



ALI ROTHLIZZI

- PRIDE COMES TO FARMINGDALE
- TAKODA'S BAR MITZVAH

BROADWAY HUSBANDS .....

**BRET SHUFORD**  
**STEPHEN HANNA**

.....  
.....  
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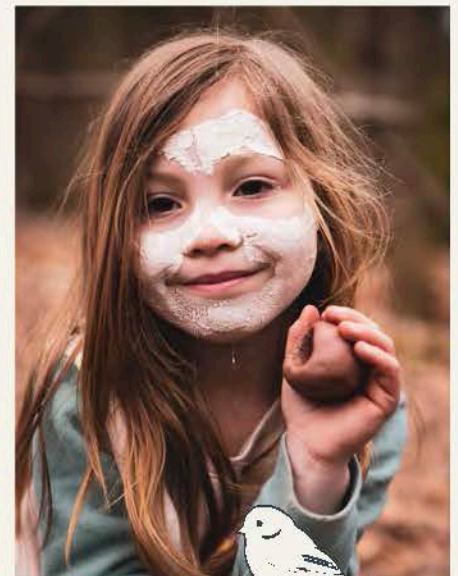
## ADULT PROGRAMS

### NEXT WORKSHOP

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### ADVERTISER SPOTLIGHT:

**The Montessori Schools in Flatiron and Soho** - Since their founding, diversity has been a cornerstone of their schools. The Montessori Schools wants to help your child become a self-directed learner, flexible thinker, creative problem solver, and curious about the world around them. - page 10



### ADVERTISER SPOTLIGHT: Riverdale Country School

- Riverdale Country School creates a culture of critical thinking, curiosity, open discourse, belonging, equity, inclusion, and innovation. - page 11



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**Takoda's Bar Mitzvah** - In this second of three articles by Ali Rothlizzi, Ali details the ups and downs of her first born's rite of passage. - page 15



**New Jersey Family Vacation** - In this third article by Ali Rothlizzi, she chronicles her family's vacation to Atlantic City and seeing entertainer Randy Rainbow. - page 19

**Broadway Husbands** - Dancer Stephen Hanna and performer Bret Shuford are known to their 100,000 plus social media followers as the Broadway Husbands. The couple are also new parents. - page 21



Cover photo courtesy of Jonathan Ochart. Photo credits this page top to bottom: photo courtesy of Ali Rothlizzi, Rachel Red Photography, Jonathan Ochart, and Ali Rothlizzi.

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## SOCIAL MEDIA



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# SUPPORT GROUPS

## Virtual

• **Virtual Support Group for LGBTQIA+ parents**, Every Monday from 7:15 PM - 8:30 PM is a free, drop-in group on Zoom for LGBTQIA+ parents. No commitment necessary. The group is open to expecting, adopting, and/or current parents. The group is facilitated by Meg Ryan, a nurse and PMHNP student. For more information phone 929-367-7419, email [info@brooklynparentsupport.com](mailto:info@brooklynparentsupport.com) or visit [@brooklyn\\_parent\\_support](https://brooklyn_parent_support).

## Connecticut

• **Queer Mamas\* of Connecticut**. Private Facebook group at [facebook.com/groups/ctqueermamas/](https://facebook.com/groups/ctqueermamas/)

## New Jersey

• **NJ Queer Parents**. Private Facebook group at [facebook.com/groups/1073706709338540/](https://facebook.com/groups/1073706709338540/)

• **Rainbow Families of New Jersey**, [facebook.com/groups/RainbowFamiliesNJ/](https://facebook.com/groups/RainbowFamiliesNJ/)

## New York

• **The Center**, check out programs for families at the LGBTQ Community Center, 208 West 13th St., [gaycenter.org/family-youth/family/](https://gaycenter.org/family-youth/family/). Phone 212-620-7310 or email [centerfamilies@gaycenter.org](mailto:centerfamilies@gaycenter.org). The Center provides counseling for LGBTQ couples and individuals, support and education for intended parents, and monthly play days for



*Play Day at The Center.  
Photo by Richard Mitchell*

LGBTQ parents with young children.

• **QFam**, for queer parents and children's caregivers located in upstate New York Hudson Valley region. 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month, 1:00 - 2:30 PM, Hudson Valley LGBTQ+ Community Center (300 Wall St., Kingston, NY). Email Melissa Zola at [qfamhudsonvalley@gmail.com](mailto:qfamhudsonvalley@gmail.com). Visit <https://lgbtqcenter.org/events/qfam/>.

• **Pride and Joy Families**, previously a support group for LGBTQ families living in upstate New York, the group lost their funding and closed in 2019. However, they've maintained this referral list: <https://bit.ly/3JPXUMW>

• **LOFT Families**. A social support group for LGBTQ+ headed families in Westchester County and surrounding areas. This group is hosted by The LOFT LGBTQ+ Community Center in White Plains, NY. To find out about their events please email [info@loftgaycenter.org](mailto:info@loftgaycenter.org) or visit [https://www.loftgaycenter.org/loft\\_families](https://www.loftgaycenter.org/loft_families)

• **The LGBT Network's LGBT Family Program** supports LGBT people building and strengthening families. Services provided include: LGBT family potlucks, dad meet ups, mom meet ups, parenthood planning workshops, and networking opportunities. You can also download a LGBT Families Coloring Book from their website as well as a list of the top 25 LGBTQ-affirming children's books. For more information visit <http://lgbtnetwork.org/family>

## Long Island Adoption Support Group

Email Chemene for info at [liadoptivefamilies@gmail.com](mailto:liadoptivefamilies@gmail.com) or visit our website at [www.LIAdoptiveFamilies.org](http://www.LIAdoptiveFamilies.org). Free peer-led support group for members at any stage of the adoption and foster care process. We offer a friendly and confidential environment for all to share their journey with others who understand.

## PFLAG Long Island

PFLAG Long Island is a part of a national organization of parents, families, friends and allies united with the LGBTQ community to move equality forward. Our meetings include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning persons, as well as parents, allies and friends who all share their experiences. We provide an opportunity for dialogue

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• **Queer Parents\* NYC.** Private Facebook group at [facebook.com/groups/118634725192458/](https://facebook.com/groups/118634725192458/)

## EVENTS

**May 7, 2023 - 11th International Family Equality Day.** LGBTQ family organizations from around the world will join forces to increase the international visibility of LGBTQ families. This year's motto is, Power Up Families. Visit <http://internationalfamilyequalityday.org/> for events.

**May 6 - 27, 2023 - Staten Island PrideFest.** Celebrate for an entire month with multiple activities throughout the month including a sunset hike, Youth Prom, and an event at the Staten Island Zoo. Their PrideFest Festival is on May 27th, 12 - 5 PM and includes activities for the whole family. PrideFest is a production of the Pride Center of Staten Island. Visit <https://www.pridecentersi.org/pridefest-save-the-date>

**June 3, 2023 - Oneonta Pridefest,** starts at 2:00 PM. All day Block Party, Main Street in Oneonta. With performers and vendors, bring your own lawn chair. For details visit [www.otsegoaliance.org](http://www.otsegoaliance.org).

**June 3, 2023 - Middletown PrideFest 2023,** 12:00 PM-10:00 PM. Middletown, Connecticut's PrideFest is an all afternoon street fair on Main Street that combines exhibitors, entertainers, food, activities for all ages and will feature their Pride March (1 - 2 PM), Pride Rally on the South Green (2:30 - 4 PM), and Pride Showcase Concerts (4 - 7 PM). New this year is a Middletown Pride Tea Dance, 7 - 10 PM on Old Church St. Visit [www.middletownpride.org](http://www.middletownpride.org).

**June 6, 2023 - The New Queens Pride and Festival.** Founded in 1993, it is the second

oldest and second largest pride parade in NYC. Usually held the first Sunday in June in Jackson Heights. Produced by LGBT Network. Visit <https://newqueenspride.org/>.

**June 4, 2023 - Westchester Pride 2023,** 12:00 PM-5:00 PM, After Party: 6:00 - 8:30 PM, Court Street between Martine and Main. Includes a pet parade and Family Zone filled with fun and games for the little ones. Visit, <https://bit.ly/3MLuIB>

**June 4, 2023 - NJ's 31st Annual LGBTQ+ Pride Celebration,** Noon-7:00 PM, Asbury Park. This event is family friendly and includes rides in their Family Zone. Visit, <https://jerseypride.org/>

**Hudson Valley Pride Festival.** Usually held the first weekend in June. Since the pandemic they held a month long series of virtual Pride events. At this writing there is no mention of a Pride Festival. Visit, <https://lgbtqcenter.org/> for updates.

**June 10, 2023 - 27th Anniversary Brooklyn Pride.** The only twilight parade in NYC Brooklyn Pride Parade is on June 10th, 7:30 - 10 PM, 5th Ave. from Lincoln Pl. to 9th St. Their Brooklyn Pride Festival & Mainstage, 11 AM - 5 PM, is at Old Stone House/JJ Byrne Park (5th Ave. between 3rd & 4th Streets) and features their Family Fun Zone of family activities, music, face painting, arts & and crafts, story-time and more. Visit <https://brooklynpride.org/>.



*Adopted baby of a gay father in LGBT Network families program. Photo courtesy of LGBT Network.*







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Credit: Gay Parent magaz

### Family in the New York City Pride March

Photo by Angeline Acain/Gay Parent Magazine

**June 10, 2023 - 5th Annual Toms River Pride Festival,** 11:00 AM-5:00 PM, Washington St. in Downtown Toms River. This festival welcomes all including children. Enjoy food, vendors, performances, shopping, and festivities. Visit <https://www.exit82theatre.com/tr-pride> or [facebook.com/TomsRiverPride](https://facebook.com/TomsRiverPride).

**June, 10, 2023 - Fairfield County's Pride in the Park,** Veterans Memorial Park, Norwalk, Connecticut. For more information visit <https://ctpridecenter.org/pride-in-the-park/>.

**June 10, 2023 - Central New York Pride Festival & Parade,** Inner Harbor, Syracuse. The parade will move along the Inner Harbor on Solar St. and turn right onto West Kirkpatrick St. Visit <https://www.cnypride.org/> for updates.

**June 11, 2023 - Capital Pride Parade & Festival,** in Albany's historic Washington Park. Presented by the Pride Center of the Capital Region. Parade kick's off at 11:45 starting down State St. onto Lark St. then Madison Ave. Visit, <https://www.518capitalpride.com/> for other pride celebrations in the area.

**June 11, 2023 - Long Island Pride 2023,** for the first time it will be held in Sayville. The celebration will feature a parade, concert and dancing, and a festival. For information on Long Island Pride's Family of Events visit <https://lipride.org/>.

**June 17 - 25, 2023 - NYC Pride.** This year's theme is "Strength in Solidarity." Once again offering multiple events during the month of June and ending with the March and PrideFest on June 25th. The Rally is on the 17th, location to be announced. For updates visit <https://www.nycpride.org/>.

**June 16, 2023 - Pride Night at CitiField, 7:10 PM.** Celebrate Pride Night with The New York Mets. \$36, buy tickets at <https://lgbtnetwork.org/product/mets-pride-night/>

**June 24, 2023 - Annual Harlem Pride Celebration Month.** Harlem Pride will feature celebrity hosts on their main stage, DJs and live entertainment. Also, food vendors, medical testing and health screening, community organizations and city service providers, and vendor marketplace. Last year for families there was face painting and Drag Queen Story Hour. Visit <https://harlempride.org/> for updates.

**July 22 - 29, 2023 - Family Week,** Provincetown, Massachusetts. This is the largest annual gathering of hundreds of LGBTQ families from all over the country, sponsored by Family Equality Council ([familyequality.org](http://familyequality.org)) and COLAGE ([colage.org](http://colage.org)). Visit <https://www.ptownfamilyweek.com> for updates and to register.

**August 26, 2023 - 22nd Annual Jersey City LGBTQ+ Pride Festival 2022,** Grove Street Path Plaza and Newark Avenue between Grove Street and Jersey Avenue. Their month long celebration will include, great tasting food, fantastic entertainers, fun for families, youth, young adults, elders and more leading up to their Pride celebration on August 29, 2023. Visit <https://jerseycitypride.com/> for updates.

**September 9, 2023 - Annual Hartford Pride Week and Pride Fest and Concert,** Trumbull St., Hartford, Connecticut. Takes place on the second Saturday in September. The annual Hartford Pride Fest and Concert is a family-centered event showcasing entertainment, food, local businesses, giveaways, activities, and numerous community organizations. Visit <https://hartfordpride.org/pride22/index.php> or <https://www.facebook.com/hartfordpride/>. ▼

Want your New York, New Jersey, or Connecticut Pride or LGBTQ family event listed here? Email us at [gayparentmag@gmail.com](mailto:gayparentmag@gmail.com).



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Our schools are not daycare facilities or pre-schools, but real schools. We focus on teaching children the skills



they need to succeed in life, not just in school.

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location, 212-633-0600 or SoHo location, 212-226-3800. We may also be reached at [admissions@themontessorischools.org](mailto:admissions@themontessorischools.org) with any questions you may have regarding the admissions process. Visit [www.themontessorischools.org](http://www.themontessorischools.org). ▼



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## High Challenge, High Support

As a global leader in education, Riverdale is often described as high-challenge, high-support. Students are supported to reach high - to attempt new skills and pursue their interests on a deeper level. Mentors abound. Deans, counselors, faculty, coaches, and



*Middle School students prepare a model rocket for launch at Riverdale Country School.*

administrators all get to know students as people on trips, service-learning events, and co-curricular activities.

In addition, Riverdale provides close to \$10 million in financial aid each year to approximately 20% of our students.

## Our Community

Since our founding in 1907, Riverdale has maintained an emphasis on building relationships and community. With approximately 1,250 students in Pre-K through Grade 12, we provide a student-teacher ratio of 5:1. This supports individual attention.

Riverdale also emphasizes community building. With 72 nationalities represented, 42% students of color, and approximately 25% faculty and staff members of color, we are committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. As a school, we are continually examining and seeking to improve our campus culture.

*continued bottom of next page*

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# Farmingdale Pride Forever

By Ali Rothlizzi

I'd just about written off Pride. Not that I don't have any, but I was beginning to concede that it had somehow become a celebration for straight people. It seemed like the only people I knew excited to go to any Prides were our straight allies.

My wife and I used to go every year. Our oldest learned to wave at eight months old after slowly rolling down 5th Avenue on a parade float watching thousands of New Yorkers wave to him like he was a celebrity. Most of the Prides I knew were for Marriage Equality and inclusive church communities.

But New York City seemed to get hotter, and parade floats more discerning. Even watching along the edge we'd wind up so far back or corralled into circles that we tended to give up, and head over to Benny's Burritos to get lunch instead and call it a day.

Huntington Pride was fun for a while. A nice respectable walk from the park, we could leave our cars around back in the lots, meet up with friends and march to ecstatically happy cheers teaching our children that our families were nothing to be ashamed of and they then picnicking with friends in the park while we watched free concerts inevitably bumping into old local friends and acquaintances all afternoon.

But all too soon the naysayers shortened the march to a



Left to right, the author Ali Rothlizzi, sons Nik and Kody and wife Amy.

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*Riverdale continued from page 11*

## Our Campus

Riverdale has the largest campus in New York City - 27.5 acres divided between two idyllic settings: our Lower School on the River Campus and our Middle and Upper School on the Hill Campus. This promotes outdoor activities, experiential learning, and exploration, as well as supports our active Athletics programs for Middle and Upper School students.

## Getting to Riverdale

Our fleet of buses serve more than 100 zip codes. We find that the learning begins for students of all ages the moment they step onto the bus. Whether it's a sense of independence and agency that begins to develop in our youngest students, the community of riders of all ages that come together every school day, or the skills of time management that commuting requires, for many students, the ride to and from Riverdale is an important part of their education.

Visit [www.riverdale.edu](http://www.riverdale.edu). ▼





**Ali's photos from the 2022 Long Island Pride in Farmingdale, organized by the LGBT Network.**

mere circumference of the park under the supposed complaint of lost business, and eventually it seemed Long Island Pride was on the move. It went to Long Beach which seemed like it might be nice, but it immediately morphed into a corporate money grab with totally irrelevant booths and individual admission charges for every single thing the kids saw that might possibly be fun; the rides, the beach, etc. Everything: extra charge.

So my wife and I stopped worrying about Pride. Covid put all that cacophony aside. We displayed our flag, donned our rainbow bracelets, and planned our Father's Day, graduations and birthdays for June without concern.

Then we heard Long Island Pride was coming to Farmingdale. Well we had to go if they were coming to our actual town. It was raining that morning and I wasn't sure if there was a set rain date, so I put a question on our town Facebook page to see if anybody knew. Nobody got back to me immediately so I ran up to Main street just to look around.

It was definitely on. Everything was quiet but there were rainbow balloons outside of certain businesses. In the main village I saw the tent set ups with the usual corporate spon-

sors, Bethpage, Target, etc. There was the [www.LGBTNETWORK.ORG](http://www.LGBTNETWORK.ORG) where this kid told me all about the LGBT safe spaces they support. I heard and could feel the excitement

around the LGBT Youth Prom, locally sponsored GSAs, and Pride Night at Citifield. This is the kind of tabling we need at Prides!

I saw pet care, and unique apparel, cancer research and some very, very enthusiastic promotions for HIV tests. The part I appreciated the most this morning was the free iced coffees I got from the Starbucks tent! I posted on Facebook that all the tribulations had been worth that free gift when a friend spotted an old friend of his in the background of my picture. I went back later for another free cup of iced joe and connected them - small world.

All this was being set up happily in the rain just before the parade. I have to admit seeing my town preparing the streets for my people made me a little teary. I started receiving notifications on my local social media inquiry, and 99% of them were pro-happy. That helped.

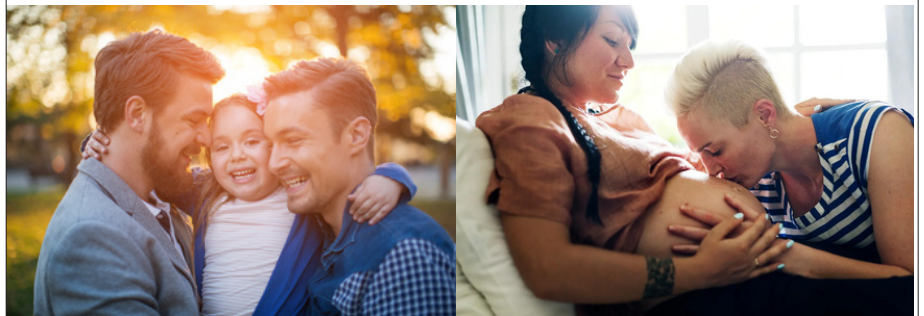


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I drove back to pick up my family and we headed to Northside Elementary where hundreds were gathered to await the March. The rain stopped, the sun came out and the thumpa thumpa began!

I was excited to see the middle school GSA up first. I used this as a moment to discuss the semantics of this with my kids only to detect a touch of reluctance. "It doesn't mean you're gay you know. It means you're an ally," I assured them. It means you support your Ema and I. Neither said too much about it and I could tell there was just a touch of 'what will the kids at school think?' Hard sometimes not to take these things to heart, but important



**Left photo of LGBTQ Pride marchers.**  
**Right photo, left to right, Kody, Amy, Nik, and Ali.**

to allot time to partake in these difficult conversations. Still, is it fair of me to put my political circumstances on them?

We asked to join the middle school GSA float but were told they were at capacity. So we hung back and watched the festivities where we were donned with many gifts ranging from Mardi Gras beads, to beach balls, to flags, sun-block and chapstick, and spongy fake bananas from Stop n Shop (yes...bananas). There were less churches than I remember from former years and more pet rescues like Bid A Wee - that wonder- *continued bottom of next page*



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# Takoda's Bar Mitzvah

By Ali Rothlizzi

**We** knew it was coming. We suspected the very day he was born. And yet, we knew nothing!

The last few years, we began to grow comfortable with that thought of doing it the way we'd come to know was the real Jewish way (and just treating Grandma and Grandpa to a Chinese Buffet)! See, things have recently been hard. Amy's only brother (only sibling at all) recently passed young from Chemo at 47. He left behind a wife and two daughters, 10 and 12 years old now. He was her only brother and arguably the main reason we ever committed to Hebrew School as opposed to our Unitarian Universalist Sunday School which our little queer family felt a bit more philosophically in line with. We'd have done both if they all didn't decide class must occur only once a week on Sunday mornings.

In addition to that, I lost my father, my uncle (and Kody's donor), and



**Takoda "Kody"  
at his Bar Mitzvah.**

my Granny to Covid. I'd only had my father growing up, so beyond a few aunts and uncles, I haven't felt very family oriented beyond my immediate circle. I have grown a bit closer to some family mainly through the planning of the funerals and helping with estates. In the meantime, my boys have been growing regardless and in particular Takoda (Kody), who has always been a kid determined to meet all his responsibilities with stoic resolve. He attended Hebrew School even when he could only do so remotely.

But perhaps more surprisingly, Grandpa wasn't having our Chinese Food Buffet idea. Grandpa wanted a party. Looking back I'm so tremendously grateful for his surprising resolve. He offered us \$5000 toward the event (provided it had Chinese food, but wasn't just Chinese food).

So that was that. We went to the Bar Mitzvah meeting at our Temple, were assured over and over that we would be gently guided through all the details, and Kody started specifically studying his portion of the Torah reg-

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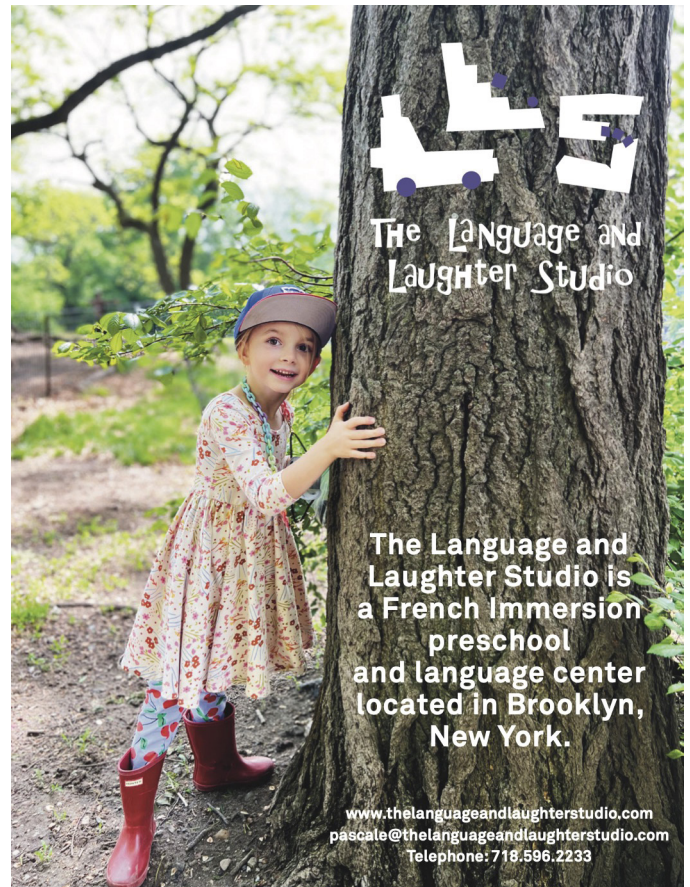
*Farmingdale Pride continued from page 14*

ful no kill shelter on Long Island!

My family and I had Daler Pride shirts made by a local entrepreneur, Good Enough Personalized gifts (<https://bit.ly/3PPsiee>). Donna is local and supportive and we ran into several of her happy customers throughout the day. Together though, my family and I looked like our own group walking back through the parade to town. The excitement of seeing so many boisterous supporters inspired my youngest into spontaneous cartwheels for which he was wildly applauded. And my oldest choreographed a spontaneous rainbow umbrella dance! The stage set up on Main and Conklin was booming and free concerts prevailed. There really was something surreal about the bursts of confetti and the mix of locals all joined together in support of beautiful happy people. I'd forgotten the joy in sharing that euphoric presence not just of overcoming strife, but being ourselves and being alive. Pride is necessary annual release, one tradition that should be preserved. ▼

*Ali Rothlizzi 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 <http://alirothlizzi.blogspot.com/?m=1>.*

Photos courtesy of Ali Rothlizzi



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ularly with Cantor Allison. Before I knew it, it was August and my wife said to me that we were going to have to postpone. I have to be honest. I thought she was being dramatic.

I was wrong.

See Kody was born November 30th and we had a Bar Mitzvah date set for December 4th. It was a Saturday, early Winter, super close to his actual birthday, and family had already been informed. What's the worry? I asked her. All we really need to do is pick the venue. I figured for \$5000, I wouldn't even have to make an appetizer. I had zero experience in hosting an event of this magnitude. Amy and I married a month before Kody was born at a roadside court house in Connecticut.

But like it always is in a same sex family, it's a challenge to see the way ahead. Lots of trails blazed for others that have not been blazed for you, so after a while you naturally stop even looking for them. The thing about this Bar Mitzvah though, it felt like there were columns of complicated expectation.

First, the guest list. We had to invite the family members (at least the ones who had attended the funerals). Covid has been a real sifter. We had Grandpa's brother and cousin from Staten Island and their families who had all been busy making their own babies. And then we had my dad's brother and sister out here on the island and all their babies, as well as my late mother's sister and her family in Queens. That made 30. Then there were Kody's friends. That made 32. This is likely where the pressure started.

See, Kody has autism. Between that, and quarantine, and the switch during quarantine to middle school, and a year remote - the social thing was put on the far left burner. But here we were now about to invite everybody we knew to an event just for him. And, being raised Catholic I knew little else about growing up Jewish beyond the family talk which appeared to always encounter the preamble "Before Jason's Bar Mitzvah" or

"After Jason's Bar Mitzvah," if not simply "The Bar Mitzvah." This felt like boarding someone else's train that may have slowed but did not stop. It was happening. It would be big. And nothing would ever be forgotten.

We decided to use this party as a means to pull back our people.

We invited our friends. There were our Yolo Pals who had faded a little during their early twin years, but who we had started going away with after they moved to Connecticut. Their oldest, Ethan, was also half Jewish and 12, but they had also lost key family during this pandemic. We would meet over Mexican and discuss who on earth do we bestow candles too? Each candle on a Bar Mitzvah's cake is lit with key figures in the child's life. We thought that if nothing else we would simply light each other's candles.

Then there was Jen and Stephanie from Temple, Dawn and Annette, Belle... a little girl Kody had always known but whose moms had now divorced and wouldn't share a room let alone a table. There was Tia Viv and Esmerelda - who



**Photos from Kody's Bar Mitzvah.**

**Top photo, the family dressed up nicely, left to right, the author, Ali Rothlizzi, sons, Nik and Kody, and wife Amy.**

**Bottom photo, Kody gets lifted up on a chair.**

were Niky's actual Earth Mothers, but who had also since split. They had their child, Kaeden, a little later so he was always a little young for our boys. It has been so difficult navigating all that and quarantining with them that we hadn't even seen them in years! We opened it up to a few scattered friends of Niky's, kids of our teacher friends, and the best kids from Kody's activities like Improv



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and Taekwondo that he might like to form a bond with. Ultimately, we wound up at 118.

Next there was the venue. Amy and I walked into the Crest Hollow Country Club out here right between us and the Temple, and almost walked right back out. It was so beautiful that we thought there was no way we could possibly afford it. But Amy's father was helping us out. In addition we hadn't gone anywhere or done anything in so long that we did have some savings to work with. We decided to investigate the possibility.

What an amazingly wonderful decision that was! Yes, it was expensive. \$10,000 for starters in February (half price) to be precise. But it was an impressive place. Grandpa even raised his contribution when he heard. They were not just our venue, however. They were our advocates, - our support - creatively and emotionally. Samantha Schiller, our Banquet Manager, was in particu-

lar so organized, professional and personable we are inviting her to our next Bar Mitzvah (she might even get a candle). When we were just trying to work out the food stations so that Kody had all of his favorites, we began to worry that the boys wouldn't like the "fancy" mac and cheese. Samantha invited us in for a tasting. We were actually a little annoyed that they wouldn't let us just take a scoop that

we could pick up on the way back from Hebrew School. Amy and I even started thinking they didn't want to give away a free "meal." There is no restaurant on the premises so it wasn't quite so easy to arrange, but eventually we did and we agreed to come in at a mutually beneficial time. When we got there, we were escorted to a private room with four settings and bottled waters. A chef came out with a cast iron frying pan full of hot, bubbly macaroni and cheese. At that point Amy and I knew we needed to make exceptions to our dieting because sometimes you just need to enjoy a moment so we agreed to just a scoop. But as each one of us took our first bites we paused in awe over the unexpected flavors! We collectively gobbled up our platefuls with complete abandon

and each went for seconds! They seemed pleased and sent us home with an entire extra plate!

Now Crest Hollow helped us narrow the search for the necessary vendors. My mother-in-law warned us that the people you contract with are not the ones who perform at the event (a warning we likely should have paid more heed to). We got some nice deals but only set up a meeting with the actual MC a week before the event. When we met the man who called himself "The Bar Mitzvah Guy" - we both felt a bit worried. He did

know about Bar Mitzvahs but I don't think he knows any lesbians. First, he downright insisted we do a Hamotzi, which I later learned meant a blessing of a Challah Bread. I was less than thrilled about this after the fact. The MC kept saying it was a good photo op and we eventually agreed just because Kody loves Challah Bread. In the end, however, I felt it was ill-timed set just after the initial energy of the party had reached a nice crescendo. He then "asked" about a hora. We agreed to do a 5 minute hora with no chair lifting. Kody was scared and nobody could assure us this was a safe activity. We wound up with something more like a 20 minute hora, a

Do si-do, and every major family member from our household and beyond bounced into the air several times! It was okay though, because we got him back. He was so intent on filling his "on" time he didn't see my very, very large father-in-law waddling right up to the momentarily empty dance floor until it was too late!

But the worst was the fact that even though he knew his limitations, he was not supported. He began pushing us to get "a dancer." I never knew this existed but apparently at these Bar Mitzvahs or weddings you can pay professional dancers to help keep the dance floor occupied. This seemed very silly to us but he kept saying that it was necessary for a party with this many kids (almost 40) and that he would talk to the "bosses" behind the



**Top photo, Kody giving his speech while mom Ali looks on proudly. Bottom photo, Nik, Ali, and Amy having fun dancing at Kody's Bar Mitzvah.**



scenes and help us get one for a much more reasonable price than advertised. I didn't even know what these "dancers" cost but I later found out it's upwards of \$800. He told us we would be contacted the next day regarding this issue.

Well, we weren't, and this left us in a pretty precarious position. I emailed asking about this a few days before the event and got the response "What dancer?" Now I had to discuss the commu-

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nication that I now realized was only initiated behind a closed door by my MC who was now vehemently denying it ever even took place. The realization that we were paying thousands of dollars in a few days for a 4 hour party run by a guy who had already admitted to not really being up for his job really broke me down at a very precarious moment. I wound up talking to the owner who had little more than a thinly veiled accusatory amusement and few scripted sales pitches to offer me. I'm sure he was acutely aware that at this point I had very few options at my disposal. At some point that day I called Samantha to just voice my concerns. It just didn't feel right. She listened quietly for a few minutes and then slowly and calmly said "Let me call you right back."

Next thing I knew I got a call from a newly humbled owner. There were still sales pitches, but at least he threw in a dancer for his "cost" supposedly. In the end I'm glad she was there as she was very good and energetic, but I still regret the way the whole thing went down. Samantha, however, you're my hero. The best thing about Crest Hollow was that once we agreed to the initial price, they never nickel and dined us in this kind of unforeseen way. From the moment we signed with them it was anything they could do to help me and my wife and our Bar Mitzvah feel happy, and comfortable, and supported throughout the entire event.

And the thing is, the day was perfect. We were so worried that despite his generosity, Amy's father would have critiques of Kody's Hebrew. We tried to prepare him. It was a Reform Temple. The service would not be the kind he was used to. Kody and Grandpa had some discussion beforehand where they quarreled over the particular pronunciation of a specific Hebrew word. A quick and confident Google Search by Grandpa revealed that Kody was right. Grandpa mumbled something about how they must have changed it to which my son instantly replied, "Yeah, amazing how often they change all

these ancient languages!"

But all that dissipated from my point of view up on the stage. Grandpa sat in the first row of the middle seat decked out in the yarmulke he had made special and his Tallit. He had presented Kody with a brand new Tallit of his own that he'd imported all the way from Israel. It sparkled and matched beautifully to the perfectly tailored royal blue suit he and his little brother wore, and the striking dress shoes that just vibrated with a warm amber glow. Grandpa was proud. And so were we.

And Kody nailed it all! He performed the entire service -- not just the Torah, but his speech and every blessing. In his speech he revealed his autism challenges with pride and sparked much conversation amongst the outer family members who didn't know. He impressed with his choreographed mom dances (even though the MC interrupted Amy's and actually cut my song short!). And Kody even braved the chair lift! He was able to ignore all the ridiculous MC calls for him to "smile" (who still does that???) and instead cracked the place up with his comedic thank you speech. The place was beautifully decked out in blue and gold, sparkling curtains and a gorgeous white dance floor! The food was magnificent from the Chinese to the soft sirloin (even though we didn't get to eat much of it. That happened when our MC decided to talk our ears off about his "plan?"). We had only 9 last minute too-late-to-refund cancellations, and one disgruntled MC to forgive after. I do wish it could have been longer, that we could have enjoyed a bit more of the delicious food, and that we'd more carefully chosen our MC from the website videos, but there were so many moments that were just perfection. Seeing my in-laws laugh and dance again, watching Kody's new friends dance (and learn Craps), giggles over the last minute seat changes that sent straight singles ladies to the lesbians; and the just-perfect Wisdom Recipe Book that took a month but made it all the way from the Ukraine the very day before the Bar Mitzvah! We lit candles in tribute to Uncle Jason and for my beloved Uncle Dany (who helped us create Takoda). Everyone had an amazing time. And Kody has exchanged numbers and has now been invited to the homes of some new peers. I feel like it was a very worthy four month long endeavor of our every single ounce of energy. ▼

*Ali Rothlizzi 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 <http://alirothlizzi.blogspot.com/?m=1>.*

Photos courtesy of Ali Rothlizzi



**Kody is celebrated at his Bar Mitzvah.**



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# Randy Rainbow and the Jersey Shore

By Ali Rothlizzi

If you're like me, Atlantic City doesn't conjure up happy images of family friendly time. With a reputation for crowds and corruption, the kind of place many are literally paid to visit, I'd actually never been there aside from a brief stop on board one of my mother-in-law's afternoon bus trips back when Amy and I were just dating. I remember a boardwalk that looked to me like Rockaway, a bunch of overpriced Coney Island carnival like shows and attractions, and a bunch of buffets and casinos that seemed to make the whole place just seem like small Las Vegas. Over all though, Atlantic City never registered as a LGBT Family friendly destination by any stretch of the imagination.

However, over the last few years, YouTube has replaced any other entertainment venue in my house. My kids could watch YouTube all day and all night if I let them, and after sustaining a year's worth of quarantine, remote learning, and the utterly ominous and foreboding Trump presidential reign, YouTube entertainment became top billing in our household. A man formerly known as the NYC Hooters' Host, Randy Rainbow has become my oldest hero for his sharp, snarky, wit and presentation of American politics remade into parodies of mostly Broadway musicals. Looking to see this icon in person, I came across his tour and immediately bought the closest four tickets I could

find. These little snippets have helped my family laugh hardily throughout some otherwise terrifying years.

Still, we were honestly reluctant to book the hotel room in Atlantic City. But the ride down was just a few more hours than we felt we could handle roundtrip in one day. Not looking to spend too much, we wound



**The family on vacation last year in Atlantic City. The author, Ali Rothlizzi, far right, with left to right, son Kody, wife Amy, and son, Nik.**



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up booking a room in the Hampton Inn. Positioned a bit inland but touting an indoor pool, the Hampton Inn was cordial, accommodating, clean and affordable. They offered us a hot breakfast buffet complete with scrambled eggs, pancakes, sausage and waffles, the reasonably nice indoor pool, gym and exceptional service. The staff really did go above and beyond assisting us with directions, accommodating our immediate needs (even holding personal items behind the front desk for a while so we didn't have to run back up to the room to put away things the kids grabbed but couldn't carry around all night.).

We did not make a dinner reservation, and in hindsight that was a mistake. The strip's nicer places appear to book up rather quickly but we wound up in a nice buffet the kids chose. The best place we ate was the next morning's breakfast at "No Reservations." From avocado toast to an incredible lobster bisque, they were true to their name but worth any wait! Late sunset and modern GPS technology gave us the confidence to walk along the quiet, completely vacant (except for us) bike path until Harrah's began to emerge blinking and glowing silently in pink and blue neon through the fog like a sleeping giant.

Randy Rainbow was spectacular and more spectacular than him was the crowd that flocked to see him! All of us with so much in common congregated (some for the first time) together in an indoor rat maze touching surfaces and drinking alcohol without masks (even as "numbers" were "up"). It was nerve wracking but still a palpable sense of relief to see other faces, and begin navigating socially again.

Randy came out and already knew what he meant to all of us. Without apology he announced that he knew he had carried us all through the last couple of years. He sang songs I hadn't heard yet and introduced us to who he really was (all available in his new New York Times best-selling book *Playing with Myself*). The show was a playful mixture of Randy Rainbow (yes, his real name) banter and explanation of how he got started posting a few playful, snarky comedic videos of fictional cut scenes from relationships with actors

like Mel Gibson, Charlie Sheen, and John Travolta. Randy promised we'd get to see his widely known "Desperate Cheeto" video parodying the notorious DT, but not until he'd artfully taken us through his life, dilemmas, new book, and several costume changes (seriously rivaled Cher's!)

I looked around and couldn't really get a feel for the crowd. It was not just gay as I guess I'd expected. I mean there were all sorts present: old, young, black, white, straight, gay, male, female, all dancing, clapping, swinging and hailing this sassy young obviously

gay super talented and confident man. I looked over at my masked son clapping wildly in celebration of this marvel. How times have changed and this world evolved! I love that my kids are so readily exposed to multiple models of masculinity.

My only critique of Randy is that after hours of hearing over and over how his book had hit the New York Times Best-seller list, and he was altruistically sticking around after the show to sign any books bought. My son, anxious to force himself to stay awake long enough, desperately wanted to meet Randy. He had to wait online, buy the book and then follow

the directions back to the auditorium to have his moment. Only after remaining an hour did we realize that Randy was signing books, but only up on stage from anonymous piles with buyers watching at ground level from afar.

The next day, we drove to the strip and easily found street parking right in front of the old abandoned Trump Plaza. Like a post apocalyptic vision of how it seemed the United States would have wound up in an only slightly alternate universe, 2500 Boardwalk was still central to some prime midday fun on the strip. My family and I enjoyed a round of mini golf and a tour of Ripley's Believe It or Not! Both were some nice low pressure easy family fun that I'd recommend to anybody looking to experience a memorable couple of hours together. ▼

*Ali Rothlizzi 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*

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**Top left photo, Ali and Nik with Harrah's Resort's lights showing through the fog. Bottom left, the family playing miniature golf. Top right, Amy and Nik pose for a photo at Ripley's Believe It or Not!**

Photos courtesy of Ali Rothlizzi



# Broadway Husbands

By Dane Miller

**B**ret Shuford and Stephen Hanna are known to their 100,000 plus Instagram followers and Youtube subscribers as the “Broadway Husbands”. On March 26, 2022 they welcomed the birth of their son Maverick and documented their surrogacy journey on their channels to help others navigate this complex process. I spoke with them recently as Maverick reached the fourth month mark and found them a joy in every way-

creative, enthusiastic, authentic, and devoted to making themselves and Maverick’s journey as love filled and comfortable as they can.

Their biggest and greatest presence has been on social media. Their journey from surrogacy to the present has been both a challenging and yet organic process. Bret had always envisioned being a parent, and Stephen comes from a bigger family who witnessed his siblings raising children. He observed how they raised their kids and thought, “I could do that and be so intentional”. When they first met, into their second year of being together, Stephen told Bret at dinner “It would be so fun to raise a kid with you”. “Bret is so playful and fun,” Stephen says and they both were on the same page from the get go.

The first step they took was an informational meeting at the Gay and Lesbian Center in Manhattan. They heard speakers talking about surrogacy, adoption, and fostering. It was the first time they received actual information. Initially they couldn’t imagine having a child through surrogacy. For a long time they were thinking about adoption.

In a twist of fate, as they are both performers, they saw a movie with Molly Shannon – “Other People”, where there’s a scene right before she dies lying in bed and tells her son, “Promise me when I’m gone, you’ll come and see your sisters,” and the son says, “Of course Mom, why wouldn’t I do that?” And the mother replies, “If you come back, you will always see me in their faces”. Something about that sentiment resonated with Bret, as



*Stephen Hanna (left) and Bret Shuford with their son Maverick.*

his father was an only child. Surrogacy allowed them to have a legacy for both their families and carry on their names into future generations.

March of 2018 is when they started the process. Initially they felt it was a bit scientific in nature but the entire process came together so organically -- from their mutual desire to have a child, to making the initial steps, to starting the embryo process. Surrogacy in general is a financial commitment, but one of the mis-

conceptions about surrogacy is that all the money is required up front -- which is not true, it can be paid over time. Once the process was implemented, they split the eggs in half, so half were Stephen’s and half were Bret’s, and they told the doctors not to tell them whose embryo it was.

When it came to where to raise Maverick, they were in New York as Covid hit. They had been scheduled to meet with their surrogate when the shutdown started. April 1st is when they left, three weeks after Covid began. One of Stephen’s ballet teachers had passed away from Covid. Unlike most New Yorkers, they had a car and went to Pittsburgh to Bret’s brother to quarantine. Weeks turned into months as they were deciding to sell their apartment in New York. At one point they had a cash buyer but initially said no. Originally, they were considering staying in New York and waiting out things until Broadway came back. Ultimately after weighing options – they decided that if they didn’t sell the apartment, they wouldn’t be able to have their baby. They were both approaching 40 and made it official and accepted the cash offer, went back to New York and started packing and putting everything in storage. They had no plans on where to go next.

Stephen received a call from a childhood friend he grew up with in Pittsburgh who was teaching ballet in Houston. She said they needed a teacher and would he like to come teach ballet in the fall. Bret is originally from the Houston area and what was supposed to be three months turned into a more permanent move. Originally renting, they decided it would be more eco-



nomical to buy a house. At that point their surrogate said she was pregnant. Again providence had stepped in.

Their surrogacy journey was initially started with one surrogate who decided not to go through with it, and then they were at a birthday party for a friend who was a past Broadway performer. Her friend who had come from Orlando knew their situation and during the party said, "I would so have your baby". The day after the party she repeated her offer to let them know it wasn't just party chatter. Surrogates have to have a criminal background check, psychological evaluations, and other types of tests. Regardless, she was totally on board.

Both Broadway husbands come from a background that has lent itself to parenting in the most creative and ambitious manner. Stephen, in addition to being a ballet dancer is also a personal trainer. Bret received a life coaching certification in 2015 while he was working on Broadway. He initially felt it was another revenue stream that could secure their income because performers have breaks in their employment. He was always focused on the Broadway community, and when the pandemic hit, his role shifted into social media options, personal branding and how to create more content. It has been very fulfilling for Bret to take on this role and offer his expertise to performers, as well as others seeking to learn how to make changes in their professions or capitalize on their existing one.

Stephen was teaching at least 4 classes a week live in New York and then in Houston, and now teaches virtually as

well. Everything restarted sooner as far as Stephen being able to return to live teaching in Houston, while other parts of the country remained in lockdown. Initially he was hesitant to teach in person but felt the space was big enough and safe enough to teach with cautions in place.

As a couple, the Broadway Husbands have been an enriching endeavor because there is an authenticity they convey. Bret amusingly shares, "A lot of people who follow us respond because we are not painting a perfect picture. We aren't photoshopped and in speedos all the time -- sometimes we are looking like a hot mess and talking about it and how hard it can be. We want to show it's not always perfect and it can take four years to have the baby -- he just didn't magically show up and we have photos of him -- it was a lot of work."

It's been an exciting roller coaster. There are some people that are seeing them and seeing that they can have this too. It may take work -- four years to achieve what it is they want, but it is possible. All we are trying to do is keep people's spirits alive so they can keep pursuing their dreams because we have been very lucky to have been able to accomplish ours."

The amount of their social media content is impressive and creative across multiple platforms. From the genesis of their relationship, to present time, they integrate their dancing and acting skills with various skits and scenarios that now center around Maverick. They also include situations



**Bret Shuford (left) and Stephen Hanna.**

parents find themselves in that are universal in scope but that are endearingly personal to them.

They have started a Sunday live Broadway Husbands recently and find it engaging and full of very astute questions. There is quite a diverse group who tune in from all over the world and they have tackled subjects like the gay bill, and the unsettling political climate in Texas. They want to be a sounding board for those willing to have real conversations.



**Bret Shuford performing.**

The work that goes into their social media content is a group effort. The hardest part is getting the two and Maverick together time wise when work and father-



hood doesn't get it in the way. It's been a huge learning curve. Because of their performance background, their social media platforms are a great opportunity to not only use those skills but they are doing it together -- something they never had the opportunity to do when they were in New York and it's become a great and fun outlet. They have learned so much about each other and each other's creativity, style, and point of view. The scheduling of creating content including Maverick, is interspersed with feeding schedules, and including him in their media, and of course daily parenting.

The journey to creating their social platform was born from the observation of other gay couples online who have relationships that don't work out yet there were photos of the "happy couple". Bret and Stephen were married and in a long term relationship and were performers, so originally it was to represent stable gay relationships and a way to reach young people who could see a gay married couple thrive but still retain their creative nature.

Bret says, "You have to learn to create more than you consume. We all are consuming so much content, but there's a reason you're consuming the content because it resonates with you -- so whatever platform- YouTube, instagram, start thinking about if you were going to create something, what would you create."

During the pandemic they made a rule that they could only scroll media if they created something. Stephen says, "It's important that we all not just contribute to the receiving of information -- we can all make an impact on putting information out there". While there is a certain amount of branding on social media, everything they support and include on

their platform are items they use in everyday life or have discovered as useful to share with new parents. The work that is involved in weaving a narrative with Mav-



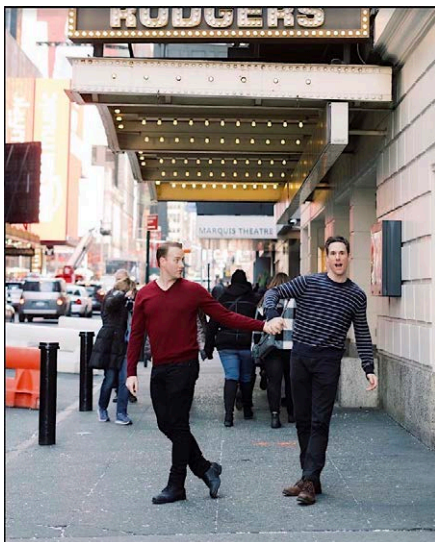
**Above, the couple with their surrogate, Krystle Robertson.**

erick and their lives is hard work but the end result is charming and is geared towards their audience wanting to know what happens next.

As a new gay parent, living in the south, Bret was used to the level of bigot-



**Above, Olympic sleepers. Bottom left photo, the couple on Broadway.**



ry growing up, but now their tolerance for bigotry is zero. In the book "Gay Dads Guide to Parenting" they read that "every day you are out in public is like coming out of the closet."

For now, Houston is home as there is professional theatre, but they will base their decision on where Maverick can go to school where he isn't the only child with two dads and there are

other gay couples.

These two men are an impressive example of a deep love of each other, their crafts, and now channeling their love into raising Maverick in the best way possible. The formula they use is organic, USDA approved European formulas, and mother owned and operated. Other baby products they use are carefully researched and are practical and yet innovative at the same time. To see the myriad of products they are sharing with their audience follow them on any of their media platforms.

The combination of both their backgrounds is a fertile landscape in which to raise Maverick and as parents they find every possible way to give him an enriching life. Even at just 4 months, the two men are learning parenting skills that are

innovative positive templates for ensuring their son gets the most out of their skill sets as fully devotional parents and multi talented individuals.

As we all have moved into this new normal and social media has become a part of the societal landscape, its refreshing to see the dedication of two hard working men who pour their love into their child, while melding their in-

nate gifts into a relatable and ingenious manner.

The world of social media is a mixed bag, but "Broadway Husbands" provides a way to experience that bag as a welcoming gift. Follow the family on Instagram and YouTube at @broadwayhusbands ▼

*Dane Miller is a freelance writer and Gay Parent contributor living in New York City. He is an avid health enthusiast with a background in nutrition, as well as interests and participation in the arts – singing, theatre, and art.*

Photos courtesy of Jonathan Ochart



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