

# Crafting fatherhood

A young gay man, devoted to his infant daughter, contemplates the unknown land of the nontraditional family

by Paul Hatton



Paul and Teresa Hatton

I carefully open the door to the hospital room, not really knowing what waits for me inside. A dim light filters through the curtained windows, and I can see Carrie, in bed, holding our daughter. I give Jeff the OK to come in and we enter together, walking to the bed. Carrie is fully awake and flashes her furious glare first at Jeff and then at me. Maybe he should leave. He gets the hint.

Carrie still wasn't too comfortable being

## Youth

around my boyfriend. Especially at a time like that, right after our daughter had been born. My daughter, Teresa. Only hours old and Carrie asks me to hold her! Oh, I cannot, what if I squeeze too hard? What if I drop her?

Carrie asks me why I brought Jeff. I tell her I wanted to. I was 16, and thinking back, I realize that probably wasn't the best of answers. But I was so terribly confused. In my arms I held a child. A child I helped to create, a being I gave life to. She was a part of me.

I met Carrie in the ninth grade. We became good friends, talked on the phone a lot, wrote lots of little cutesy notes back and forth and grew closer. I knew I was gay, but I "asked her out," thinking it was the right thing to do.

I tried very hard to enjoy myself—I tried for two years. Things just didn't feel right. I would catch myself watching cute boys, wondering what it would be like to be with them. But I didn't dare leave her—she loved me too much, and I couldn't bear the thought of hurting her. So I stayed.

One day she came over to my house. We sat in my room and talked. She said, "I need to tell you something," and I could tell something was wrong. Jokingly, I said, "What, are you pregnant?" She looked down at the floor, and I knew.

The two years since then have been really tough. When Teresa was born, I got a job at a local miniature golf course. My parents and I consulted our lawyer regarding child support. Because I was so young and would not be able to work full time, I did not make enough money to legally

have to pay Carrie anything. I asked the lawyer if there was a fixed percentage. She told me what it was, and I decided to use that to personally provide support for Carrie.

I was a junior in high school when Teresa was born. Carrie had already graduated and had a full-time job with a florist. It was difficult to see them during the school year, but I tried my best to see both of them often. Carrie and I remained friends, and I am very grateful for that. It was especially hard on her, losing her "now gay" boyfriend and having to live with her parents.

Teresa grew up so fast. Soon after her first birthday I left for college, three hours away. I was lucky if I saw Teresa once a month. By the time I came home and was able to spend time with her, she was talking. We hold conversations; she cries, says "No!" when I don't push her on the swing set.

And, due to her mother's training using an old photograph of me, she calls me Daddy. Or Paul. She calls me either.

But I wonder what our future holds. Carrie is engaged now—eventually Teresa may have three fathers and one mother. Will she accept it? What will her friends in school say when she tells them her father is gay? Will they tease her? Will they call her a lesbian? And if so, will she regret having told them?

It's scary, living as a gay father—and one so young. I have matured quite a bit during the past two years, but it still amazes me that I have a child. That I took on such a responsibility.

Thoughts like these are a daily issue for me. Always wondering, always hoping, but never regretting. If I could go back in time I wouldn't have done anything differently, really. Teresa is wonderful, and she is my daughter.

I know that in time, when Teresa can understand, things will be fine between us. I will always be there for her no matter what happens. And although I may feel like just a father "figure" at times, we will both always know that I am her father.

Her gay father.

Paul Hatton is an 18-year-old clarinet major at James Madison University in Virginia. His work is distributed by the Rainbow Writers Group, a syndicate of young queer writers.

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Richard looked first at the Mexican torta  
and baked stuffed avocado before deciding  
on the prawn enchilada,  
which made him think of the  
first time he tasted fresh-off-the-  
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Mexico with that loser of an ex-boyfriend.



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