



*Dedicated to helping LGBT
people build and strengthen
their families.*

We Ought To Be In Pictures

A local University LGBT Center , University media center and photographer collaborated to create a regional model of Love Makes a Family , using the same approach of positive images and first person accounts to relay the stories of LGBT people and our families. At the opening reception, I stand in front of our family photograph, depicting Mona's angelic face snuggled into my chest, her arms wrapped around me, her eyes sublime and blissful. Jack leans into Mona, my hand caresses his shoulder, our heads gently tilt, a queer representation of Michelangelo's Holy Family. No one suspects that only moments earlier I contemplated dragging our daughter from the shower and tying her to the top of our car so we'd be on time. Nor would anyone suspect from viewing our tranquil images just how manic our life can be.

For example, the following morning begins with Mona taking the usual inordinate amount of time in the bathroom and in her bedroom getting ready for school. She suddenly remembers that it's a dress-down day (meaning kids can wear sneakers, jeans and shirts with writing), so of course she has to get undressed and redressed. At eleven years old, Mona has gone from not caring if she wears clothes to clothes completely defining who she is.

Now, she's running even later than usual. I notice that her skin is a bit ashy and ask, "Lotion?"

"No!" she mumbles. I pump a few drops into her hands, which are flailing to match her mood, and the school bus pulls up. She can't turn the doorknob because her hands are slippery. In the hysteria – I don't remember if she or I finally open the door – one of our dogs runs out of the house, almost under the front wheels of the bus. I chase the dog, screaming, "Gertrude!" at a big yellow bus. Fortunately, Gertrude (the dog not the bus) runs back into our house and Mona is off to school. Next, Jack leaves for his biweekly blood test before work to make sure that his interferon treatments are not damaging his liver. Last Fall, Jack was diagnosed with a melanoma and is now undergoing a year of interferon treatments. It's amazing what becomes routine.

After Mona comes home from school and has a snack, I drive her to piano, then pick her up again, drive home and start supper, so she can eat before she goes to dance. Mona's doing her homework when Jack comes home, and my ninety-six-year-old mother is sitting in her bedroom, which until she moved in was our dining room, listening to one of her favorite Julia Roberts movies. My mother's hearing aid doesn't work well, so whatever videos she watches we all listen to. Julia, as a brassy lawyer presenting substantial physical cleavage, yells something about the numerous blow-jobs she's given, and I charge into my mother's room.

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Annoyed, my mother protests, "But it's a true story." To which I walk back to the kitchen, smack myself in the head and moralize to no one in particular, "Oh, it's a true story, so that makes it okay for Mona to hear someone screaming about fellatio coming from her grandmother's bedroom."

Jack sits in the living room reading the newspaper, and I feel like I'm living in a Mad Magazine cartoon. It dawns on me that, assuming my mother could even hear Julia's rants, she may not know what the word means. I think of Steve Martin in his movie *The Jerk*, when he announces to his family that he finally found work, explaining that some girl has promised she'd give him a blowjob. I also recall nostalgically a Ruth Gordon movie, *Where's Papa*, when Gordon's overstressed son nails her bedroom door shut. Later, while I wait for Mona at her dance studio, I get a call on my cell phone: one of my godsons has been arrested. I first met him twenty years ago through the AIDS Task Force when I was his Buddy – he was a year old then. This isn't the first time he's been arrested. But lately he's been turning his life around, and this arrest appears to be for an old charge that somehow got lost in bureaucracy.

Back home, after saying prayers with Mona and tucking her in bed, I explain that I have to go bail (we'll call him) Buddy out of jail. I leave Jack sleeping off his interferon funk, our two dogs curled up next to him, and my mother sitting in the living room reading – probably pornography. I jump in the car and head downtown to the prison where I fill out papers, hand over my charge card and listen to a young mother smack her toddler and tell him to, "Sit the fuck down!" My thoughts drift back to my family's serene photograph at the LGBT family exhibit. I wonder how many years I can get for false advertising.