

on being a gay parent

by brett webb-mitchell :: *qnotes* contributor

The next generation

Those of us who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer expressing, questioning and straight friends, family members and allies, live in a time of great story making and story telling. February is Black History Month and it has me thinking of our history, looking forward to Gay History Month in October. And, what will we tell each other this year? From our nascent beginnings as a civil rights movement in the 1960s with the Stonewall riots, the fight for equal justice for all people by the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s lieutenant Bayard Rustin and politician Harvey Milk, the prominence of out-lesbian athletes like Martina Navratilova, the consecration of the Rev. Gene Robinson as an Episcopal Bishop, to the power of the masses that drew and draw attention to HIV/AIDS among all populations, movies shedding a prominent light on issues facing transgender people like "Transamerica," the daily line-up of shows on the Logo channel on television and the fight for equal marriage rights and the right to serve openly as an LGBTQ person in the military or as clergy in faith communities...it is an incredible time to be living, gay or straight, as we witness history being made daily.

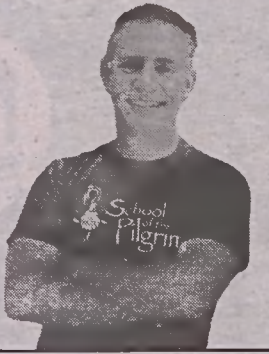
And, we are not the only ones witnessing history in the making. Our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces and nephews and our "almost like family" young kith and kin are all witnesses to the story of

equal rights and justice unfolding in their — in our — midst. Even though long-term consequences of most of our actions are simply unknowable, we move forward and live our lives honestly and smartly, knowing that the next generation is watching our every move carefully.

When I was growing up as a young boy, and now as a father, the phrase often spoken by my mother was, "little pitchers have big ears." This was not a baseball phrase. Instead, it is the acknowledgement that children hear and understand more than you and I think they do. The play on words here is on the resemblance of the ear to the handle of a pitcher that contains water, a phrase coming from the 16th century that has endured the test of time.

In our families, our children are watching, hearing, sensing and remembering all that is going on in our families and around us in modern society.

In our families, even christening, baptism and bat or bar mitzvah, every graduation, every falling head over heels in love, every birthday and anniversary, every bout of depression and anxiety, every time we leave and return home and every death is remembered by our children and grandchildren. A family is never static, always changing,



constantly becoming family. A family is the many things that happen within our circle of members.

And, the web of relationships that hold our families together are rocked easily by events occurring around us. Out of the corner of an eye that tears itself from Facebook and U.S. history textbooks, my son watches news of the Don't Ask, Don't Tell debate; taking out her iPod ear buds, my daughter listens to an NPR program of marriage equality on trial in California. My children have heard the word "faggot" spoken sarcastically, quietly and pointedly in the hallways of a public high school where it is forbidden. We talk, email, and text each other about these developments in our family, questioning the nature of a person's or society's habit of the heart that would allow such hatred and injustice.

The next generation and the generation after that is already being formed and shaped in its opinions, actions and societal behaviors by our dealings and attitude shared openly as well as privately in our families. In the spirit of St. Valentine's Day, a day of heart and soul, hopefully we will demonstrate to the next generation not only how to respond to the open callousness and misinformation directed toward people who are LGBTQ with the truthfulness and honesty of our lives. Hopefully, we will also be a tangible model, a living example, of how we met the bigotry, injustice and prejudice with love. For in the not-too-distant future, our children and grandchildren will be telling their children and grandchildren about "my fathers" or "my grandmothers," who, by simply living out and without shame or excuses, changed the world and the family in which we live today, as well as for the next generation to come. ::

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