

## The Importance of Uncles: More Faerie Tales from the Rainbow Library

By NETH URKIEL-TAYLOR

Uncles seem to be a favorite subject for the queer children's literature market. Is it because uncles are removed just enough from the roles of parent, brother, sister, spouse or ourselves to talk about their trials and tribulations without shame?

Mary Kate Morgan has written a wonderful book entitled *Losing Uncle Tim*. This book is about disease, death, and the relationship between Uncle Tim and his nephew Daniel. Moreover, it is Daniel's story of the process he goes through in understanding

AIDS as an illness. Neither the author nor the illustrator ever hints at the sexual identity of Uncle Tim. He is simply a bachelor and could be gay, straight, bisexual or transgendered. In this way, we are able to relate to the emotions of the character's grief and love without a bias.

In *My Two Uncles*, Elly must come to terms with the struggle facing her Uncle Ned (her father's brother) and Ned's friend Uncle Phil. The grandfather patriarch of the family makes it clear the gay couple is unwelcome to attend his and his wife's wedding anniversary. In Elly's thought, "It wasn't fair. Cousin Rob is bringing his girlfriend and

Grandma Sue's fiancé is coming. Why won't Grampy let Uncle Ned bring Uncle Phil?" Elly's dad explains to her that sometimes a man loves a man or a woman loves a woman in a way married couples love one another.

Without further explanation, author Judith Vigna challenges us to view the homosexual relationship in terms of a lifetime sealed with a kiss. This analogy is overly simplistic and an incorrect comparison. Elly does not learn that queer relationships have little to no recognition by church or state, and in the 21st century homosexual relationships are more equal to 'boyfriend' and 'girlfriend.'

Even with this glaring flaw in the story I still believe the situation of homosexuals barred from family gatherings is well portrayed by this book. *My Two Uncles* demonstrates to us that acceptance of queer people can span generations. Even with love and support from family, acceptance comes in stages and with time for some relatives.

What is mom's brother like? Does he wear a hat covered with fruit or tight black leather pants? In *Uncle What-is-it Is Coming to Visit!*, the children do not know what to expect. Author/illustrator Michael Willhoite does a superb job of adding all the right stereotypes to this collective imagination of what is a gay man. For all us queer folk, laughs await us aplenty. This book adds a whole new meaning to the term 'fruit leathers.' ▼

Neth is currently involved in *The Rainbow Library*, a Vermont

resource for queer-themed picture books, videos, and family information. Library staff is willing to facilitate reading circles with your friends and family, group, school or organization. Call 652-0878 to learn how you can become involved, to get a bibliography, or to learn more about the library.

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