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FEATURES

EMAIL & SOCIAL MEDIA - Family photos and feedback from our audience. In support of the Black Lives Matter movement featured are three Black families. - page 6

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Cover photo courtesy of Dr. Sonja Cooper and Dr. Felicia English. Photos this page, top to bottom, photo courtesy of DeQuawn Parker, Latricia Queenb Sweeney, Tori Redd Caines, Steve Disselhorst, Cara Cilento, and Dr. Sonja Cooper and Dr. Felicia English.


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Family photo share from DeQuawn Parker

Family photo share from Latricia Queenb Sweeney

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Akron, Ohio
www.akron.travel
Greater Akron is extending an open invitation to the LGBTQ community to experience and enjoy everything their area has to offer. Their web site includes a LGBTQ-friendly list of dining and shopping options in Akron's Northside District, where visitors can enjoy a collection of restored buildings, galleries and restaurants on the northern edge of downtown. Families will enjoy Akron’s Fossils & Science Center, Akron Children’s Museum, Akron Zoological Park, Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, Hale Farm & Village and more. Please note since the COVID-19 pandemic the Akron/Summit Convention & Visitor’s Bureau suggests visitors take all health precautions and to contact attractions and accommodations directly for operating hours and event schedules. Akron is home to the Community AIDS Network/Akron Pride Initiative (www.canapi.org) and LGBTQ visitors can contact them for further information on events and programs in the area including the Akron Pride Festival which has now been scheduled for August 2021 (https://www.akronpridefestival.org/). See their ad on page 11.

The Inn at East Hill Farm
www.east-hill-farm.com
The Inn at East Hill Farm is an award winning family farm vacation resort in Troy, New Hampshire. This farm resort features wholesome and delicious home cooked meals and youngsters will enjoy the adventure of collecting the eggs they eat for breakfast. No matter what the season, there is always something to do at the farm: swimming indoors or outdoors, boating, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, water skiing, hay or sleight rides, and Nordic skiing or ice skating are just some of the activities family members can enjoy. Also there are activities planned specifically for children including crafts, campfires and games. They’ll also have a chance to milk a cow and help feed the farm animals. Please make sure to check out their page on COVID-19 information, it includes procedures required for guests: https://east-hill-farm.com/covid-19-information. See their ad on page 11.

Two LGBTQ Family Vacation Ideas

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For Children

The Fighting Infantryman
By Rob Sanders, Illustrated by Nabi H. Ali

By the time she arrived in Belvidere, Illinois, and started working as a farmhand, Jennie had a new name and a new identity... Albert D. J. Cashier.

In 1861, the winds of war blew through the United States. Jennie Hodgers, a young immigrant from Ireland, moved west to Illinois and soon had a new name and a new identity—Albert D. J. Cashier. Like many other young men, Albert joined the Union Army. Though the smallest soldier in his company, Albert served for nearly three years and fought in forty battles and skirmishes. When the war ended, Albert continued to live his life as a man. His identity fit him as snug as his suspenders.

Decades later, a reporter caught wind of the news that an old man in the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Home was actually a woman. The news swept through the country. What would happen to Albert and his military pension? Would he be allowed to continue to live as he wished? How would his friends, fellow soldiers, and others in the community react?

This book is published in partnership with GLAAD to accelerate LGBTQ inclusivity and acceptance. See ad this page.

Uncle Bobby’s Wedding
By Sarah S. Brannen, Illustrated by Lucia Soto
https://littlebeebooks.com/books/uncle-bobbys-wedding/

When Chloe’s favorite uncle announces that he’s getting married, everyone is excited. Everyone except Chloe, that is. What if Uncle Bobby no longer has time for picnics, swimming, or flying kites? Chloe just wants to keep having fun with her favorite uncle, but she’s afraid everything is going to change. Can Uncle Bobby and his boyfriend Jamie show Chloe that, when it comes to family, the more the merrier? In this inspiring, love-filled story, Chloe learns just what family means.

Produced in coordination with GLAAD, this adorable picture book is a positive example of same-sex marriage and a celebration of family.

For Parents

By Jaqueline Worth, MD, Adrienne L. Simone, MD and Danielle Claro


The Winter Loon
By Lori Henriksen

Set in the 1930s, The Winter Loon honors the strength and spirit of all those who struggle with social persecution because of who they love and how they define family. Ruth Thompson, the heroine of this novel, joins a rodeo circuit to earn her college tuition. Once at college, she meets and falls in love with free-spirited Gisela. The Winter Loon is inspired by Henriksen’s mother who died when the author was nine. Henriksen writes that she lived as a family with her mother and her mother’s female companion until shortly before her mother’s death. Read the first chapter of The Winter Loon at https://lorihenriksen.com. See ad on page 12.

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For Children

An Ordinary Day
By Elana K. Arnold
Illustrated by Elizabet Vukovic
This book teaches about the circle of life with diverse representation. In one neighborhood a same gender parent family says goodbye to their pet and a traditional family of color welcomes a new baby.

The Only Woman in the Photo: Frances Perkins & Her New Deal for America
By Kathleen Krull
Illustrated by Alexandra Bye
Published 2020
This looks like a children's book but it is for all ages. This is an inspiring picture book recounting the incredible life of Frances Perkins, the principal architect behind the Social Security Act, child labor laws, and more.

Plenty of Hugs
By Fran Manushkin
Illustrated by Kate Alizadeh
Published 2020
Two mommies and their toddler spend a perfect day together, riding bikes and seeing animals at the zoo. The day ends with dinner, bath time, and goodnight hugs and kisses. It was important to illustrator Kate Alizadeh to feature not only two moms, but also a mom who was masculine-presenting like herself. Kate used herself and her wife as inspiration for the characters.

For Teens / Young Adults

The Derby Daredevils: Kenzie Kickstarts a Team
By Kit Rosewater
Illustrated by Sophie Escabasse
Published 2020
A book with lots of humor and an authentic middle-grade voice as fifth graders dream of becoming roller derby superstars. Queer author Kit Rosewater trained as a derby referee and is a roller derby aficionado.

For Adults and Parents

The Gender Creative Child / Pathways for Nurturing and Supporting Children Who Live Outside Gender Boxes
By Diane Ehrensaft, PhD
Published 2016
Explaining the interconnected effects of biology, nurture, and culture.

Gender: Your Guide
A Gender-Friendly Primer on What to Know, What to Say, and What to Do in the New Gender Culture
By Lee Airton
Published 2018
An authentic and accessible guide to understanding and engaging in today’s gender conversation.

If These Ovaries Could Talk:
The Things We’ve Learned
About Making An LGBTQ Family
By Jaime Kelton and Robin Hopkins
Jaime Kelton and Robin Hopkins are the creators and hosts of their award-winning podcast, If These Ovaries Could Talk, where they discuss and interview LGBTQ families. Now the lesbian mom pals have written a wonderful book based on their numerous interviews of guests from their podcast. The book is fun and informative and uniquely organized to be read either by topic (all stages of family life), by each of the authors talking about their own personal parenting journeys, or by guest.

continued top of page 13
A courageous love story that redefines family despite 1930s social persecution.

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READING OUT, LOUD AND PROUD – BOOKS FOR LGBTQ FAMILIES

By Christopher Katis

No one was more excited about Niko becoming a part of our family than his big brother Gus. Both of his best buddies in our neighborhood were big brothers – Charlie had Molly, and Isaac had Jude. To help him adjust to his new role, my parents gave Gus the book, I'm a Big Brother by Johanna Cole. The problem with it was almost every page featured a mom and dad, so it didn't really reflect our family's reality. So, my mom diligently crossed out all the references to "Mama" and wrote "Papa" instead. What can I say? My mom's a rock star.

Not everyone has a mom as cool as mine. Luckily, there are a growing number of titles for kids with LGBTQ+ parents, as well as for their moms and dads.

For the Kids

The body of literature geared for kids with same-gender parents ranges from rhyme books in which young readers see families just like theirs to colorful stories celebrating diversity. There are even books to educate and offer inspiration. Here are a few to check out.

One of our family’s all-time favorites is And Tango Makes Three by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell. It’s the real-life story of two gay penguins in the Central Park Zoo, who are given an abandoned egg to hatch. The result is their daughter, Tango. This is a well-written and illustrated classic, and has always been a big hit in our home.

Leslea Newman has several titles geared toward younger kids with two dads or moms. Daddy, Papa, and Me is a rhyme book geared toward younger kids in which a toddler shares the fun he has playing with his two dads. Newman also has a sister book for two-mom families called Mommy, Mama, and Me. Her Donovan’s Big Day tells the story of how, Donovan, with dogged determination, spends his day staying out of trouble and focusing on one important job: serving as the ring bearer at his two moms’ wedding.

A Tale of Two Daddies by Vanita Oelschlage is a fun read which highlights a girl with two dads who answers, “which parent does what?” questions. We learn that in her family both dads help with math, but Papa’s the father that helps with the bath. There’s also a two-mom version called A Tale of Two Mommies.

Linda de Hann’s King and King tells the story of an abdicating queen, who insists her son be married before he ascends to the throne. After a series of princesses are rejected, one finally shows up with her hot brother, and the two princes are married. de Haan also has a sequel, King and King and Family that has our royal couple on a jungle honeymoon, and adding a little princess to their family.

If royalty is your thing, you can also check out the beautifully-illustrated Prince and Knight by Daniel Haack. It’s the story of a brave knight who saves the kingdom and wins the heart of a handsome prince.

For a good read celebrating diversity in which same-gender parents are included in an examination of various types of families, you can’t go wrong with Todd Parr’s colorful and enchanting The Family Book. Equally as compelling is I See the Sun in the USA by Dedie King, which teaches kids about accepting all people, including kids from gay families. And don’t forget the perfectly-named Love Makes a Family by Sophie Beer.

Likely every kid raised by two moms or two dads has faced some form of discrimination or bullying. Love is Love by Michael Genhart, a clinical psychologist, tells the story of a boy with two dads who is bullied because of his parents, but soon realizes his family isn’t all that different after all.

We teach our kids the ABCs, and in The GayBCs by M.L. Webb, they’ll learn that “A” is for ally, “D” stands for drag, and “N” is for non-binary. This is a great tool to help kids understand the wide-range of people that make up today’s society.

Meanwhile, Jessica Love’s Julián is a Mermaid is the delightful story of a little boy that wants to transform into something beautiful. It’s also about acceptance and
New & Noteworthy Books

continued from page 11

Their guests include comedian Judy Gold, writer-activist Stacey Ann Chin, politician Zach Wahls, and LGBTQ+ family experts. Read more about Kelt- on and Hopkins and their podcast here

https://gayparentmag.com/if-these-ovaries-could-talk/

The Pride Guide
A Guide to Sexual and Social Health for LGBTQ Youth
By Jo Langford

Published 2018
Explores sex, dating, relationships, puberty, and both physical and online safety.

Raising the Transgender Child:
A Complete Guide for Parents, Families, and Caregivers
By Dr. Michele Angello and Ali Bowman
Published 2016
Written with both clinical expertise and personal experience. Topics include: Decoding the Language of Gender, The Legal Battles You Never Thought You’d Fight, and What Will My Child’s Adult Life be Like?

The Trans Generation / How Trans Kids (and Their Parents) are Creating a Gender Revolution
By Ann Travers
Published 2018
The author interviewed trans and gender non-conforming children and adults in the USA and Canada over five years. ▼

love. Seeing characters of color is also refreshing.

The young activist in your life will enjoy Kid Activists: True Tales of Childhood from Champions of Change by Robin Stevenson. This is a wide-ranging look at a variety of people over the past 300 years who have changed the world for the better, including past and present members of the LGBTQ+ community.

To help kids understand gay history, there’s Queer Heroes: Meet 53 LGBTQ Heroes from Past and Present by Arabelle Sicardi. This is a more comprehensive look at a variety of LGBTQ+ people from around the globe who have positively influenced society. Rob Sanders also has two age-appropriate titles that may be of interest: Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag; and Stonewall: A Building, an Uprising, a Revolution.

Cool tweens will enjoy The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher by Dana Alison Levy. This series focuses on the adventures and antics of a couple of brothers, who just happen to have a dad and papa.

For the Parents

Being any kind of parent isn’t an easy job, but being a parent and a member of the LGBTQ+ community can be additionally daunting. Thankfully, a healthy body of work has emerged over the past couple of decades to offer insight and advice.

Pride and Joy: A Guide for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Parents by Rachel and Sara Hagger-Holt deals with gay parenting in the UK and Ireland, but shares funny and moving experiences relevant to LGBTQ+ parents around the world.

In The Kid: What Happened After My Boyfriend and I Decided to Go Get Pregnant, Dan Savage regales readers with the story of his own journey to fatherhood. Never one to shy away from controversy, he also discusses his personal life, and the unintended challenges that becoming a parent can present.

For LGBTQ+ people, there are myriad paths to parenthood. Confessions of the Other Mother: Non-Biological Lesbian Moms Tell All, by Harlyn Aizley, examines the unintended feelings that can arise from biological motherhood and non-biological motherhood – both good and bad. For the guys there’s Gay Dads: A Celebration of Fatherhood by David Strah and Susanna Margolis, a touching collection of personal stories from gay men about their journeys to fatherhood.

Not every book has to be serious. Some lighter titles include: Dan Bucatinsky’s Does This Baby Make Me Look Straight? (possibly the most aptly named book for gay dads ever); You’re Not from
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One book I wish had been published when we first adopted is The Ultimate Guide for Gay Dads by Eric Rosswood. In it you’ll find great information like the difference between donor breast milk and formula, and how to discern which is best for your child. There’s also a section on creating a birth plan for open adoptions and surrogacy births.

There’s one final book that just might be a “must read” for every gay parent: Raised by Unicorns, an anthology of stories of people with LGBTQ+ parents, edited by Frank Lowe. It’s filled with over a dozen essays with titles like “The Curious Case of a Straight Boy Coming Out”, “Two Hens and a Chick: My Teenage Life with Two Moms”, and “My Dad is a…Drag Queen”, providing unique perspectives LGBTQ+ parents need to hear.

All of these great reads are a testament to just how far LGBTQ+ parenting has come, and each would make a terrific addition to any family library. That fact notwithstanding, my favorite book for kids with two dads will always be our unique copy of I’m a Big Brother – lovingly edited by my mom.
Determined to be a Dad

By Angeline Acain

Steve Desselhorst lives with his husband and children in San Francisco. Steve works as a leadership coach and consultant and has now written a book about his childhood, coming out, and about his path to parenthood through adoption. His book, Determined To Be Dad, A Journey of Faith, Resilience, and Love, published June 2020. In the following interview with Gay Parent Magazine, we chat with Steve and learn a little about his life.

You grew up Catholic in the Midwest, that's two strikes against you as a gay person. Did you think you would have a Catholic wedding and marry a cis woman?

I grew up in an Irish and German Catholic family. My parents had a short courtship after meeting at the Chicago Young Christian Worker’s Dance in Waukegan, Illinois. It was love at first sight, and they got married. There were four of us within five years—an infant, a two-year-old, a four-year-old, and a five-year-old. Shortly after I was born in Grant Hospital in Chicago, my parents moved us to Skokie—a middle-class suburb outside of Chicago—to buy a house and create an independent life. I went to Catholic elementary school until I was in the 5th grade before my parents transferred me to a public school.

While I grew up in one of the most Jewish suburbs of Chicago, I didn't know any Jewish people until I went to public school. In the late 1970s, Skokie was a community of around 68,000 people. During my first year in public school, there was a horrible incident that would have a significant impact on the rest of my life. The Illinois neo-Nazi party wanted to hold a rally at Skokie City Hall to espouse their hateful, racist, and anti-Semitic beliefs. At that time, Skokie had one of the highest percentages of Holocaust survivors—about 7% to 8% of the population had survived. I remember seeing the numbers that had been tattooed onto the arms of people who lived through the concentration camps.

I always envisioned having a Catholic wedding and marry a cis-gender woman with a similar upbringing. While there were hints of my homosexuality at an early age, I pushed those feelings far away and didn’t recognize those feeling until I was almost 20 years old.

When you finally came out, was raising a child the farthest thing from your mind?

When I came out in the early 90s, I mourned the loss of being a dad. I came out during the early 90s and the queer community was in the middle of the AIDS epidemic. Most gay men weren’t having children, they were trying to survive. During this time, there was no same sex marriage. It felt like a binary choice between being a parent in a heterosexual relationship or being gay without children.

I met my husband, Lorevic, at a beer bust on a Sunday afternoon. We dated for a couple of years before moving in together. In 2011, eight and half years after our first meeting, we decided to bring together our families and celebrate our union with a wedding which was presided over by an Episcopal priest. We got married again in 2015 after the supreme court ruling allowing same sex marriage.

When did you realize you wanted to be a parent?

I always knew that I wanted to be a parent and have a family. It was part of the fabric of my being from the beginning of my life. A family is what made me feel happy and connected to humanity. The personal connections with family from across the country and around the world, the festivities of life through parties and celebrations, I loved all of this and wanted this for my own family when I grew up. This desire to be a parent felt predetermined, like the color of my eyes and the way I walked.

It was a mutual decision for my husband and I to start a family. We were on different time lines since there is an 8-year difference in our ages. It took us some time and reaching some career and education goals prior to starting our family.

Your book is titled Determined To Be Dad: A Journey of Faith, Resilience, and Love. That title sounds like your journey to being a father was difficult. Did you and your husband experience discrimination or setbacks?

We did not face discrimination in our journey to become parents. We were very deliberate in our choice of an adoption agency that was completely inclusive of LGBTQ families. We faced a very long and arduous road with both of our adoptions.

In the two years we waited for our daughter, we were contacted by 14 different women in varying stages of pregnancy. Most were legitimate, while others felt like they were running scams or that their stories just didn’t ring true. Yet, we took every phone call, email, and text that came through seriously, wondering if our future child and birth family were on the other side of the call. None of these contacts resulted in an actual live meeting until our daughter’s birth parents connected with us.

For our son who came to us through the foster-to-adopt program, we were told when we received the call for his placement that his birth parents were no longer involved and while their parental rights had not been terminated that the adoption would be straightforward. Two days after his placement in our home, his birth mother re-emerged and was provided reunification services which resulted in bi-weekly visits and a plan to return our son to her. It was a long and draining road of ups and downs prior to his adoption.

What are the personalities of your children and how do they address you and your husband?

We have two children—our oldest, Kaitlyn, is eight years old and came to us through private, open adoption. Our son, Matthew is four and a half years old and came to us through the foster-to-adopt program. Kaitlyn is a sweet, calm, kind... continued on page 16
loving girl. She is emotionally aware and introspective. She is very social at school and has a wide network of friends. Matthew is a very energetic, happy, smart, affectionate little boy. He is always moving and does not like to go to bed at night. He too is very social and has a lot of friends at school. I am called papa and my husband is called daddy.

**Briefly describe your work as a leadership coach and consultant and your involvement with the San Francisco Evryman Group.**

I am a co-active trained coach that focuses on an integrated personal and professional leadership development approach. I help clients become emotionally aware and authentic in their lives and work. I work with clients to pursue both short and long term goals and bring awareness to barriers in achieving them and creating accountability.

I also provide consulting on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with organizations that aspire to create people-first cultures, through trust, honesty, and a deep caring for employees, customers, and the end-user. My work involves creating leadership development programs to advance historically under-represented groups into senior leadership positions, facilitate trainings to improve organizational effectiveness, and design learning solutions to foster culture change. I work with each client to achieve their unique goals.

The San Francisco Evryman group focuses on bringing men together to exercise their emotions so they can lead more successful, fulfilling lives. I am a long-time member. We meet weekly for 3 hours where we meditate and check-in emotionally. We help each other grow deeper in understanding our emotions and create a space for men to safely express complicated feelings.

**Due to the pandemic, the world has changed a lot since the time you started writing your book. What has it been like so far for you and your husband to be raising young children during the pandemic?**

Like everyone else living through the Coronavirus, we are muddling our way through working remotely and homeschooling our two children. We are facing the unique challenge of teaching a four-year-old boy and an eight-year-old girl who are developmentally at very different levels.

We start our days with snuggles and breakfast. Both of my children start their days with Zoom meetings at 9:00 AM. For our son, the zoom meeting is a way to connect with his classmates, and the teachers provide some instruction for the day, but the utility of providing him with activities for the day is limited. For our daughter, the teacher sends an email in the morning with the lesson plan for the day. During my daughter’s zoom meeting, the teacher walks the entire class through the lessons for the day and answers questions. This meeting is a fantastic way to understand her work for the day and to take responsibility for her work. It’s super helpful because the teacher is giving direction versus her parents, where there is usually a lot more resistance. Throughout the day, we tag team based on our individual schedules. When one of us has an important meeting, the other will watch the children. We try to keep the kids off their iPad and doing their workbooks. In the afternoon, our son naps and our daughter reads on her
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 Kinarra and whatever else you could think of. I was ready for you. But you know, that one social worker that came to the house looked past all that stuff and asked, “How are you 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 case 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 he chewed. If your eyes turned down, you wanted me to pick you up. Soon all those self help books were scribbled in and tossed. The T.V. station was changed to PBS kids.

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 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 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 came back to me and said, “When we go over that chapter I’m going to raise my sweatshirt and show them this.” Under your sweatshirt was a “Black Lives Matter” tee. I wryly smiled when I saw the pent up frustration of generations of social injustice. I said, “If you choose to do that, you will get in trouble. I will support you. I can’t get you out of trouble but you won’t be in trouble here.” When you take a stand, don’t be afraid to fall but make sure you get up. Learn that.

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
Life during Covid-19, Illinois

By Deadra Albrecht-Frasch

I was asked to write about my experiences as a healthcare worker and how my family has been dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic so far. While I typically enjoy writing, I actually hesitated before agreeing. I hesitated because that would mean I would have to actually stop and process all of the feelings I've been compartmentalizing these past couple of months; something I think most healthcare workers are all too familiar with doing.

I'm in Illinois, so once Covid-19 hit the east coast, we started preparing for the inevitable. As a supply chain Supervisor for a Chicago suburban hospital, I'm largely responsible for ensuring that the entire hospital has everything that they need for all disposable supplies everything from bandages to fluids to all of the PPE gowns, gloves, masks, and N95s. All the supplies that you've been hearing about in the news that are high demand. Almost immediately, the pressure to secure supplies hit my team and me in the beginning of March. Those first few weeks when we knew it was coming, was an ordering frenzy. I spent almost all of my days for the first few weeks in constant ordering mode trying to find and stock up on the supplies we knew would be affected for months to come. Extra supply carts, extra everything trying to ensure we would have all that was needed to take care of our patients and staff.

Like everywhere else, we have Covid-19 positive patients now. Supplies continue to be an issue but for the most part, we are sustaining things and making it through each day. At the time of this article, it had been nine weeks since Illinois went on lockdown. At work, we are all hyper aware of germs probably more than ever; wiping down surfaces, hand washing, and sanitizing almost constantly. It seems trivial to complain about, but one of the hardest things is wearing a mask. It's hot, hard to breathe, causes the occasional nosebleed, and my face is breaking out and drying out at the same time. Even at home, when I am not in a mask, I smell and taste the mask.

It seems like almost daily, local businesses are donating food to different areas of the hospital. That’s been great for staff moral during these times. There are signs when we drive on campus from community members calling us all heroes. All the thank you signs given from the community are amazing, but it’s so strange to be called a hero. I feel like what I’m doing in no way compares to what the frontline nurses and doctors have to deal with. Yes, I realize without my team they wouldn’t be able to do what they do, but I don’t see myself ever feeling comfortable as being hailed a hero.

Every single day I worry I’ll bring it home to my wife and family. My wife Alice (Al) has an immune deficiency disorder that was triggered from a car accident in 2002. In a normal person, if we get a cold, our body builds up antibodies so that the next time we get that cold, we can fight it off. Simply explained, that doesn’t happen with her and she can get the same cold over and over again. She gets an infusion every four weeks for the rest of her life that gives her antibodies to sustain until the next infusion. Needless to say, she hasn’t left the house during this except for a few times. I do the shop-
ping after work so she doesn’t have to. People think we are crazy because we haven’t kissed in nine weeks. Yes we are in the same bed and house, but I’m unwilling to put her at more risk, knowing I’m in a place every day with Covid-19 positive patients. It’s a small price to pay in my eyes.

We also have twin 5 year old girls who were in preschool half a day until this happened. The other half of their day was spent with my mom until my wife got home from work (Al is a paraeducator interventionist for a local school district). The transition for not only my wife, but also my girls has been challenging. For starters, trying to teach 5 year olds about this “germ” has been difficult and we have to constantly remind them about good hand hygiene. They have a hard time understanding why they can’t see their grandmas, their Aunts and Cousins, their teachers, their friends. Devlin also was receiving Speech, Occupational, and Physical Therapy in and outside of school, so that has transitioned to teletherapy, which Al has to lead during the week. Devlin also has a unilateral hearing loss and has a hearing aid in one ear; she was working with a hearing itinerant at school before this. Devlin’s twin sister Shay also receives Occupational therapy via Teletherapy now. About two months before this pandemic, Shay was also diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. Her anxiety coupled with this new way of school and life has caused her to have at least a once daily meltdown. She cries because she misses the way life used to be. We try and remind them that this isn’t forever, but that’s a hard concept for them to grasp.

Since my wife works in education, she’s been fairly organized with all the school work and therapies. She has developed a schedule to keep them all on track but has said its difficult juggling all the teletherapies and classwork. Devlin isn’t good at expressing her feelings and Al said that Devlin seems to get very frustrated with the speech and hearing lessons because they have to send videos practicing which is hard on her. Devlin, who normally never gets upset about things, has also started to cry on some days. Due to this, my wife has started to institute “free days” where they don’t do any work to try and give them a break.

I asked my wife to talk about how her emotional wellbeing has been. Al said it is hard being both mom and teacher and they all have their moments of frustrations. She’s learning to recognize more easily their frustrations and then they take a break. She said they don’t understand why they can’t go to the park, or do anything; they ask that every single day. My wife said she also struggles with not being able to take Shay’s anxieties away. We’ve noticed regression with Devlin’s memory as well. There are many days when I come home and I can see that everyone is frustrated. While I’m exhausted too, I try and step in to give Al even a thirty minute break. I bring home crafts and other projects for the girls to do to try and ease their days. We order food a lot more just because Al is exhausted by the end of the day. I’m spending way too much money online shopping but a few weeks ago we painted our kitchen cabinets so at least there’s been some productivity. Like everyone else, we are all just doing our best to make it through this and some days are better than others. ▼ Photos courtesy of Deadra Albrecht-Frasch
Daughter of Gay Couple Honored by Southern Social and Civic Club

By Ron Thomas

Dr. Sonja Cooper and Dr. Felicia English are very proud of their daughter, Samantha Holli English-Cooper when she recently made history. Samantha became the first member of the Strikers Royal Court for Mardi Gras based influences in Mobile, Alabama, with openly gay parents.

The Strikers Club, founded in the 1930s by nine men, takes pride in being an integral part of the social community in Mobile. Charity, friendship, service, and noteworthy community contributions are instilled in Strikers members. Some of the club’s civic activities include work with the NAACP and Ronald McDonald House, and sponsoring the Ebony Fashion Show.

In 1934, the all-male Strikers Club joined with the all women Smart and Thrifty Club in sponsoring the first African-American Mardi Gras Parade. Following the parade a coronation event was held. Most people don’t realize that Mardis Gras originated in Mobile, Alabama.

In 1936, the Strikers Club instituted its first African American Debutante Ball where young women were introduced and lauded for their social and community involvements. The Debutante program encouraged young women to pursue higher education and provided education in civic, social, and religious topics.

In May 2019, the Strikers Club introduced the Strikers Royal Court with Mardi Gras based influences. The Strikers Royal Court was established with a mission to provide civic, cultural, educational, and social platforms to youth in a nurtured environment in order to foster leadership and volunteerism. This is all done while maintaining the traditions and practices of the carnival season.

Now in 2020 is another historic moment for the Strikers and the LGBTQ community with Samantha being selected for the Strikers Royal Court.

Samantha’s activities and interests include Girl Scouts, cheer, dance, karate, swimming, singing, and playing with slime. She wants to be a doctor and her favorite quote is “Never, never give up,” by Winston Churchill. Dr. Sonja Cooper has a PhD. in Education and Dr. Felicia English has a doctorate in Management (DM) in Organizational Leadership.

Gay Parent Magazine chatted with Samantha’s moms Sonja and Felicia as they tell us more about their family.

Gay Parent Magazine (GPM): First of all, congratulations on Samantha making Striker’s Club history. Briefly explain Samantha’s attire in the photos you sent us as it relates to the Royal Court.

Felicia English: There are set...
roles for the Mardi Gras Court and Samantha was selected to fulfill the role of Floral Princess. The train is traditional attire, but is only worn by members selected to the Royal Court. On the back, are her initials and family crest, since she is a legacy.

**GPM: Living in the south, have you faced discrimination?**

**Felicia:** In the south back in the day people did not talk about it. I was actually a [Strikers Club] “Second Lady In Waiting For The Queen” and this was only for heterosexual families so being openly gay was just not accepted. However, now I notice on the application it says: “We don’t discriminate against sexual orientation.” They have embraced us and it’s no longer hush, hush. You can be exactly who you are.

**GPM: Where do you live now?**

**Sonja Cooper/Felicia:** We live in the Atlanta, Georgia area.

**GPM: As same gender parents, what’s it like for you as a couple raising a child?**

**Sonja:** We make it our norm. We have made a goal that our child will never be subjected to our issues. All of our family has to accept that Samantha has two moms. That’s the bottom line.

**Felicia:** Samantha is very proud to say that she has two moms. She sticks out her chest proudly and has no problem correcting others if need be. Samantha is especially alert when people might without thinking say something that she feels is not accurate. The community and our area in general have also embraced us. They know us very well.

**Sonja:** She’s getting very devious now (laughing).

**GPM: What do you mean?**

**Sonja:** Well, she tries to pit us against each other just like a normal child would. We had a decorating issue this past Christmas and we had to take a picture and show her proof of what she was trying to do.

**GPM: What kind of decorating issue?**

**Sonja:** Well, she came to me and said Felicia was not letting her do some decorating which was definitely not the case. So, she can be devious.

**Felicia:** She is definitely your typical 5-year-old.

**Felicia/Sonja:** People should always practice love and acceptance. Know your value. If you live a sheltered life people will pick up on that. This has not been a difficult process for us because we have been so transparent.

**GPM: Give us a little background on you as a couple. Are you married? How long have you been together?**

**Felicia/Sonja:** We have been together off and on since 2004. Starting out as friends then becoming a couple, then parents.

**Sonja:** I have been asking her for years to get married, as recently as this past December.

**GPM: So what did she say this time?**

**Sonja:** She says she is married to parenting Samantha.

**GPM: Are you going to keep asking?**

**Sonja:** I’m very happy with everything but I’m going to continue to keep asking.

**Felicia:** I already feel this is marriage. (smiling)

**GPM: What advice would you give other couples just starting out?**

**Felicia/Sonja:** We strongly believe in communication. It took us time to grow. We trav-
elled all over the world and were having a blast but that doesn’t mean we were truly communicating. You really have to work on it. It could be as simple as discussing what book you’re reading. Keep the lines open.

Felicia: I feel Sonja is my soulmate.

Sonja: Ask them how they feel every day, not just how was your day. It also doesn’t have to be every little thing as well.

Felicia: I’ll give you an example, early on I was the one always into feelings and Sonja wasn’t as much. Now it’s reversed.

Sonja: I’m very into that now…. how’s the heart? I’m a big proponent of that now.

GPM: What advice would you give couples that want a family?

Felicia: There are so many options out there these days. Moreover, many of the options are affordable. Many people don’t know that. We tried Insemination twice, embryo adoption twice, and laparoscopic surgery because my tubes were blocked. Then I talked to a friend of ours who is an attorney. He discussed adoption options with us and wouldn’t you know it, shortly thereafter we got a call that Samantha would be born in three weeks on April 8th around Mardi Gras, so it was so meant to be.

As we were closing out our conversation Felicia asked if she could put Samantha on the phone and here are her words.

GPM: Hi Samantha, it’s nice to meet you!

Samantha: Hi.

GPM: So what do you have planned for today…. anything special?

Samantha: I’m waiting for my cousin Isabel to come over.

GPM: Oh, ok…. what’s going on?

Samantha: We’re going to have a play date today.

GPM: That sounds so nice! Well, have a great time!

Samantha: Thank you. I better let you talk to my mommy…. bye!

Photos courtesy of Sonja Cooper and Felicia English