

Queer Daddies

Richard Cornwall

Fulltime lesbian parents in Vermont are unusual, but are positively abundant compared to fulltime gaymale parents, especially single gay parents. In fact, we are so rare one might ask if Queer Dad is an oxymoron. Boston and Montréal have groups of gay fathers - one even existed for a short time here, though it was hard to find out about and join. This is too bad, for Vermont is surely a great place to raise kids, and I have found schools very open to my joining in as a parent as my kids have gone through all levels here.

Having kids is a fountain of mental juice that many gaymen and lesbians would savor. Many enjoy this drink by working at child care, teaching, or counseling services. This is an antidote against retreat into smothering security, into rigid patterns for living, which most of us want at times. We see gaymen complaining about life in urban gay ghettos and moving to suburbia or even to Vermont, seeking order and calm in upscale rural living, just as straights do. Having kids saves queer parents from such a fate!

Positive examples: My teenagers introduced me to the delights of Joan Armatrading, Sinéad O'Connor, Tracy Chapman, Lenny Kravitz (stay calm, my heart), Eric Clapton, Roger Waters. As parents, we also gain deeper appreciation of what coming out means as we see that our children also have to make choices about whether and how to come out to their peers about their parents being queer - not a trivial act in most high schools in this state. Thanks are due to the many people who keep Outright Vermont vigorous.

Painful examples: Among queers, lesbian and gay parents are often viewed as counter-revolutionary (e.g. *Outweek*, #74, Nov. 1990). Thus from gaymen I have sometimes gotten the reaction to my being a

parent: "That's the heterosexual part of you which I don't understand." We can be seen as outsiders both by gaymen and by straight folks.

There is a parallel blindsiding by straights: fellow workers or neighbors will talk very openly and with a real sense of sharing about our children, but never say a word when I am publicly prominent as a queer. In fact, I only recently saw how I have been an accomplice to this closet construction: with certain good friends I only raised kid-issues.

There are so few gay fathers, that we are rarely among ourselves. In fact, I know of no other full-time gay fathers in Vermont now - the kids are either away at college or are only home a few nights a week or less, so there is time to go to gay bars or even Boston for a weekend. And being a parent does get in the way of savoring queerness. All my spare money and time go to doing things with my kids or travelling for work with visits to queer movies, plays, bars and sex clubs stuck in the corners of these trips. No gay cruises or trips with the Chiltern Outing Club, and even trips to Montréal and visits with local gay friends are scarce. This is harder when the other parent is three thousand miles away, and weekends cannot be freed.

What offsets this isolation is the sense of being useful to our children. Also of no small satisfaction is being living monkey wrenches to the religious and (the irony here is delicious) Darwinian dogmas which assert that the purpose of sexuality is procreation - propagation (of diversity) of species through sexual reproduction. We are very tangible witnesses that having sex and creating children are **distinct** acts which all parents should balance:

- Having children is clearly a special choice for us, not taken lightly in the blindness of passion.

- Having sex is a life-sustaining necessity to maintain self-esteem and social interaction - something lesbian, gay and bi- people make real and which heterosexism denies.


By being social pioneers in learning how to balance these moral imperatives, truly "The Future is Ours" - the motto of the 1990 San Francisco Lesbian/Gay Pride Parade.

I got married to have kids. Now more and more lesbians first grappling with being queer and **only then** choosing to have children. This new social path-breaking is becoming steadily more influential in our society. In an era where the technological and economic pressures put a premium on voluntary choice to be a parent, this underlines our deep connection to the prochoice position which so rivets social attention in the 1990's. It also suggests that queers be less prone to use the label "breeder" to designate the heterosexists who have hurt us. There are breeders among us!

I would also plead that all queers be aware that our liaisons and legislators who are working for our civil rights law have chosen, not without careful thought perhaps, to **exclude** parenting from the list of activities where judicial processes should be blind to sexual orientation. Child custody cases should be decided solely on the basis of good parenting and, at present, advice from divorce lawyers. Threats by divorcing partners and the queer parent's typical overload of guilt combine sometimes to give very destructive decisions as to whom a child ends up living with.


Being a gay parent requires agile footwork to keep from falling into crevices, but the rewards for straddling several worlds are intense. I often dance to Erasure's "River deep, mountain high." ▼

PO Box 220 (802) 888-4100 Office
Hyde Park, Vermont 05655-0220 (802) 888-2977 Home



VALERIE WHITE
Humanist Minister
American Humanist Association

Namings - Weddings - Union Ceremonies - Memorial Services



GOLDEN THREADS
a contact publication for lesbians over 50 and women who love older women.

Canada and U.S. Confidential, warm, reliable. For free information send self-addressed envelope; (U.S. residents please stamp it). Sample copy mailed discreetly, \$5.00 (U.S.\$)

P.O. Box 3177, Burlington, VT 05401