Cherubin is a gay man with lesbian moms who lives in New York City and is incredibly happy that the NHL is back in season.*

### Secrets, from p.5

received the award. She was the most proud mom you can imagine. She, of course, wants the longer version.

**JFU:** *How would you like to see the film used?*

**KL:** I had the opportunity to go to a high school in Park City when I was there for Sundance and that was pretty amazing to show the film to about thirty high school students who were all in a media class. They asked me a range of questions from the content to the actual technicalities of making the film. That's something I would love to do with the film - show it to high school students, or have it easily available to high school students, whether they're just interested in filmmaking, or are gay or lesbian, or have gay and lesbian families. Secrets are in most families, one way or the other, so I think it's a film that anyone can relate to.

---

*Small Town Secrets may be purchased for the discounted price of \$40 plus \$10 S/H by emailing Frameline at [distribution@frameline.org](mailto:distribution@frameline.org). Reference discount code COL1005 and include full contact information and a credit card number with expiration date. Purchase price includes public performance rights in free-admission settings only.*

## Did you know that JENA MALONE is a queerspawn celebrity?

### Jena Malone (actress)

Jena has appeared in such movies as *Saved*, *Stepmom*, and *Bastard Out of Carolina*. She was nominated for a Golden Globe in 1998 for Best Supporting Actress in a TV Movie - "Hope", an Independent Spirit Award in 1997 for Best Debut Performance - "Bastard Out of Carolina" and a SAG Award in 1997 for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a TV Movie or Miniseries - "Bastard Out of Carolina". Until age 10, Malone lived in Lake Tahoe, Nev., raised by two moms. Then her birth mother broke up with her lover and became a born-again Christian. Legally emancipated since 2000, Malone says she is close to her large extended family, which includes four brothers and two sisters.

## Did you know that REBECCA WALKER is a queerspawn celebrity?

### Rebecca Walker (author)

Rebecca is the daughter of renowned bisexual author, Alice Walker. Raised in an activist and literary household, Rebecca co-founded Third Wave, a feminist organization that began in 1992. She is also the author of several books, including "To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism" and "Black, White, and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self."

# In My Shoes

Stories of Youth with LGBT Parents



## COLAGE's Hot New Youth Documentary!

Be among the first to see this brand new film created by the COLAGE Youth Leadership and Action Program! A great tool for raising awareness and making the case for same-sex marriage in schools, community centers, churches, legislative offices and more. *In My Shoes* is the first movie created by and about youth with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents.

In a time when LGBT families are debated and attacked in the media, courts, and Congress, from school houses to state houses across the country, five young people give you a chance to walk in their shoes - to hear their own views on marriage, making change, and what it means to be a family.

This 30 minute documentary film was directed by filmmaker Jen Gilomen and produced by the COLAGE Youth Leadership and Action Program. *In My Shoes* debuted in San Francisco in June 2005. Copies on VHS or DVD will be available with a complete discussion and action guide in November, 2005.

If you become a monthly donor to COLAGE by Dec. 31, 2005 we will send you a FREE copy of this exciting new youth-produced documentary. See the form below to order.

### GET YOUR FREE COPY OF *IN MY SHOES*

**YES!** Send me a complimentary copy of *In My Shoes*. I would like to make a monthly donation of

\$10

\$25

\$100

\$15

\$50

other amount: \$\_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ ORGANIZATION: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER(S): \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL : \_\_\_\_\_

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The campaigners and their donors, listed below, helped raise \$10,000 to support COLAGE's work!

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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](http://www.colage.org/join)*

**THANK YOU!**

# COLAGE NOTES

## 2005 LEE DUBIN MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

*The Lee Dubin Memorial Scholarship is named in honor of a gay father and founder of the Family Pride Coalition whose daughter, Ali Nickel-Dubin, was one of COLAGE's founders. Each year COLAGE and the Family Pride Coalition award up to five scholarships to children of LGBT parents/guardians through their collaborative Lee Dubin Memorial Scholarship Fund. Each scholarship provides up to \$1000 of funding for undergraduate college students who have demonstrated ability and commitment to affecting change in the LGBT community and the community at large. The Scholarship promotes the idea that the most powerful members of the LGBT community are the children of LGBT parents who have grown up being nurtured and supported by this community and are now part of a whole generation that has the power to create dramatic change in the world. Through college scholarships we aim to honor this power and celebrate the unique experiences and achievements of our families. To date over \$24,000 in funds have been distributed.*

### Shirley Lea Wilson

Fridley, MN Shirley will be transferring to Hennepin Technical College in Fall 2005 to complete her training to become an automotive technician. Her father, who identifies as bisexual, has been in prison for 30 years for a fight that occurred over his sexual orientation. He is the person, Shirley says, who, "taught me to be proud of who I am." Shirley is active in many causes; she has been a peer advisor at school, spoken to college classes on public health issues, received a leadership award for her work with NHCCO, an American Sign Language



organization, and attended Minnesota rallies in support of gay marriage. "I think if the world were a better place for people with GLBT parents, it would look like a place where family was the most important thing."

### Adrienne Klein

Los Angeles, CA Adrienne is entering her sophomore year at Grinnell College in Iowa where she is an International Relations and Russian major. Her mother came out as a lesbian when she was 4 years old, and now Adrienne is busy participating in activism on many fronts. She facilitates diversity training, is a member of the Youth Advisory Team to the LA County Commission on Human Relations and the Executive Advisory Board to the Stonewall Research Center, and works with local high schools to provide workshops for students and teachers about homophobia. Adrienne plans to become a lawyer after college and says, "My education will provide me with the tools to affect change and fight for justice through the court system."



will show them that my family is perfectly acceptable- that there is nothing wrong with my family or any other family with GLBT parents."

### Kelly Muscolo

Martinez, CA Kelly will be a sophomore in the fall at Whittier College where she studies English, Sociology, and Spanish. She is currently involved in the Bisexual, Gay, and Lesbian Activists for Diversity and serves as the co-president of the Coalition of Activist Leaders. She has helped plan annual teach-ins focusing on homophobia and community responsibility to promote equality for all people. She says that she had never seen her background as something that had a great effect on her- "Now, however, it's becoming clearer and clearer to me that having a lesbian mother has had a huge impact on who I've become." Kelly even directs her passion for writing and art towards the advancement of gay rights; she has been published in COLAGE's very own Focus On MY Family Anthology, and has created an art piece about gay marriage.



### Trenton Lamere

Salt Lake City, UT Trenton is the son of a gay father and is entering his senior year this fall at Utah State University in Salt Lake City. He is majoring in psychology with a Spanish minor. He describes the atmosphere at his school as very conservative and, while he has done panels for diversity classes across campus, he now uses research as a means of fighting homophobia. He has been working on a study that examines the outcomes of youth with same-sex parents as compared to straight-parented youth. Trenton dreams of, "providing our law makers with research that



### Moira Brace

Boston, MA Moira entered her freshman year at Hampshire College in Western Mass this fall where she will be concentrating in Sustainable Agriculture. Raised from birth in a lesbian-parented household, Moira attended her first Gay Pride when she was just 8 days old. "Since then I have felt more at home in the GLBT community than anywhere else," she says. Starting in the sixth grade, she spoke on panels for gay and lesbian couples planning to have children. Moira has been involved with her local GSA since Middle School and has attended multiple national GLSEN conferences. She calls her family, "one of choice rather than chance". Moira says, "Without them [my moms and aunts], I would have half the confidence I have today. They taught me not to tolerate people who are different, but to cherish them."



## COLAGE HAS A NEW WEBSITE!

Our re-designed website was unveiled in September, thanks to the tireless efforts of Program Director Meredith Fenton and web designer Jen Gilomen.

To find out about our many programs, advocacy efforts, and upcoming events, check the new site out at

[www.colage.org](http://www.colage.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.