

ately.

- We will establish a savings account for you, so that when you leave you have some money in the bank to get a car or your own apartment or whatever it is you need to do to get started.

"In exchange for that we expect some things from you:

- You may not smoke in the house. We discourage smoking. Smoking is permitted outside the house.

- We will not allow weapons of any kind in the house.

- You will take school seriously. If you are having trouble, we will get tutors or whatever is necessary.

- If school is not working out, you must be involved in something to improve yourself. Hanging out is not an option.

- You must respect our privacy.

- You must make some good decisions when you're out. Officially, you may not do drugs or drink. However, when you're out with young people, that's going to come up whether we like it or not, so you must rapidly begin developing a detection system so you can tell when things are moving into uncomfortable territory and it's time to move while you can, in which case you call us immediately. We'll come pick you up. You will not be punished. We will undoubtedly talk about it.

- As long as you make good decisions, you can do a lot of things and have a lot of personal freedom and we'll have some really good times.

"These are young people who have never had to do chores. We have been spectacular failures at encouraging the idea that 'Many hands make light work.' Their allowance is just that. It's not a wage. Young people need to have a certain amount of money for their daily needs. It isn't linked to how many times they wash dishes. If they want to wash dishes and mow lawns and wash the car, then there's an opportunity to make more money. When they need more money they know they can earn it.

"Two straight boys were placed here for several months. They had each been sexually abused

in their own homes by parents and boyfriends of parents. Over 90 percent of all sexual abuse is done by heterosexual men—fathers, the mother's boyfriend, uncles, teachers, ministers, doctors—the people who are supposed to be giving children comfort and care. These straight young people had to be placed in a gay home to protect them from straight people. We made it clear that no one would be abused in this home, neither sexually nor psychologically nor verbally nor physically nor nutritionally, although they seem to abuse *me* auditorily when they play rap music—or if I have to hear 'I Will Always Love You' one more time!

"It is very dismaying to hear these young people's inner-city views of life. So, when we sit down at the table every night there's no TV. There're napkins and stemware, the whole works—we're not talking Waterford here—but stemware and soft light and music and conversation at the table. This is a totally new experience for these young people. I think they really appreciate it. There isn't a topic they can't openly and rationally discuss here.

"My partner works. Since I am retired I have plenty of time to teach social interaction. I'm at home, so I do most of the at-home things. People who are working all day may come home tired and not want to deal with someone who has very serious problems. So they may want to consider someone younger who does not have many inappropriate behaviors. However, the more difficult the young person is considered to be by the state, the more money it provides for his or her care. In that case it may be financially feasible to stay home and have this be your work. We are financially comfortable through our own resources, although the state's provision is one of the reasons we are



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEVER

He added, "Eventually, when I get older, I'll probably adopt one or two kids. I want to have kids, but I'm not going to go out and get married just to have kids. I love kids. I have a natural talent with kids. I like the family scenario. I want my own family. The only problem I have is finding somebody who wants a family too."

Tim Fisher concluded, "There's nothing about sexual orientation that automatically makes us better parents. However, we have to really plan our families and not have our kids by mistake or casually or because it's expected of us, but the opposite in that we really make this choice to have kids and think of all the considerations. We have this enormous drive and desire. We are going against society's expectations. We work at researching and networking and dealing

with our families and our neighbors and gathering support. We have been asked so many times, 'Is it fair to the kids? What are you going to do about schools?' and we've thought through so many things before we get to the first diaper that it helps to make us good parents. Those are part of good parenting skills. Our kids are really special because they're so planned for, so wanted and treasured."

Gay fathers by choice often do not feel a need for genetic connection with their children. Their parental feelings bypass biology to go right to the heart of the matter. Regardless of the method used in determining where the children come from, each of these families is a conscious creation formed around a core of love.

I asked the foster son if it made a difference to be in a gay home. He replied, "Yes, because they can understand what I'm going through. Even a gay-friendly straight person could never understand what a gay person has to go through growing up. I've done a lot better this year than last year and every year before that. I'm very happy. I can see my life going in a positive direction. Instead of ending up like my brother [in jail], I can end up like... Whitney Houston!" he laughed.

able to spend so much money on the boys. One of their friends gets an allowance here every week. He has stopped stealing. All he needed was to have a little money in his pocket. He couldn't get even the basic things he needed without stealing. We do encourage young people to get jobs."

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