

Gay Parent

LGBTQ

July-August 2022 | Issue #143

gayparentmag.com

NEW BOOKS
'T WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE PRIDE & ALL MOMS

FAMILY VACATIONING
with Aubree Calvin
SCOOCHIE & SKIDDLES
Author Tom Tracy

MULLINS FAMILY of TEXAS

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Cover photo courtesy of Octavia Mullins. Photos this page, top to bottom, photo courtesy of Rory Kealohi, Tom Tracy, Octavia Mullins, and Aubree Calvin.



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Family photo share from Brandi Bishop



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A glittering celebration of queer families puts Pride gently in perspective—honoring those in the LGBTQ+ community who fought against injustice and inequality.

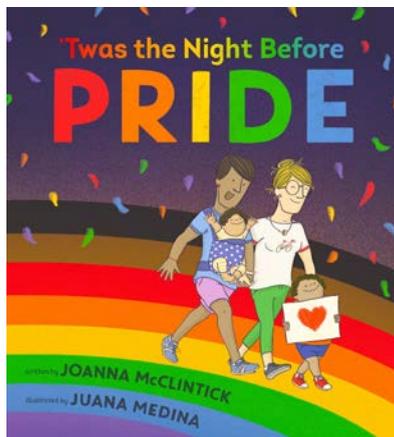
*Pride's a day that means
"Together, we are strong!"*

'Twas the Night Before Pride
By Joanna McClintick
Illustrated by Juana Medina

This joyful picture-book homage to a day of community and inclusion—and to the joys of anticipation—is also a comprehensive history. With bright, buoyant illustrations and lyrical, age-appropriate rhyme modeled on “’Twas the Night Before Christmas,” it tackles difficult content such as the Stonewall Riots and the AIDS marches. On the night before Pride, families everywhere are preparing to partake. As one family packs snacks and makes

NEW BOOKS

signs, an older sibling shares the importance of the march with the newest member of the family. Reflecting on the day, the siblings agree that the best thing about Pride is getting



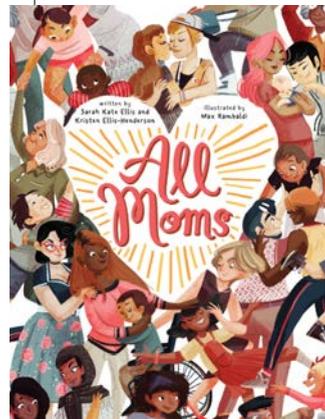
to be yourself. Debut author Joanna McClintick and Pura Belpré Award-winning author-illustrator Juana Medina create a new classic that pays homage to the beauty of

families of all compositions—and of all-inclusive love.

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All Moms
By Sarah Kate Ellis
and Kristen Ellis-Henderson
Illustrated by Max Rambaldi

"All Moms is such a special and important book for young readers, because more than ever, it's key that we teach our children to have love and compassion for others. This book re-



minds kids and families that all moms are superheroes, no matter how they look, what they do for work, or where they come from." - Melissa Etheridge, GRAMMY and Academy Award-winning singer-songwriter

Moms are amazing! The care, support, and love they give make us stronger, smarter, kinder, and happier. Every mom is unique and special, so celebrate them with this beautiful picture book written by the married team of Sarah Kate Ellis, the president and CEO of GLAAD, and musician Kristen Ellis-Henderson.

All Moms is a love letter to mommies. Moms make us laugh. Moms read us stories. Moms snuggle us when we're sad, and help us grow. Some moms are silly, some are sporty or crafty, but all moms are incredible. Moms can do anything!

Created in partnership with GLAAD, this inclusive picture book features and celebrates all different types of mommies and the amazing things they do.

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Lambs are born almost daily in January and February. In the spring, we have many baby animals residing at the farm. Kids of all ages enjoy helping with the cow and goat milking and collecting eggs for their breakfast. Helping to feed the animals, making butter, horse back riding and jumping in the hay are fun activities for everyone. When the ice is off the pond, the paddleboats and rowboats are put on the water for everyone to use. Our pond is a great place for fishing and boating. During the months of July and August, water-skiing is one of our most popular activities at our lake site about 20 minutes away. As soon as the weather is cold enough and there is snow, we offer supervised sledding, ice fishing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and ice-skating on either the pond or our man-made rink.

The indoor pool, whirlpool and sauna are open all year long, and the outdoor pools and tennis court are opened in mid-May. We have a children's recreation program that includes arts-n-crafts, story time, games on the lawn, friendship bracelet making, hair wraps, ice cream making, ping pong tournaments,



Guests at Inn at East Hill Farm can feed farm animals.

and more. Additional resort activities include volleyball and dodgeball games, shuffleboard, guided hikes of Gap Mountain and Grand Monadnock, and candle making. Evening activities include New England contra dancing, BINGO, magic show, a night walk with our resident naturalist, campfires, or dance parties.

The surrounding region of New Hampshire and southern Vermont is rich in historical and cultural sites and activities.



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Photos of guests having fun at Inn at East Hill Farm in New Hampshire.

There are many options for outdoor activities such as hiking, golf, biking, boating, snowmobiling, and horseback riding. Antique shops abound in almost every surrounding village. Covered bridges span many of our rivers and streams. Golf courses generally open in April and close in late October. Maple sap is harvested in March and syrup producers are boiling to create the sweet delicacy that is maple syrup. Apples are picked in September for eating, pressing into cider, and baking in pies.

The relaxed country atmosphere with our cozy rooms, home-cooked meals, and breathtaking views of Mt. Monadnock, create a unique setting. We would be happy to host your family vacation, family reunion, Bar or Bat Mitzvah, meeting, conference, or holiday gathering. East Hill Farm is the place for your farmtastic family vacation!

Visit www.east-hill-farm.com for more information. ▼

Photos courtesy of Inn at East Hill Farm

African Queen Travel for LGBTQ Families

By Dane Miller

Carla Smith is the owner and operator of African Queen Travel, an all inclusive travel agency offering excursions to South Africa catering to the LGBTQ community. Carla is exceptionally qualified to offer these services, as she comes from a South African family whose legacy is steeped in the hotel business.



African Queen Travel offers a 10 Night Study on Safari Family Tour exclusively for LGBTQ parents and their children scheduled for March 2023.

In 1927, her great grandparents opened their first of many hotels in the western Cape. In the late 60's they opened their first hotel in Cape Town called the Silver Sands Hotel, now called the Premier Hotel on 1 Marais Road. Carla's parents owned and managed three hotels of their own as well while she was growing

up in Cape Town.

In the 1980's, her grandparents, mother, and sister immigrated to San Diego, California when she was 14. Her father stayed in South Africa and went on to manage many Southern Sun Hotels including Cape Sun Hotel, Sun City, Presidents Hotel, The Mount Nelson Hotel, as well as opened, managed, and retired from the Westin Cape

Town. Her mother was a hotel manager in both Cape Town and La Jolla California. Her stepmom in Cape Town is currently a travel agent but worked in group sales for the Southern Sun Hotels as the group sales manager for 28 years. Her stepsister in Cape Town is currently the Brand Acquisition

WRITTEN BY JOANNA McCLINTICK ILLUSTRATED BY JUANA MEDINA

'Twas the Night Before PRIDE

A new favorite that pays homage to the beauty of families of all compositions and to all-inclusive love

"An affirming and kid-friendly history lesson."
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manager for Condé Nast South Africa/GQ.

While in California she lost contact with her father for 26 years but at the age of 37 he called her out of the blue and they reconnected. In the meantime she became a registered nurse in California and though she is currently a nurse, she plans to officially change careers at the end of the pandemic (hopefully June 10 2022 for her). She is grateful to have a job during Covid while many tour operators and others have suffered.

For the last 12 years, she has been organizing African Safari trips and tours for friends and family and always had a desire to own her own tour company to South Africa. After her most recent trip in September 2019, she decided she wanted to go on a lesbian group tour to South Africa. She called Olivia Travel and was quoted \$17,995 for a 10 day trip. She said she just about fell through the floor and decided that day to create African Queen Travel to offer unbelievable all inclusive tours for the



Photo from African Queen Travel's website.

LGBTQ community to South Africa at a reasonable price (\$15,000 for a family of up to four). South Africa was one of the first countries to legalize gay marriage so there's no need to upcharge the LGBTQ community for an unbelievable vacation.

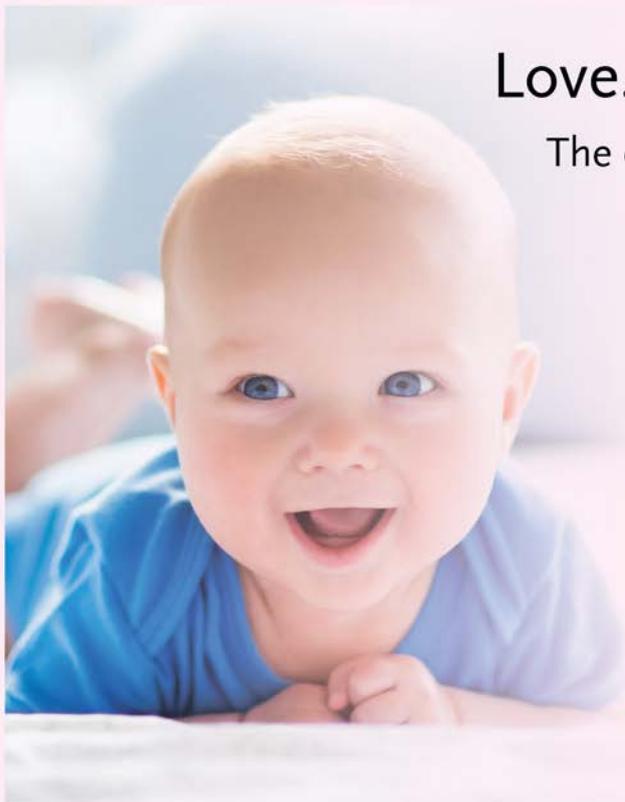
The 10 Night Study on Safari Family Tour is full of exciting activities for a family. She designed this trip based on parents wanting an amazing memorable experience, while also giving their kids a most memorable learning experience few can say they have.

According to Carla, in South Afri-

ca when you are in 7th and 8th grade, the school sends the entire student grade on a 3 day camp called "Study on Safari", where Carla says she stayed on a farm, learned about flowers and trees, and saw wildlife animals in their native habitat. It was her first experience with animals, and to this day she still remembers how much fun it was to learn about elephants and giraffes while looking at them. "The goal is to teach young adults about

animals, plants, rocks, and minerals, as South Africa produces 50 percent of the worlds gemstones," says Carla.

The 10 Night Study on Safari Family Tour also includes a visit to The Cradle of Humankind - known as being the place where some of the earliest ancestors of modern humans were born. The site of Nelson Mandela's imprisonment, Robben Island, is also included. The tour also includes colorful activity books and other exciting materials for children. The complete list of the highlights of the trip are on their website but the following are an exciting preview of



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Gods Window - named for its panoramic view it is known for its private game reserves and one of South Africa's main wildlife destinations.

Oudthoorn - known as the ostrich capital of the world and home to Cango Ostrich Farm.

Cango Caves - one of South Africa's most popular tourist caves with an extensive system of tunnels and chambers. Guided tours of the entrance and beginning areas of these tunnels are available to groups.

John Benn Boat Cruise - double decker floating restaurant offering lagoon tours to the Knysna Heads area.

Birds of Eden - the world's largest free flight aviary and bird sanctuary.

Jukana Wildlife Sanctuary - shelter for leopards, jaguars, and other big cats.

Cape Town

Table Mountain - a flat top mountain plateau overlooking Cape Town that visitors can hike to or take a cableway.

Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens - one of the best botanical gardens in the world; it was the first to place emphasis on the cultivation of indigenous plants.

The African Queen Travel tours also include a Seal Island cruise, seeing penguins at Boulders Beach, shark cage diving and whale watching.

At the time of this writing the next tour scheduled is in March 2023 but others will be offered if the interest is there. This is a tour designed exclusively for parents who are LB-GTQ and their children of all ages. There are other tours available for adults only and they will also organize private tours as well. The tour often includes travel to three countries so everyone is required to be vaccinated, have a negative Covid test and highly recommended to wear a mask while traveling.

Carla also has a US based resort area that you can check out on her website that also works with LGBTQ couples and families. She also offers Destination Weddings and has just entered a partnership with Men's Vows, opening up her destination weddings services to all LGBTQ couples.

Carla and African Queen Travel have the background, knowledge, and a lineage of experience going back generations to offer you what could be the trip of a lifetime. For more information visit www.africanqueenstravel.com. ▼

Photos courtesy of Carla Smith

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Adding A Little History to Your Family Vacation

By Aubree Calvin

My family has the travel itch. After the past few years of having to stay at home, we're ready to see more of the world. I'm always up for a good road trip, just as long as we all agree to share control of the music, and try to eat in as many local restaurants as possible. It's good to take a break from your everyday surroundings and get caught in a different city's traffic. Even a bad trip can help you appreciate your hometown.

I come from a road trip loving family. As a kid, my parents would load my older brother, younger sister, and me in the family van (full size, not mini) and we'd travel to some new part of the country. I'd be armed with my stack of books, our



The author, Aubree Calvin, on right with her wife, Victoria (left) and daughter Corinne (middle) on vacation in Disney World.

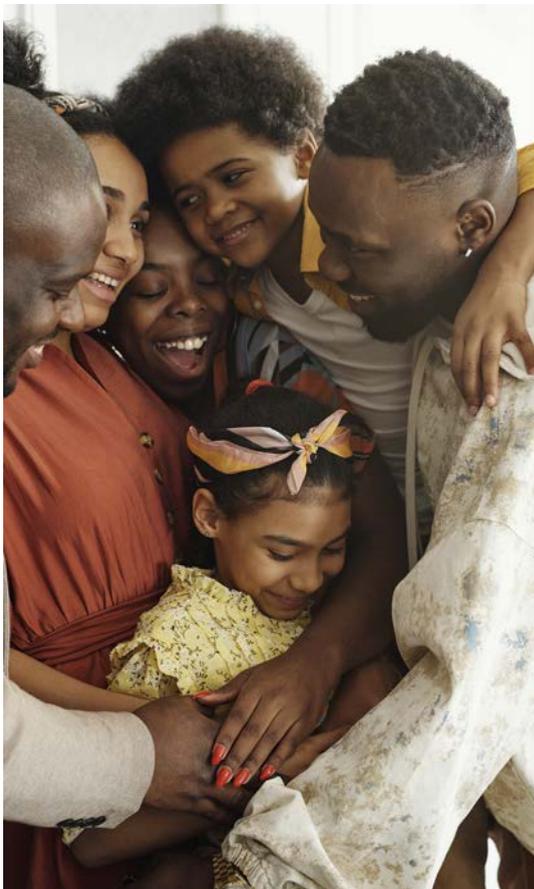
playing cards, mix tapes of 70s songs, and plenty of travel games. Mid-90s travel was different. My dad let me highlight our course in our Rand-McNally Road Atlas. My mom would load our cooler with fruits, snacks, and horribly flavored sparkling

waters. No cell phone with internet and Google Maps directions. No streaming videos. Not even a Game Boy. My siblings and I were forced to talk to each other for hours at a time. There would be the inevitable argument over something so trivial, I can't even begin to recall what they were about. California, Detroit, Niagara Falls, Wyoming, Oklahoma, we seemed to have driven everywhere.

These summer vacations are some of my best memories, and as a parent, I was excited to create

some new ones with my family. Corinne's (our daughter) first time seeing the ocean during our beach trip to South Carolina might be my new favorite vacation memory. A close second is her first time on an airplane going to Disney World. In my pre-teen years, I never knew that the magic of the family road trip required a lot of non-glamorous pre-trip planning. There's an endless checklist of hotel reservations, budgeting, activity logistics, packing. And don't forget to pause mail delivery. That pile of Amazon packages is a tempting target for your average porch thief. As a queer family, we've gotten used to taking a few extra precautions in our travel plans. I'm a Black trans woman with purple hair and multiple piercings, so I'm used to a certain degree of attention, but thankfully there has only been the rare run in with a stranger who questioned my use of the women's facilities.

When I started my medical transition almost a decade ago, we developed a travel rule of only stopping in towns that had a Starbucks, other indie coffee shop, or a Target, because that's where we were sure to get the least amount of restroom harassment. Now that I'm a bit more passable, I'm less concerned about what's in a stranger's head and am too old to be self-conscious about the occasional second look. We have kept the coffee shop rule, but that's because we're unashamed caffeine addicts.



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Sometimes the hardest part of the journey, whether it is a road trip or by flight, is just deciding where to go. Our family loves to infuse a little history in our trips. Maybe the desire to constantly absorb knowledge even when on vacation is a telltale sign that we're a homeschool family. Originally, I was going to create a list of LGBTQ+ historical places to include on your family vacation plans. But the list became long and cumbersome, and frankly, some historical landmarks aren't exactly kid friendly. Instead, I want to share five tips to add a queer element to your excursions.

1. Seek Local Bookstores

The indie bookstore is back! Locally owned bookstores are usually a great place to find non-mainstream queer books, zines, local history, and quirky accessories like bookmarks, clothing, and enamel pins. Most of the non-hetero reading that I want I can't find in Barnes and Noble, but my local store almost never lets me down. The staff is usually friendly, frequently in the community themselves, and have great recommendations on not only what to read, but also what to see and where to eat. Plus, books!

2. Read LGBTQ Weeklies

Local papers always have the pulse of any fun activities and queer owned restaurants. Fortunately for our digital age, they're all online, allowing you to peruse a few recent issues for upcoming happenings at your vacation spot.

3. Contact Local Historical Societies

I've come to believe that local history is always more fascinating than national stories. The Gay Rights Movement, much like Pride Parades, is more local than ever. And historical groups have risen to either dig up forgotten or suppressed LGBTQ history and to preserve the stories that we do know about. These groups typically have social media pages where they highlight interesting historical sites. They're also run by well-intentioned volunteers that you can message for local travel tips.

4. Follow Travel vlogs

Admittedly, this one is a little harder

to find. There aren't that many really well known travel vlogs in general, let alone those that cater to gay and lesbian families. But there are a few on YouTube and Instagram that can provide a more personal review of an area. Travel vlogs are particularly good for planning international trips where you might be more unsure about how safe your family would be.

5. Be Willing to Be Surprised.

Living in the south, I often hear remarks about how miserable I must be in such a repressive, conservative area. The same could be said about some of the Midwest or more rural parts of liberal states. While it might be hard sometimes, we have to remember that states are more than their politicians. Most people, no matter where they are, have a pleasant demeanor with a general live and let live vibe in everyday situations. So, take a chance and explore that state or country you swore you'd never set foot in. Of course stay safe, but allow yourself to be surprised.

If you're really looking for queer plac-

es to go, there are a bunch of top ten lists floating around. I can save you the Google Search. The usual list looks like a version of this: Orlando (or any Florida beach), Provincetown, Austin, San Francisco, Palm Springs, Portland, New Orleans, Denver, and New York. But ultimately, remember that we have and always will exist everywhere. No matter where you go, you'll always find a little bit of our history. If you need me, I'll be on the beach. ▼

Aubree Calvin is a part time writer and full time professor of government at a Texas community college. She writes about race, politics, and LGBTQ issues. She is also the co-host of the podcast, www.southernqueeries.com, which talks to individuals about being LGBTQ in the south. Aubree and her wife, Victoria, homeschool their preteen daughter and live in North Texas. She can be contacted at aubreecalvin@gmail.com and you can read more of her writing at www.aubreecalvin.com.

Photo courtesy of Aubree Calvin



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Tom Tracy: Scoochie & Skiddles

By Deadra Albrecht-Frasch

As the LGBTQIA+ community continues to fight for representation in literary and educational material, the need for age appropriate publications to teach children about the many different types of LGBTQIA+ families, is essential. Author Tom Tracy, recognized that need and is working hard to fill the void. Within four months of each other, he has already released two children's books with plans for more. Tom's first book, was published by Mirror Publishing on October 15, 2021 and titled *Scoochie & Skiddles in Fun at Gramma's*; illustrated by Dustin James. Tom's second book was self-published, again illustrated by Dustin James, released on January 29, 2022, and is titled *Scoochie & Skiddles: Scoochie's Adoption Story*. Tom Tracy and his husband Elliott Wilson live in southern New Jersey with their five-year-old daughter Alice Catherine, and seven-month-old daughter Micah.

How did Tom and Elliott meet?

Tom was working for a healthcare system where Elliott and Elliott's Mom were also

working. Elliott's Mom was friends with Tom and thought the two should be introduced. The rest is history. Tom said they joke now that he has a longer relationship with Elliott's Mother than he does with Elliott. Nevertheless, Tom and Elliott started off as friends and that friendship blossomed into something more. They were together 6 years before getting married on September 27, 2014. Tom explained that one fun fact from their wedding involved a drag queen. One of their favorite



Left to right, Tom Tracy, Alice Catherine, Micah, and Elliott Wilson.

vacation spots is Key West in Florida, where they would always go to a particular drag bar. While planning their wedding, they knew they wanted a drag queen so they flew up a favor-



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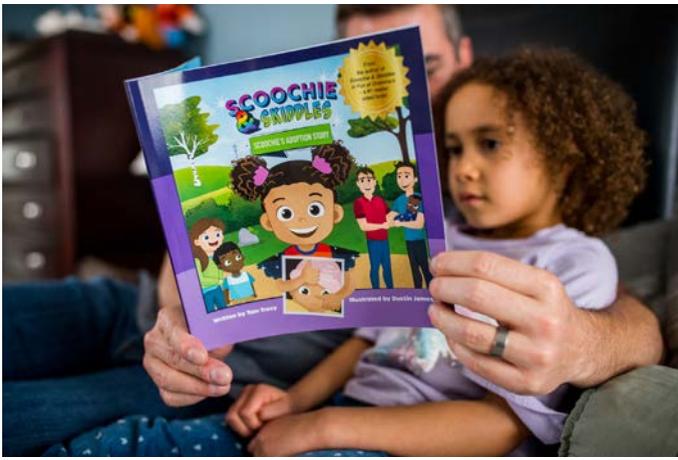
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Tom reading Scoochie & Skiddles to Alice Catherine.

ite performer from Key West and she performed as Celine Dion and Pink at the wedding complete with costume changes. A memorable night for all.

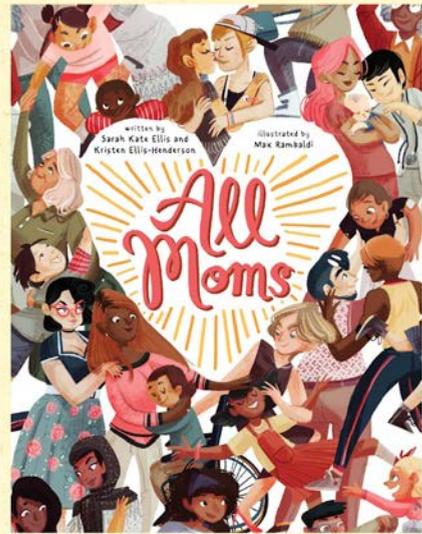
Both Tom and Elliott were born and raised in South New Jersey so they knew they wanted to stay close to family. They purchased their home in southern New Jersey in 2012, were married in 2014, and by 2016 they had their first child, Alice Catherine. Tom said that they are so thankful to be within 30 minutes of drive time of both sides of their families. The support they receive from their families is greatly appreciated.

Alice Catherine

Tom said that Alice Catherine’s adoption story “was a little bit of a fairy tale because it broke all of the normal rules.” He explained that they signed on with their adoption agency out of Pennsylvania and within thirty days they were matched with a birth mom that was in her first trimester. She was local and open to having in person relationships which was important to both Tom and Elliott. The birth mom saw their profile and didn’t even look at another profile because she knew they were the perfect fit. Tom and Elliott were slated to be in the delivery room, but didn’t make it in time but made it to the hospital within hours of Alice Catherine’s birth. They still stay in touch with the birth mom and the birth mom’s parents. Tom said “what’s really special is that [Alice Catherine’s] birth mom is an adopted child as well so she really has a deep appreciation for the adoption experience through her lived experience as an adoptee.” Alice Catherine is named after Elliott’s grandmother Alice, and Tom’s Grandmother Catherine. Tom explained that they choose to use Alice Catherine and not just Alice, to honor both of their Grandmothers.

Micah

For Micah’s adoption they decided to go with a more local agency out of New Jersey. It had been 18 months since they signed up and hadn’t had any luck. Tom and Elliott had a heartfelt conversation and made the decision that they were going to give it six more months and then stop. Tom said perhaps the universe was trying to say it wasn’t meant to be. Then, literally the next day, they received a phone call. That phone call explained the situation, and that the baby has been born and was being discharged from the hospital tomorrow. Were they interested? Of course, the answer was Yes. Ironically, they had already been planning a large extended family vacation and were leaving the next day. They were packed, had a dog sitter and were ready to go. They made the decision to send Alice Catherine with the rest of their family to enjoy vacation in *continued bottom of page 17*



“This book reminds kids and families that all moms are superheroes, no matter how they look, what they do for work, or where they come from.”
 -Melissa Etheridge, GRAMMY and Academy Award-winning singer-songwriter

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Small Bronx Public School With A Lot of Soul

By Ali Polizzi

If I was the parent of a queer or questioning middle or high school child especially in the Bronx, I would want to know about East Bronx Academy for the Future (EBA). Sure there is the incredible specialized Harvey Milk High School in Manhattan, but what if your child is not old enough? Or the commute is just too far? I'm sure there are lots of safe schools for LGBT students in the NYC area, but sometimes it's hard to tell from the outside or on paper just what kind of culture you are entrusting your child to join. I am writing because everyone should know about and consider attending EBA.

East Bronx Academy for the Future is a tiny little 6-12 NYC DOE school nestled in the crook of 174th and Southern Boulevard where the 2 and 5 trains stop. It's not much to look at from the outside (which is why I think it

often goes overlooked). But EBA is a warm, inclusive, family style hidden gem. There is a multipurpose room that substitutes for a gym (not a selling point I know) but a very nice attached Seabury Park used in the warmer weather with a student painted mural

conveying our chivalrous values on one side of the park.

When you enter, the first thing you see to your left is an entire wall titled



“EBA has Pride (see photo).” This was lovingly put together a few years ago as a tribute to Pride month that was just so perfect it has never been taken down. This wall has individual photographs of teachers who opted to pose and display their responses

es to the prompt “I support the LGBT Community because...”. We have responses like, “You make our community even more beautiful,” “No one should

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hide their true colors,” “I love love”, and of course, “Love is love.” These are all phrases personally written by faculty who volunteered to have their sentiments and pictures taken to promote solidarity and comfort amongst our EBA community.



The author, Ali Polizzi (right) with stickered friend.

If you meander around the halls, there is hardly a corner without some reminder of the core value of inclusivity here. There are portraits of historically significant LGBT figures with just enough of a blurb under each to propel further research if someone was motivated. There are rainbows snuck in everywhere - in the art, on bulletin board borders, etc.

There is SOUL or the Sexual Orientation Unity League, which is a GSA group and an office where anyone can go anytime to discuss any personal, psychological, sociological, family or political issues. Most of all every celebration is shared by the entire school. Coming Out Day, Respect For All Week, Day of Silence, and of course,

Pride Month are all times when you'll find just about everyone ostentatiously adorned in rainbow stickers, ribbons, masks, with their preferred pronouns proudly displayed, and a general celebratory norm. As one of our 6th grade

students put it “Everybody at EBA is either gay or a gay ally. It's like our safe second home.” Learn more about the East Bronx Academy for the Future at, <https://bit.ly/3HkkJsz> ▼

Ali Polizzi is a mother of two and wife to her partner, Amy, of 22 years. She is an intimately genuine ever evolving author who writes about creating and raising her same sex headed family, life, and philosophy. She also a dedicated special education teacher in the city and has written several articles on travel, politics, and media reviews. You are invited to check out, comment and share her blogs on a variety of same-sex headed family issues, raising her quirky, feminist children, and general philosophy of life at

<https://bit.ly/39jNLMw>

Photos courtesy of Ali Polizzi

Tom Tracy continued from page 15

Virginia while they drove to Albany, New York to pick up their baby girl, Micah. Overall, Tom said that “even though both adoption situations were different, it also felt like both adoptions were just right and that everything was meant to be for that particular circumstance.” Tom and Elliott both always loved the name Micah and Elliott’ moms middle name is Lee. Both girls use the combined last names of Tom and Elliott with no hyphen; TracyWilson.

Daily Life

Tom is a licensed clinical social worker in New Jersey, and his full-time career is with a healthcare organization in a business strategy position. Elliott is also in healthcare and in charge of virtual visits. Luckily both Tom and Elliott are able to work remote. Tom was fortunate to be able to take the first four

month’s with Micah off of work. Even working from home, they’ve had to utilize day care while working. Alice Catherine is in pre-K and Tom said she’s an amazing big sister. She is nurturing and loving, and Micah in return just lights up when ever she sees her big sister. Tom said their Bond is amazing already. Elliott is known as “Daddy” and Tom goes by “ODie” a nickname given to him years prior and a fun take on “Other Daddy”.

Scoochie & Skiddles

Tom said he always loved to write growing up and had a guidance counselor in high school whom he would share his writings with. Tom explained that after Alice Catherine was born, he found himself inspired by her zest for life. One day he was watching her play with her cousin and was struck with inspiration. Tom explained that when Alice



Inside page of Scoochie & Skiddles.

Catherine was a newborn she would wiggle around constantly, and Elliott nicknamed her Scoochie Pants. Then during that same day someone joked and asked who is Scoochie playing with, her cousin Skiddles?! – Tom heard it and loved it. Thus, the Scoochie & Skiddles book series earned its name.

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News Flash: Gay Moms Have Trans Son

By Roseann Foley Henry

“You guys are starting her a little early, don’t you think?” I guess our neighbor was trying to be funny as he wisecracked about our daughter’s new three-piece suit, but the comment stung a little. We were a two-mom family in a relatively diverse, progressive neighborhood. Surely this smart guy – a PhD, no less – wasn’t suggesting we were somehow *causing* our child’s gender non-conformity?

I knew it wasn’t true, knew that my four-year-old simply had a different idea of herself in her head than was apparent on the outside. In pretend games with her sister or with her friends, my wife and I could hear our daughter choosing a male persona for herself (“I’m the dad” or “I’m the big brother”). When we played the game of *Life*, she chose a little blue peg, not a pink one, to represent her.

She played Little League baseball, where she was always the only girl on her team, but she seemed to feel right at home on the bench with the boys. At age 5 she quit gymnastics rather than accede to the coach’s demand that she stop running and vaulting and tumbling with the boys’ group, and instead take her place with the girls on the balance beam – in a leotard and tights. This kid knew who she was, and who she wasn’t.

And there we always were, the two moms of the only girl on the team. I had trouble keeping the other families clear in my head, since they all looked alike to me. The little boys were all cuter than buttons, veritable Norman Rockwell characters as they stepped up to the plate with their too-big helmets, each with two parents, one mom and one



The author, Roseann Foley Henry, on left, with her wife and their son (center) on his high school graduation in 2021.

dad. Which family was which? I wasn’t entirely sure – but they always knew us, the two moms with the only girl on the field. Did all of them privately think we were “starting her too soon”?

Yes, there was a tiny piece of me that worried people would think we were confusing our little girl into thinking she was a boy. Or *should* be a boy – one family member opined that it was psychological, that our daughter was trying to fill in for the man who was missing in our lives.

Tom started working on the first book in April of 2021, found an illustrator, and by October 2021 *Scoochie & Skiddles in Fun at Gramma’s* was published. In the book, the cousins use imagination and creativity to turn their day into something fun and exciting while also teaching how to manage feelings of disappointment.

On the main page of the Scoochie & Skiddles website, www.ScoochieandSkiddles.com, it reads, “Our books are necessary contributions in the world of children’s literature. There are precious few children’s books that feature diverse families; there are even less that features same-sex parents.” As a parent of young children, I wholeheartedly agree. Tom also has a blog on the Scoochie & Skiddles website where he talks about different things associated with the books. For instance, *Scoochie & Skiddles in Fun at Gramma’s* was voted #1 Reader Voted Book on *Reedsy Discovery*. Additionally, the first book made the list of books for schools to consider promoting for

World Book Day on Twinkl (www.twinkl.com) which is a UK educational resource site. Tom also wrote on his blog “...when *Scoochie’s Adoption Story* achieved #27 ranking on Amazon in the ‘Children’s Books on LGBTQ+



Tom Tracy, back right, and his family.

Families’ category and #36 ranking in the ‘Children’s Multiculturalism & Tolerance’ section just 5 days after its release, I was nearly brought to tears.” Indeed, a true testament to how appreciated these books are in such a short period of time.

The second book, *Scoochie & Skiddles*:

Scoochie’s Adoption Story, was published in January of 2022. This book shares the story of Tom and Elliott’s experience in adopting Alice Catherine aka Scoochie. The book is narrated by Scoochie as she proudly shares with her friends her adoption story. Micah is subtly in the 2nd book, and as the series continues Micah will be added in. Tom explained that Micah is very verbal and has already earned the nickname Squeaky. Both books are available directly from the website, and can also be found on Amazon.

The Future

Tom said finding the balance between being a full-time parent, and employee while writing two books in a short amount of time has been challenging. His plan is to publish around two books per year as a goal, and any more than that would be icing on the cake. Both books have also been donated to Alice Catherine’s school library.

While the first book is a fun book telling a tale of two kids being creative, Tom said the second book is definitely a target topic. As he wrote the second book he felt much more compelled and inspired knowing there is a



On left, the family at home in New York in 2005. Right photo, the family in 2006 in Chicago.

Periodically I would have to stop and take a deep breath and reassure myself that this was not about my wife and me – and that no matter how smart some straight people were, they didn't understand how the whole LGBTQ thing worked at all.

In the summer of 2008 — after 15 years together and having acquired a house and two children and even a mini-van — we flew to

Lake Tahoe and celebrated our official, legal, it's-about-time wedding. Of all the milestones of that event, we didn't realize it would be the last time our daughter would wear a dress. From the moment she started kindergarten that fall, she was clear about how she was going to present herself to the world.

When she was eight years old and preparing for her First Communion, our daughter

told us she would make her Communion, she would walk down the aisle in line with the girls, but the big fancy dress was not an option. I tried to tell her that it was like wearing the cap and gown she'd worn for her pre-K graduation — that it didn't mean anything about her, it was just a costume. She was having none of it.

I found myself imagining telling the same thing to the boy across the street, a big bruiser of a second-grader: C'mon, kid, it's like

need for this age group of books addressing topics relevant to the LGBTQIA community, as most books are either geared toward very young kids or older. Tom's books are definitely fun but with a much-needed purpose to address pertinent topics that don't have enough representation. One can only hope that the Scoochie & Skiddles book series becomes a staple in EVERY home and that Tom surpasses that goal of two books per year! Purchase Scoochie's Adoption Story through Amazon here, <https://amzn.to/3txTkhi> ▼

Deadra Albrecht-Frasch lives in the Chicagoland area with her wife Alice and twin daughters Shay and Devlin. Deadra has a degree in Psychology from UNC-Charlotte and works in the healthcare field. In her free time she enjoys writing, and playing the piano and trumpet. She has also written a Children's book that delves into child anxiety surrounding moving to a new home. Available for order on Amazon via ebook or paperback, Stretch City: Moving Day, <https://amzn.to/3zAOQKz> Deadra also writes about the Mullins family on page 22.

Photos courtesy of Tom Tracy.

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the graduation gown, just put on the dress. Making that analogy was the wake-up call I needed: In my own head I was equating my daughter with a boy. Of course I couldn't be 100 percent sure where this was headed, but from that moment on I was pretty sure we had a trans child – and that it had nothing to do with us at all.

A therapist specializing in gender helped us through that crisis and provided something of an identity road map to guide us through the coming years. He also invited us to take part in a group with other parents puzzling their way through the journey. How many other couples are in the group, we asked him, and how many of them are gay? There are about a dozen other families, he told us, adding with a smile, “you'll be the only gay couple there.”

We walked into a roomful of mystified straight parents, all in varying states of confusion over finding themselves in the LGBTQ



Left photo, the family on vacation in Disneyland in 2006.

Photo on right, the moms celebrating their child's 3rd birthday.



world. It was reassuring to be with others like us (in one way at least), but also a little frustrating. These straight parents presumably weren't being accused of turning their child's gender inside out based on their own orientation, right? Nobody had ever asked these straight couples if they were “starting a little

young” on their child's gender identity?

Okay, so maybe I was a little bit defensive about my neighbor's question, even this many years later.

We found ourselves on an odd footing in that group – on the one hand, we were familiar with LGBTQ terrain, having navigated it ourselves. But on the other hand we knew too much, with personal knowledge of what living in that world might mean for our child. We didn't have to make up imaginary dangers an LGBTQ kid might face – we knew full well the slurs, contempt, and disrespect that can get directed at anyone who doesn't toe the gender line.

I came out 30 years ago (thanks, Ellen) and it's much easier to be yourself now than it was then. Growing up Irish Catholic in the 1960s, I never even knew there was such a thing as being gay. When I found out, and started to think I might be, I practically had a nervous breakdown. I'm astonished that my preschooler not only knew who she was but felt perfectly comfortable with it. Somehow she knew it was okay – and maybe having two moms made that easier for her.

But *easier* doesn't mean easy. The world may have changed, but there are still moments of awkwardness and embarrassment in not being straight or cis, in being “other.” We know that not everyone respects us, that some people would try to legislate us away (or worse). We listen to the news and read those online comments; we hear and see how some people talk about us. Yes, we know they're ignorant fools unworthy of our attention, but it still hurts. And if those goons can hurt my feelings, can still prick at my own sense of self-worth, what might they do to this beautiful child of mine?

When my child started sixth grade, I went

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on high alert. Middle school is tough on everybody – what would it bring for the girl who wore boys’ clothes and sported a short haircut, the one who had two moms? I was ready to take on anyone who so much as looked at her funny.

If they did, we never heard about it. We learned a new lesson about twenty-first century kids – they are not nearly as consumed with gender and orientation labels as my peers were 50

years ago. I’m sure there are still plenty of kids who agonize over their own coming out, but when they do the news seems to land with a big “so what?” or even “you do you!”

That’s in our progressive town, anyway. Having congratulated myself on making my child feel accepted and loved no matter what, I now fear what the outside world will bring to that sense of confidence. Beyond our urban center – or even within it, in the wrong neighborhoods – there could be danger lurking. That thought strikes fear in my heart.

Being gay has taught me that failure to conform to social expectations is a surefire way to bring on scorn. I know what may be in store for this beautiful kid, whom I now introduce as my son.

He doesn’t see peril in the shadows, as we do. He marches to his own beat, and I think he assumes everyone appreciates that as much



*Top photo, Christmas 2008 family photo.
Bottom photo, the family vacationing
in Bermuda in 2018.*

as his adoring parents do. When it was time to choose a college, he searched online for transgender-friendly schools and applied to #1 on the list – and got in. He is comfortable on campus, where he wears his trans pride t-shirt with delight. He doesn’t seem to have a second thought about introducing himself as trans to anyone.

I don’t claim to know his internal struggles as he came to terms with his identity over the years. To me he went from the little girl who confided that “I feel in between, not really either a boy or a girl” to the high school student who told me “I identify as non-binary” to the college freshman who is a proud trans man. Remembering myself lurking in the corner of the bookstore where the “homosexuality” titles were, afraid to say the word even to myself, I marvel at how confident he is in himself, and in the world’s acceptance of him.

Not for a moment do I think we “started a little early” in anything except accepting him and encouraging him to be his authentic self. I have not walked his road, exactly, but I’ve been down a similar path. And in today’s era of backlash – anti-trans legislation, the movement to roll back marriage equality, who knows what’s next – I believe we’re simply in different lanes of the same road. We are all in this together.

And as for my wisecracking neighbor? Well, he moved away – and although I can still feel the sting of his words, I know he was wrong. It was never about me, or my wife, or anything other than my son’s own identity. And I don’t need a PhD to know that. ▼

Roseann Foley Henry is a writer, editor, and web producer in New York. She and her wife are raising two internationally adopted children, who are now teenagers.

Photos courtesy of Roseann Foley Henry

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The Mullins Family of Fort Worth, Texas

By Deadra Albrecht-Frasch

Octavia and Brittany Mullins are married and live in Fort Worth, Texas. Both women also were raised in Texas. Octavia grew up in Lubbock, Texas and was raised by her mother and step-dad. Brittany grew up in Dallas, Texas and was raised by her father. They met through a mutual friend on the way to a gay bar, but didn't start dating until a year after their initial meeting. They've been together four years now and have been legally married for a year. They have two children, a ten year old girl, Brielle, and a three year old boy named Greyson. Brittany currently works for the United States Post Office, and Octavia is an account executive for HUD (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development); so both women work for the federal government.

While Octavia was pregnant with their son, she remembers a friend talking about fertility issues on social media. From there, the idea of becoming a surrogate one day was put into Octavia's thoughts. Fast forward after having Greyson, she saw an ad on Facebook about being a surrogate and starting looking into it more. She filled out a questionnaire and it went from there. At the time of this interview, Octavia was thirteen weeks pregnant with a girl, for a single gay male that lives in the country of France. She explained that the laws in France don't allow him to have a surrogate which is why he was looking elsewhere.

Octavia ultimately registered with an agency based out of the state of Oregon. The prospective clients/parents also registered with that agency. After passing an intake questionnaire and medical screenings, Octavia was assigned a case manager. The case manager handles everything, arranging potential matches between surrogate and intended parents, including anything Octavia needs during pregnancy. Octavia said she is also offered support via phone calls and emails for anything needed. Octavia explained that potential surrogates make a profile that intended parents can browse. If there is a potential match then they chat and see if everyone agrees. They were open to any type of intended parent and just happened to be an added bonus that the intended parent was a member of the LGBTQ community.

Top photo, the Mullins family, clockwise from top, Brittany, Brielle, Greyson, and Octavia.

Bottom photos of Brittany and Octavia's wedding.

Octavia and Brittany discussed that once you are selected and both parties agreed, Octavia had to take estrogen and progesterone and go through an embryo transfer. All medical expenses are paid through the agency and Octavia also receives a monthly payout while pregnant. Luckily, the embryo transfer was a success on the first try and Octavia became pregnant. She does have check-ins with the intended father via the computer.

Octavia said that she does feel connected in a way to the baby, but in a way where she is happy to be able to help the future father out. Octavia also acknowledged that while she is African-American, the baby she is carrying is Caucasian. Octavia said that psychologically she knows that the baby isn't hers and has no apprehensions about handing the intended parent's daughter over once the baby is delivered. Octavia also explained that other than having a 'funny taste' in her mouth, this pregnancy has been a good experience.

She has also been really tired in the first trimester. That tiredness seems to be going away now that she is in her second trimester.

Brittany said they do discuss having more kids of their own at some point, but right now they have their hands full with a very active three year old. So, perhaps when he's a little older. They explained that since Brittany carried their Brielle, and Octavia gave birth to Greyson, that



they've also considered eventually fostering or adopting. They also have extended family nearby that is supportive of Octavia being a surrogate. Brittany has also considering being a surrogate but is undecided at this time.

Octavia said that the intended father that she is currently pregnant for, has an additional eleven embryos and knows that he does also want a boy in the future. She said she will probably consider being preg-



Top photo, during the pandemic and right before their wedding, Octavia and Brittany bought a house. Bottom photo, Brielle holding Greyson.



well, play together, and have each other's backs. Ironically, both kids have birthdays in the same month, March. So last year, their daughter wanted to do a joint birthday party and share their day together, with her little brother. Just another testament to how much the siblings love each other.

Right as the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Octavia and Brittany had been planning their wedding. They had paid for the venue and everything but ended up having to delay. It did take almost a year to get the money back from the venue which created a lot of stress. They persevered and rescheduled, and have been married for a year now. During the pandemic, they were also busy buying a house and unfortunately experienced the loss of one of their Mothers, so it's been challenging these last two years. They ended up closing on their house only one month before their wedding. They bought an older house so have been busy fixing it up and making it their dream home. They also said that the neighborhood is up and coming so they are excited for that.

Octavia said she wanted their family story to be in *Gay Parent Magazine* because they consider themselves a unique blended family structure and love reading about all the different types of families. The Mullins family seems to have a strong foundation and compassion for helping others and we wish them continued success in all they continue to accomplish. ▼

Deadra Albrecht-Frasch lives in the Chicagoland area with her wife Alice and twin daughters Shay and Devlin. Deadra has a degree in Psychology from UNC-Charlotte and works in the healthcare field. In her free time she enjoys writing, and playing the piano and trumpet. She has also written a Children's book that delves into child anxiety surrounding moving to a new home. Available for order on Amazon via ebook or paperback, Stretch City: Moving Day, <https://amzn.to/3zAOQKz>

Deadra also writes about children's book author Tom Tracy on page 14.

Photos courtesy of Octavia Mullins

nant again for him or someone else in the future but one step at a time for now. Octavia said she does have contact with the intended father but hasn't actually met him in person which she is looking forward to but that probably won't be until the baby is born.

Octavia also explained that before the process even began with her surrogacy, the entire family met with counselors to make sure everyone understood the expectations including their current children. Brielle expressed that she was kind of excited but also understands that this isn't their sibling. As far as keeping in touch with the father, they've talked about keeping in touch, but Octavia explained that the father has gone through a miscarriage in a prior surrogacy (not with Octavia). Understandably so, he is leery about speaking of the future until the baby is born. The plan is for him to fly into the country nearer her due date and be there for the birth where he will meet his new baby daughter.

Octavia and Brittany are proud of their kids and said even though there is an age difference of seven years, they get along

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