

Family Matters

A Time of Reflection

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I am writing this column on a beautiful spring morning in 2007, and thinking about the changes in our LGBT family and parenting communities over the past two decades. Perhaps it is a strange way to inaugurate a new column by reflecting on the past, but as I have been contemplating the development of this column on LGBT family issues I have been thinking about how far we have traveled in the past twenty years. Professionally, it has been a time of enormous change for LGBT families. Backed by solid research, academically and clinically we have established a field of study that grows increasingly more complex and diverse and is now reflected in changing laws and policies protecting LGBT families.

Although the political arguments about our families continue, even our most conservative opponents cannot deny the existence of LGBT-headed households. Their argument is no longer “can” or “should” LGBT have families, since it is obvious that we *can*, and *will*, and *do*. They may try to influence what is taught in schools, and try to block our integration into the lives of mainstream cultures, but like those still flying the Confederate flag, they surely must recognize that the tide has turned against them; they have become a minority voice as more and more communities welcome our families.

It is a time of personal reflection for me, as well, as I mark some significant milestones in my own life: This year I will be celebrating my 50th birthday; it has been 20 years since I received my MSW; my oldest baby is graduating from elementary school; and my youngest is completing first grade. I find myself casually saying things to students and friends that sound like this: “Twenty-five years ago ...,” “Oh, I’ve known her for nearly thirty years now ...” and “Back in the day ...”

Back in the day, simply put, LGBT people did not have “families,” at least not in the way we speak about families today. We were not out as queer professionals, and did not have journals dedicated to the therapeutic and research needs of our families. When I was an MSW student, there was one journal that addressed gay issues — *The Journal of Homosexuality*, a title that sounds strangely quaint now — and it was kept under lock and key, at my University library. In order to peruse a copy, I had to walk up to the reference librarian’s desk, and specifically ask for an issue. This meant I had to say the word “homosexuality,” which inevitably made the librarian’s eyebrow cock upward. Since only one volume was allowed to be removed from the shelf at a time, the librarian would then ask me which specific issue I wanted to read. “May I have volume 2, issue 1,” please, I would politely ask, and each time the word homosexuality rolled off my tongue with greater ease.

Queer scholarship in those days was about proving that gay people were pretty much just like regular people without any major psychopathologies, except, of course, that we were oppressed, discriminated, and under constant societal condemnation. The word queer, was still an insult, not an identity or an academic discipline. Bisexuals and transgender people were invisible in the literature, and lesbians were still mostly a subset

category under the umbrella of “gay” identity, and assumed to be some mirror image of gay men in hiking boots. I devoured all the gay research I could find, hungry to read all I could about gay people, gay couples, and gay therapy. All these years later, the titles of some of those seminal articles are still embedded in my mind (“lesbian-client/lesbian therapist” -- what a mind-boggling concept that was in mid-80s!).

Back in the day, gay men and lesbians simply did not have children; viewed as sexual perverts, the last thing we wanted was to be publicly seen expressing an interest in children. If we did have children, they had most likely been produced in some previous heterosexual encounter, and if they wanted to actively parent and retain custody of our children, gay parents kept their homosexuality carefully closeted. We did this partially to protect our rights to our children, and partially to protect our children from the “gay lifestyle.” The issue is not just that they thought we shouldn’t have children, but that most of us suspected they were right.

It’s hard to understand nearly 40 years post-Stonewall how LGBT people internalized the worldview that we did not have a right to have families of our own. In the mid-80s (e.g. in the last century), I was working at an in-patient addiction recovery program and interviewed a new admission. He was a man in his early 50s, who, once he was assured of his confidentiality, told me he lived with another man, and they had been together for 25 years. They owned a home together and a business. Yet, when he wrote down his contact information on the admission forms (“Who should we contact if there is an emergency?”), he listed his 86 year old mother who lived in another state, and with whom he had little contact since young adulthood; after all, she was his “next of kin.” When I gently suggested that “his partner” was his next of kin, his family, he looked askance at me and said he had “never thought of him in that way.”

This was the world in which I decided as a single out lesbian to become a mother. I was recently interviewed for an article in the *Village Voice*, and although the reporter stated she wanted my expertise on gay parenting, she really just wanted to know about my personal history of becoming a parent. She kept asking me questions about “when” I first decided to have children, or “what year I first began trying to get pregnant.” As kindly as I could I said, “I tried to get pregnant for over ten years, and my oldest son is eleven; we are talking about things that happened nearly a ¼-century ago; I just don’t remember all the details.” “Oh,” she said, with a voice inflection suggesting she was likely still in diapers on that unknown day in prehistory when I decided to be parent.

I have to accept that the 1980s are ancient history to many people who are now functioning adults in their own right. Indeed, had I become pregnant when I first began this journey, my baby could now be old enough to work for the *Village Voice* and interview me for an article on the good old days. I also know that some of you reading this article were the authors of those early articles in the *Journal of Homosexuality*, and to whom I’m a still a young whippersnapper, a neophyte, still in the early days of my career.

There are two careers here, living side-by-side, entwined into one another, on which I am reflecting: my professional career as an out lesbian therapist, a specialist in LGBT family therapy, and my “career” as a lesbian mom, a parent, my personal daily experience parenting my beloved children.

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The last ten years flew by, as everyone told me they would, and I really can easily imagine that in the blink of an eye, my boys will be out the door, on their own, making their way in the world. I was cuddling with my 11 year old (yes, we still do that) a few weeks before my last birthday, and he proudly said, “Momma, you are going to be 59 years old.”

I smiled, “49, dear, just 49.”

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said, I am quite positive about that.”

I paused.

“When I am 59, my love, you will be 21 years old.”

His eyes grew big and wide and that ear-to-ear grin on his took over his startled face. All he could say was “Wow!”

Wow, indeed! For him, the thought of being 21 years old symbolizes freedom, maturity, and independence. For me, it is a harsh reminder of all the things we haven’t done together yet, all the conversations we need to have before I feel like I can launch him into the world prepared and confident. I make another mental note to myself: Talk more to the children about God and AID’s.

For all us, whether or not we are parents, children’s growth is a marker of time. We have all had the experience of being shocked by the age, or size, of a child. It could be a neighbor, or a friend’s child, but suddenly you find yourself saying those dreaded words from your own childhood, “Wow, have you grown up! How old are you now?”

I recently became reacquainted with an old friend. I knew she had a son a few years older than my eldest. I said to her, “Wow, your boy must be post-bar mitzvah already.” She said, “He has his own apartment.” We met my children’s old childcare teacher at the Gay Pride parade and she wept when she saw my children, and muttered, “I’m getting old; I’m getting old,” over and over again. I recently heard my 11-year old say, a very grown up voice “Look how big you are!” to five year-old child. He remembers vividly when that child was born, who is now standing there demanding a piggy-back ride.

My older son is way past piggy-back rides from anyone besides an NFL quarterback although he is still a few years from having his own apartment. He stands nearly 6 inches taller than me now (some of you who know me may be muttering, “Well, that’s not so hard,” since I am only 4’10”, but he towers over most of the students in his school, including the Middle Schoolers, and many of the teachers). He leans his elbow on my shoulder, and bends way down to kiss me. (Yes, he still kisses me, hello and good-bye in public, and refuses to go to bed without his nightly kiss.) I once had a dream when he was a small baby: I was putting something in the trunk of my car when this tall brown boy leaned in over my head to help me. I remember in the dream thinking, “Oh, it’s you, my son, that’s who you will be.” I woke up and here we are.

Summer is nearly upon us, with plans to travel, to go to camp, to go swimming, and, oh yeah, to engage in intimate conversations about God and AIDs. Last year my entire summer consisted of three things: making a list of the activities I wanted to do with the children, putting away the winter gloves around mid-August, and buying school supplies. Boom, another summer of their childhood raced past me! When I was a child, summers went on forever. Summer mornings were long and lazy, with the blue skies and diffused light in my window. My kids say their summers feel that way to them, endless,

as if it is really years, not just weeks. I am relieved because for me, it seems I went from changing their diapers to preparing them for their bar mitvahs over what seemed like a long weekend.

I picked up my son at a friend's house the other day. As I waited for them to find him (a curious thing in itself), I noticed a frayed piece of paper on their bulletin board, poking out from under other papers. It was a list, with each child's name, and each parent's also, and under the name, bulleted, were the things they wanted to do over the summer. It was impressive, and looked a lot like the list I have on my bulletin board. It included things like gardening, going to the library, hiking, picking strawberries, fishing, archery, and bowling. I think the list was from last summer and I suspect they were trying to just recycle it forward to the coming summer. It relieves me to know I'm not alone, that it is not simply bad planning, or worse, bad parenting, but simply, the intensity of life speeding past us.

In the early years of parenting I read every parenting book and magazine I could find, and each author repeated that children grow up quickly and admonished the reader to not worry so much about the dishes and the laundry but spend time more on the floor crawling around with the babies, playing in the backyard with the kindergarteners, and even watching television with the pre-teens. I remember wondering why they needed to repeat that so much; surely all of us who wanted children knew that, indeed that was precisely why we had children. We wanted to spend our time connected to them, engaging with them, sharing intimate time together, not washing dishes or doing laundry.

I envisioned hours of coloring together, taking long walks, and building Lego towers. I had imagined a fun home, filled with laughter, and toys, and creative projects. We would read poetry, plant flowers, and learn together about astronomy or geology or Sex Ed. I knew I would never worry much about things like children with chocolate smudged on their faces, or rooms with toys strewn about.

However, what I've learned from the vantage point of ten-plus years of parenting is that children with chocolate on their faces often have it on their hands too, and therefore it is also on the walls, counters, toilet paper, schoolbooks, and checkbook. The chocolate wrapper that was left on the floor when the chocolate on their faces was first consumed becomes a homing device for all the ants in the neighborhood.

The toys strewn about on the floor are often broken, sometimes with sharp edges that indiscriminately cut both tender baby skin and thicker, more leathery adult skin. Blood stains.

I didn't know that homes filled with laughter often meant that parents were the butt of the jokes, literally. My younger son has referred to me as "Ms. Butt-Fanny," and then collapsed on the floor amid peels of laughter; any attempts on my part to discuss issues of the respectful way to talk to parents seem to just reinforce the pejorative title. I take comfort that he at least referred to me as "Ms."

I remember thinking: I would love to spend hours playing with finger paints with my children. All you need is newspaper to cover the floor, some old clothes, and how messy could it be? But when my son stuck his head into the blue paint and shook it, like a wet dog, it made me rethink the fun of painting indoors. I put the paint away on a high shelf and was therefore surprised four years later when his younger brother climbed onto the shelf and opened each plastic paint bottle and attempted to neatly pour the paint into

small circles just like they do in school. I luckily came into the room when the third bottle was running down the length of the living room.

I once heard a dad tell a story about how he used to go to visit his friends who had children and he'd see them jumping on the furniture, kicking their parents, throwing food on the floor and he'd think, "Why do they allow that?" Then he had children and said now he understood that they didn't "allow" it, they just hadn't figure out how to stop it. My therapist voice wants to say "yet," but it is a more hopeful voice than my experienced parent voice. Like dogs that hump, and cats that refuse to come when called, children do not simply do as they are told. Some actually do the opposite of what they are told, and some don't even care much if they get caught.

When my younger son was discovered eating a few pounds of Belgium chocolate (actually procured *in* Belgium), wrappers included, he didn't even stop eating it while I ran up the stairs, yelling, smoke coming out of my ears. He just sat there and chewed. My partner said that he consumed so much that, "if he were a dog, he'd be dead." When I screamed, "What were you thinking?" he explained, "Well," he said slowly, "I knew you would never let me eat it, so I thought what is the worst thing you were gonna do to me if I did?" What a great question? What was the worst thing I could do, legally that is?

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Let us say, that parenting is not the way I thought it would be, and I am not the parent I thought I would be. I love my children, adore them in fact, but I liked myself more before I was challenged to parent them.

If you will allow me to indulge for a minute, I'd like to review this past weekend with you. It started like this: I offered to drive my oldest son on a school field trip to a museum in another city. I kindly suggested that I could drive two friends, and we could stay later than his class and have dinner out. He was very excited about this and after a week of long, involved emails and phone conversations with the families of his friends, we were able to secure their permission. I try very hard not to diagnosis people outside of my office hours, but worried parents behave in ways that just beg for a diagnosis. After assuring them of my driving record, my rules about seat belt usage and my abhorrence of junk food, and writing down a list of cell phone numbers, including grandmothers, aunts, and their preferred choice of emergency rooms, they reluctantly agreed to let their children spend the afternoon with me.

My partner then announced she would have to work, and asked if I could I take the youngest with us. I know you've never met my youngest but the best we've come up to describe him is a mixture of Howie Mandell and Eddie Haskell (from *Leave it to Beaver*, remember Wally's friend who always said, "And that is a lovely lunch you are making, Mrs. Cleaver"). Just add a bit of laughing gas. He is a lovely person, caring towards animals, a talented musician, and a fierce warrior against injustice ("Give me back my pencil or I will slice your head off").

As expected, my oldest son's reaction to his younger brother coming was a long screech. ("Why does he screech like a girl, Momma?" "I don't know, dear; that's just the way he expresses himself.") He assures me that I have "ruined his life" by inviting his brother, and now there is simply no reason to go.

Right about then the phone rang. It as a desperate phone call from the mother of one of my youngest son's friends (who is made of pretty much the same stuff as my

youngest is, minus the laughing gas, add a Game Boy compulsion and serious food pickiness); apparently mom had a work crisis, and said, "I have no shame. I'm on my hands and knees. Could you take one of my kids for the weekend?" Her husband is in Japan working for five months (a likely story and one I will try to remember the next time I try to sneak out of here for a few *months*). She promised that when he comes home, she would return the favor of my taking her kid, by having *him* take my kids for a day (I admire chutzpah like that!). Since I like women on their hands and knees, I said, "Of course, what's one more." As I pulled out of the driveway, the news was reporting the mysterious death of a child on a school field trip, an ominous beginning.

I will spare you the details of the art museum ("And why would they call that art?"; "Is that his PENIS, hahaha."). The short hike to the waterfall we took afterwards only left one child sopping wet and one covered in mud. I also learned that most children are not accustomed to eating ethnic foods, and my children had a great time teaching the other kids all about Thai sauces, and the joys of eating sushi. The young child who is very picky eater discovered that he really likes Katsu in Ponzu sauce, and politely called the server over to say, "This sauce is delicious; may I please have some more?"

We returned the children home safely except for the one we were keeping for an overnight ("We have to go to bed already? We haven't done ANYTHING, today!"). In the morning they had a birthday party to attend. The family rented the entire movie theater so the kids got to watch *Shrek III* (mine for the second time), and eat cake for lunch. By the time I picked them up, they were out of their minds from hunger and exhaustion. My younger son was screaming for a play date ("We never do anything. Our lives are so boring. Your ruin everything. Now I will have to wait A WHOLE WEEK."); my older son was explaining to me that his school report that was due next week did not need any punctuation; he explained, "No one in my school uses that stuff anyway."

Now, this is where we must pause. I have read many, many parenting books. I teach Developmental Psychology for a living. I really do understand how to "talk so children will listen and listen so children will talk." I will often advise my clients how to say things to their children, and they will ask me for a pen and paper, so they can write down my profound, deftly-worded insights.

Somehow though in real life, all I want to do is yell something like, "You are so unappreciative and rude to me. I have spent the last 24 hours driving you and your friends around, and now you are mad at me that you have homework to do before you get to watch television." I want to use words they would have to black out in this journal and yet I know (from experience) that all they are hearing is an endless drone, like the mother lecturing in the old Peanut's comic strip: "wha-wha-wha-wha."

Sometimes in the supermarket I see parents yell at children, yank children by the arm, threaten them inanelly, "I will leave you in the store forever," and I think how ineffective, inappropriate, and sometimes bordering on abusive these parenting strategies are. Yet, I'd be a liar if I didn't say that, upon occasion, I've watched myself doing the same. I say "watched myself," because it is a bit of an out of body experience, usually when I'm overtired (did I ever mention that parenting is exhausting?), or God Forbid, ill. Illness is simply not allowed when you are a parent. If you are running a fever, have a headache, or are throwing up, children kind of look at you strangely, turn their music up higher, jump on the bed, leap onto your body and say, "Sorry, you don't feel well ... So, when's dinner?"

I really didn't think parenting would be like this. I'm not sure what I thought exactly, but it wasn't quite like this. Harry Chapin suddenly seems less like a distracted, distant father, and more like someone who knew that parenting was a losing battle and decided to just get his work done instead. What I mean is that being a good parent is really not so easy, and I say that as someone with relative educational and economic privileges, and skills in childhood development.

I remember, somewhere in my late 20s, realizing that I might never have it all together, so that if I wanted to become a parent, I would likely be an imperfect one. However, I really had no idea how bad it could get. I just realized the other day that my children may go off to college before I paint the bedroom (not theirs, mine!). The neat creative scrapbook of their childhood is a large messy box of mementos and intentions. If time is marching on, where exactly is it marching to?

We have an expression in our house. It's called "Another dollar in the therapy jar." It's our way of recognizing that we will make mistakes, or more likely we will do the very best we can and they will still think that we have done a lousy job. A friend once told me that as she was leaving Disneyworld one evening at 11 PM after arriving there when the gates opened in the morning, her son said, "So what are we doing next?" Our children are clearly deprived.

So there are things I think I do just fine (i.e., class trips, Disneyworld) that may not be recognized, and let's say there are things I have done that are more questionable. My younger one has been known to look at me, eyebrows raised, and say, "Do you think that's an appropriate way to behave as a parent."

I too used to have many opinions about all the things my mother did wrong while parenting me. Now I suspect she actually deserves an award for all the things she could have done much worse, for all the ways she modeled restraint. Unlike Mary Poppins, I am not Practically Perfect in most ways, and I have discovered more ways to be imperfect than I ever even imagine existed.

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When I first planned to have children I spent a lot of time thinking about having a child as an out lesbian-feminist. I thought deep questions about gender and how I felt about having sons after spending much of my young adult life excluding men from my life; the only thing I ever said to men for nearly a decade was "fill 'er up" -- perhaps that joke doesn't work any more in a self-service world? I worried about how my sons would survive schoolyard fights where their friends taunted them for having a lesbian mom who didn't shave her legs. I imagined long discussion at their schools about homophobia, and circle time with their friends explaining what it means to be gay. I knew that no one would let their kids sleep over my house.

None of the things I prepared for turned out to be the skills I needed. None of the things I was afraid would happen actually ended up happening. Then conversations we have about gender at my house more often involved demanding they aim into the toilet bowl. Their friends seem more concerned about whether we allow PG-13 movies and have newest video games, than where we sleep or whether we shave our legs. The "gay thing" doesn't much interest them at all, and being gay doesn't seem to make us an expert

on even the gay subject; they clearly know more about it than we do (“It’s not really like that now, Mom!” I am once again reminded.)

Did you notice in my story about this weekend’s field trip, not one parent seemed concerned that I was a lesbian. For the record, some of these parents are republicans; a number of them are quite religious. They are happy to have their children sleep at my house, glad to invite my kids to their parties; their concerns about me being responsible for their children mostly involves my driving record (note: they didn’t ask if I’ve ever been arrested for protesting at the Pentagon).

The skills I’ve needed, that I am sadly poorly prepared for, turned out to be 1950s housekeeping stuff. How do I get grass stains out of shorts? Do I “force” the kids to eat vegetables? How do I organize a seven year olds Birthday Party so that it is lots of fun, and very cheap? Do I let my 8 year old ride his bicycle across the street?

It seems strange that after so much hype about (maestro, sounds of eerie music in the background here, please) “gay parenting,” that it turns out not to be much different than straight parenting. Family life, for all its ups and downs, joys and sorrows, seems not so very queer after all.

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So daily parenting is not quite what I thought it would be, and to be honest, queer scholarship turned out to be a bit more tedious than I thought it would be. *The Journal of Homosexuality* turned out to not really be all that juicy when I finally read it years ago, issue by issue, under the penetrating gaze of the librarian. I mean it was interesting, compelling even, to a nascent queer scholar, but not racy by any meaning of that word. How sexy can articles be that examine the “variables related to the acquisition of a gay identity,” or how to “define sodomy in the seventeenth-century”? Although the only visuals were statistical charts, the librarian assured me that if the journals were left on the shelves they would be destroyed, and the “pictures would be ripped out of it.” I imagined hordes of homophobic college students roaming through the basement shelves seeking revenge on gay research by tearing out and burning Ven diagrams. To my knowledge no one has harmed the journals since they have come out and joined the other more mainstream journals, visible and out on the library shelves, and of course, their coming out has paved the way for even more radical journals, like the one you are holding in your hand.

Dan Savage once quipped that if the religious right wanted to put an end to gay sex then they should be more supportive of gay adoption, because nothing could influence the frequency or intensity of gay sexuality quicker than gay parenting. Of course, that’s really just a middle-age joke; surely ageing is a key variable in how parenting and family life impacts sexual frequency, whatever one’s sexual orientation (nod yes, please). Sounds like a good research project that I could read in bed at night while my beloved is in a deep exhausted slumber next to me.

Queer scholarship, LGBT family research, has expanded tremendously over the past 20 years (“My how you have grown!”). A brief look at the articles in this journal astounds me: What happens in a family when a sibling comes out; religiosity in gay couples, narrative therapy with transsexuals, domestic violence, and queer youth? We have come a very long journey in establishing the validity of our families, in developing (and receiving funding for) research that includes our families, and generating and

establishing treatment methods that apply to the unique dynamics of our families. It has, in many ways, been a long uphill battle reminiscent of Sisyphus. Yet, all these years later, students still ask the same questions, “Do you think it is okay for children to grow up a home with gay people?” “WHY would someone want to change their sex?”

But yet, despite the repetitiveness of the work, we continue expanding the field, broadening the research, and reaching more and more clinicians and communities with our advocacy. On my desk right now are three projects: I am writing an article to reexamine the role of gatekeeping in the WPATH Standards of Care; I am preparing a presentation on gender-variant children and youth for a American Family Therapy Academy’s annual meeting, and I am developing a training for the Human Rights Campaign for adoption professionals on working with gender-variant and transgender parents. Like my children, the field of LGBT family therapy is growing out the door! Once upon a time, I could say that I’d read almost every gay book and article that had been written; now the pile of unread books on my night stand threatens to fall and crush me in my sleep.

Nearly 40 years ago, my shame about being queer was overshadowed only by an even fiercer passion to behave in very queer ways; gay love was not a public thing in those days, and the need to hide my feelings was a near-full time job. The process of transforming my girlhood shame into an adult pride was formed over decades living on lesbian land, marching in gay pride parades, and embracing the early gay scholarship in *The Journal of Homosexuality*. The first time I took a woman’s hand while walking down the streets, or took out a lease on a one-bedroom apartment with another woman sporting a crew-cut and hiking boots, were acts of enormous courage. The first time I presented on a paper on lesbian alcoholism in a Social Work Policy course, or questioned why gay people were not included in research on health care disparities, I was scared, but acted brave. And each act of courage made me stronger.

I hope that we’ve paved a way for today’s queer youth that it is not fraught with quite as much shame, or demanding of quite as much courage. The research seems to verify this observation. Today there is a post-Stonewall generation that is gender-bent and confident in themselves and their rights, comfortable in their bodies in a way I could not have imagined.

I look at the famous picture of Barbara Gittings, who recently passed away, at the first March on Washington with her sign “Homosexuals Should Be Judged as Individuals.” None of us could’ve imagined in those days when a handful of homosexuals bravely marched in front of the White House that someday queer people would fill the streets of DC for miles, celebrating our pride. Eschewing heterosexual culture, who among us could’ve have foreseen that a gay marriage debate would be one of the top issues in national elections. Certainly, I could not have imagined having children who have two women’s names on their birth certificates. I have witnessed an amazing revolution in my own lifetime.

And there is no doubt that as the gay liberation movement is closing in on its 40th year since Stonewall, we have left behind Erickson’s stage of *Identity versus Role Confusion* and are passing through *Intimacy versus Isolation*, and on our way to *Generativity versus Stagnation*. We have gone from being isolated people demanding a right to have an identity, to a community of people demanding health insurance for our loved ones, and safe schools for our children. I am not suggesting that, of course,

individual people are not still coming out and struggling with identity issues, or that all of us do not continue to negotiate the terrain of intimacy. I mean that our *movement*, the queer-alphabet soup of LGBTQQI, is a movement that is not a stage, or a phase, but queer liberation has left a permanent impact on the world in which we live.

We have done that, in part, by demanding our rights to have family: to have our spouses and children recognized and seen as our family. Even the religious right who decry our “lifestyles,” denounce our families and decree them inferior, can no longer deny what is obvious: we *are* family. They try to destroy us by criticizing our families, but in that they are actually validating our very existence. I cannot help but smile as I watch the plastic smiles on the faces of conservatives families forced to recognize that the Vice President’s lesbian daughter is parenting her son with her partner; methinks the tide has changed. For better or worse, I am a radical lesbian mother who spends way too much time doing laundry and dishes, and wiping chocolate off of hands before they wind up smudging the latest issue of *The Journal of Homosexuality*, which is sitting out on the coffee table, waiting for a free moment of my attention.

I was recently asked to keynote the social work graduation of the University where I graduated 20 years ago, and where I have taught on the adjunct faculty for the past 18 years. As a student at the school, I mercilessly confronted homophobia, a kind of one-woman band, disrupting classes and challenging liberal heterosexism <bang> <smash> <boom>. Everyone was shocked when I was hired to teach there, and my queer activism was a source of continuously discomfort, for me battling the shame and confusion of being an out lesbian professor, and for them, perhaps hoping I might finally lose the battle.

Over the years, my family therapy practice specializing in LGBT therapy has grown (“What does the T mean?” one professor asked me); I have published books and articles, which, of course, in academia where one publishes or dies, means I am fast becoming immortal. It has been a long process making a place for LGBT therapy within the hallowed halls of academe. It was an honor for me to be asked to speak at graduation, and quite a moment of pride to hear the Dean introduce me by identifying my pioneering work with sexual minority clients, and mentioning my partner and my children as “part of the extended family of our school.” It’s not quite tenure, but it felt like my queer self just won some kind of Stonewall Award.

Reflecting on the past two decades of scholarship and diapers, I find myself pleased at all we’ve accomplished. As our children grow up and out into the world, they become a kind of living document of how boringly normal our families really are. When our children withdraw the money from their therapy jar in the years to come, they may complain about many things and find fault with their families as all grown children do, but I suspect that being raised by radical dykes will not be high on their list of issues; as my son says, “It’s just not like that anymore, Mom.”