

# PROGENY

Coming Out to Courtney

by Barbara Dozetos

When my daughter, Courtney, was seven, she came to me to discuss a matter of great importance to her. As it turned out, it was no light-weight topic for me, either. I'll never forget the day or the details, though, I'm sure she'll tell me I have it all wrong when she reads this.

I was sitting at the computer when she walked in and positioned herself on my left side, knowledgeably avoiding my mousing arm, and asked, "Mom, when are we going to have a dad to live with us again?" The time had arrived to deal with a question I had only recently answered to myself.

A little background information is appropriate here, I think. Courtney and I left her biological father when she was only 3 months old. She has since adopted my best friend, George, as her dad. George does his job beautifully and anyone who doesn't know otherwise, assumes Courtney is actually his daughter. They are adorable together and terribly proud of each other.

So, when Court came to me with her little question, I wanted to be sure to address the correct issue. Was she just upset with George about something? Did she want to replace him? Or, was it a direct comment on the lack of another adult living in our household?

I phrased my questions carefully and learned that she had no problems with George. Of course, in her heart of hearts she will probably always long for the days when the three of us did live under the same roof. However, standing there next to me that day, she was already resigned to the fact that things were never going to be like that again.

"I thought you liked the way things are," I said. She spent a couple of nights each week with George and his girlfriend and seemed perfectly happy with the set up. "Oh, yeah, but I wish we had someone here with us." This was the moment from which I could

not retreat.

Over the course of her seven years, there had been many difficult questions and uncomfortable subjects. I had a strategy in place and it had always worked before. My theory was that kids only ask questions for which they are developmentally and intellectually prepared to hear the answers. The burden lies on the adult to answer carefully only what is really asked, not to overload the child.

For instance, years earlier, Courtney noticed that other kids had fathers who lived with them and she came home to ask me about it. "Do I have a father?" I answered, "Yes, he lives in another state." That's all she wanted to know then. Little by little, she came back for more information until she asked if her biological father had been mean to me. I said yes. She wanted to know more, so I told her. She absorbed the information and has never really mentioned it again.

I have since received a pat on the back from therapists about this process. It isn't an earth-shattering new theory, but it has always worked out nicely for me and for Courtney.

So, here I was, about to put it to the most important test. Courtney wanted to know about this hole in our family and what I intended to do about it. I drew a couple of deep breaths and said, "Well, you know, I've been thinking that I'd kind of like to have someone else around, too." Courtney nodded, but I wasn't getting off the hook this easily. She all but tapped her little foot as she stood there with her arms folded.

Throat well-cleared, I continued, "But, how would you feel if that new person were a woman?" Courtney contemplated this idea for only a split second then turned back to me with a slightly threatening look, "Well, OK, as long as I like her, too!" Before I could react, she was gone — back to her toys. I should have known that my loving open-minded

daughter would extend to me the same consideration she has for the rest of the world.

Courtney knew about gays and lesbians before we had this conversation. I'm convinced that was key to making it go so well. She had already seen acceptance of queers in my attitude and George's. She had even been overheard explaining the difference between gay and lesbian to a couple of girls several years older she was.

Being a single mother from the almost the beginning, I've shared a lot of things with Courtney that other kids might not be exposed to. She has very often been my dearest companion and we have a very adult relationship on many levels. It would have been unnatural for me to exclude her from my coming out process.

Courtney is quite fond of many of the films in the queer canon. She burns with anger over homophobia, cries when someone dies of AIDS and asks the most amazing questions all the rest of the time. She spots Pride stickers on cars before I do and only yesterday had a rainbow painted on her face at the flower show in Burlington. She's with me at Pride and spends a lot more time than she wants to in the offices shared by *Out in the Mountains* and *Outright*.

Courtney doesn't see my being a lesbian as a secret or something to be ashamed of. It's just a fact.

All things considered, I should not have been startled a couple of months after the not-so-big announcement when the little miss returned to my side at the computer. "Well, Mom," she asked, actually tapping her toe this time, "How's it going? Have you found someone yet?"

Anyone interested in participating in discussions about queer parenting, please contact me at [wordsrus@together.net](mailto:wordsrus@together.net) or at OITM phone or mailing address. I welcome comments and suggestions.

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