



JUST FOR US

FOCUS ON HEALTH

Vol. 19 #1
2007

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

TOWARDS A HEALTHY FUTURE

Picture this. It's any given day somewhere in NY and I am running a table to give out information about the COLAGE NYC chapter at some luncheon at some venue for queer families. Heaps of queer parents come up to the table excited to see there is an organization made for their kids. Then they see that I am wearing a t-shirt that says Queer Spawn on it accompanied by the ever so cute I (heart) My Lesbian Mom button. "So you grew up with a gay mom, huh?" Yes, I say. "How was that for you?" hoping to hear me say that it was awesome and their kids will be happy to have had a gay parent because no issues would ever come of it.

The truth is, life was complicated. No matter what I tell these parents, every queer spawn has a story, and not one of the hundreds of stories I have heard is the same as the one before it. We all have different experiences and mine is just one of the millions of queerspawn tales.

My mom and dad divorced when I was 6. My mother is Jewish, my father is Irish-Catholic and for years my mother would tell me they split up because of religious differences. My mom had been friends with another woman for a couple of years – *best* friends. I would visit my dad on weekends and he didn't like this other woman at all and would tell me that. I didn't really understand why. Within the year, she moved in with my mom and me. She took the extra bedroom I always wished another baby would take. Mom said she was helping us pay the rent. Such a funny excuse now that I look back and realize we owned our house.

For years, my mom and I would explain to my friends and their parents that she was her best friend who helped to watch me and keep the house in order. I kind of only sort of believed this was the whole truth but didn't argue. When I was 11, during a visit with my dad, he started to aggressively question the relationship between my mother and this friend. Though he never directly outed my mother to me, I knew what he was getting at. I freaked, called my mom to have her pick me up, and got in the car.

It was out - literally- they were gay but we decided to not tell anyone at school. We thought it would be better if no one knew. I heard the kids



talking about fags and being gay and how that was horrible so there was no way I was going to open my mouth about it to anyone. I actually never said "my mom is gay" out loud until I was 18 and in college over 100 miles away from home.

Being gay didn't exist in my town. If it did, those people would be ostracized by everyone. I was angry and upset and wished it wasn't me that had a gay mom. I hated her for being gay and for causing me to keep this secret. I now know that I wasn't upset with the way my mother parented me, only that she was not what society expected her to be and that everyone around me was telling me this is wrong, gross, NOT NORMAL! Living in a world with these messages is the problem, not our parents.

After college, I finally found out about COLAGE and connected with other grown up queer spawn. It's amazing how close I feel to this new found family. However, with the growing acceptance of my mother being queer came the growth of a lot of pent up anger and sadness that the world is still homophobic. Every time I hear people preaching that faggots are "going to burn in hell" I feel things I felt when I was a little girl with a closeted family. People don't think it could be possible for these beliefs to exist in New York City, but every morning in a major subway station I hear a person screaming things that I take ever so personally. Anger and aggression enters through me and sometimes ruins my day. It's like I am making up for the tears I never cried and fights I never fought as a child.

The issues of homophobia that other kids are face are still present, even in the most urban and liberal of places. I see the importance now of a safe spaces

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SPEAKING OUT FOR CHANGE

AN INTERVIEW WITH SYDNEY MACMANUS-SMITH

At the end of 2006, Sydney McManus-Smith, testified before the NJ Assembly Judiciary committee about the Civil Unions Bill and marriage equality. *Just For Us* asked Sydney about her activism.



JFU: Why did you want to testify about the marriage bill in New Jersey?

I was willing to talk about my family and what problems we have because we don't have marriage. When my mom first told me I was excited to talk about how offensive it

is that we don't fully get the same rights. I was really nervous but I was also excited to help get marriage for my family and others like me.

JFU: What was it like to speak in front of the Assembly?

I was kind of shy because I wanted to get it over with. But my mom rubbed my back while I talked so I could slow down and have a good time. I got to wear a beautiful dress and there were cameras and microphones in my face. That was fun. Everyone told me that I was gonna be a star! I felt proud of the courage it took me and now I hope I get to do it again sometime.

JFU: Have your moms gotten a civil union?

We were at the courthouse just last week. My moms picked me up from school and I was really looking forward to it. They switched rings and it was exciting.

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



Dear friends and family,

When it comes to COLAGErs, the topic of health impacts us in so many ways - physically, mentally, emotionally, legally, politically and more.

For generations, homosexuality was and transgender identity remains (falsely) medically diagnosed as illnesses. Over the past three decades, the 'Right' has claimed LGBT people and parents are dangerous and unhealthy to children. Many of us are impacted by institutions and laws that do not treat our families justly or equally and therefore affect our ability to access and receive health care. I see connections between the ways in which unequal health care access impacts queer families, poor and low income families, immigrant families and other families facing oppression. We all need and want, in fact it is our human right, to be healthy, to have the means to take care of ourselves and each other and to have our health care needs attended to in an adequate, dignified and relevant manner.

We can not ignore that living in a society with homophobia, sexism, racism and transphobia takes a toll on COLAGErs' and our families' mental and physical health. Many of us, in our past or even today, live silently or hidden in the closet whether that is a decision made by us or our parents. I believe the depression, self-harm and abuse which (do) manifest in our lives and families (despite many of our parents' and LGBT organizations' attempts to deny this reality) are a reflection of society's outright discrimination against and disregard for us and our communities. It is crucial for us to be aware of the effects that internalized oppression can

have on our well-being in order to move towards a positive place of resiliency in the face of prejudice.

My lesbian mom is one of my primary role models for achieving personal and community health. She is diligent about taking care of herself-- both in terms of her body and home (by making environmentally sustainable choices, leaving unhealthy relationships, and eating according to her blood type) and also in terms of her mind, spirit and community (by finding ways to creatively express herself, building sacred support among an intergenerational, multi-cultural circle of women, and being an activist for global peace and justice). I think that queer parents often give us unique and vital access to families, communities, hobbies, ways of being and other outlets essential for living healthy lives.

The idea of organizational health is also an important theme as I write. Right now COLAGE is taking time for reflection and self-examination through a new Strategic Planning process. Taking stock of where we are and better defining our goals and programs for the future is a way of promoting a more healthy organization for all of us youth and adults with LGBTQ parents. Together, COLAGE board, staff, volunteers, donors and base are creating new strategies and traditions for how we and society can be healthy - beginning with us.

As always, we hope you enjoy this issue of Just For Us and that it will inspire dialogue and action to foster healthier individuals, families, and communities. Wishing good health (of body, mind and spirit) to you and yours!


Beth Teper

Sydney Continued from page 1

JFU: How do you think that you and other COLAGErs can make a difference on issues like marriage and civil unions?

I was able to make a difference because I was the only kid there to testify. They could see how kids are feeling and understand how we aren't supported. It's not our fault that we have gay parents. It's the law's fault that they don't protect us. I think I helped get people to support marriage and civil unions.

JFU: Do you think that our families would be healthier if we had more laws to protect us?

Yes. For one it helps kids because we go to school and get bullied by people who say, "Your parents never got married." Now we can say "they had a wedding, a civil union." The bullies won't be right anymore.

JFU: What advice do you have for kids facing bullying?

If there is a bully it's no big deal. They may have an opinion about you but it's not true. You don't have to answer questions about your family. And if you are having a problem, tell a grown up and get support. You don't have to do it all by yourself.

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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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LET'S UNITE TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE IN OUR FAMILIES



For the past 3+ years I have volunteered as a crisis

counselor for Community United Against Violence (CUAV), an organization that works to end violence within and against the LGBTQ community. CUAV was started in the aftermath of several infamous hate crimes in San Francisco, most notably the murder of City Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone in 1978.

A good-sized chunk of the calls CUAV receives on our crisis line come from LGBTQ people who are experiencing hate violence, intimidation, or discrimination in housing, employment, and public services. However, after hate violence, the vast majority of remaining calls we get relate to domestic violence (also referred to as intimate violence and relationship violence). The situations described by callers range in severity from very unhealthy relationships (in which the affected couple might benefit from extensive individual and group counseling) to the very-abusive relationship (in which it is necessary for the relationship to end before one or both parties is seriously injured or worse).

There are many myths that try to minimize violence in LGBTQ relationships. Some of the most common include the idea that the violence is 'mutual'; stereotypes that gay men are too 'effeminate' and lesbian women too 'nurturing' to engage in violence; or simply the misinformation that such violence is only a problem for heterosexuals. **Actually, intimate violence in LGBTQ relationships operates similarly to violence in heterosexual relationships, and rates of violence are about the same for both kinds of relationships.** Above all, it is an issue of power, control, and dominance in which one partner is seeking to systematically deny the other person their full range of options within the relationship.

Coincidentally, my work with CUAV started around the same time as I began working with COLAGE, and these overlapping activities drew some serious and alarming gaps to my attention. Within CUAV, I received an incredible amount of information about almost any aspect of LGBTQ inter-personal violence that you can imagine: information specific to gay men, lesbians, bisexual people, and trans folk; information about abuse in same-sex couples and in polyamorous relationships; how abuse differently impacts LGBTQ people due to race, ability, class,

and other factors; statistics; local and national resources; the list goes on and on... yet at no point in our training did the subject of families, or LGBTQ folks with children, ever come up. This is not a fault of CUAV's - they did an amazing job of getting their volunteer counselors pretty much all the information that was available. Unfortunately, information about violence in LGBTQ families simply wasn't available.

Similarly, at COLAGE, we often spent a lot of time talking about challenges facing LGBTQ families, and the many ways that children from our families may experience forms of social violence such as isolation, bullying, discrimination, or other negative impacts due to the homophobia directed against us. Yet, during these discussions within COLAGE and with our partners in the LGBTQ family movement, the issue of violence in our families was rarely mentioned. COLAGE has yet to develop any formal resources or programs to help children (or parents) experiencing violence within the home. Partly because COLAGE doesn't have the resources to single-handedly develop comprehensive resources around family violence, particularly if organizations that do focus on violence are not taking steps to include families in their data gathering, analysis, service development, and policy recommendations.

If LGBTQ groups that work on violence aren't thinking about families and LGBTQ family groups aren't thinking about violence, where does this leave children and parents who are struggling with an abusive loved one and want to protect themselves? There are many good reasons our community avoids talking about the violence that can, does, and will continue to occur in our homes and private relationships. For one thing, LGBTQ relationships are already scrutinized and characterized by homophobic law-makers and religious leaders as inherently sick and unhealthy. This tactic has provoked the LGBTQ movement, especially the family wing, to go to great lengths to prove that our relationships and families are healthy, effectively pushing the issue of relationship violence into the closet. It is of critical importance that activists and leaders in LGBTQ social justice movement work to counter the misinformation of the Christian right without putting out myths that keep us from recognizing, preventing, and responding to a major health and safety issue that affects everyone, gay and straight alike.

Children in LGBTQ families where violence occurs live a world bound by 'double-layers' of secrecy, isolation, and shame. A child experiencing abuse usually keeps that abuse a secret - and children

from LGBTQ families invariably go through periods of being less open about their families. Thus, a child in an LGBTQ family where abuse is happening is functioning under a double-layer of secrecy - who is in their family as well as what happens within their family is information that must be closely guarded. A person who is engaging in abusive behavior generally takes steps to isolate the person they are abusing - but LGBTQ people and their children are often already isolated by homophobia. This double layer of isolation makes it even less likely that a friendly neighbor, teacher, or other community member will be able to recognize the possibility of abuse and extend a helping hand. People who are being abused - regardless of their age - tend to have a lingering reaction of 'shame' (a feeling that there must be something wrong with them, or they must have done something to bring on the abuse); and once again LGBTQ people and their children are often already struggling with shame as they live in a social and cultural landscape that consistently derides them as mentally unstable, perverted, and immoral. If someone believes that the violence they are experiencing is their fault, or that they don't deserve any better, they will not value themselves enough to take steps to reduce the violence they are experiencing.

I have now spent a lot of time working at LGBTQ family events, summer camps, and other programs, not to mention responding to letters and emails sent to the COLAGE office. I know for a fact that violence happens in our families because I have seen it and heard about it. Given the double-layer secrecy/isolation/shame effect I have described here, and the minimal availability of data and resources for our families, I believe that violence is probably more widespread than we realize or may be willing to admit. We also live in a time in which many forms of violence are widespread and socially supported - war, torture, poverty, and police brutality are all major national and local issues. As we think about how to keep ourselves healthy and how to move our community forward politically, it is my fervent hope that all of us take responsibility for addressing violence in our lives and the lives of people we love. We have spent enough time playing the PR game with the religious right: it's time to start defining and solving our own problems on our own terms.

Jesse Carr has two lesbian moms and grew up in central Pennsylvania. He lives in Oakland, CA, and works for Generation FIVE, an organization working to end the sexual abuse of children within five generations. Jesse continues to work as a hotline counselor for CUAV and provides informal trainings on the impact of violence on children with LGBTQ parents and our families.



SPEAK OUT

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THAT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY STAY HEALTHY?

Kate, 9, Houston, TX

Me and my sister play soccer and softball and we're vegetarians.

Cara, 16, Salt Lake City, UT

My family does many things to stay healthy including: volunteering, eating nutritious foods, walking our dog, and doing various other forms of exercise. One of our main practices is yoga. It keeps our body, heart, and mind healthy and aware. Yoga is a way for us to find our center. We can only help others by first connecting with ourselves.

Kaiti, 11, Lancaster, CA

To take care of your self for your heart you should exercise. I do karate two hours two times a week. To take care of health you should eat more healthy and less sugar. I eat apples and drink apple juice and my fave to eat is bananas. To take care of your teeth you should brush you teeth 2 times a day- morning to get gunk out and night to get food you have eaten out. To take care of your mind you should work hard at school and for happiness you should be social.

Emily, 17, Georgetown, MA

After a particularly stressful week my family likes to spend one day of the weekend never getting out of our pajamas. Everyone needs a day of relaxation, pancakes, and reading uninterrupted by showers or leaving the house. The weekday will come, and we are rested and ready for the demands outside our warm home

Dylan, 14, Brooklyn, NY

My Mom and I explain thoroughly what we are grateful for prior to any meal we have together. On a physical note, we try to eat healthy, by not going to fast food restaurants and even consuming soy-based products. We have decided to attend Karate classes as well; something we had not done in a long period of time.

Phillip, 14, Oak Park, IL

Staying healthy means gossiping about Fritz and Alvin, our two cats. Fritz is so needy that he lies down on the sidewalk to let three year olds pet him, which is really taking your life in your hands. The cats give us a lot to laugh about.



STOP TOLERATING, START CHOOSING

Asthedaughter of a lesbian, society has determined many decisions in my life. When I was a child,

society said we had to be a closeted family. In college, society said to stick with my own kind (like THAT was an option). After college, society made me feel like I had to go to another state in order to feel accepted. There came a point where I realized that society was running my life. I wasn't happy with society's decisions and I believe that my health suffered because of it. I believe that happiness is the key to good health. I believe that our health fails when we are stressed and not living our lives in a way that serves who we are.

Once I realized that society was running my life, I decided I had to do something about it so I explored who I am and what I really want out of life. I found many ways that I was letting others determine my happiness. I examined what I was "tolerating" in my life. This was a major shift for me. I had quite a long list. I was tolerating - no retirement

account, back pain due to riding on a bus or train all the time, opposite schedules from my husband, many nights with little sleep, eating foods that weren't good for me and that's just a few examples. You can see how this might affect my health. Over a seven year period, I developed two digestive disorders and an irregular heartbeat.

This self-examination lead me to return to my home state and create a new life that included less expenses with more income, a job that didn't require commuting, time for my husband and I, freedom to sleep the hours my body wants to sleep and eating foods that I want to eat. I'm sure you can imagine how much better I feel now that I've quit tolerating.

The biggest change I made was my career. Eight years ago, I was pursuing a career that I thought I had to pursue in order to be happy. I was chasing happiness that would never come as long as I kept looking for it in my job. When I took time to know myself better, I found out that happiness was all around me. I didn't have to search for it. I found that I wanted a career that touched my heart and allowed me to help others

live their dreams. That's when I decided to become a Life Coach. I decided I wanted to help others, like me, who were letting society and other forces run their life. I wanted to help them see that they can be authentic and still have the life they want to have. So, I am now a Life Coach myself. I work with adult children in the LGBTcommunity to help them find their passion and create the life they WANT to have. It's truly amazing work where I feel fulfilled, accepted, happy and best of all free to be myself.

To do your own exploration- make a list of all the things you are tolerating in your life. Things you are doing because society says you should. Pick one that you would like to change. Make the decision, TODAY, to look for something new that will take you away from just tolerating and into happiness. You deserve the life you want to live, free of tolerations. Create the life of your dreams!!

Kristen Beireis is a Life Coach for adult children of the GLTB community. Kristen started Amazing Steps to reach out to this community and help others find their unique, authentic selves, and live their lives in a way that serves their individuality. For more information visit www.amazingsteps.com.

BOOK REVIEW



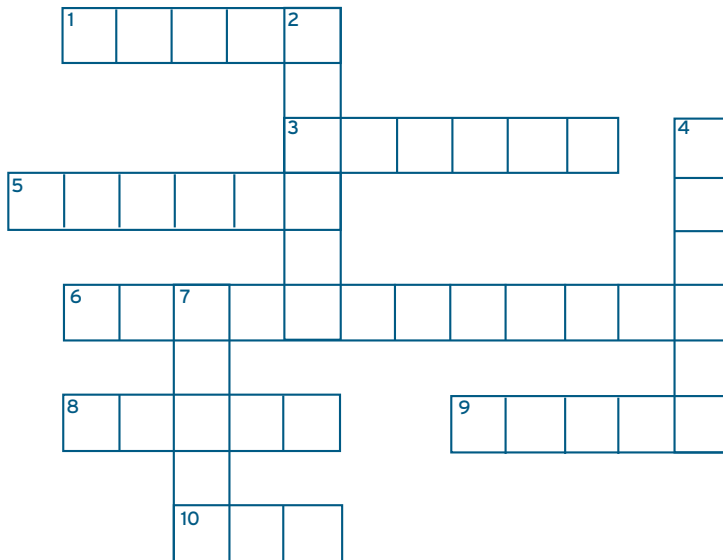
MONIKA'S PAPA IS TALL AND RYAN'S MOM IS TALL

BY HEATHER JOPLING

These two queer-positive children's books are perfect for little ones who are learning their opposites. Monika and Ryan's parents may be the same gender but everything else about them, from their height to their hair to their tastes in food, is different. These are sweet, non-issue books that familiarize readers with two loving families. I especially like the puzzle piece motif of Allyson Demoe's illustrations and the positive body language.

Reviewed by Pamela Liebowitz

COLAGE HEALTH CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 The Spanish word for health
- 3 A group for queerspawn community
- 5 Protection for your head when you bike
- 6 A person to help sick animals
- 8 You should get 10 or more hours

- 9 An _____ a day keeps the doctor away
- 10 The virus that causes AIDS

DOWN

- 2 Dre, Feelgood and Doolittle are three examples of one
- 4 A great source for vitamin C
- 7 Brush them twice a day

Across: 1 Salud, 3 COLAGE, 5 Helmet, 6 Veteranarian, 8 Sleep, 9 Apple, 10 HIV
Down: 2 Doctor, 4 Orange, 7 Teeth

THE THINGS CANCER BRINGS

The phone rings
No one expects what it brings
Tragedy and fear
We all shed a tear

Can I really have cancer?
We all know the answer
We ask anyway
We have made our journey north way

Doctors and nurses
Noticed she's writing the verses
To a song
They hope she will not keep quite so long

Who's that? They ask
As you leave the room to get me a mask
That's my mom's partner, why?
Cool, they respond in a blink of an eye

Okay I'm ready to go!
The last time I had alone time with you, was a long time ago.

You stay the night
Wrap my blankets around me tight

Moms coming up tomorrow to cut my hair off
My itchy scalp will hopefully be doff
It's falling out anyway
It has since yesterday

Mothers Day
There was no hip hip hooray!

Your daughter needs to go to ICU
The care she needs we can't do
She needs help getting oxygen

Our cultures came back positive with a pathogen
Antibiotics the treatment we have to do
We'll be here to see her through

We didn't think you were going to live
Girl, hope is what you give!
Now I'm here to stay
I remember to enjoy life everyday

I thank my parents for always being there
It really showed that they did in fact care

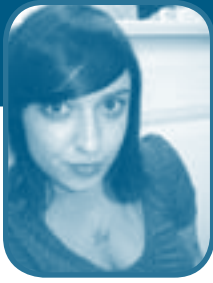
Barb, you're my other mother
I could never replace you with another

Mom, I loved when you held me in bed
And rubbed my head

Parents always know the best things to do
And I could've never made it this far without you two!!



Deanna Makinen lives with her brother Troy and her two moms in New Hampshire where she founded the COLAGE New Hampshire Seacoast Chapter. She was diagnosed with AML Leukemia in March 2006 and received a bone marrow transplant from her brother last fall.



CHAPTER UPDATE: Report Back from the Historic Chapter Institute

Growing up in a small town, I often wondered if I was the only kid with a lesbian mom and secretly wished for the chance to meet other kids that had families like mine. I didn't meet another person with LGB and/or T parents until I was 23, and I did not know that COLAGE existed until I was 24. As you can imagine, no words can explain the overwhelming and emotional feelings that came with my discovery of an organization made of and for people like me. After such an exciting finding I was naturally dismayed to learn that there was no active COLAGE chapter in the Los Angeles area. Feeling the absence of a queerspawn community I, along with 2 other adult COLAGERS, decided to restart the COLAGE-LA chapter. Last May we had our kick-off event with the L.A. premiere of *In My Shoes*, and we have been having monthly events ever since.

Co-leading a COLAGE chapter has been an awesome experience! I've had a blast getting to know queerspawn in my community while doing fun things like playing glow in the dark mini golf, having a movie night, throwing a pizza party, and hosting a recent roller skating event with over 20 COLAGERS! We are slowly building our COLAGE community in Los Angeles, and while I think our chapter is amazing, I know there are always things we can do to make it even better. That's why I jumped on the chance to attend the first-ever COLAGE Chapter Institute in Dallas.

Last October queerspawn from all over the country arrived in Dallas to participate in the first-ever COLAGE Chapter

Institute. The Chapter Institute created a space for COLAGE chapter leaders to meet and learn how to make our COLAGE chapters even better than they already are. During the institute discussions addressed the always important topics of outreach and fundraising. Do you dream of having a "topless" car wash fundraiser for your COLAGE group? Now I can tell you how! Attending COLAGE chapter leaders also were trained to use individual chapter websites/blogs, the fabulous new COLAGE brochure, and COLAGE's latest publication "Speak Up. Speak Out! An Activism Guide for Youth and Adults with LGBT Parents."

While most day-long learning experiences leave me feeling exhausted, I left the Chapter Institute feeling re-energized and ready to apply my new skills to our already spectacular COLAGE-LA chapter. In addition to my new COLAGE smarts, I had the privilege of getting to know other COLAGERS from across the country. Never before have I been surrounded by so many adult COLAGERS, and never before have I been surrounded by so many sincere, thoughtful, caring, and exuberant people. Sitting amongst them it was clear to see that our voices are strong, proud, and meaningful, and this is something that we should not soon forget.

Amanda Litwin works for the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center's Family Services Program where she spends most of her waking hours planning and implementing fun programs for LGBT parents and their children. She enjoys meeting other queerspawn, taking pictures of Buster Potpie (her tortoise), and blasting queercore music when she is alone in her apartment. She also spends possibly unhealthy amounts of time talking about fat cats and watching episodes of The Golden Girls.



FINDING MY WHOLE SELF By Tia Swett

My mom came out when I was 8 or 9...in the third grade anyways. It was a difficult time for lots of reasons not least of which was the fact that my mom underwent the process of leaving my dad for a woman in her practice (my mom is a midwife and her partner was an ob-gyn she worked with) in a small New England town. I

lived in this space where I didn't know who knew, who cared, who was talking. Before my mom came out I had never heard of a gay person and I had no idea what the word lesbian meant. My dad was really angry about it and his reaction taught me that I should be ashamed and I shouldn't talk about it unless I was ready for a freak out.

I remember sitting on the bus on my way to school and thinking "man I just want to stand up and shout that my mom's gay and that I don't care and that if anyone has anything to say about it then say it to my face" but of course I didn't. I was terrified of people's reactions, I loved my mom, liked her partner and knew there was nothing wrong with my family, but I didn't know how to talk about it. So I really didn't tell anyone except a couple of my best friends who had family issues all their own and who didn't care about who my mom slept with as long as we could still play in our world of innocence-not-quite-yet-lost.

When I did start speaking about my mother being a lesbian (and started doing all the things that go along with that - educating people as to what a lesbian is, answering a long barrage of questions as to what it was like, how hard it must have been, etc.) I remember getting reactions from my friends that were like "Well, I believe that that's wrong and against God and your mom'll go to hell, but we can still be friends." I would just take it; that was the reaction I expected and I didn't challenge it (even though my insides were going "What??? You go to hell! That's my mother you're talking about!").

I am pretty convinced that a big reason the talking and negativity died down during high school was due to my success as a very openly hetero-normative person throughout my young adulthood. I had boyfriends, I didn't get into trouble, I got good grades, I was active in student council and our community service club. I mean, I was the picture of a "normal" high school girl. And that made it easy - for me, my moms, my little sister (my mom's partner gave birth to a baby girl about 1 year after my folks got together using donor insemination). I showed everyone that having lesbian parents didn't make you a freak, didn't make you gay yourself, didn't hurt you in any way. That was my triumph. It was my coping mechanism - being normal in every way was my way of avoiding all the hard emotions that I never dealt with around my mom's lesbianism. My older sister coped differently; she freaked, dropped out of high school at 15 and

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OVERCOMING ILLNESS

To me, having a gay parent has always meant that certain aspects of my life are more difficult. After 20 years of my Dad being out I still get embarrassed when people ask me if my father ever remarried after my parents divorced. Besides having to deal with the prejudices that are associated with being gay, in the past 20 years the AIDS epidemic put a different twist on it.



I remember sitting with my dad at a restaurant on Seventh Avenue and 15th Street in Chelsea, New York, the kind that the tables are much too close together so you are literally having dinner with the people at the table next to you. The words were still resounding in my head "Pamela I need to tell you something. I have Hepatitis B." My immediate thought was "well at least it isn't AIDS."

It was really hot and and I felt annoyed and upset all at once. I started to cry and wanted to get out of there. "Now listen I don't want you to get upset about this. I am not actually symptomatic. I was in for my blood work and the doctor noticed very high sugar levels which apparently is a way to detect it. When they tested for the Hepatitis virus it came back positive." The rest of the evening was a bit of a blur but when I got home I told my husband everything I knew.

I immediately went into research mode. The virus attacks the liver, which causes jaundice and eventual liver failure. Someone infected with the virus cannot get a liver transplant because they virus would simply attack the new liver. It was another way that my dad's sexuality was going to affect my life and I wanted it to stop.

The only drug that they were using to combat Hepatitis B wasn't getting great results. Also, by taking the drug you risked becoming sicker than you were before you started treatment. The virus is prevalent in the gay community. The thing that really bothered me about this though was the fact that there is a vaccine and my father never got it, not to mention that he must have had unsafe sex. What was he thinking?

My father was told he had between 18-24 months to live. He and his partner made the decision to retire and move to Palm Springs California. There is a large gay community there, and it is located in the desert. My dad has always loved warm weather. He also became part of an experimental drug program nearby.

After they moved to Palm Springs, my Dad would travel once a month to La Hoya and he was subjected to various blood tests, and given different rounds of drug treatment.

Now, almost ten years later, my daughter and I just returned from spending winter break in Palm Springs with Grandpa. His last visit to the doctor in the fall of 2006 found that the virus has completely left his system. The doctors think that a combination of his change of diet, elimination of alcohol, and the experimental drugs that he was on has enabled his body to fight the virus. I still get upset and I feel like he could have prevented this all from happening if he had behaved responsibly.

But in the end, I thank god everyday that my Dad is still around and most importantly that my kids are able to know Grandpa.

Pamela Geary lives in Westchester County New York with her husband, daughter and son. Her dad came out when she was 18 and she sometimes found it to be a struggle. After spending years in politics, Pamela now works in public relations.

EXPECT EQUALITY:

MAKING MY COMMUNITY HEALTHIER

Every February 14th for the past 6 years, I have accompanied my two moms to our local county clerk's office in San Mateo County, for National Marriage Equality Day. Every year, we have been the only LGBT family in our county to go to the county clerk's office and ask for a marriage license. My moms and I would go in with the required \$80.00 in cash, their birth certificates and their passports. Every year, we waited our turn in line, but would be denied a license. It was always painful, hurtful, and a devastating reminder of the fact that my parents and my family were second class citizens, without the same rights and protections that most other families have. It was hard to walk away every year with a heavy heart, feeling pain that only someone who is denied equality could relate to.



Marina Speaks during the Rally as COLAGE youth support her

It was easy to understand why no other LGBT families from our county would go to ask for licenses. Why would anyone choose to be reminded of being unequal? However, there was another side to why we went in every year to ask for a license. We were reminding our county clerk, his staff, and the people of our county and state via media attention, that there were couples and families who were members of their OWN counties and communities who were not only living, but were suffering without basic civil rights! For my family that includes access to health care benefits, and basic family protections because my parents are a bi-national couple. In showing up year after year, we were giving a face to a family, one of MANY in our county, and one of MILLIONS in our country, affected by the lack of equality. Without society seeing the faces, and hearing the stories of families and children in this country affected by inequality, they could neither understand nor relate to this issue, nor could they possibly realize that they had the power and the obligation to help support equality, and help it become a reality.

Last year, I decided that there had to be a better way to gain support from our county and state leadership. I was tired of going in and being denied a license, and I felt that I could do more to educate people, and gain support from our leaders and our community. So, I decided to ask my county clerk Warren Slocum to stand with me and my family publicly and say that he believed in equality for ALL people and ALL families. After meeting with me face to face, he was affected deeply.

This year, our county clerk wrote a letter to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger asking that the Governor allow him the right to marry all the people in his county. He also sent it to every county clerk in California. This February 14th, 2007, I stood on the very same steps that I had stood alone with my moms, only two years prior. However, this year we were far from alone! Standing alongside my moms and I was County Clerk Warren Slocum, my Godfather- California Assemblymember Mark Leno, California State Senator Leland Yee, COLAGE, many leaders and organizations, and between 100 to 200 LGBT people, couples and families!! Though our county clerk could not issue marriage licenses, his office created a historical book, providing pictures of families, and allowing families to write and design their own pages, as a permanent reminder of the history that we were all a part of.

So one might wonder, how in two years time could we go from being the only LGBT family in our county, to this year standing with our local and state

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COLAGE EVENTS



The COLAGE Bay Area Community celebrates at the annual Bowl-a-thon, December 06



Children from COLAGE New Orleans enjoy parachute games



COLAGers with COLAGE E.D. Beth Teper show off their Halloween costumes during the dance at the Act OUT conference in Dallas.



COLAGE Speak OUT member, Becca Lazarus, testifies at the Connecticut State Capitol to win marriage equality



Members of COLAGE Hudson Valley make pizza at their recent Pizza-Making event



A few representatives of COLAGE Los Angeles show off their COLAGE pride early in February



COLAGers at the Speak OUT training in San Francisco, January 07



Josephine and Geraldine Speak at Youth Advocacy Day in Sacramento, CA

THE DRAGON AND THE DOCTOR

SPECIAL OFFER TO COLAGE MEMBERS!



COLAGE recently received copies of "The Dragon and The Doctor" by Barbara Danish. Like the story itself, the books come with a history that COLAGERS know well.

The Heart of America Foundation launched a book drive campaign to give books to libraries and schools in areas of great need. "The Dragon and The Doctor" was donated to the foundation by its publisher, The Feminist Press. After reviewing the book, the Foundation determined that the book contained "controversial" material. A young adult COLAGER who was interning at the Foundation donated the books to COLAGE.

So you are probably wondering, or maybe even guessed what is so controversial about a dragon and her doctor, well here's the gist.

"Doctor Judy has an unusual patient - a dragon - with a very unusual problem - a sore tail. With Nurse Benjamin's help, Doctor Judy cures Dragon and together they celebrate with Dragon's many friends. One of these friends, Lucy suddenly develops spots...so the Doctor, the Nurse and the Dragon and Lucy race home to two moms, Mama and Mommy."

MMMmmm what is the controversial part? The female doctor...no. The male nurse....no. The fact that at the party, Lucy was unsafely swinging from a chandelier. No, none of those were controversial, although many years back these would have been reasons to ban such a book. The controversy, that we all know well, was Lucy's loving family of two moms.

Get The Dragon and the Doctor Today!

Their loss is your gain. This special children's book is available to COLAGE members. If you renew your membership or make a donation to COLAGE in the next three months, you will receive a free copy of this great children's story. Visit www.colage.org to support COLAGE's crucial work and get your free copy of the Dragon and the Doctor. This is a great story to add to your children's collection or to donate to a local library or elementary school. Quantities are limited. One copy per family, please.

If you want to purchase additional copies of this book, visit www.feministpress.org (search keyword dragon).

UPCOMING COLAGE EVENTS

COLAGE AT THE RAINBOW FAMILIES OF MINNESOTA CONFERENCE

MINNEAPOLIS, MN, APRIL 21
Community building and leadership empowerment for youth in 6th-12th grades. www.rainbowfamilies.org/conference/index.html

COLAGE AT THE RAINBOW FAMILIES DC CONFERENCE

TAKOMA PARK, MD, APRIL 28
Fun youth programming for COLAGERS ages 9 and up!
www.rainbowfamiliesdc.org

COLAGE DC AREA HOUSE PARTY

SILVER SPRING, MD, APRIL 29
3-6 PM
www.evite.com/app/publicurl/rlalonde3@yahoo.com/colagedc

COLAGE AT THE PARENTING WITH PRIDE CONFERENCE

LOS ANGELES, CA, MAY 5
COLAGE community and programs for youth ages 9 and up. 323-860-7320

SAUGATUCK FAMILY WEEK

An incredible weeks sponsored by COLAGE and Rainbow Families Great Lakes
SAUGATUCK, MI, JULY 7 -13
www.rfgl.org

PROVINCETOWN FAMILY WEEK

PROVINCETOWN, MA, JULY 28- AUGUST 4
Register at www.acteva.com/go/colage

FAMILIES BY THE RIVER

GUERNEVILLE, CA, AUGUST 17 - 19
A new weekend for LGBT families with COLAGE youth programming.

FAMILIES IN THE DESERT

PALM SPRINGS, CA, OCTOBER 5-7, 2007

COLAGE AT THE LAMBDA FAMILIES NEW JERSEY CONFERENCE

MONTCLAIR, NJ, NOVEMBER 10,
www.rainbowfamiliesnj.org

More information about COLAGE events at www.colage.org!



Youth participants in the COLAGE Speak Out event in San Diego, CA.



ADVOCACY &

How do issues of health impact COLAGeRs?

There are many ways that health and healthcare impact COLAGeRs every day. Therefore there are many different actions you can take to promote a healthier world for yourself, your family and for other COLAGeRs from the very personal to the political. These Advocacy and Action pages introduce just a few of the issues and suggest just a few starting places to make change in the realm of health.

ACCESS TO EQUAL HEALTH CARE

The Williams Institute report published in October 2006 shows 20 percent of same-sex couples are uninsured, compared with only 10 percent of married people and 15 percent of the overall population. This means that a higher number of LGBT couples as well as their children do not have health coverage. LGBT people who are unable to access adequate health care are less able to care for children.

Some LGBT parents are able to access health coverage through domestic partner benefits. Still, the majority of employers don't offer domestic-partner benefits, and even among those that do, some people may not feel comfortable taking advantage of them due to lack of employment protection or fear of homophobia in the workplace.

For LGBT families, reform of broad laws that support families' access to adequate health care will greatly improve our access to health care as well as benefit other families impacted by oppression in the United States. Especially in states where neither joint adoption nor second parent adoption are legal options, LGBT families may experience discrimination in accessing health care, making decisions about health care options for parents or children who are not legally/biologically related, and being recognized as a family in hospitals or by health care providers.

Additionally, hospitals and other health care providers must continue to adopt policies, provide trainings, and promote acceptance to make safe environments for LGBT families.

VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN OUR FAMILIES

COLAGeRs have long talked about the

difficulty of feeling pressure to be ideal children and to have a perfect family as a means of combating negative myths and stereotypes about our families. But our families, like many families, face challenges such as domestic violence, physical and/or mental abuse, or substance abuse. However, it is even more difficult to reach out for help with these challenges if you are afraid that any problems facing you or your family will be blamed on the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of your parent/s. There is also an overwhelming silence about violence and abuse in LGBT families from within our movement, due to fear of giving opponents fodder for legislative or societal attacks.

IMPACTS OF HOMOPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION

Furthermore, we live in a society where homophobia and transphobia are still rampant, and are complicated by other forms of oppression. No matter how strong and proud we are of our families, discrimination against us and our families still may have a powerful emotional impact. It is okay to feel sad, scared, powerless or lonely in the face of prejudice. But it's also important to know that there are places to find support and community and actions you can take to make change.



COLAGER EXPERIENCE:

Whether it was tonsil removal, ear infections, bronchiole asthma, or even wearing glasses, my brother and I had to go to doctors throughout our childhood but we never had reliable health coverage. My mom tried her hardest to make sure we were always covered, whether it was bouncing us back to our dad's insurance, getting free help from medical professionals in the family (we have doctors, nurses, therapists and the like) or just pushing through with over the counter remedies. It would have been so much easier on my mother if we could have been out about her and her partner and be on her partner's union supported healthcare. —Ryan, son of lesbian moms.

ACTION

How to Take Action?

SUPPORT UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE:

COLAGE supports health care reform that assures access to and coverage of comprehensive health care services for all U.S. residents and families. There are many organizations and community groups leading efforts to reform health care in the U.S. Just a few to check out include:

www.healthcare-now.org

www.familiesusa.org

ADVOCATE FOR IMPROVED ACCESS AND TREATMENT BY HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association and HRC debuted the Healthcare Equality Index in 2006 as a way to identify existing policies that may be used as a guide to healthcare organizations with the hope that many more hospitals will adopt and promote policies of equality. To learn how to support this important project contact: hei@hrc.org.

COLAGE recently debuted "Tips for Medical Professional on Making a Better/Safer Environment for Children with LGBT Parents". This fact sheet is something you can share with your health care providers. Check out our website to access this new resource. Our staff and members also conduct trainings for pediatricians, social workers, hospitals, nurses, and other health care providers and students about youth with LGBT parents. www.colage.org

There are also LGBT friendly resources about accessing health care available through the Know More Campaign its sponsor The National Coalition of LGBT Health which is committed to improving the health and well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals and communities. www.lgbthealth.net

SUPPORT HEALTH COVERAGE FOR LOW INCOME FAMILIES

Enacted as part of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) broadens coverage for low-income children.

This federal program helps states provide health insurance to children in working families who do not have employer provided coverage, or who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid. This also covers kids whose LGBT parent's insurance can not cover the child because of lack of family recognition by the provider or state.

Over the past decade, SCHIP has played a valuable role in ensuring access to health care for low-income children. Amidst a backdrop of rising health care costs, significant declines in employer-based coverage, and an increase in the number of uninsured Americans, it has covered millions of children who otherwise would not have access to health care.

Contact your U.S. Congress Representative and Senator and tell them you support the reauthorization of federal SCHIP.

www.insurekidsnow.gov

ADDRESS VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN LGBT FAMILIES

We need to break the silence for youth and for adults on violence and abuse in our families and our lives. Being able to recognize that our community is not immune to violence and abuse is an important first step. Learn about services and organizations in your community that can help youth or families facing these challenges. You can also ask violence-focused organizations to include questions about parents and children in their research, A good place to start is the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs. www.ncavp.org.

FIND SUPPORT

If you are having a hard time, for any reason, remember that there are ways to find support. Through COLAGE talk lines, community groups and more, you can find support, role models and friends to help you get through the times that are hard or frustrating. Being sad or feeling mad is not a reflection that you are a bad person; it just means you are human!

One queer friendly youth talk line is www.youthtalkline.org/.



WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS!



DAKOTA FINE: Dakota, 25, based in Washington, DC, is the program assistant to Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), a nonprofit association of grantmaking foundations. Coming off a six month fellowship with HRC, Dakota is a determined advocate on behalf of GLBT rights. Dakota is an experienced organizer and activist acting as the fundraising chair to the COLAGE board of directors. In his free time, Dakota maintains a semi-professional photography business, and manages a competitive soccer team on which he plays. Dakota has been an outspoken and valued member of the COLAGE radio tour, speaking out across the nation on behalf of our families.



KEOTT GOMEZ-STARNES: Keott, 17, is a senior in high school. He lives in Silver Spring, MD, with his 13 year old brother Dylan and his two dads. Keott is on the football and wrestling teams of his school and enjoys spending time with his friends. Keott has been a member of COLAGE for more than 5 years, and has attended every Provincetown Family Week since 2002. He is featured in COLAGE's *That's So Gay* photo-text exhibit, and has spoken out about family equality on numerous panels and with the media.



CHRISTY HUBERT: Christy, 24, most recently pursued a double major in Sociology and Womens Studies at Loyola University and is now working at a preschool in Austin, TX. Christy is the only daughter of a gay/transgender father and a gay/transgender stepparent. She also has as a biological mother

residing in upstate New York. Working with COLAGE has not only brought Christy to three wonderful family weeks in P-Town and Saugatuck, but also to a number of Trans conferences. Christy is excited to increase and expand the resources and activism available for kids of transgender parents.



TOBI HILL-MEYER: Tobi is 23 years old and lives in Eugene, OR. Tobi grew up in Oregon with her lesbian moms and her younger brother. She connected with COLAGE through online communities. She does workshops and presentations on a wide range of issues such as gender identity and trans inclusion, linguistics and sexual and gender identity, and queerspawn issues. She is also an enthusiastic writer and a sex-positivity activist.



HELIANA RAMIREZ: Raised in a large Catholic, Mexican-Irish-Czech family, Heliana, 30, grew up with 2 gay dads, 1 straight mom, 3 brothers, 4 grandparents and 33 aunts, uncles and cousins. A mixed race, Queer Chicana Feminista, Heliana is a social worker by profession, activist by necessity and Spoken Word artist by inspiration. Blessed with 15 years of social justice work as a counselor, health educator and community organizer, Heliana has worked with LGBT communities across race, class, age and gender identity. Heliana is currently employed as a Health Science Research Specialist for the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Menlo Park, CA and is particularly interested in culturally relevant harm reduction in terms of disease, overdose and violence prevention.

TIA, Continued from page 6

never looked back. I didn't. I was "normal". I was a straight, "good" girl.

But was I? That's a question I grapple with every day - I have since I was a kid and I still do. I've always had a huge aversion to entertaining the possibility that I might be attracted to women and I've never really understood why. My mothers would be pleased as punch if I brought home a woman for thanksgiving dinner. During college I had a lot of friends that came out or that were questioning. Currently I have both coworkers and friends who are gay, lesbian, bi, trans, and questioning. So, in the midst of what is a very accepting and supportive community, why am I still uncomfortable admitting that my sexuality is not simply heterosexual?

I think that a part of the answer to that question relates to the impact that being ashamed of my momma had on my mental wellbeing and my ability to recognize and be comfortable with ALL of my

sexuality, not just the hetero parts. In other words, I think that my experiences as a kid resulted in a LOT of internalized homophobia...I'm all about everyone around me expressing the nuances of their sexuality but I'm scared of my own.

I am currently working at a rape crisis center whose mission is to support survivors and friends/family of survivors during their healing process. We all recognize that healing is a process unique to each individual in their quest to become whole. Working in this environment has really driven me to think about all the ways that I am not whole - all the ways that I have sliced off different parts of my identity because I am uncomfortable admitting that they exist. Survivors of sexual assault are inspiring folks - its difficult to articulate, but I somehow feel that in doing my personal work towards wholeness, looking my discomfort, my fear, my anxiety in the face, I am honoring not only myself, but all of the amazing survivors that I work with on a daily basis.

My mental health has been impacted by my experience as a kid who went through a divorce and the ensuing coming out process of my mom. All I can do is try to understand this and move through it in whatever way I need to. For me that means finding a therapist who I can trust to see me through the scary journey of my child-mind. I am lucky to have a (male) partner who encourages me and supports my process. It's one that will only benefit our relationship, as I become more comfortable with each n' every part of my identity. I don't want to be sliced n' diced anymore - I want to be whole, healthy, looking forward to whatever comes.

Tia is a 25 year old daughter of lesbian moms who lives in Washington DC. She works at the DC Rape Crisis Center as the Counseling Assistant and SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners) Program Advocate. She loves riding her bike, meditating, and eating yummy vegan creations.

DAD'S BIG SECRET

I was 20 years old. A sophomore in college. My father (who had come out seven years earlier) called me one day and asked if he could see me the following afternoon. He sounded serious. I thought I was in trouble. It was 1990. Springtime.

The following afternoon, I sat across from him at a café near my dorm. He told me that he was HIV positive. He had known for two years and had not wanted to tell me or my brother because he didn't want us to worry. But recently, he had lost a good friend to AIDS who had never told my father he had HIV. My father felt angry that he was not able to be a part of this friend's illness and death. Dad realized that by not telling us, he would be doing the same. So there we sat, over cups of coffee as he tried telling me how healthy he felt, how no one knows what can happen, he was seeing a great doctor, doing new treatments, and that he knew I was scared but that he loved me very much.

I remember saying goodbye to him later and hugging him hard. I remember going back to my dorm room and telling my boyfriend who kissed the tears off my face. I remember thinking, "it does not mean he's dying, not now."

By 1990 the HIV epidemic had reached catastrophic heights - wiping out gigantic portions of the gay community - many of my father's generation. As early as 1987, I had taken an interest in the disease and wrote a paper for my U/S History class comparing this epidemic to that of the Influenza Epidemic of 1918. When I arrived to college I attended countless rallies and ActUp events. I wore a pink triangle and spoke proudly of my gay father whenever given the audience. I knew of the famous people who had died of AIDS. I knew that at that point in time, HIV was a deadly illness, a death sentence. But he'd always been safe - he'd always been beyond the reaches of a virus. Before that day.

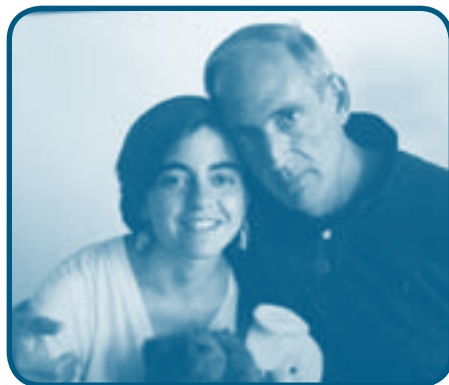
In 1992, I graduated from college, moved into my own place in New York, and started my life. I talked with him almost every day, saw him often and rarely spoke of our fears about his illness. Occasionally, he would tell me his t-cell count was good (an indicator of how much the virus was affecting him), or about participating in all the cutting edge trials, such as AZT. But like many other treatments at the time, it was powerless in the long run.

HIV is a terribly smart virus. And even after a decade of medical research there was no solid treatment to really keep people alive after enough of the virus had invaded their body. HIV eats away at the part of the body's system which keeps you healthy - the immune system. It is terribly smart and terribly dangerous. He got thinner. And he got more tired. And the medications, he said, gave him nausea and a terrible taste in his mouth.

In 1995, Dad was admitted into the hospital with pneumonia.

Back then AIDS had a very distinct look. That image was usually a (gay) man, thin, looking old, frail, maybe with large red marks on his face, and eventually this image involved that man being hooked up to machine, lying in a hospital bed. It was a scary, awful image. And for the 5 years I'd known my father had HIV, I had done my best to keep that image out of my mind. "It might not ever happen," is what I told myself.

I went to the hospital to see him. The nurse gave me a white mask to wear on my face. I thought it was to protect me. I wasn't sick. But in



fact, it was for his protection - as he was so vulnerable he could catch any sort of germ anyone carried in- and it could make him more sick. And there he was, thin man, machines, tubes. The whole picture but the difference was that he was my dad, not some anonymous person, not some actor in a movie. He was this man I loved and who loved me. And he smiled at me. And it sucked that he couldn't see me smile back.

Over the next year he was in and out of the hospital. By February of 1996 a large portion of his body was failing. AIDS, the late stages of a person with HIV, has a domino effect.

One failing part of the body puts too much stress on the rest. And the body is a very balanced system, and for a while it can hold itself together, but after a certain point, it is too much. This is what happened to my Dad.

On February 15, at 1 am, he died. I was holding his hand. Earlier that night, I tried very hard to imagine letting him go, letting him disappear. How could this ever be ok? What was I going to do without him? I simply could not imagine life without my father. And I finally realized that the most important part of him, the part I loved and needed and was terrified to lose, was already inside me - in my heart, in my mind. And that the rest of him - the physical body, well that was just a wreck. And he had been such a gorgeous dignified man, he was so heartbroken to lose his sense of beauty and control. It would be a relief at that point, after all the pain and anguish he had gone through, to let that body go.

It was hard, I was angry, sad, and lost for a long time. I still miss him every day, but the pain has changed. Time helps. It doesn't make me forget, just makes the pain different, manageable.

Four years after he died, I began teaching HIV awareness to teenagers in public schools in NYC. It was a way for me to take this sadness and turn it into something useful, something productive. If I could take all my understanding and experience with HIV and AIDS and use it to help young people stay safe, I knew my Dad would be so proud.

HIV is still terribly smart virus. It is infecting millions of young people in the US and many more around the world. The largest growing population of new infections are among inner city, straight teenagers. This is mostly due to ignorance and lack of real, honest discussions about sex, self esteem and the physical realities of the virus. It is not, and never was something that happens to other people, it was not a gay virus, it is not an African virus, not a poor person virus. It happens to all of us, all the time. And it is awful and sad. And even though now there are very good medications which allow people to live full healthy lives, it is not something that you want for your family, your friends or your self. Please, make smart choices about your life to protect yourself from this disease.

My father did not live long enough to know about COLAGE. He would be so happy to know we have this, and he would be so pleased to be part of our community. I still miss him. Every day.

For more information about youth and HIV/AIDS, one place to visit is www.advocatesforyouth.org/hivsti.htm.

Jenny Laden lives in Brooklyn, NY. Grew up in Philadelphia, PA and had a fabulous gay father named Richard who died from HIV/AIDS in 1996. She is a visual artist (see her work at www.jennyladen.com) and is expecting her first baby in July! YAY!



SPAWN TALK

by Abigail Garner

TIME FOR SOMETHING NEW

A number of years ago, my queerspawn mentor Stefan Lynch told me he

was “retiring” as an official spokesperson to pursue a degree in nursing. I marveled at his solid sense of clarity. And then I made it “all about me.” I asked him with wonder: “How will I know when it is time for me to move on?”

“You’ll just know,” Stefan said confidently.

His response wasn’t helpful at that moment, but now I know what he meant. Now I “just know.” It’s time for me to do something else. I want to take on new challenges outside of the queerspawn movement. And I want to get out of the way for new energy and leadership to come forward within the movement.

For my final column, I share with you something I wrote on my blog for “Blogging for LGBT Families Day.” This sums up what I have strived to articulate in the 12 years since I first facilitated a COLAGE group.

I am a grown queerspawn, meaning I am among the countless adults walking among us who have one or more LGBT parent(s). My father came out

to me when I was five years old.

Really?? I am asked nearly every day of my life, *What was that like?*

Here’s what it’s like:

It’s being at an endless audition. Countless times I have received an unsolicited judgement, without realizing my entire conversation had been something of an interview/assessment to deem me “normal enough.” Comments I wish I had a nickel every time I heard: **Well look at you – you turned out just fine! and You are proof gay parents can raise children! and In spite of your upbringing, you turned out to be so...so...normal!** (What is the appropriate response? “Um...thank...you...??”)

It’s being on trial. In third grade, peers started asking aggressive and inappropriate questions about whether or not I was gay, too. Implicit in the questions was the idea that my father did not deserve to be a parent if he couldn’t raise kids that were heterosexual. The questions didn’t let up until...oh wait...I’m *still* asked aggressive and inappropriate questions about my sexual orientation.

It’s being hunted. Haters say we’re “attacking” them, but I say it’s the other way around. LGBT families are just trying to live our lives with dignity, not going out of way to strip other people of their basic human rights. In

first grade I developed an irrational fear of white men dressed in suits, worried they would take me away from my father to “save” me from the evils of homosexuality. This fear was based in a truth that still exists today: anti-gay politicians will do anything to try to prevent gay people from being able to adopt children. Some politicians go so far as to advocate laws that would remove children from gay foster parents *with whom they are already bonded*. Our families live with the low-grade stress of always bracing ourselves for the next attack.

It’s being invisible. Ultra-conservatives who oppose the mere existence of gay families wring their hands asking, “What about the children? It is unfair to subject children to this lifestyle.” At the same time, they conveniently refuse to acknowledge that these families *already exist*. The laws they try to pass to invalidate gay families erode children’s sense of dignity and security.

It’s connecting with your long lost brothers and sisters. Being out as queerspawn, especially as adults, matters because it’s the only way we can find one another. When we do get together, it’s a lot of fun – a connection you never let yourself notice you were missing.

Abigail Garner, 34, is the author of Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parent Tell It Like It Is. This is her final column in Just for Us. She will continue to blog at www.AbigailGarner.net.

Expect Equality, Continued from page 7

leaders, several hundred other LGBT families, and being fully supported and embraced by our leadership? The answer to that question is easy. I expected my leaders to stand with us, I asked them to, and they recognized their duty, responsibility, and obligation. It is the obligation and the responsibility of every leader to lead for EVERY member of his or her community. To do less, is to ignore those members of their communities who are suffering from lack of equality. If we show our leaders how to support us, we are helping them understand the duty that they have, as well as the power that they have to make a difference. You see, we MUST expect equality. When we expect them to lead for us, they will. To be happy, healthy, strong, empowered people, we must believe that we can make a difference, and not simply accept less than we should. Each of us has the ability to create great change, thereby making ourselves stronger, wiser, and better people. And in turn, we pass on that strength, inspiration, hope, and belief to others.

We can’t wait for change, and we can’t expect others to make it happen for us. We can’t always measure the differences that we make. However, inspiration, hope and change spread faster than we can ever know. It also touches more people in positive ways than we can imagine or believe. It is up to us as individuals, and also as a community, to stand up together and lend our voice, our visibility, and our support for our families and our youth. If we expect equality and we demand it, we may in fact get it! I believe that on the day that we as communities stand up together expecting FULL equality for ALL people and NOTHING less, we WILL indeed change the world overnight.

Marina Gatto is a freshman at the University of California Berkeley and a nationally recognized LGBT family activist. You can see one of her attempts to secure a marriage license for her family in the COLAGE produced documentary, In My Shoes: Stories of Youth with LGBT Parents. www.colage.org/inmyshoes.

Towards a Healthy Future, Continued from page 1

such as COLAGE to talk about our families. The ability to express how we feel is essential to us living as healthy queer spawn. To live in silence is like living without air, and make us feel like the forgotten members of the LGBTQ community. I am lucky to have found a safe and secure group of colleagues, friends, and boyfriend who make no assumptions of me because of my family and who I know I can rely on when times get difficult. We can not erase the past experiences but we can use the adversity we faced to become more open-minded people ourselves and can find communities that support our mental health. Maybe that’s not what parents want to hear when they ask me how it was but remembering the bad times allows me to move beyond them towards a healthy future. If I could sum this up in a couple of sentences I guess that’s how I would respond to the queer parents that constantly ask me how it was. But remember your own story and remember the bad times also affect the positive attitudes and energy in you today and always.

Dori Kavanagh is the chapter coordinator of COLAGE NYC. She grew up in NJ with her lesbian mother and her partner. Dori lives in Brooklyn, NY and will be graduating with a Master’s Degree from Hunter College School of Social Work in May 2007.

COLAGE NOTES

2007 SCHOLARSHIP

COLAGE is pleased to announce a new partnership with Horizons Foundation to offer four \$1,000 scholarships to support the undergraduate studies of students with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender parents. The application deadline is April 20th, 2007.

COLAGE and Horizons Foundation will award four scholarships to children of LGBT parents through two funds in memory of gay fathers Lee Dubin and Joseph Towner. Each scholarship will provide \$1,000 to post-secondary students with one or more LGBT parent(s)/guardian(s) who have demonstrated ability and commitment to effecting change in the LGBT community and the community at large. The Deadline for all applications is April 20th. Visit <http://colage.org/programs/academic/leedubin.htm> for more information.

COLAGE INTERNS

From October 2006 - January 2007, COLAGE was lucky to have Pamela Liebowitz intern in the COLAGE Office. She grew up in Baltimore with her lesbian mom and twin

brother. Pamela is an avid ultimate Frisbee player who loves children's books. We thank Pamela for sharing her experiences and skills with COLAGE!



Pamela Liebowitz

To be an intern at COLAGE, contact us today! We are now hiring for the Felicia Park Rogers Summer Internship Program. The application is online at www.colage.org/programs/academic/internship.htm

STAFF UPDATE

With a mixed bag of emotions, COLAGE bids farewell to Jesse Carr who has served as the COLAGE Membership Coordinator since May 2005 and worked with COLAGE as an intern before that. Jesse is leaving COLAGE to work with Generation Five, a non-profit working to end childhood sexual abuse. We will miss Jesse but know that he will bring his great talents to this unique organization.

Jesse wishes to share with the COLAGE Community, "I have really enjoyed my time working here and getting to know

the many families, COLAGE members, youth, and other adults has been a blessing. I know I'll be a part of queerspawn community for years to come. I'm looking forward to seeing people at many COLAGE events in the future. Thank you for filling the last two and a half years with so much love and joy."



Jesse with his mom's partner, Julie

You can share your good wishes and stay in touch with Jesse at jcarr@riseup.net.

HELP US MEET THE CHALLENGE!

COLAGE has received an exciting \$25,000 challenge grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund. In order to access these funds, we must raise \$50,000 in new or increased donations. This challenge grant makes NOW an especially critical time to join as a new COLAGE member, or to increase your membership level. With your support, we can meet the challenge!

Sydney Continued from page 1

JFU: How do you keep yourself healthy?

I go to school with confidence so that I can be healthy and proud. The civil union is healthy for me cause I am not sad because now my parents are legally married. I also like to exercise a lot and go outside every day.

JFU: What else do you want to say to other COLAGERS?

People all around the world are different. You can not change that you have LGBT parents. You should never be sad or ashamed. Be happy, get good friends and a good education and celebrate that you are different. Anything different about you is good and special.

Editors Note: As of 2007, New Jersey began offering Civil Unions to LGBT couples. Ongoing activism in the state continues to advocate for full marriage equality.

Sydney Macmanus-Smith is in the 3rd grade and lives in Howell, NJ. Sydney plays softball, soccer, basketball and swimming, and enjoys writing and loves animals. Sydney says that she might grow up to be a lawyer or a teacher.

SYDNEY'S TESTIMONY

My name is Sydney MacManus-Smith. I am 8 years old. My family has me, my sister, my brother, mommy Karen, Mommy Honey and our dog, Benny. I know I can't vote but I hope you will listen to my story.

When I was 6 years old, I was playing at a playground. Two girls who were about 9 or 10 years old started playing with me. One of the girls noticed a very little baby with his mother. They asked me about the father. When I explained who I the father was, one of the girls said that white and brown people can not get married and have children.

I was very upset and said that brown people and white people most certainly can get married and have children. I told them my brown and white parents are married. Then I pointed to each of my moms. The two girls were even more upset by my saying that two women could get married. They said there can not be such a marriage. I offered to show them a video of my moms' wedding to prove that they were married. Then I threatened to tell their parents if they do not stop the mean remarks.

Even now I hate these bullies being correct because my moms still can't get married at the courthouse. It's up to you to change that. People are getting bullied because the law treats gay people different. Please vote for gay people to get married. Marriage should be one law for all.



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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.