

# THE GAY DAD BLUES

**The timing of this year's queer pride celebration in Portland isn't making everyone have a happy Father's Day** by David Burnett

**T**his year's Portland gay pride celebration falls on Father's Day, which serves as a stark reminder to me of how torn I am between two worlds. Celebrating my gay freedom is something relatively new to me, celebrating my fatherhood is not. This will be the fourth year that I will celebrate my life out of the closet, however it will be the 20th year I celebrate being a dad. And to be honest, celebrating both being gay and a dad has not been easy.

I was married for more than 17 years before I came out. My wife and I had three sons together. Today they are 20, 12 and 10 years old. We were a close family; our relationships were built on love, togetherness and fun. We attended a fundamental Christian church, which shaped our ideals and solidified our family.

When I came out, I had fairy tale dreams that life wouldn't change all that much. I fantasized that my ex-wife and I would remain good friends and that my children would fall right into my new life. These dreams turned into nightmares that still haunt me four years later. My ex-wife and I remain on amicable terms, mostly for the sake of our children. Our battles, however, have been fought in the courtroom.

After our separation, my ex-wife gained court support that forbade me to come out to my two younger sons. (I had already told the oldest.) Furthermore, the court prevented my sons from visiting me in my home because I had begun a relationship with another man and they were not to be exposed to that relationship. These stipulations were to remain in place until I had attended counseling sessions with my ex-wife and the therapist she and the children were seeing.

I had no objections to the counseling sessions. In fact, they turned out to be very beneficial. Our objective was to determine how we were going to continue co-parenting our children and do what was in their best interest, without totally compromising what we believed as adults. The issue of visitation rights became the real struggle.

Three years and eight months after separating, my children still have not visited me in my home and the younger two still don't know I am gay. I have become the ultimate Disneyland Dad. We spend our weekends in motel rooms, eating out, playing in the parks, walking malls and hanging out in video arcades. They of course love it—no chores, someone else to make their beds, no dishes to clean after meals. For me it's become a pattern I accept, but one I am eager to move beyond. I want my children to see how

I really live and to understand that my gay life is not a fearful, horrid thing that I have to keep hidden. I want to spend time living with them as opposed to just being with them.

This Father's Day should be the last, or nearly the last weekend my visitation is spent this way. The day after Father's Day, my ex-wife and I have our final counseling session with the therapist to clear the way for me to come out to my sons, the first step in moving toward visitation in my home. On June 29, we meet with the children to tell them that Dad is gay; in August, they will come live with me for a month. To be very honest, I'm scared, very scared.

After I told my oldest son I was gay, he barely spoke to me for over a year. It was a very painful time for both of us. Our relationship had been very close—we were like buddies, spending lots of time together, talking, teasing and having fun. My coming out hurt him and made him angry. Although he now visits with me and is willing to spend time going to movies or dinner together, we don't talk about my life. I'm afraid my younger sons will have similar reactions.

What does a 12-year-old know about homosexuality? Not very much, I think, particularly when they've been sheltered in a fundamental Christian home. I don't doubt that they have a playground knowledge of "faggot" and "queer" though. In their world, it's probably the worst insult you can heap on a classmate. Now their dad is going to tell them he's one. I can only hope that I've built the foundation of our relationships solid enough that they will survive this revelation.

The other day I asked my oldest son if he would attend the counseling session with the family when I tell his brothers that I'm gay. He said he would not, that he's been through it once and doesn't want to go through it again. It stirred up a lot of old garbage in me: thoughts I believed I had conquered, and feelings I thought I had worked out. Suddenly I felt again like I had done something terribly wrong by coming out. The further I get away from the agony of being a gay man trying to live a straight life, the harder it is to remember just how miserable I really was. I have to remind myself that I did not leave my wife and children because I stopped loving them, instead I came out and left because I wanted to stop hating me.

This year I cannot celebrate both gay pride and Father's Day together as a reminder of who I am as a whole person. Being gay and being a dad are still distinctly different in my life. I hope next year will be different.

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## transition

### IT'S OFFICIAL

Mary Ann Morache and Jennifer Marie Delao were joined in a commitment ceremony May 16, 1998. Both lesbian and Native American traditions were honored at the event, which was attended by 60 supporters. The Rev. Cher Big Bear Lions presided over the ceremony. Congratulations may be e-mailed to float@teleport.com.



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