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And these specific jobs:

- Invoicing Instigator
- Stuffing Night Coordinator Queen
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And or those of you who just want to get your toes a little wet, there's always...

### STUFFING NIGHT!

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Wednesday, March 1, 2006, 5pm.R.U.1.2? Community Center  
34 Elmwood Avenue, Burlington, 802.861.6486  
[opsmgr@mountainpridemedia.org](mailto:opsmgr@mountainpridemedia.org)

## IN A FAMILY WAY BY ARLENE ISTAR LEV

# Trans-Parent

IN MY WORK IN THE TRANSGENDER community, I often have the experience of people cozying up to me at social events (in and out of the queer community) and, in hushed voices, asking questions or disclosing information about themselves or family members who are crossdressers or transsexuals. Perhaps they have a nephew whose "effemininity" they are concerned about, perhaps they like crossdressing for Halloween more than they want to admit. Once upon a time gay identity issues also provoked this kind of curiosity, but, even with the religious right on our tail (oooooh), we've made enormous advances.

**Sixty percent of national adoption agencies will "let" us adopt children (they should be on their knees begging us).**

**We have "permission" to join the institution of marriage in one state.**

We have won the right to have sodomy in the privacy of our own homes with the permission of the Supreme Court, 60 percent of national adoption agencies will "let" us adopt children (they should be on their knees begging us), and, the whopper of all, the "permission" to join the institution of marriage in at least one state (since the 50 percent divorce wasn't enough to scare us off). We've come a long way in the past 40 years, light-years in fact, since the days when we would routinely lose custody of our children for any revelation about same-sex sexuality.

The political successes of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community have not yet been granted to transgender and transsexual people. Trans people may retain some civil rights if they are in legal heterosexual marriages, although sex changes routinely introduce questions about the validity of "same-sex" marriages — depending, of course, on the direction of your sex-change, and the sex of your partner. If a person in a heterosexual relationship transitions, they may now be perceived as being in a same-sex relationship — hence the marriage may not be legally recognized; if a person in a same-sex relationship transitions, they may now be perceived as heterosexual, and granted legitimacy in the eyes of a judicial system obsessed with heterosexual privilege and the power and significance of genitalia.

When a trans person is a parent, the legal system wields the weapons of heterosexism and gender-normativity to jeopardize basic parental rights. When a couple relationship does not survive transition and there are children involved, the transgender person may find themselves embroiled in a legal custody battle, where their transgender status becomes a de facto definition of parental incompetence. Woe to the couple or individual who do not yet have children, and seek parenthood following a gender transition.

Trans people, just like LGB people, have always been parents. They may have been closeted, they may have buried their own truths deep down in their souls, pretending to be someone they are not in order to maintain a socially acceptable relationship with their children. They may have left their children in the care of ex-spouses, grandparents, or friends, disappearing in the night, in order to live their dream. Perhaps their children never knew about them or their new lives, perhaps they were told their parents were dead, or even worse, evil perverse people unworthy of love or respect.

The idea that trans people have a right to be parents, to retain custody of their children, to maintain relationships with their children, is an idea whose time has finally come. Thirty years ago a woman who stood up in court and admitted to being in a lesbian relationship was unlikely to secure custody of her children; today, in most courts in the U.S., this would be a minor issue in the case, not impacting the "best interests of the children." We need to extend these rights to trans people, so they can also stand up in court rooms — dressed how they like, using the pronouns they chose, regardless of their surgical or legal status as male or female — and be treated with dignity and respect, secure that their gender identity or expression will not impact what is in the best interests of their children.

Trans people are coming of age. Transwomen are storing their semen before transition, hoping to biologically father the children they will someday mother. Transmen are getting pregnant, shaking the foundation of medical system — bearded, balding men, large with pregnancies, birthing the children who will call them Papa. Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Cleaver have new neighbors with whom little Beaver can play.

Transgender parents will need a great deal of support in the next decade, fighting for health coverage, fighting adoption agencies, fighting custody battles. LGB people must not rest on the laurels of all we have gained; we must use the political clout and social acceptance we have gained to assure that all members of the larger LGB and T communities acquire the same legal protections as we have won. It's in the best interests of our children. ▼



Arlene Istar Lev LCSW, CASAC is a family therapist, activist, author, and lesbian mom to two handsome sons. Find her on the web at [choicesconsulting.com](http://choicesconsulting.com) and [proudparenting.com](http://proudparenting.com) (search: Dear Ari).