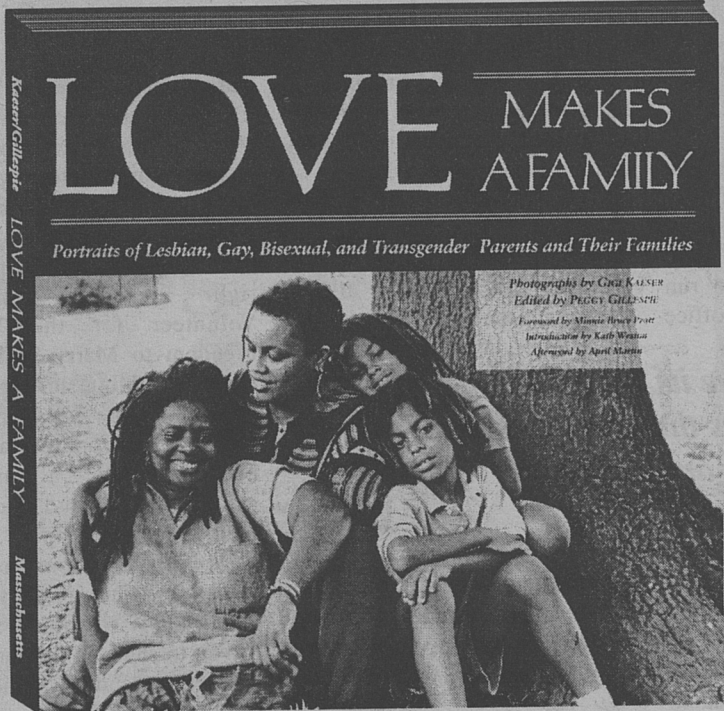


# LOVE MAKES A FAMILY

Portraits of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Parents and Their Families

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GIGI KAESER — EDITED BY PEGGY GILLESPIE  
Foreword by Minnie Bruce Pratt — Introduction by Kath Weston — Afterword by April Martin



"This is a beautiful, beautiful book and exhibit. Many of the photos brought tears to my eyes. To look into the faces of these families is to see courage, strength, joy, commitment, and most of all, love. Reading the interviews of parents and children made me very proud of our community."

—Lesléa Newman

author of *Heather Has Two Mommies*

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*Love Makes A Family* can travel to your school, university, workplace, library, house of worship, community center, Pride event, corporate headquarters, or conference.

FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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www.lovemakesafamily.org

## PROGENY



# Of Cigar Boxes, Coming Out, and Control

BY KEVIN MCATEER

I "came out" when I was eight years old. Not as a gay man — that came later — but as a fatherless son.

I was only eight years old when my father died in 1978. In my third grade class in small-town suburban New Jersey, everyone else had a mother *and* a father. Even divorce was not as commonplace in 1978 as it is today (let alone same-sex parents).

I was the outcast, the one other kids snickered at or asked uncomfortable questions. I was the only one who had to ask to stay home the Friday before Father's Day to avoid having to use some combination of an empty cigar box, construction paper, crayons, and paste to make a gift for a father who had died of cancer six months earlier.

It wasn't until my early 20s that I came out as a gay man. Yet I credit years of having to share "Um, my father died when I was younger" in preparing me for saying proudly "I'm gay." While they are two separate and distinctly different life passages, benchmarks, maturation stages, whatever you want to call them, what I have begun to appreciate is that the experience of being a fatherless son and a gay man have put me in a unique place.

For me, one of the most inspiring aspects of being gay is feeling as though I have been given full control of the reins to shape and define my life and, as a result, my future family. In many ways this sense of independence is empowering. Yet these same feelings of "you're gay, run with it, be creative, question authority, do what is right for you" are also a reminder of being eight years old and feeling "my father is dead, everyone else my age has two parents, you're now a fatherless son, deal with it." So I did deal with it, along with my mother and three siblings, all of whom deserve incredible praise for giving me the unconditional love and varied outlets for grief that an eight-year-old needs.

In fact, I find that I am still dealing with it. This month will mark my 21st Father's Day without my dad. Twenty-one years! That's a long time. Most books on grief recognize that grieving is life-long, but why does it seem so ever-present for me, especially during the month of June, even

after all this time?

I want to blame the marketing teams at Callaway golf clubs and Hallmark, who throw gift-getting ideas in our faces just as soon as Mother's Day is over and fancy pottery and hanging plants are marked down 50 percent. (Come to think of it, we could all probably blame most consumer marketers for manipulating our emotions.)

A few weeks ago, I wanted to blame Hugh Coyle, whom I don't even know personally. If you are a regular "Progeny" reader, you will remember his eloquent essay last month that examined how the added dimension of being gay influenced

his feelings of loss around the death of his mother. I barely got through reading the article when I realized, yet again, that here's another thing that I won't have to do: come out to my father.

Then it hit me. This is why I am, in one sense or another, still grieving. Almost daily someone or something reminds me that I am a fatherless son. Whether it

is something I read or something I experience myself, that there will continue to be benchmarks along my own life journey that I won't be able to share with my father. And this is where I am stuck.

What I would prefer to do, of course, is say, "OK, move on Kevin." Yet the planner in me wants to not only be able to anticipate any event or situation that will cause me to think about my father, but also to know how to react and, eventually, move on. (Do you think I have some control issues?)

As a result, when I meet someone, particularly a man, who has experienced early parent loss (before the age of 19), the conversation almost automatically switches to the topic of death, grieving, etc. It's sort of like a post-gaydar experience: you have found common ground with a complete stranger and you are both feeling pretty safe opening up to each other.

I remember when I first met my good friend Tracy; she was interviewing for a job at the college I was working at. During our meeting, she began to explain that she was moving back to New Jersey to be closer to her mother after the death of her father earlier that year. I felt compelled to tell her that my father had died, too. We