New York Senator Brad Hoylman & family

- LOFT Families
- A Letter to My Boy by Cara Cilento
- I was adopted by Jewish lesbians - Moshe Alpert-Eschbach

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Cover photo courtesy of Avi Small. Photo credits this page top to bottom: photo courtesy of Kieva Anderson, La'Shay Hamilton, Richard Mitchell, and DeQuawn Parker.
MICHAEL S. GOLDSTEIN, ESQ.

Recipient — 2006 Congressional “Angels in Adoption” Award
Adoption and Family Law

Michael S. Goldstein, Esq., LCSW, is an Attorney admitted in New York and Florida and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. He has been practicing adoption law for 35+ years, and is the proud adoptive father of three. Michael has helped thousands of adoptive families and birth parents create permanent, loving families through adoption. He is a Founder and Current Fellow of the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproduction Attorneys (AAAA), Governor Emeritus and Legal Advisor of the Adoptive Parents Committee (APC), Founder and Former Board Member of the New York Attorneys for Adoption and Family Formation (NYAAFF), Former Board Member of the Adoptive and Foster Family Coalition of New York (AFFCNY-formerly NYSCC), Member of the National Council for Adoption (NCFA), Member of the Port Chester Immigration Defense (PCID), Co-Founder of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. (FFTA), and Founder and Executive Director of Foster Teen Employment Network (FTEN).

- Michael focuses on helping domestic families successfully adopt.
- Provides legal services for those needing assistance with their immigration concerns.
- Provides private Counseling Sessions for all members of the Triad.

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Forever Families Through Adoption (FFTA) is a Hague Accredited, New York and Connecticut authorized, not-for-profit, adoption placement agency and resource center founded on the belief that every child has the right to grow up in a loving, nurturing, secure and forever home.

The goal of FFTA is to find a home for every child eligible for permanent adoption, regardless of age, racial or ethnic background, or physical or emotional challenge.

FFTA treats all people with the respect and compassion they deserve, regardless of race, religion, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, age, nationality or disability. We take great pride in representing many single and same sex clients. FFTA is the recipient of the HRC SEAL of Recognition since 2011. FFTA is here to ensure that your dream of building a family through adoption becomes a reality.

Joy S. Goldstein, LCSW, ACSW, the Co-Founder and Executive Director of FFTA, is an adoptive mother of three boys and has been working with her husband, Michael, for approximately 33 years as an Adoption Consultant. She is the recipient of the 2012 Congressional “Angels in Adoption” Award, nominated by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand. FFTA is staffed by caring and experienced social workers, attorneys, adoptive parents, and adoptees who are here to assist you with your domestic and international adoptions.

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www.foreverfamiliesthroughadoption.org
A Note From Gay Parent Magazine

Dear Readers,

While we were working on this issue of our annual Gay Parent Magazine-New York (GPM-NY), COVID-19 happened. For the past 18 years GPM-NY has always published on May 1st. This year because of the pandemic we had to postpone publishing until July 1st. Next year GPM-NY will resume publishing on May 1st in time to list Pride events taking place in the tri-state area. An annual supplement to our bi-monthly Gay Parent Magazine, GPM-NY focuses on LGBTQ family life in the tristate area of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Most of the content of this issue was written pre-pandemic and before the recent #BlackLivesMatter protests. Gay Parent Magazine supports the #BlackLivesMatter movement and from our beginnings in 1998, always made it a priority to include parents of color on our pages. In fact in 2015, Gay Parent Magazine was given an award for Outstanding Magazine at the 9th Annual PrideIndex.com Esteem Awards (see photo). The PrideIndex.com Esteem Award honors local and national organizations and individuals for their continued efforts in supporting the African-American and LGBT communities in the areas of entertainment, media, civil rights, business, and art.

Also a big change, you are reading our first digital only issue of Gay Parent Magazine-New York. Due to the pandemic we have decided to change to publishing and circulating only our digital issues. To read it on paper, print this digital issue. Although this is a big change, Gay Parent Magazine is still committed to supporting and empowering our audience of LGBTQ parents and those in the LGBTQ community wishing to become parents. We’ve been doing it for over 20 years. So whether you’re reading our digital issue, visiting our website, or engaging with our social media—Gay Parent Magazine is here for you, supporting your family.

Make sure to get on our mailing list through our redesigned website and follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/gay.parent.magazine), Twitter (twitter.com/gayparentmag), and Instagram (www.instagram.com/gayparentmagazine) to get our latest issues, interact with other families, and receive information on LGBTQ parenting.

We, the team at Gay Parent Magazine thank you for reading this issue. In this new reality, we wish you and yours, safety, good health, and a bright future ahead.

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- Bonding Repair Therapy • Baby Massage
- Understanding the Newborn in the 4th Trimester
- Professional Trainings & Supervision
- GoGo Babies® Tummy Time, Baby Yoga, & Developmental Movement
- Babies • Children • Adults

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Founder and Director
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www.brightstartbabies.com

Family photo share from Kieva Anderson

Family photo share from La'Shay Hamilton
Family photo share from DeQuawn Parker

Family photo share from Latricia Queenb Sweeney

We love to hear from you. Send us your photos and comments by email at gayparentmag@gmail.com or through facebook/gay.parent.magazine.com.

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Connecticut

• Queer Mamas* of Connecticut. Private Facebook group at https://www.facebook.com/groups/ctqueermas/

New Jersey

• NJ Queer Parents. Private Facebook group at https://www.facebook.com/groups/1073706709338540/

• Rainbow Families of New Jersey, https://www.facebook.com/groups/RainbowFamiliesNJ/

New York

• Bronx Family Circles Inc., https://www.facebook.com/Bxfamilycircles/

• The Center, check out programs for families at the LGBTQ Community Center, 208 West 13th St., www.gaycenter.org/family-youth/family. Phone 212-620-7310 or email centerfamilies@gaycenter.org. The Center provides counseling for LGBTQ couples and individuals, support and education for intended parents, monthly play days for LGBTQ parents with young children, and a LGBTQ Family Building Expo.

• Pride and Joy Families, Helping lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) people in Upstate New York achieve their goals of building and sustaining healthy families. Established April 2000. A Committee of the Center for Gender, Art, and Culture, Binghamton, NY, visit www.facebook.com/PrideandJoyFamilies or email: prideandjoyfamilies@gmail.com.

• LOFT Families. A social support group for LGBT headed families in Westchester County and surrounding areas. To find out about their events please email Ryan Kirrane at ryan@loftgaycenter.org. See article on page 12 about LOFT Families.

• The Center Family Project is an initiative of LIGALY and The Long Island LGBT Community Center. Services provided include: parenthood, family & relationship support, Long Island LGBT Foster Care Project, and family resources. The Center has partnered with the organization, You Gotta Believe, to place teenagers in permanent adoptive homes and provides Adoptive Parent Preparation Classes every Monday at The Center at Bay Shore. For more information visit http://lgtnetwork.org/family.

• Long Island Adoption Support Group, Suffolk County, NY. Email Chemene for info at liadoptivefamilies@gmail.com. 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. Visit our website, www.liadoptivefamilies.org.

• Family Pride, visit www.capitalpridecenter.org/programs-services/family-pride/.

• Park Slope Queer Parents’ Group (but not limited to Park Slope!), email: psqpg-subscribe@yahoogroups.com, visit http://groups.

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Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc. earns All Children – All Families Seal of Recognition for LGBTQ best practices

Forever Families Through Adoption (FFTA), a NY and CT-authorized adoption placement agency and resource center in Rye Brook, NY, proudly announced that it is being recognized in Change-Makers in Child Welfare 2020 -- a report highlighting the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation’s All Children - All Families (ACAF) program’s partnership with 100 organizations across the country working to improve the services they provide to the LGBTQ community, including children in foster care and prospective foster and adoptive parents. These organizations serve more than 600,000 clients annually in 28 states, and employ more than 15,000 workers.

FFTA was again awarded the All Children-All Families Seal of Recognition by the Human Rights Campaign. The Seal signifies that FFTA is an organization that is welcoming, affirming and supportive of LGBTQ families, and recognized as one of 100 child welfare agencies committed to LGBTQ inclusion and has once again demonstrated skill and competency in areas of best practice. FFTA reached the highest “Tier of Recognition,” which celebrates FFTA as being fully LGBTQ welcoming and affirming and being one of the 39 agencies reaching the “Innovative Inclusion Tier”; meeting ALL 25 criteria and going above and beyond to innovate services for LGBTQ families.

FFTA originally received the SEAL in November 2011 during National Adoption Day at the Westchester County Family Court with the Honorable Judge Kathie E. Davidson presiding. National Adoption Day is recognized throughout the United States when an unprecedented number of courts open their doors to finalize the adoptions of thousands of children and celebrate all families that adopt. Judge Davidson has been recognizing and finalizing same-sex adoptions for many years, and has always supported the work that FFTA does and congratulates them in receiving this important honor.

FFTA is truly proud and pleased to continually place children with LGBTQ families and to always focus on the best interests of children in need of their forever family. Joy S. Goldstein, LCSW, ACSW, Executive Director and co-founder of the agency stated, “As we celebrate the awarding of the All Children-All Families Seal of Recognition we are not only supporting the LGBTQ community, but are standing up for ethical practice by removing barriers to LGBTQ adults who dream of becoming parents and to children in need of a safe, permanent and loving family.”

Every day FFTA is committed to treating all persons with respect, dignity and compassion and welcomes all families regardless of race, religion, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, marital status, age, nationality or disability.

The All Children – All Families initiative, launched in 2007, promotes policies and practices that welcome LGBTQ foster and adoptive parents. The program seeks to enhance LGBTQ cultural competence among child welfare professionals and educate LGBTQ people about opportunities to become foster or adoptive parents to waiting children. More information about HRC and the initiative can be found at www.hrc.org/acaf. More information about FFTA can be found at www.ForeverFamiliesThroughAdoption.org or call 914-939-1180.

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LOFT Families is a social support group for LGBTQ headed families living in Westchester County and surrounding areas. The following is an interview with Ryan Kirrane, Volunteer & Membership Manager with the LOFT LGBT Community Center. Please note we chatted with Ryan prior to the COVID-19 stay at home orders.

Gay Parent Magazine-New York: Why the name change from LOFT Kids to LOFT Families?

Ryan Kirrane: We changed the name to LOFT Families to signify that this group is meant to be a mingling and networking group for LGBT families as a whole, and not just the kids. We hope that LGBT families are able to make connections with each other which includes both parents and kids.

GPM: Approximately how many families use your services?

RK: Each group event has a different range of families, typically we get between three to ten different families who come to our meet-ups and groups. Our email list goes out to over 150 parents and is always growing!

GPM: What areas do the families live in that use your services?

RK: We have families that come from all different towns and cities of Westchester. Katonah, New Rochelle, Yonkers, and Chappaqua, are just a few to mention. We have also had families come to groups who are from Manhattan, the Bronx, and Rockland County.

GPM: What services and activities do you offer families?

Support Groups continued from page 10

• 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 about sexual orientation and gender orientation, in a friendly, confidential and supportive environment. Visit http://www.pflagli.org/

• COLAGE - People with a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer Parent. A national organization operated by and supporting children of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents. Provides support, social events, education, and advocacy. Email: colage@colage.org, visit www.colage.org.

• Queer Parents* NYC. Private Facebook group at https://www.facebook.com/groups/118634725192458/

• Queer/Trans Family Building Group, The Queer/Trans Family Building Group is a series of online workshops designed to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals planning to become parents. https://www.facebook.com/queertransfamily/

EVENTS

Note, we normally list events beginning in May but due to the COVID-19 pandemic we are listing events that may have already took place this year. Even though some of these events already took place, these events usually occur around the same time each year and feel it’s worth listing so that you can make a note for their event next year. Also, check this list for the few Pride celebrations that are still happening (not virtually).

8th Annual LGBTQ Family Building Expo. Usually
RK: Currently we do a lot of different types of meet-ups for families. We have had meet-ups at Westchester Pride, hosted Halloween costume parties, back-to-school events, clothing and toy swaps, and more! We planned a Drag Queen Story Hour event at The LOFT this April. More information about past events can be found at www.loftgaycenter.org/loft_families

GPM: Ryan, how long have you been the Volunteer & Membership Manager and what are your duties and background?

RK: I have been a staff member of the LOFT since August of 2017. I became the Volunteer & Membership Manager in January 2018! I coordinate all of our volunteers and interns at the center as well as our paid members and business partners. I supervise and set-up our volunteers with projects, as well as conduct interviews. I also co-facilitate The LOFT’s 20-Something LGBT peer support group and am the staff person in charge of coordinating LOFT Families activities.

GPM: Do you have children?

RK: I do not have children myself but I am pursuing my Master's in Social Work and have really enjoyed my experience working with LOFT Families so far.

For more information email Ryan at ryan@loftgaycenter.org or visit www.loftgaycenter.org.

Photo courtesy of Ryan Kirrane

Queens Pride. Usually held the first Sunday in June in Jackson Heights, this year Queens Pride was livestreamed on June 7th. View a recording of Queens Pride by visiting www.queenspride.org.

Westchester Pride 2020. Last year Westchester Pride took place the first weekend of June at downtown White Plains, Court St. - Renaissance Plaza. As of this writing a note on their website says information about Westchester Pride 2020 will be updated in the coming months. Visit www.loftgaycenter.org/westchester_pride for updates.

Hudson Valley Pride March & Festival. Usually held the first weekend in June in New Paltz. This year they held a month long series of virtual Pride events starting with a the repainting of a rainbow crosswalk in Kingston. It ends with a Very Peculiar Drag Show on June 27th. Visit http://lgbtqcenter.org/pride for information.

Brooklyn Pride week long events held in June were virtual this year. They are postponing their Dine With Pride Home Edition Trivia and Drag Queen Bingo events. For more information visit www.brooklynpride.org.

Long Island Pride took place virtually this June and featured Taylor Dayne, Johnny Weir, Senator Charles Schumer, NYC Councilman Danny Dromm and many more. Looking forward to seeing them back on the beach next year. For information visit https://prideonthecoast.org/.

8th International Family Equality Day was held on May 3, 2020. LGBTQ family organizations from around the world will join forces to increase the international visibility of LGBTQ families. Next year’s International Family Equality Day will be celebrated on May 2, 2021. Visit http://internationalfamilyequalityday.org/ for events.

Staten Island PrideFest 2020 took place virtually this past May featuring more than a week of events. PrideFest is a production of the Pride Center of Staten Island. Visit www.pridecenteronsi.org/pridefest-events.

Oneonta Pridefest 2020 streamed live and was recorded on June 6, 2020. Since it was recorded watch Oneonta Pride 2020’s full list of musical entertainment including Evergreen Studio Concert, Enormous Little Things Studio Concert, Bold Theatrics, and Sweet Marie Studio Concert. To watch visit https://www.otsegopridealliance.org/pridefest-2020/

For updates.


Moving from Queens to Long Island

By Ali Polizzi

I once dated a woman who basically lived in a "closet" on Long Island (a walk in to be sure) and she never really even been to the city. The quiet there was punctuated only by the sound of the local train whistle that always made me feel like I was in a Melissa Etheridge song. It seemed so strange but now that I live on Long Island, I understand how she never went to the city. I'm currently commuting from Nassau to the South Bronx. Don't pity me. I absolutely love it!

My wife and I are Bayside, Queens girls. I grew up listening to drag racing up and down Francis Lewis Boulevard, and she was raised in a garden apartment off 73rd. We'd assumed we'd own a three story Victorian but I've yet to meet a GenXer who was raised in a garden apartment off 73rd. We'd assumed we'd own a three story Victorian but I've yet to meet a GenXer to do that. So at first, we decided to purchase a co-op while we began our family. We enjoyed the freedom to paint our own nursery without worrying about landlords, so I had a panoramic coral reef scene complete with an ocean that crashed up against textured mountains and peered into space. But we couldn't host a decent family gathering and everything I ever planted was thoughtlessly ripped from the earth or died from polyurethane paint.

We started looking for a home again. Our oldest is on the spectrum and we'd heard amazing things about Herricks' School special education program. We'd found a home we liked, but we were quickly out bid. This happened a few times' School special education program. We'd found a home again. Our oldest is on the spectrum and we'd heard amazing things about Herricks' School special education program. We'd found a home we liked, but we were quickly out bid. This happened a few times. We started looking for a home again. Our oldest is on the spectrum and we'd heard amazing things about Herricks' School special education program. We'd found a home we liked, but we were quickly out bid. This happened a few times. We started looking for a home again. Our oldest is on the spectrum and we'd heard amazing things about Herricks' School special education program. We'd found a home we liked, but we were quickly out bid. This happened a few times. We started looking for a home again. 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more times (the average is 20) before we began to fall in love with Mineola. It was close and about as ethnically diverse as Queens. We put a serious bid up for a little Cape. We thought it had been accepted and immediately put up our co-op for sale, but we lost the house and suddenly faced homelessness.

Quickly, we scrambled to rent in Glen Oaks, Queens. Back to white walls, I enjoyed a deck and courtyard where our two boys made their first friends rather easily. There were mornings we woke up to other people’s kids peering in our glass doors and asking to use our bathroom or share our breakfast. The elementary school was adjacent to a farm, but we endured annual threats that we may have to move as our landlord aged and her daughter saw bigger dollar signs with new renters. So we decided we’d better move on to a “real space we could call our own.”

This was when we went all in. We had a wish list, and we knew we wouldn’t get it all. The non-negotiables were the school districts, tax maximums, and a backyard barbecue where we could feed birds (rookie move!). We worked with MANY different agents over the years, but at this point we’d found Kathy Caruso who really stuck with it working tirelessly to help us find the best home.

Our major stalemate was when we found ourselves between two houses. One was a classically large home in the Harborfield’s school district and the other was a smaller quirky Victorian in Farmingdale Village. My wife liked the Harborfield house. But here are some of the issues: the cancer rate on Long Island is one of the highest in the country, and Greenlawn set off our Electromagnetic Field...
Adopted by Jewish Lesbians, Meet Moshé

By Michael P Coleman

Moshé Alpert-Eschbach almost defies description. He certainly has a journey that defies perception and expectation.

He and his brother, Asa, were adopted as infants by two Jewish lesbians, Susan Eschbach and the late Harriet Alpert. The two women met in the 1980s at a Boston multi-service center where they both worked.

“In New York at the time, there was a new court case that said that an unmarried partner of a couple could adopt the birth child of one of the couple,” Eschbach said. “When the courts let this happen...it paved the way for straight couples who were unmarried, but the man wanted to adopt his partner’s birth child. Then, we came along [in] an unmarried partnership who could not marry, with one parent being the adoptive one.”

Eschbach had adopted Alpert-Eschbach as a single person because gay couples couldn’t adopt at the time in their then home state of Texas. The prior court cased paved the way for gay and lesbians to form families via second parent adoptions.

“The judge who ruled on that initial second parent adoption wanted to rule on our case before she retired,” Eschbach said. “Moshé’s case was the first case like that in New York City at the time. By the time we adopted Asa in the same way, three years later, there were already over 50 cases [involving gay or lesbian parents].”

After a sigh, Alpert exclaimed “Now, out married or unmarried gay families can adopt without all of that mishegas!”

“We used to rent a house there every summer,” Alpert-Eschbach continued. “One of the houses we rented towards the end, right on the beach, was also rented regularly by [former Secretary of State] Colin Powell and his family. How cool is that? It was an amazing experience spending my growing up years there in the summers, surrounded by community and people that felt like ‘home’, if you will. I will always treasure the people from there and the memories I carry in my heart to this very day.”

Not all of Alpert-Eschbach’s childhood experiences were as bucolic. In contrast to his fond memories of Provincetown and the love he felt from other LGBTQ families, he sometimes eschewed that same community. For example, he recalled shunning the rainbow stickers and flags his moms proudly displayed.

“I remember the whole rainbow bumper sticker thing,” Alpert-Eschbach said. “When I was little, I used to ask my moms to take it off, to stop. I [could] see the looks we were getting, and I could feel the hate. My moms also had a rainbow flag outside of our house growing up, and that caused a lot of drama with neighborhood kids. People would say things all of the time and just be really mean about it.”

You may have caught Alpert-Eschbach’s mention of “the end” of his family’s summertime fun in Provincetown. It heralded a much more troubled time in his life.

“We stopped going to Provincetown regularly when my mother Harriet fell ill with [Our home] was filled with all of the things that children need, plus so much more, when it comes to my mom’s love, devotion, fun, play, and adventure.”

One of the locales for “adventure” during Alpert-Eschbach’s childhood was Provincetown, Massachusetts, where he and his family attended Family Week every summer. They were among the first to attend the event, in the 1990s.

“Provincetown means a lot to me,” Alpert-Eschbach said. “It is a place forever in my heart. We were sort of like pioneers there for Family Week — we were there right from the beginning. It was great to watch [the event] grow over the years and become what it is today!”

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“We stopped going to Provincetown regularly when my mother Harriet fell ill with continued on page 18
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(EMF) Detector all over the place. We wanted a proper EMF inspection but we were refused that access outright by the seller's realtor. While trying to explain, I mentioned that EMF's have been linked to cancer and they can tend to be higher within a few feet of above-ground power lines and railroad tracks. That realtor dug in describing us as ridiculous. Her friend had lived right by the railroad tracks - until he died of a brain tumor!

Now, I liked Farmingdale. There's Republic Airport, Adventureland, a State College, a quaint little main street area and they sport both a tree and menorah during the holidays. I held an instant affinity for Farmingdale where there was enough going on that I knew we'd have a certain anonymity.

But Harborfield is rated one of the top school districts in the country. It's on the Northern side of the Island, and Greenlawn has a skatepark! Our tour through the elementary school revealed they even had a GSA - gay straight alliance - for elementary school kids! Farmingdale (we've since come to learn) also has a GSA, not in the elementary schools (there are four) but in the middle school. Our local hairdresser revealed to me that she was struggling with her transgender kid's coming out. One of her "problems" was with the middle school contacting her to ask her permission the change her child's records to reflect preferred pronouns. Preferred pronouns!!!

One dinner in Greenlawn sealed the decision that the place just felt too small - too quiet. It just felt too unlikely we'd fit in. We wound up buying a different house in South Farmingdale. It checked most of the boxes, passed inspection, and possessed its own innate charm. It hasn't been without wrinkles. I fed the birds and the next day my lawn was torn up. For a couple years we thought it was moles and actually sprayed fox urine to keep them away. Turns out it was a raccoon! Unfortunately, as much as my family took to the streets campaigning house to house for Liuba Grechen Shirley, Peter King kept his seat in the Senate.

We fit in, but we don't fit in. They make it feel like a chill community - nobody blinking to our face over the fact that two women married and have children. But when I casually asked if the annual father/daughter dance at the school could evolve into a parent/child gig, all hell broke loose over the internet and it's pretty clear that the special education services here are policed by an unchallenged boys club. I haven't much bothered since with the PTA and instead have found my own little pockets of cool outcasts to hang with, but we're getting along.

The thing is that at the end of the day, the kids have less friends to play with, but the ones they do have they are really close to. They have the opportunity to play many different sports and join several different clubs for less money than normal (taxes) and the commute gives me ample time to unwind to my books on audio. I get the chill excitement of the Bronx working in a school I love as well as the opportunity to fall asleep to the sound of crickets and distant train whistles.

Photos courtesy of Ali Polizzi
severe [brain] cancer," Alpert-Eschbach said. "I was in the sixth grade when she died. It was not only a blow to the entire family, but to all of our beloved rituals, as well. To this day, it's still hard. Nothing was the same after."

The family stumbled after Alpert's death, during a few events about which Alpert-Eschbach still feels strongly today. "About a week after my mama Harriet's death, my mom Susan rebounded into a relationship with a new woman," Alpert-Eschbach said. "That's something that is still a sensitive subject, as they are still together, and one that I have definitely not gotten over. I probably never will."

Alpert-Eschbach also felt "the hate" very directly from some of his peers, having been relentlessly bullied as a child. Because of it, he described himself as a "life long struggler with self esteem."

"I was bullied so much as a little kid," Alpert-Eschbach remembered. "From day one, people had an issue with me. People would constantly ask whether I was a boy or a girl. I had feminine facial features when I was little, so no one knew what I was. I was just always picked on for that, by older boys, mainly."

"I remember one time I was in a hot tub with these older, teenage boys and they were asking me 'What are you?' and 'Do you have one of these?' as one of them grabbed his thing. It was really shocking. The bullying lasted up until the end of high school, where it wasn't so much about LGBTQ stuff: it was about racial stuff."

Like a diamond that is formed under pressure, Alpert-Eschbach transformed his pain into a survivor's spirit — with a little help from one of his moms.

"I'll never forget the ruby rose necklace that my mom Harriet gave me as a kid, when I was too scared to get in front of a few judges for a movie audition," Alpert-Eschbach recalled. "She told me it was a ruby in memory of the strength possessed by civil rights legend Ruby Bridges. It worked! I sang my heart out!"

And he got the role! You can catch Alpert-Eschbach in the independent series Project Greenlight from 2002. He has also been featured in photographer Gabriela Herman's internationally acclaimed book of photographs of people from LGBTQ families.

And in case you're wondering, Alpert-Eschbach’s relationship with his surviving mom cleared its hurdles.

"My mom Susan did the best she could," Alpert-Eschbach reflected. "Did she make mistakes? Of course! But she is my absolute rock. She has stood by me and supported me throughout many tumultuous years, during my own downward spiral during which I dabbled in the NYC nightlife scene, which lasted on and off for many years. I feel so lucky to have her and I don't know what I would do without her. She's my everything."

"Sometimes it pains me and scares me because my love for her is so deep and I don't know what to do with all the feelings," Alpert-Eschbach continued. "I'm scared of losing her too. Always."

I wrote earlier of Alpert-Eschbach’s resistance to being categorized. For example, he described himself as "mostly gay."

"I feel gayness as I move through this world," Alpert-Eschbach said. "I project it. But that doesn't mean that I haven't been with women or feel attraction towards them, either. I guess one could say it's a more fluid approach to the whole thing."

"My Kinsey Scale rating would lean gay, but not entirely," he continued. "I may typical-
ly prefer men, but I’m not blind either!”

While his physical appearance reflects his African descent, Alpert-Eschbach said he is much more connected to his Jewish heritage.

“My blackness is just a part of who I am, the skin I was born into,” Alpert-Eschbach said. “Being black is just an immutable characteristic. I don’t subscribe to societal pressures to place meaning on that. I full-heartedly reject stereotypes. I was raised to look beyond constructs like race, gender and orientation. I refuse to be defined by them.”

“I will never be enough something for some people, and I’m totally okay with that,” Alpert-Eschbach continued. “I’m happy simply being me.”

In closing, Alpert-Eschbach wanted to offer a word of encouragement to others, particularly to other children of LGBTQ families.

“I’d like to encourage other kids of LGBTQ families to find people who come from families like yours, and hold them dear, treasure them,” Alpert-Eschbach said. “I went to a school that had a COLAGE group (www.colage.org). I grew up in a town where there were a lot of kids of LGBTQ people, so I learned early on that there are great opportunities for connections to be made.”

Connect with freelance writer Michael P Coleman at michaelcoleman.com or follow him on Twitter: @Coleman-MichaelP

Photos courtesy of Moshé Alpert-Eschbach.
A Letter to My Boys

Dear Boys,

From the minute I saw you, I was in awe. You were just so perfect. It was hard to imagine that such perfect babies were blank slates and behind your soft brown eyes you were waiting for my wisdom and life’s lessons to write the foundation of your history. It left me with the question of “Where should I begin?” To tell you the truth I had lost my mother just three months before you became my sons and I felt like was flying blind. I watched T.V…a lot of T.V. Was I going to be a Mrs. Brady? A Roseann? A Mrs. Huxtable? Marge Simpson? When I became a mother and my children looked at me—what caricature was I going to be? Would they know I didn’t know what I was doing? Seriously, I didn’t know what I was doing. So, I had to read everything there was to read. I took classes. I researched transracial adoption. I did it all just so I could be prepared to share with you tried and true data driven strategies and advice for African American boys being raised by a white mom. I felt successful. I knew how to braid hair, twist hair, and make corn rows. I knew Jamaican Castor Oil from coconut oil and Shea butter from Cocoa Butter. I had African American books, dolls and wrapping paper. I had a Kinara and whatever else you could think of. I was ready for you. But you knew, that one social worker that came to the house looked past all that stuff and asked, “How are going to raise them in Black Culture?” I held my tongue. You see there! There is a lesson! Sometimes you have to hold your tongue and think before you speak. In this thought I thought it better to smile and say “Well what do you suggest?” She had no suggestions. Just a statement. “You’re not Black don’t erase their culture.” I wanted to smack her and say “Really? What gave it away, Captain Obvious? Of course I’m not Black!” But I didn’t. Which is another lesson: Keep your hands to yourself. But I guess I passed her inspection because I became your mother.

The day I picked you up at the hospital, you looked at me with magnificent wonder. Our eyes locked. It was as if you were speaking to me without words. I wondered how many others looked in your eyes but couldn’t hear you. I wondered how many people didn’t look at you at all.

Day after day and night after night, you spoke to me with your eyes. Sometimes you reminded me to look with a cry or a fret. Sometimes you entranced me with giggles and smiles. All along speaking to me without words. I knew when to hold you. Change you. Feed you. Play with you. All from looking at your eyes. If the corners turned up, you needed a change. If you liked dinner you closed them as if the corners turned down. If your eyes turned down, you wanted change. If you liked dinner you closed them as if the corners turned up. Sometimes you have to hold your tongue and think before you speak.

I admit, as you grew, sometimes things were awkward. It was better to laugh than get upset. That’s another lesson. Look for the humor because nine times out of ten, it’s not you being the fool. Like that time the lady in the elevator asked me if I was your sitter and how much I charge. Or the time the camp counselor wouldn’t release you to me because “she didn’t see your mom”…or my favorite, the time the waiter tried to seat you with the family waiting for a table ahead of us because they were of color. But through all the humor, I realized that we had to change our game plan. Most people don’t see what I see, that we are all one race…a human race. It is literally, a black and white world out there. Remember that.

From there I think the three of us can agree that things got harder in the outside world. For me and for you. You saw me cry over Trayvon Martin and Tyre King. Not only cry for the lack of justice but a deep communal cry that all mothers cry when they lose a child. You saw my face fall when you told me you weren’t getting driver’s licenses because you didn’t want to get shot like Philando Castile and I saw your hearts sink because you came to the realization that our world is different than most. So act like the world is watching. Be men when others behave like children. Your future…your lives depend on it. Tell that lesson to your children.

Together, we learned to stand up for ourselves with grace and dignity. Sometimes we made people uncomfortable. Don’t be afraid to make people uncomfortable with your knowledge and pride. That’s what makes people grow. Another lesson. Remember that time you had to read Holes for school? And the Black character was shot for kissing a White woman? I went to the school and I said, “I know this is part of history but what are you going to do to promote African American culture?” They offered to do a lesson. One lesson. On the history of the NBA. Remember I came home so upset that, not to take away from the NBA, but they considered THAT history! I mean, you were learning about states and capitals couldn’t they do a lesson on the founder of Chicago? Jean-Baptist-Point Du Sable? A man of color from Haiti. I came home and shared my frustration with you and one of you stormed off. You saw me cry over Treyvon Martin and Tyre King. Not only cry for the lack of justice but a deep communal cry that all mothers cry when they lose a child. You saw me cry over Treyvon Martin and Tyre King. Not only cry for the lack of justice but a deep communal cry that all mothers cry when they lose a child. You saw me cry over Treyvon Martin and Tyre King. Not only cry for the lack of justice but a deep communal cry that all mothers cry when they lose a child. You saw me cry over Treyvon Martin. I realized that we had to change our game plan. Most people don’t see what I see, that we are all one race…a human race. It is literally, a black and white world out there. Remember that.

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From that experience, and my home lesson on Du Sable, you questioned your origins. Where were you from? We took DNA tests. I was Italian/Greek, European Jewish and yes, North African. You were Congolese, Cameroonian and yes, European. You both had rich 80,000 year old history of wars, regime changes, and European influence such as German, British and Portuguese. You carry legacies of strong people. Draw on it as you grow. Learn who you are so you know who you can become. More lessons. I promise, I’ll stop now…but I think I have one more.

The other day we were riding in the car and I was listening to music. I knew we were going to get into our struggle of who is in control of the radio. Again, I lost the battle. You said to me you wanted to listen to Black music. Now, I could have gotten into a philosophical argument and debated what exactly is Black music but I let it go. Instead, I said, “Guys, if you haven’t noticed, I’m white.” One of you replied, “Yea but you’re Black on the inside, Mom”. Black on the inside. I thought about that social worker who said I wasn’t Black. She’s still right. I’m not. But she was wrong about me adopting you and erasing your culture. You both adopted me and made me part of yours. That’s my lesson.

I love you both,
Mom ♥

Residing in New Jersey, Cara Cilento is the mother of two adopted fourteen year old African-American boys. They have been her muse as she writes about social issues in communities today. Cara uses those writings as a voice for the voiceless, to give perspective from the outside looking in, and jump start conversations which are sometimes hard to have. Cara has been a speech pathologist in the public school system for over 20 years and has been writing for way more. Her first book of poetry, Snapshots: Say Cheese! The World Is Watching, received the 2019 Bronze Living Now Award in the Sexuality/Femininity category. When Cara is not writing, she is feverishly creating images to be exhibited in various galleries across the nation or navigating the teen years with her boys.

Photos courtesy of Cara Cilento
New York State is well-served by two-term senator, Brad Hoylman. Openly gay, and a fierce defender of the LGBT community, Brad is also a husband and a proud father of two.

Brad was born in Phoenix, Arizona in 1965, the youngest of six children. His mother was a schoolteacher; his father was a process systems analyst for a Swiss power and automation technology company.

Much of Brad’s childhood was spent in Lewisburg, West Virginia, where he attended university, graduating with honors. He attended Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, earning a Master’s in political science. Following this, he returned to America for a degree in law at Harvard, before beginning his non-profit affordable housing career.

Clearly community-minded, Brad was drawn to grassroots activist positions, serving as a member of Tenants & Neighbors, and of Citizen Action, and as the three-term chair of the Manhattan Community Board 2. Additionally, he served as the past president of the Gay and Lesbian Independent Democrats, and as the Democratic District Leader for New York County.

In June of 2012, Brad declared his candidacy for the 27th District of the New York State Senate, after State Senator Tom Duane decided to retire. With Tom’s support behind him, Brad handily won the Democratic primary election in September of that year, taking in 70% of the vote.

Brad’s district consists of much of the heart of Manhattan, including Greenwich Village, Chelsea, Hell’s Kitchen, the East Village, East Midtown, Times Square, Columbus Circle and the Upper West Side.

During his swearing in ceremony, the master of ceremonies was Deborah Glick, New York’s first openly gay state legislator; Brad was given the oath by J. Paul Oetken, the first openly gay federal judge.

Eight years later, Brad continues to enjoy the broad support of his community, and is the only openly gay member of the New York State Senate.

Brad lives in Greenwich Village with his husband, David Sigal, The couple have been together since 1992.

David graduated from Washington University in St. Louis and earned a Master’s in Fine Arts from New York University. He is currently a Manhattan-based filmmaker. He was the executive producer of ‘Escaping the Madhouse: The Nellie Bly Story’, which won the 2020 Women’s Image Network Award for Outstanding Made-for-television film.

David and Brad – who celebrated their 25th anniversary in February of 2018 – were married in a ceremony in February of 2013, at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah in Manhattan.

The couple are raising two daughters – nine-year-old Sylvia and two-year-old Lucy. Both girls were conceived via surrogacy in California, as New York at the time of the girls’ birth banned the practice. New York’s stance on surrogacy, which Governor Cuomo described in December of last year as being “based in fear, not love,” was something that Brad, as a senator, had the power to change.

In January of 2019, Brad introduced a bill in the Senate to legalize paid gestational surrogacy for couples who are unable to have their own children. It was passed by the Senate in June of that year, and at a press conference following the vote, Brad was joined by Governor Cuomo, who said he would sign the bill into law if it passed the Assembly, and by Bravo channel star Any Cohen.

Andy, who is gay, was shocked to discover that gestational surrogacy was illegal in his home state, when looking to grow his family. “How draconian is that?” Cohen said,
as recorded by northcountrypublicradio.org, “So if a woman went ahead and carried a baby for a gay couple in New York, she would be committing a felony in 2019? It doesn’t seem possible to me.” Andy chose to travel to California like Brad and David for surrogacy, and now has a one-year-old son.

Unfortunately, Brad’s bill encountered resistance in the Assembly, by none other than Assemblyperson Deborah Glick, who MC’d Brad swearing-in ceremony eight years ago.

Glick claimed, in the same NCPR article, that the bill doesn’t offer enough protections for women, and that there are “already thousands of children in foster care who could be adopted.”

Other opponents to the bill included women’s rights activist Gloria Steinem and religious organizations, including the Catholic Church.

A spokesperson for the New York State Catholic Conference declared, “We see this as fundamentally something that will exploit women’s bodies for the benefit, largely, of men.” The spokesperson went on to say that the bill had an “uncomfortable connection to the legacy of slavery,” adding “women, like slaves, will be treated as a form of ‘chattel’.”

With amendments, the legislation was re-packaged and included in a budget bill, and finally passed in April of 2020, bringing New York’s surrogacy laws in line with 48 other states. In the press conference following the passing of the bill, Brad had this to say:

“As a gay dad, I’m thrilled parents like us and people struggling with infertility will finally have the chance to create their own families through surrogacy here in New York. The passage of legislation that will help New Yorkers create families is a signal of hope during these dark and uncertain times for our state.” (from www.bioedgedge.org/)

While the passing of the surrogacy bill will certainly go down as a significant part of Brad’s legacy, it is by no means the only poker he has in the fire. He has passed over 54 pieces of legislation, including one called GENDA, or Gender Expression Nondiscrimination Act, which prohibits so-called ‘gay-conversion therapy’. He also sponsored the Child Victim’s Act, which allows survivors of childhood sexual abuse to “seek justice against their abusers and the institutions that may have harbored them.” (www.nysenate.gov/newsroom)

Brad gained national attention in June of 2018 when he introduced the T.R.U.M.P. Act (Tax Returns Uniformly Made Public), which would require any candidate for President or Vice President to disclose five most-recent years of Federal income tax returns. Failure to do so would disqualify the candidate from appearing on the general election ballot.

While the bill didn’t succeed in New York, it prompted the introduction of similar bills in 28 other states around the nation, representing almost 150 million Americans. These bills passed in the legislatures of California, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland and New Jersey.

Follow Senator Brad Hoylman at nysenate.gov/senators/brad-hoylman and @bradhoylman on social media.

Photos courtesy of Avi Small
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