

Changing the World, One Diaper at a Time

BY SCOTT SHERMAN

A friend of mine once told me that she liked kids, but only in small quantities. "One child is adorable," she said, "and two can be fine. But once you get past three, you have a gang on your hands, and if you've ever seen *West Side Story*, you know the heartache gangs bring."

I thought of her words as I watched twelve boisterous children tear through my house the other day. Although most were too young to join the Jets or the Sharks, one thing they had in common was that they were old enough to pose peril to my furniture and carpets.

Another thing they had in common was that they all had gay dads.

It all started innocently enough when my partner was talking to his friend, Bill Lippert, about our experiences as gay dads. Bill is a guy who seems to know everyone, and sure enough, he offered to introduce us to some other gay dads he knew. Well, they told some friends, as did we, and soon, what started out as two couples getting together turned into seven other families at our home in Richmond for a Sunday morning coffee klatch/playdate.

Fourteen dads and their progeny came from assorted towns: Middlebury, Isle La Mott, Shelburne, Shoreham, Hinesburg, Burlington and Montpelier. Also attending were Bill and his partner, and a friend who's thinking about adopting, but who hasn't yet taken the plunge.

It can take a long time for alternative families to find like-minded friends, but in a stroke of serendipity, one of the families who came had just moved to Vermont three weeks earlier. Another had been here for only three months.

Watching the melee made me introspective. Playing den mother to a dozen children and comparing daycare providers was

not the life I had imagined for myself while growing up as a gay teenager in the late 1970s. My knowledge of the gay "lifestyle" had been gleaned from books like *Dancer from the Dance* and *Faggots*. I envisioned days of glit-

the same man for 14 years, in bed by 10 o'clock and with a belly that's growing faster than the national debt. And, oh yes, a parent. Sometimes, I have a Peggy Lee moment and wonder *is that all there is?*

diapers and do laundry.

Instead of becoming the gay stud I imagined myself, I've become my mother.

And some of the other dads at our party were also surprised to find themselves so

This is certainly not a sidewalk cafe in West Hollywood! I am sure no one at a White Party is ever as tired as I am every night! And we move bravely forward for son number three!"

In the late 70s and 80s, gay life seemed thrillingly transformative. I remember thinking that my friends and those like us were going to change the world. ACT UP, Queer Nation, even GLAAD in the early days were dynamic agents of liberation and freedom. Now, we seem to work on such a more intimate scale. Our big battles are over the domestic: The right to marry, employment equity, and adoption laws dominate the agenda.

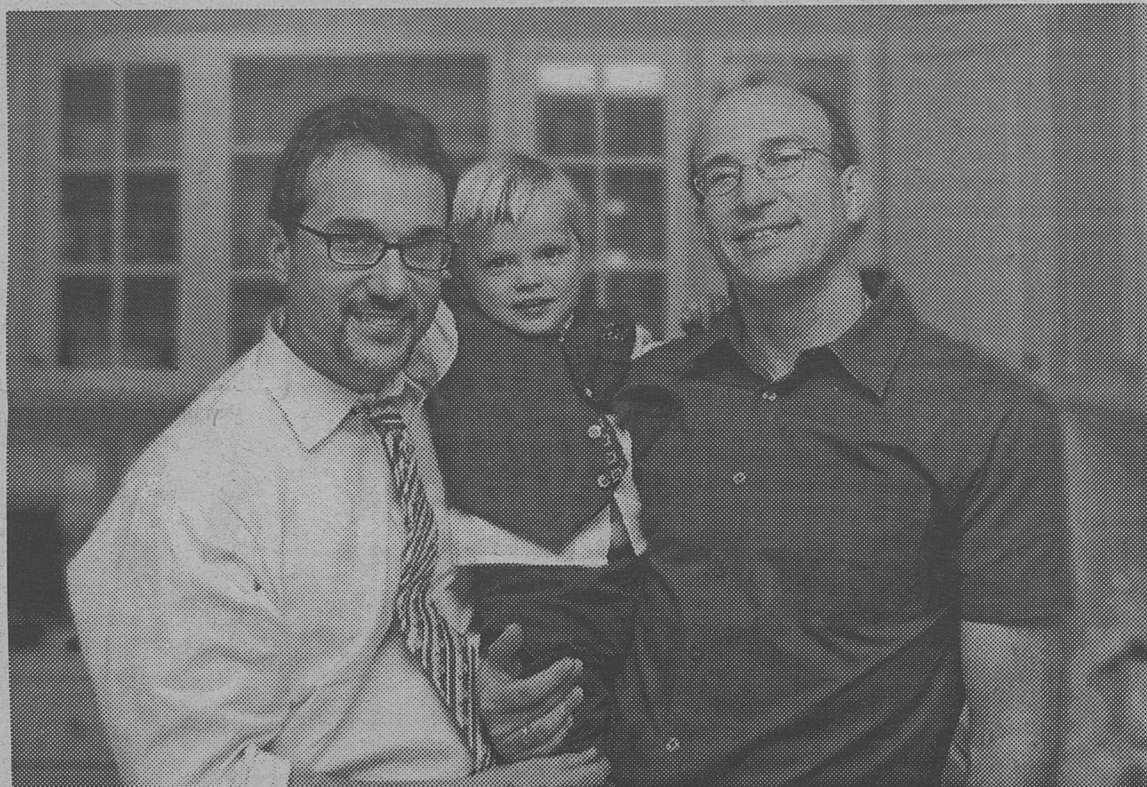
What has made so many lgbt people suddenly settle down and, sometimes even have children? And who can say if it's better than the wild days of revolution and rebellion? I'm too close to venture a guess as to whether the shift in focus represents a win, a loss, or a push.

What I do know is this: When straight people have children, most people think of it as the most normal thing in the world. When lgbt people have children, many, if not most, straight people find it, at least, unusual, at worst, dead wrong.

But watching the beautiful children and their parents at our home, I realized that anyone exposed to them will have to change their minds, because the reality of our families is that they are joyous and strong. The option that some lgbt people have to stay closeted or within their own communities is shattered when you have a child who needs to go to school, the doctor, and the playground. More than anything else, a child forces us to open our lives.

So, maybe we gay parents are changing the world after all. One diaper, one child, one family, one community at a time. It's a start. ▼

Scott Sherman and his family live in Richmond.



"Instead of becoming the gay stud I imagined myself, I've become my mother."

Scott Sherman (L) with son Sasha and partner Marty Rouse in Richmond

tering glamour, filled with drug-fueled orgies, nightclubbing, and impassioned activism – Act Up, Fight Back! I couldn't wait! After my boring suburban upbringing, sleaze and sensationalism sounded swell. I wanted to be anyone but my parents: Not middle-aged, not tied down with kids, not dull.

But here I am at 41: With

What happened to me? I was supposed to be hot and revolutionary and *fabulous*. Instead I'm a middle-class married man, more worried about what school district I'm in than about getting into the latest club. My dreams of boy toys have been replaced by shopping for boy's toys. Sometimes, I feel like I do nothing but work, change

domesticated. As one dad, who is in the process of adopting another child, wrote me in an email: "Did I think this was the life I would lead as a gay man? Too funny. As I speak we just got back from soccer, one son is having a hard time with homework, the other has girl trouble ... and since I was off today I did nine loads of laundry."