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## In a Family Way: Meeting and Greeting

**H**ow exciting for a writer to have a blank sheet of paper and a new audience! I have been invited (alright I begged) to publish my lgbt parenting column in *Out in the Mountains* and it is with excitement that I write this first column.

My name is Arlene Istar Lev and I am a family therapist and I specialize in working with lgbt families, in Albany New York. I recently published two books. The first book, *Transgender Emergence* (Haworth Press, 2004), is an academic and clinical tome on the need to de-pathologize transgender people and develop therapeutic services that actually serve this population with respect and advocacy. The second book, *The Complete Lesbian and Gay Parenting Guide* (Berkley/Penguin, 2004) addresses the real life issues that lgbt families face. Rosie O'Donnell was kind enough to say the book is "both deeply serious, and belly-laugh funny, while remaining filled with useful advice and heartwarming personal stories." I won't tell you the price I've had to pay to force those words out of her. I also write an lgbt parenting advice column: trust me, my mother thinks the fact that I write an advice column is very, very funny.

Apparently I still think I have more to say!! First, like any good parent, queer or otherwise, I'd like to tell you about my kids. Actually, I'd like to show you pictures. My older son is nine years old, although I confess I'm not sure where the last nine years have gone. He just came home tonight after his first week away from home, on a class trip to a science/nature camp. It poured the entire week, and the kids came off the bus smelling quite damp, like a moldy basement. They proudly announced they hadn't showered all week, and one mom pulled her son's pants down a bit, yelling, "Those are the same underwear you left home in!" My son jumped off the bus and into my arms (note: he is an inch taller than my 4-foot 9-inch frame), and without any shame said, "I had a horrible time. I missed you every day." So,

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that's my sensitive child.

My younger son just turned five, and is a cross between Howie Mandel and Billy Crystal, with a large dash of Eddie Haskell thrown in for good measure (remember *Leave it to Beaver*? "Hello, Mrs. Cleaver, What a lovely day!" he said, while plotting minor 1950s hoodlum behavior). My younger guy can work a room. He rises early, spends his nights listening to subversive music, and fills my house with wall-to-wall with

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projects and experiments. He's the kid with the spider in his pocket. His brother is the arachnophobe, and if you spend a few minutes imagining that dynamic (think Eddie Haskell) you have a good sense of my daily life.

So, here I am, a nearly-fifty-year-old, ageing dyke feminist scholar and activist, raising two handsome black men in our Jewish queer household. And my goal, every couple of months, is to tell you funny stories about my boys, while we collectively plot the overthrow of patriarchal, homophobic, racist and otherwise icky government public policy. Interested?

There is one more hat that I wear (yes, I'm a femme with a large hat collection). I am a Board Member of Family Pride ([www.familypride.org](http://www.familypride.org)),

the only national organization dedicated to education, advocacy, and support for lgbt families. We recently launched a new initiative to compile data on lgbt families and arm ourselves to fight the right-wing conservatives who are hell-bent to tell lies about our families. Queer families are at the center of the Republican backlash, organized by people like Dr. James Dobson, founder and chairman of Focus on the Family. Under their influence, laws are being passed all over the county limiting lgbt people's right to provide foster care, severing our right to adopt children, and making same-sex second parent adoptions illegal. This places our children and families in grave jeopardy.

Family Pride intends to be the voice of not only reason and compassion, but scholarly knowledge and evidence-based research – which by the way, is

abundant – proving that our families are healthy and functional. Under the leadership of Family Pride, lgbt families are refusing to sit at the back of the bus. The Montgomery Bus Boycott took more than a year, and for that year people refused to ride the bus. So we invite you to walk, march, and carpool with Family Pride – we are officially off the bus and standing up for our rights. We too are focusing on the family. Come watch my younger son slip that rainbow spider down Dobson's shirt and hear him squeal. ▼

Ari Lev is a family therapist, activist, and lesbian mom. Contact info: [www.choicesconsulting.com](http://www.choicesconsulting.com) and [www.proudparenting.com](http://www.proudparenting.com) (search: Dear Ari)

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