

MAKE ROOM



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

FOR DADDY

Gay fathers agree about the big things: love, sharing, and the need to go into parenting with your eyes open

by Risa Krivé

Where do babies come from—when they are the children of choice in gay male families? They come from alternative insemination, adoption, foster care, and surrogacy. Openly gay men who choose to raise children are forever changing the face of fatherhood. I spoke with several such families from the West Coast to the Eastern Seaboard. Looking through the lens of chosen gay fatherhood, I saw a kaleidoscope of infinite arrangements from common components: diverse conceptions, colors, cultures, and family constellations—yet a constant display of the need to nurture children and the maturity to take responsibility for oneself and for others.

Tim Fisher is executive director of Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International. Tim, 36, is a homemaker and “Daddy” while his partner of 18 years, Scott Davenport, 37, is a management consultant and “Poppa” to their two children by surrogacy—daughter Kati, 5, and son Fritz, 2 1/2. Tim is the biological father of both children. “I was the catalyst in this process of becoming parents,” he said.

“In college I came out to my folks. I’d read all the literature, so when my mother was shedding a tear I knew exactly what she should be feeling. I said, ‘Don’t worry, it’s not your fault,’ and she said, ‘Oh no, it’s not that, I’m upset because you will never have kids.’ Without even thinking, I said, ‘I’m not prepared to give that up yet.’

“Scott didn’t have a driving need to have children. He never thought it would be possible, so he didn’t get excited about it.

“We put an ad in the gay newspaper *Washington Blade*. We thought we would hear what our options were from gay and lesbian parents. Instead we got one response, from a potential surrogate mother. We met and planned our process step by step. Fifteen months later our daughter was born. Another ad appeared in the same paper from a woman who wanted to be a surrogate. When Kati was a year old, we called her and she was available and interested. Fifteen months later our son was born. We’ve been very lucky and have great kids. They’re wonderful sleepers and happy, intelligent, involved, friendly children and we’re having a great time.

“We are white upper-middle-class professionals. Scott says we’re the *Leave It to Beaver* family for the ‘90s. He’s Ward. He jokes that I should be wearing a strand of pearls. I don’t do drag, thank you. We have a rather ‘50s division of labor in terms of the breadwinning. One researcher compared how gay fathers of young children divide household labor to how straight couples with the same age kids do it. They found the gay men are much happier about household chores, because if you’re gay there are no assumptions about who cooks and cleans and does the car and the yard, but rather you divvy up things based on what you like. If you both don’t like to do it hopefully you hire someone else to do it or both bitch about it and do it anyway. The gender inequity baggage that even progressive straight couples labor under doesn’t exist.

“Regarding what I call the Role Model Question: the assumption that your kids will be damaged goods if they don’t have the opposite sex model is far-fetched and overstressed. Our children are very close to their grandmothers, their aunts, female godmothers, special women friends.... Our goal is not to say, ‘There have to be women in our kids’ lives.’ Our goal is to say, ‘We want good, consistent, quality adults who are going to be there for our kids.’ Of course, half of them are going to be women, because half of those people in life are women.

“Before we had kids, neither of us had any hands-on baby experience. I read every parenting book and magazine on the market. After three issues you see the topics all repeat. There’s only so much you can read about cloth diapers vs. disposables, breast-feeding vs. bottle-feeding. At that point I began to feel that we would easily learn diapering and feeding skills. It was a breeze, but we were blessed with easy kids. If we’d had a colicky baby we probably would have been tearing our hair out.

“There are more gay families in this town every day. On Sunday, Lambda Families of New Jersey will have a welcoming ceremony. There are so many new kids in our group, either people who have moved here recently or adopted kids or recent births, and all the older kids who’ve been around for a couple years. We’re going to make a quilt and have a ritual. Elaine Wickens, who wrote *Anna Day and the O-Ring*, a very matter-of-fact mystery story about a boy and his dog and his two moms, will read.

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