



## on being a gay parent

by brett webb-mitchell :: *qnotes* contributor

### On being a second-class parent

I was walking into my local YMCA when I noticed them: a table of Boy Scouts selling Trail's End popcorn for a fundraising drive. While my local YMCA (Chapel Hill-Carrboro branch) welcomes LGBTQ individuals and families as full members

— without any special proof of our family relationship — the same could not be said of the Boy Scouts of America. I was flummoxed in seeing the Boy Scouts in front of our YMCA branch. The Boy Scouts of America have been given the right to discriminate against gay young men and gay scout leaders, according to the U.S. Supreme Court as a private non-profit, 501c3 organization.

The legacy of discrimination by the Scouts continues throughout the U.S. today. For example, Jon Langert, a gay dad in Dallas, Texas, who has held the fundraising drive for his nine-

year-old son's Cub Scout troop for the last two years, was told that he could neither wear the shirt designating him a scout leader nor serve in a leadership role in the Cub Scouts. "What message does that send to my son? It says I'm a second-class citizen," said Langert (*Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 16).

In reading this story, I remember how my Dad served proudly as the scout leader for my Webelos pack, spending countless hours teaching me how to tie knots and work on my latest soap box creation. Of course, he didn't know he had a gay son in the pack, but then again, I didn't know that either at the time. I did not go on to Boy Scouts, choosing instead to become a Civil Air Patrol (CAP) cadet when my father became a leader of the troop as a U.S. Air Force reservist. I followed my Dad's footsteps. Those of us in CAP were junior Air Force cadets, working primarily in the area of search and rescue while given multiple opportunities to fly in small planes. Both Scouts and CAP gave my Dad and I time to get to know each other better, drawing us closer together as father and son.

The fight for what is right, what is just, for equality for all in all arenas of life for LGBTQ parents and children, is at a fevered pitch. Second-class citizenship in Scouts, in the military services or in faith communities, is no longer acceptable or status quo. We are not going to be relegated as second-class parents. There is a shift in the cultural attitude toward a more welcoming, accepting and inclusion of LGBTQ people among our straight allies, friends and family members. This has come at a cost, but also brought out our creative answers to the obstacles thrown at us. For example, while the Boy Scouts of America do not welcome gay scouts or scout leaders, the imaginative response was the creation and organization of Scouting for All, which is inclusive of gay scouts and scout leaders. Group by discriminatory group, we are working toward making this world a network of organizations that are welcoming of all who wish to participate. In hindsight, I should've engaged in a conversation with the scouting parents and scouts about the purpose of the scouting program as they sold their popcorn, sharing with them why I was not going to purchase their popcorn. Such discourse is the necessary work of justice as we LGBTQ parents care for, love and do everything in our power to provide our children with the most incredible life possible. ::

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