

STONEWALL BABY

Rethinking family

*Without role models and in an era of legislative dictums
it's up to us to choose our kin*

by Will O'Bryan

Lately, I've been single-minded. Following a visit by a friend we've known for years, Mr. X (my boyfriend-spouse-lover-lifemate—haven't found a phrase we like yet) and I have entered into some kind of pact. It's a simple contract: After Mr. X and our friend, Chris, a lesbian, finish graduate school, we'll all buy a very rural house together.

It's a plan that includes giving up the promise of fast-paced, involved, urban jobs in return for maintaining some beehives, a bit of hydroponic gardening, some dog breeding, and low-paying jobs in the nearest hamlet. And why not? As gay people who don't want to live as islands, we're free to create our own definitions of

because (gasp) we have sex, or as harbingers of the apocalypse because we want our domestic unions to be legally recognized. To add insult to injury, we have to pay to maintain this unjust system. When Sally and Johnny get married, they start filing their taxes jointly—and paying less. Somebody has to make up the difference. In an indirect way, the difference is paid by *legally* single adults. So we pay.

Some gay people have criticized the idea of fighting for same-sex marriage and adding hetero-esque families to the gay and lesbian American experience. It's been argued that it will reduce our culture, homogenize us (no pun intended) with the rest of society. Make us bourgeois. On principle, I agree, but practically,



family. I know I don't want to be Donna Reed or Dick VanPatten, but I want my future to include something communal, supportive and worth investing in: not nuclear, but a family, nonetheless. I don't want to spend my middle age watching never-ending versions of MTV's *The Real World* (Boise, Bogotá and Budapest yet to come), and feeling envious of even that forced, yet genuine, community.

The typical American lesbian girl or gay boy coming of age isn't expected to do or expect much of anything in his or her future as far as family is concerned. Few people ask me when I expect to be a father, let alone if. I don't recall ever having been asked if Mr. X and I plan to have a marriage ceremony.

Really, gay men and lesbians have been out of the closet for such a relatively short time that people—perhaps even we, ourselves—don't know what family means to us. Is it the family we were born into, the family that may blame us for being the end of the family line? Does family mean living with your girlfriend and having a backyard barbecue ceremony followed by an expensive, personally invasive struggle to adopt? Who knows?

Our role models in this area are scant, to say the least. And the greater society we belong to isn't about to help us define anything either. The only input we seem to get from the hallowed halls of our legislators is, at best, We'll tolerate your unofficial unions and throw you a benefit bone if you happen to work in the public sector. Sometimes the private sector follows suit, à la Disney. This may be accompanied by one of the nation's largest churches, à la Southern Baptist, organizing a boycott.

At worst, you're damned if you do, damned if you don't, and most likely appreciated if you just shut up and go away.

In our culture, queers are attacked as sodomites

that argument is irrelevant. The heart of the matter is economic, not emotional.

In my own social circumstance, I have to consider that I live under various political bodies at various levels that chose to subsidize, partly at my expense, an automobile culture (interstate highways and cheap gas), organized sports (tax breaks on mega-stadiums), meat (subsidized grazing), and the destruction of the Cuban state (Helms-Burton Act). Now, as a vegetarian, socialist gay man who doesn't own a car on principle and who can't watch football or baseball without falling asleep, why stick around?

My circle and I couldn't come up with a satisfactory answer. We just came up with more reasons to homestead in the future.

Before you think that I've reserved a spot in my future for giving up and dropping out, don't. I'm bound to humanity as surely as my mother is bound to weekend flea markets. There is no stronger bond. But I can nurture my humanity all the more if I create a healthy culture for myself: a gay-centrist culture where there are no commercials, no drive-alone commuting; where sports means backyard badminton or a quick hike; where the only animals around will be running and playing instead of getting digested; and where sexuality is something to enjoy, not defend.

Of course we'll probably have a straight person or two in the household, because, hey, some of my best friends are straight.

In this setting, I'm confident I'll be able to define myself more easily, to think thoughts more clearly, and to fight more earnestly. Ironically, I may be coming to a point where I'll start agreeing with Ralph Reed and Phyllis Schlafly that families are the building blocks of society, the units that nurture us and make us strong. But it will be a family on my terms and those of the other family members.



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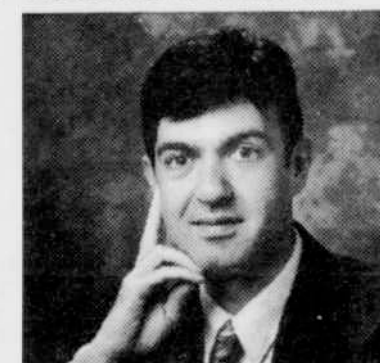
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