

PARENTS TALK BACK

When gay parents are equal, too

Case Flatley is chipping away at a gray block of crumbly plaster using a toothpick-sized stick with a flattened edge.

The 5-year-old stops to brush away the dust and rubble, peering at the indentation in the brick. He's digging for dinosaur bones — a triceratops, to be exact.

He's focused, but carries on a casual conversation with his dad, David Cossa, sitting next to him at their home in St. Peters, Missouri.

“Can we have pie?”

“Why do you want pie? You still have Easter candy,” Cossa, 29, asks.

“No,” Case clarifies. “Pie for dinner.”

His other dad, Bryan Buffa, 37, is a pastry chef, so perhaps the request is not outside the realm of possibility.

No one is having pie for dinner.

Buffa has known Case since he was born.

He remembers when Case was 3 and his biological father, Buffa's cousin, died after struggling with addiction. Case had lived with his maternal great-uncle and aunt until Child Protective Services intervened.

By that time, Buffa and Cossa had been together for a couple of years. They knew they wanted a family. They decided to become licensed as foster parents so they could take care of Case, with the hope of adopting him.

It was a drawn-out process. They had background checks and classes and home visits and detailed paperwork. But they were committed to being ready when the call came.

The phone rang on a Friday in November of 2012.

“We are concerned for his safety,” the social worker said to Buffa. “Can you take him for the weekend?”

Buffa didn't hesitate: Absolutely.

Case carried a bag of clothes with him and an old silk shirt he used as a blanket. At first, he asked a lot about Maw Maw and Paw Paw. Buffa told him he was going to stay with them until the judge made a decision about where he would live.

For the next year and a half, Buffa and Cossa went to court hearings, filed more paperwork and dealt with a rotating door of state workers. They felt like their lives were under a microscope. In September of 2013, they got legally married in Iowa, where gay marriage is recognized, and had a wedding in St. Louis.

Case was the ring bearer.

Almost nine months later, a judge terminated Case's biological mother's parental rights. The adoption was scheduled for five months later. They were finally nearing the finish line, although there were worries that gnawed at Cossa.

Only Buffa's name would be on the adoption certificate because their marriage wasn't recognized in Missouri. They planned to petition six months later to add Cossa's name as a legal parent.

“During the adoption process, there were some days when I felt left out,” Cossa said. “I was doing all the same work Bryan was. I was just afraid with his name on everything, if something were to happen, (Case) wasn't my child. I had no rights over him.”

He had been living with Case for two years and taking care of him while working, just as his partner had.

“He's my child, and I deserve those rights just as any father does,” he said.

He worried what could happen if a cop stopped them and didn't believe Case was his son. Or what if there was a medical emergency — would he be allowed to even see his child in the hospital?

He wasn't going to be an official father, even after traveling this long road to become official.

Then, two weeks before their adoption hearing, a Kansas City judge ruled that marriages of Missouri gay couples wed in states or countries where such relationships are legally recognized must be honored here, as well. A later ruling in St. Louis found Missouri's ban on same-sex marriage to be unconstitutional.

As soon as the couple heard about the ruling, they called every state worker involved in their case to see if both their names could be on the adoption record.

A week before the adoption, their request was approved.

On Nov. 5, 2014, they took Case with them to the St. Louis County Courthouse.

The had explained to Case the night before that a judge was going to sign a paper and make it official.

“You're going to be our son forever and always,” they told him.

The proceeding took less than 15 minutes. They both felt an overwhelming sense of relief.

“It was a relief to know he was going to be safe with me,” Buffa said. He said he felt his cousin's spirit with him in the courthouse. “We were going to give him all the things his dad wasn't able to give him.”

Cossa said he felt assured.

“Now you know they can't take him away from us,” he said. “I used to go into his room and pray by his bed. I'd ask God to watch over him and keep him safe.”

Buffa said every time Case calls him “Dad,” it melts his heart.

On this ordinary day at their kitchen table, working on his dinosaur excavation set with his parents, Case is persistently chiseling, scraping and hammering away at that chunk of rock. It seemed immovable when he started half an hour ago.

He pauses and wipes his hand across his forehead. It's a little harder than it looked when he started. But he's as persistent as his parents. And just as the foundation of their family emerged gradually, he starts to see an outline emerging in the plaster.

“I found a bone!” he says. “Daddy! Look, I found some bones!”

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AISHA SULTAN
Parents talk back

Just what the cat needs: a hat

By JENNIFER FORKER
Associated Press

It's not enough to knit sweaters for our children and grandchildren — no. Dexterous fingers need more. They need to knit something smaller, faster: They need to knit hats for cats.

What started as a lark — and to honor the grandmother who taught her to knit — has turned into steady work for Sara Thomas, author of “Cats in Hats: 30 Knit and Crochet Patterns for Your Kitty” (Running Press, March 2015).

Thomas hopes the book, with quick knitting and crochet patterns for a dinosaur, chicken, bunny, turkey, cupcake, extraterrestrial, banana, Santa, elf, lion, baby bear and more, will free up time so she can knit and crochet something else.

“As much as I love the cat hat, I do want to do other things,” admits Thomas, of Nashville, Tennessee.

In 2009, Thomas launched her Etsy shop, Scooter Knits, with disparate handmade items, including one hand-knit kitty hat, which quickly sold.

She's been crocheting tiny hats for feline companions ever since. In 2012, her biggest hat-selling year, that was 300 kitty chapeaus (the holiday hats sell best). Thomas sometimes crocheted until 4 a.m. to fill the orders.

Hannah Milman, editorial director of crafts at Martha Stewart Living, isn't surprised. “People love their pets — it's



This photo provided by Running Press and Quarto, Inc., shows Dinosaur from the book “Cats in Hats,” published by Running Press. The book released on March 24, 2015.

‘the new baby.’ So it's no wonder people want to create personalized, wearable gifts for their pets,” Milman says. “A large part of it is also social media Who doesn't love seeing cats or dogs on Instagram in cute homemade outfits or accessories?”

At least one of the patterns in the book — the Happy Birthday Cat Hat pattern — is free at

Thomas' blog.

Her two cats, Dorothy and Sinclair, are first to try out her admittedly kitschy creations. Dorothy has proven agreeable, but not Sinclair.

“Sinclair does not enjoy modeling the hats ... in fact, he likes to attack them,” says Thomas.

A patterns book of hats for dogs isn't out of the question.

And Thomas also would like to rework her grandmother's vintage patterns for a book: “She was a beautiful knitter who grew up in Germany, so I'd want to make the patterns era-appropriate.”

But first? She'll probably embark on a holiday-themed book that puts more cats in outlandish hats. She has learned that hats for cats sell.

OUT OF THE VAULT

Pendleton drone industry began with local hobbyist



RENEE STRUTHERS
Out of the vault

Pendleton is home to one of Oregon state's new UAV test sites, and the drone industry here is gearing up in a big way. But Pendleton's involvement in military drone technology started 13 years ago, thanks to a local resident. A Pendleton hobbyist who started building remote-controlled planes in 1992 was recruited by the U.S. Navy following the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks to research and develop UAVs — unmanned aerial vehicles — to attack and spy on enemies of the U.S.

Jim Conachen was building remote-controlled planes for a living out of his garage when the September 11 attacks nudged him to approach the

armed forces with an offer to build a remote-controlled attack plane. He was contracted to develop three UAVs: a target plane, a surveillance unit and a strike unit. The military in 2002 didn't have experience with robotic or remote-controlled vehicles, and turned to hobbyists like Conachen for help. Conachen joked that the military didn't even know there were jet-powered remote-control planes that could travel as fast as 300

miles per hour. “They were playing catch up ... they were so far behind us it wasn't funny,” Conachen added.

The target plane, made of fiberglass, was designed to travel 150 miles per hour — at least, until shot down by Navy stinger missiles. He was reluctant to discuss the other two planes he was developing for fear a competitor would steal his ideas, but he said both would have stealth capabilities. He added that his surveillance planes would be used for border control. His contract with the Navy was about 300 drones per year, but there was a chance he would be making up to 1,000 strike planes annually. He was planning a move from his

garage to a larger space, and hiring more help.

Conachen, a veteran who served in the Army with anti-terror units in the Middle East from 1978 to 1984, also was a licensed pilot and would fly “anything.”

Conachen Aviation is still in business, building custom UAVs for private and corporate customers. The main office is located in Spokane, Wash., with a hangar is located outside Sandpoint, Idaho.

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Renee Struthers is the Community Records Editor for the East Oregonian. See the complete collection of Out of the Vault columns at eovault.blogspot.com

Dog behind wheel of runaway vehicle causes scare

LONDON (AP) — Don the Sheepdog might want to learn a new trick: applying the brakes.

The border collie inspired a traffic scare and social media gold after he plunged down a hill and onto a highway in his master's vehicle.

Wednesday's incident near Abington, Scotland, began when farmer Tom Hamilton left Don sitting in his utility vehicle as he inspected lambs. He insists the parking brake was on.

Not strongly enough. The vehicle rolled through a fence, down a steep hill and across the M74 motorway, missing other vehicles and hitting a security barrier. Onlookers presumed the dog was driving, and that inspired an online joke-fest.

Some wondered if police had collared Don and put him in the doghouse, whether he was licensed to drive, or might have been barking mad.

Woman gets 3-7 years for bacon-less burger shooting

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — A Michigan woman has been sentenced to three to seven years in prison for opening fire at a McDonald's restaurant after workers twice failed to put bacon on her burgers.

Authorities say 30-year-old Shaneka Torres became angry in February 2014 when the first burger she ordered at the restaurant's drive-up station was missing bacon. She was offered a free meal, but bacon also wasn't added to a second burger order.

Police say she fired a shot through the restaurant. No one



Danny Lawson/PA via AP

Don the dog at Kirkton Farm in Abington, Scotland caused tailbacks on a busy motorway Wednesday. The border collie inspired a traffic scare and social media gold after he plunged down a hill and onto a highway in his master's vehicle.

was injured.

A Kent County Circuit Court jury convicted her March 25. Judge Paul Sullivan on Tuesday sentenced her to one to five years for shooting at a building, plus two years for possessing a firearm during a felony.

Torres says she's sorry “but it's over and done with.”

Missing wedding ring found in poop, returned to owner

SITKA, Alaska (AP) — An Alaska woman suspected her family's dog snatched her wedding ring, but she couldn't find proof — until the diamond-encrusted platinum band turned up months later at a local ball field.

Nikki Balovich lost her ring in January, when she was pregnant and often took it off her swollen finger, the *Daily Sitka Sentinel* newspaper reported.

The Sitka woman suspected Halli was the culprit because the 90-pound mastiff puppy often carries household items in its mouth. She spent

time searching for the band, including checking Halli's poop outside.

“I gave up, I thought it was long gone,” she said. “We take the dog everywhere with us, on hikes, on the boat — what were the chances we're going to find it?”

Balovich had no evidence of the dog's involvement until last week, when she saw a post on a Facebook sales site about a ring being found in an “unusual place.”

Balovich had a gut feeling and contacted the poster, Bob Potrzuski.

Turns out, his wife found the ring while picking up dog poop at a local ball field. Balovich also recently volunteered at the field, and brought along Halli.

Potrzuski and his wife previously tried unsuccessfully to find the owner by putting an ad in the *Sentinel*. They also called police.

Balovich was reunited with her ring on Thursday, her husband's birthday.

“It's been on my hands ever since,” she said. “My hand was feeling naked without it.”

Woman eats three steak dinners in 20 minutes in Texas

AMARILLO, Texas (AP) — A competitive eater has conquered three 72-ounce steak dinners in about 20 minutes during a food challenge held at a restaurant in Amarillo, Texas.

Dozens of people gathered outside The Big Texan Steak Ranch on Sunday afternoon to watch Molly Schuyler eat the steaks, plus three baked potatoes, three shrimp cocktails, three salads and three rolls.

Schuyler finished her first steak dinner in 4 minutes and 18 seconds, which beats the restaurant's record of 4 minutes and 58 seconds, which she set last May.

She told the *Amarillo Globe-News* that she had to turn down a fourth steak, because she was sick of the taste and not because she was full.

Driver cruises for miles with man on hood after fight

PITTSBURGH (AP) — State police say a Pittsburgh man drove for several miles through seven communities with another man clinging to the hood of his vehicle after an argument.

The driver, 46-year-old Dwayne Harvard, is charged with aggravated assault and other crimes after the Sunday night incident. He tells local TV reporters he was just defending himself and called 911 while driving with the man still hanging on.

Harvard and his girlfriend say the man had a knife. Harvard also says he was afraid the man might shoot him if he stopped driving.

The other man hasn't been charged.