

Families Count

More Faerie Tales from the Rainbow Library

BY NETH URKIEL-TAYLOR

A lot of children's picture books about families that include queer community images are also activity oriented. For instance, *Who's in a Family* by Robert Skutch lightly explores ethnicity and composition of family groups. The book invites us to create or collect pictures of our parents, siblings, relatives, friends, guardians or care givers.

One of the original queer family books for children was printed as a coloring book. Children's book author/illustrator Michael Willhoite illustrated many types of families in *Families* (a coloring book). As an adoptee, I am glad that both this book and *The Family Book* by author/illustrator Todd Parr make reference to adoption. Both Michael and Todd illustrate in animated and eye-pleasing styles. However, Todd's book is a bit heavy on the hetero and depicts queer families very little.

If you want to see

almost exclusively queer families in a child's picture book it would be better to stay with two books published by Two Lives Publishing. The first, *A B C - A Family Alphabet* is a winner. Not only do we see queer families living their lives, but we get to learn our alphabet. The lively illustrations of Desiree Keane and Brian Rappa are superb. Interestingly, little queer subtext is added to the book - S is not for snap, D is not for Drag Queen, F is not for Fabulous (although this book is).

The second book, *1 2 3 - A Family Counting Book* lacks in visual appeal. The illustrations by Danamarie Hosler are rather muddy and appear unfinished. However, the illustrations do depict the physical closeness of same sex relationships better than any of the other family picture books. A big thanks to Two Lives and publisher/author Bobbie Combs for seeing these books into print.

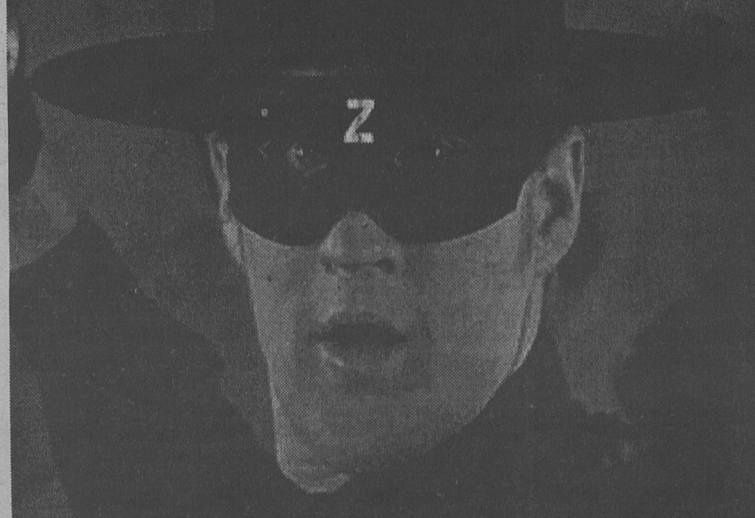
Coloring pages, creating/collecting family pictures, learning numbers or the alphabet

are all active invitations for us and our children to spend more time absorbing queer family images rarely offered in many children's books. None of these books use the words "queer," "gay," or "lesbian" when describing the two-mom or two-dad illustrations. As well, none of these books focuses solely on the two-mom, two-dad and child(ren) equal a family model. There is room for grandparents, aunts, uncles and animals. *A B C - A Family Alphabet* says it best: F is for Family and R is for Rainbow. As they well should be. ▼

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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