

Queer Q&A for Parents: Filling in What the Folks Don't Know

By ROLAND F. PALMER

It's all about the questions: "How do you know you are gay?" "Do you have a boyfriend?" "Your father and I want to know what transgender means. You know, the T in GLBT."

And how to provide the answers when you can't find a book to deal with all your parents' questions about being gay.

If you are Brad Andrew Shutzberg you write and publish your own book.

In October 2001, at age 27, Brad called his sister and a cousin to share with them that he was gay. He then sent an email to 35 of his *closest* friends, which was soon followed by a phone call to mom and dad. *Still A Steelers Fan ~ A Gay Son's Book to His Parents* opens with the text from the email he sent out to his friends.

The first section of the book takes the reader through Brad's "life in the closet" up to his coming out in October 2001. We learn what it's like to grow up in Pittsburgh, the trials and tribulations of elementary and high school, dating women – while trying not to lead them on – Penn State dorm showers, life at Cornell University, the effects of Ellen DeGeneres's coming out

and Matthew Shepard's murder, moving to Vermont to start a career as an engineer, and finally the tragic events of 9/11/01.

"The events of the day had proven to me that life is too short and too precious to be miserably afraid and ashamed. As I fell asleep that night, with no one to curl up beside me, I felt alone. I was tired of pretending and tired of hiding. I deserved happiness. I was finally ready to come out of the closet."

The second section of the book relates the "coming out" of Brad Andrew Shutzberg in October 2001 and his life in the days following. He details his conversation with his parents, the flood of emails and phone calls from friends, attending his first coming out support group meeting, seeing a psychologist, and his parents' visit to Vermont. In the third section Brad answers some of the common questions like "Why I am gay" and "Are you still a Steelers fan?"

The unique and moving conclusion of the book is a sampling of the responses Brad received from people who received his coming out email and phone calls. The book is written more as an autobiography rather than a direct address to his parents. Although the book details his own personal odyssey, Brad believes the book could be beneficial not only to parents in similar situations, but to friends, co-workers, and also to anyone who is considering coming out.

I had the opportunity to catch

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Brad Andrew Shutzberg Still a Steeler's Fan: A Gay Son's Book For His Parents

Xlibris Books, 108 pp.
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up with Brad at a Burlington bistro to talk about his book and where he is at, a year after coming out.

OITM: Your bio says you're an engineer who lives in Vermont. What made you decide to write and publish a book?

Shutzberg: After telling my parents that I was gay, our relationship was a bit strained. I tried to imagine what it must be like for them, not knowing anyone who is gay and only seeing what the media portrays as "the gay lifestyle." I started to write them a letter that basically turned into this book. When I told my friends what I was doing they all indicated that they would be interested in reading it as well. I then saw an ad in Mother Jones magazine for a company that allows people to self-publish and decided that's what I would do.

OITM: So it's been just over a year since you came out and wrote your book, how has your life changed?

Shutzberg: I would have to say that the

biggest change in my life is my comfort level with my homosexuality. A year ago I was in the closet, now I have written a book about my experiences. In terms of my personal life, my friends like to joke that nothing has changed – I am still single.

Brad moved to Vermont to work at IBM and was one of many people who were laid off during the recent downsizing. He is now an 8th grade Science and Mathematics teacher at a Central Vermont school, a career switch that is also proving to be quite a life-changing event. He was hired just a few days prior to the start of the new school year and says he's still adjusting. Brad also volunteers his time at several area non-profits.

OITM: Has everyone stayed supportive over the past year? Were there any negative responses to your coming out?

Shutzberg: As I expected, all of my friends have been very supportive. My family has been supportive as well; it has just been difficult talking about the matter. I have to be patient. It took me around 14 years before I told anyone, so I cannot expect my family to suddenly show up at the annual Thanksgiving soccer game wearing cleats, shin guards, and gay pride sweatshirts.

Most recently I had to come out to my principal as I was starting to get some local publicity for my book. Although I work in a very conservative

town, everyone whom I work with has been very supportive.

OITM: In addition to your poem published in your high school literary magazine and your master's thesis, which can now "be found in the basement of the engineering library at Cornell University," is there another book in your future?

Shutzberg: There may be a sequel titled *Still A Penguins Fan: A gay grandson's book for his grandmother* or possibly another called *How I Survived the Eighth Grade: A new teacher's survival guide*.

As the interview came to a close, a couple seated at the table next to us asked about the book that Brad had written. I showed them the copy I had with me. They seemed impressed, as was I, that this young man had decided to write and self-publish his own book. Although Brad's personal coming out experience was much different from my own, I can't help but wonder how different my coming out would have been if I had found and read this book first. I know most certainly that I would not have felt like I was the only one in the world going through this painful process. ▼

Roland Palmer is a native Vermonter, a theatre maven, and the president of the MPM Board of Directors

Punky Spunky Twins Turn Out Twice the Singer-Songwriter Sound

By LLUVIA MULVANEY-STANAK

Some of the best things in life come in pairs. Peanut butter and jelly. Peas and carrots. Vanilla and chocolate. Musically, this has not necessarily been true – Donny and Marie? Duran Duran? Milli Vanilli? Eh, not so much. When it comes to lip-synching a little bit of country or rock n' roll, I'm hungry like a wolf, but for *good* music I turn to the indie music world. The time has come to introduce you to a new, hip, and cute duo that are bound to make you do a musical double take. Tegan and Sara are sisters, twins, and – even better – lesbians!

Are you sick of the solo, emotionally tortured singer-songwriter? Well, even if you are not, it's time to change that Ferrick or Ani CD and put in a fresh disc that will hit those same emotional chords. Hailing from Vancouver, Canada, Tegan and Sara have gone back to their punky roots to make an album that will make you tap your foot and sing out loud.

If It Was You has simple, hard-hitting lyrics that will make you remember those first loves, harsh breakups and even those bizarre living arrangements. "Time Running," "Monday, Monday, Monday," and "City Girl" are definite crowd pleasers. "Living Room" will make all of you who rent smile, as it puts into musical terms what it means to have your

windows look into the house of the folks next to you. Nothing like getting dressed in front of your neighbors!

Barely of legal drinking age, these young women are taking the indie music scene by storm. For those of you who have heard of this snazzy sister pair, this sophomore effort, *If It Was You* (2002), is hip, poppy, and harder-edged than their debut album, *This Business of Art* (2000).

Taking a page from Weezer's Rivers Cuomo, Tegan is the songwriter workhorse, penning a tune daily. Sara goes for the minimalist approach and produces a handful of songs a year. In true fairness (any twin will tell you, being fair is a huge part of the dynamic between twinees), the sisters both contribute equally

to the song line-up on the record.

Stylistically, the album certainly comes across as a work of enjoyment. Sara remarked, "In the past, there's been some apprehension about recording. This time it was fun." Sources close to the sisters reveal that this record was conceived on a small island way off the mainland of Vancouver. A cabin, the rolling surf, and random wildlife all served as a backdrop – can you imagine Britney Spears doing this for her next record? I think not.

These gals have shared the stage with Bryan Adams, Neil Young and the Pretenders, and even gay heart-throb Rufus Wainwright. Their live show borders on humor and all-out war. Apparently the Quinn twins are known for their sisterly

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Tegan & Sara If It Was You Vapor Records CD

verbal bickering on stage. Hey we all enjoy singers who interact with the audience, and a little good-humored sisterly combat is icing on the cake. Just off a tour with Ryan Adams and currently touring throughout their home country of Canada, they are bound to hit the States again and with authority, since they now have a full band. Check out their website for the latest tour info: www.teganandsara.com.

Mixing their punky past with folky banjo strums, driving snare beats and smooth vocals from the twins – Tegan

and Sara's new album is sure to please both rock and folk fans. Okay, find a musical group: sounds like, um ... Weezer and the Pixies on the rocks with a double Tori Amos. In a time when most artists struggle to cut a chart topping single, these ladies have managed to go old school and produce a musically diverse and quality album from track one to twelve.

Two gals. Two guitars. Two Virgos. Album Two. Good stuff.

Always remember: buy the indies, burn the biggies. ▼

Lluvia Mulvaney-Stanak's first name means "rain." When she's not working at Outright Vermont, she enjoys music in Burlington.

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