

Bundles of Joy

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The couple plans on using the same sperm donor, a multilingual scientist at a prestigious university, to have another baby at the end of this year.

"As happy as we were before having Jake, I don't think it compares to the happiness we have since his birth," Gores says ecstatically. "It alters not only your whole life, but your whole being."

Gay Dads Having Kids

Without a womb to carry their offspring, gay men have to find help. Some will use friends, while others seek out paid surrogates. In either case, money becomes a major issue for most men.

For couples, the question of which partner will be the biological father is another issue to be worked through. New research being conducted in Oregon, however, may eliminate the need to choose just one to be the biological father.

Medical researchers in the Beaver State are experimenting with a technique that may someday allow same-sex couples to have a child genetically related to both partners. Scientists at the Oregon Regional Primate



Dan Dale (left) and Michael Byerley at the home they created for their three sons. Below: Dale and Byerley's three sons share a quiet moment.

Research Center plan to create a primate later this year that will carry the genes of three different parents. Two males will fertilize eggs, and the resulting embryos will be fused and implanted in the surrogate.

Although an increasing number of men are having children as single parents or with their

male partners, most gay dads are involved with raising their children from a previous heterosexual relationship.

After marriage, two children and a stint in the military, Michael Buonocore, 29, became a single gay dad. When he met his partner, Dean Sidwell, he decided to take several months to

slowly introduce his daughters to Sidwell. Eventually the two men combined households and continued having Buonocore's two young daughters visit three weekends a month. Buonocore says Sidwell is very involved with the children and a positive influence on his young daughters.

While divorce isn't easy for anyone, Buonocore expresses gratitude for the support he's experienced as he transitioned to his new life and the positive relationship he now has with his wife in raising their daughters.

"I'm grateful for the relationship I have with their mom," Buonocore says about his ex-wife, explaining that the only thing he'd change about his experience is to take away the pain that the divorce brought to his former wife.

While some gay dads share custody of their children with their former spouses, many only have court-ordered visitation.

According to an ACLU report, a vast majority of states no longer deny custody or visitation to a person based on sexual orientation. In theory, state agencies and courts now apply a "best interest of the child" standard to decide the cases.

In Oregon, sexual minorities are beginning to be certified for foster care and adoption in increasing numbers.

There are in excess of 500,000 children in foster care nationwide. (Oregon has over

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I Want Kids, Don't I?

BY JONATHAN KIPP

I am unsure of most things in my life. I question everything: my beliefs, dreams, relationships, values, morals and just about everything else. But I always knew I wanted to be a dad. I never questioned that. Living on the East Coast, West Coast, fat, thin, rich, poor, long

hair, short hair, single, married, happy or sad, kids were eventually going to be in my life. The question was not if, but when? And how?

My short marriage didn't produce any children. This is usually viewed as a blessing by those who know me, but I never really felt that way. I felt sad, like you do if you missed a great opportunity. Later it was obvious that single parenthood was not a viable option. I am way too, shall we say, "artistic" to support and care for children on my own. I want sane children, after all.

But I could never get past 90 days with the future-other-father of my children. Somehow, telling them on the third date that I wanted kids kind of set the stage for, well, the end. Year in and year out I never learned to keep that quiet. It was too important to me.

And then I met Eddie.

It wasn't that Eddie wanted kids. He didn't. But he didn't not want kids. There is a big difference. He was open to the idea.

After 18 months together we became foster parents. We agreed to do it "as an experiment" to see if we even liked being dads. Almost four years later, we've cared for seven boys (ages 9 to 17) day in and day out. Many have had severe emotional and psychiatric issues. We naively jumped in and just tried to do our best. Surprisingly, being gay has never been an issue. We are constantly ready for the issue to be raised, but nobody feels like indulging us.

The children have been very challenging, but it's dealing with the bureaucracies that is the source of the most frustration. Foster parenting has been incredibly rewarding and unbelievably stressful. But it has answered important questions for us, which was our goal. We liked being dads. We liked staying home more than not. We liked cooking for more than two. We



liked homework struggles and Friday night Monopoly games.

It became very clear that we wanted our own family. We wanted a family where caseworkers weren't telling us what to do with our kids and how to do it and how many milligrams of this and that the kid should take. We wanted the kind of family where we didn't have to get a permission slip to take our kids across state lines!

I've heard parents say, "You don't own your kids. They aren't chattel." I say those people have never been foster parents. We wanted our own kids. We wanted to be able to hug and snuggle with them and to send them to the school of our choice. We wanted to raise our kids without ever hearing or using the word *appropriate* or *inappropriate* ever again. We wanted to be regular parents.

After researching and Net surfing, we went to an attorney to get the lowdown on adoption. I was adopted at birth and felt I knew a lot about it. But I was really unsure if two men could adopt a baby in Oregon. Our lawyer said other same-sex couples had done it.

So we signed up and started the process to adopt. The lawyer also mentioned the possibility of surrogacy. We could have our own biological child. We hadn't given much thought to that option. More questions to contemplate. This would cost us *only* \$35,000 to \$45,000!

So we got busy on that track, too. Internet ads, home study, papers to fill out, physical exams, criminal history checks, references, visits to the clinic for "donations," e-mails and more e-mails.

In response to our Internet ad, all these women were suddenly offering to have a baby for us. Every day we received

responses to our ad. They were from everywhere, but most were from California.

All this activity was exciting, but I suddenly was completely overwhelmed by it all and became paralyzed. And angry. Straight people don't have to go through this. It isn't fair!

For the first time in my life, I seriously questioned the one thing I'd been so sure of since I was a little kid. Did I want children? It is too hard and too expensive. And I really didn't like some of what I saw in myself as a father anyway. The foster kids seemed to push every button I had. Maybe I wasn't any good at being a dad. Maybe I should just enjoy Eddie, our dog and cats, our rehabbed Victorian on a tree-lined street, walks on the beach, sunny get-aways, dinner out. Maybe we should be like every-

one else.

And then I got the flu. Our weekend jaunt to Phoenix wasn't going to be sunny, but I went anyway. I sneezed and coughed and moaned and read Dan Savage's book, periodically looking out at the palm trees and wondering if this would be a destination for us in the future—part of our fabulous childless life.

I related to this author who, it turns out, adopted his son just blocks from our house in Portland. I could relate to every word. Thirty thousand feet in the air, nearing the last pages of *The Kid*, I was edging toward tears, so I slipped on my sunglasses. The glowing sunlight streaming in my window helped cast the mood. I closed the book after it's final word, and I had my moment.

Eddie sat next to me, tapping away at his laptop. He rarely questions anything after he makes a decision. He doesn't over-analyze and talk himself out of things he wants. I admire him for that. He glanced at me, reached over and patted my leg. We were going to have a baby. We both knew it.

We are back to the papers and e-mails and the nonstop discussions now. We've since found a wonderful surrogate, arranged to have one of our friends donate eggs, and a physician to pull off the magic of making our little boy or girl. A year from now we could be fathers. I frequently find myself daydreaming about what it will be like at home with the baby.

I admit I still find myself questioning things. But now it's different. Should we move? Public or private school? Circumcision? Baptism? Godparents? Soy formula or regular?

I can do this, can't I? I deserve this, don't I?