



Dedicated to helping LGBT people build and strengthen their families.

GOP Munchkins

By the time Jack and I had decided to become parents, we had not only been out for a number of years, but also active in local LGBT politics. However, there's out and then there's OUT. I still remember Jack and me sitting in Grand Central Station. We had been parents for two days, and had just completed a thirty-hour train ride with our screaming infant. We were waiting for our New York City to Syracuse connection. I'm sure we were quite a sight: two gay men with red eyes, bad hair, searching a sundry of bags for a clean bottle, nipple, formula, diapers, a talisman – anything that might calm our daughter. To garner a bit more attention, add to this picture that Jack and I are both European American and our daughter is African American. We might as well have held up a sign: *We're Here, We're Queer, and We Don't Have a Clue!*

It's difficult to believe that was ten years ago, and I'm reminded of the quirky coincidence that Mona entered our lives during a celebration for National Coming Out Day. We were walking through the lobby of a local hotel, and I decided to check our answering machine at home. This was pre-cell phone, at least for our family, so I popped a coin into one of the payphones that once lined hotel lobbies. There was a message from our adoption agency and a phone number to call. Within minutes, Jack and I discovered that we had become parents. Two of Mona's godmothers-to-be were with us, so the four of us stumbled toward our cars, while trying to absorb the wonderful news.

Any queer parent understands the prophetic significance of having been informed of one's parenthood at a National Coming Out Day gala. How many of us have experienced our toddler sitting in the baby seat of a grocery cart and proudly announcing to the cashier and all shoppers within a five-mile radius that she has two daddies? Or, "No I don't have a Daddy, but I have two mommies." Mona loved introducing Jack and me as, "This is my father and this is my other father," or, "This is my father; my other father is at home," to complete strangers who had merely smiled or said hello.

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During this year's National Coming Out Day I was not only reminded that the past ten years seem to have passed in a blink of an eye, but also of the irony of having a celebration of living openly and honestly juxtaposed with the actions of "closeted" Mark Foley. What are queer parents, especially out gay dads to make of this mess?

Disparate gay rights activists such as Andrew Sullivan and Michael Rogers suggest that living as a closeted gay man contributed to Foley's behavior. Though I agree with the assertion that the closet brings with it a plethora of deliberating consequences, I don't believe that the closet had anything to do with him exploiting young pages. For years, Foley's being gay was common knowledge in the Washington political world. He would repeatedly deny it in mainstream press, but this was an intentional political game to deceive his Christian-right supporters and appease his fellow GOP cronies. It was not emblematic of him living a repressed life. Foley was more of a user of the closet than a victim of the closet.

Foley also used his votes to maintain his closet. After voting for *DOMA* in 1996, Foley received a score of 44 on the Human Rights Campaign Congressional Score Card, and the idea that he was yet another closeted gay politician voting against gay rights was posed in the *Advocate* (Sept. 1996). Aside from 1996, his voting record on gay-related issues was considered favorable. One can't help but wonder if the *Advocate* article and other gay-press articles have kept his voting record somewhat in check. In 2006, Foley has received a score of 75 from HRC. But he still voted against repealing *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* (H.R. 1059) and against allowing same-sex partners of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents the same immigration benefits legal spouses of U.S. residents enjoy (H.R. 3006). Maybe it's just me, but I think that a queer politician should be held to higher standards. Regardless, he did a fair job at not upsetting the gay press and at reaping donations from organizations like HRC, while maintaining just enough cover to keep the GOP happy.

In saying that Foley intentionally used the closet for his own purposes, I'll admit to my own occasional but persistent lapses, especially when I'm feeling a bit low on energy.

Twenty-five years ago I had a severe bout with asthma, and was referred to an allergist. I remember him joking, "You're probably allergic to that blond you're sleeping with." Wheezing and coughing, I smiled and nodded. I didn't mention that the blond I was sleeping with happened to be named Jack. Twenty-five years later, I still have similar lapses. Sometimes shattering mainstream assumptions takes more energy than I can muster. A few days ago a contractor gave me an estimate on a brick patio. He was quite a talker and assumed I had a wife. "Your wife might want this", or "Your wife can decide that." I ignored this as I ignored most of what he was saying. Later that evening when he and his coworker returned to discuss specific plans and revised estimates, I introduced them to my "wife." Jack proceeded to share his thoughts about the patio. If these men didn't get our relationship upon my introduction, they surely figured it out after listening to Jack and me ruminate over the shape and location of the patio and over our concern about disturbing the tender, surface, feeder roots of a Japanese red maple we had planted several years ago.

But Foley was not a gay man who sometimes just wanted to get an allergy shot without having to correct heterosexist assumptions. He was a cog in the wheel of a political machine that has at its base constituents who would love nothing better than to shove all queers back in the closet and not only lock the door, but also turn on a trifle of gas. Queers holding influential positions, but playing closet games with mainstream press, are not unique to today's political regimes.

Foley simply got busted at his own game of deception and exploitation. Like so many politicians, Foley abused his position, but because of today's fractious climate around sexual and gender identity politics, ironically sensationalized and profited upon by Foley's party, his exploitation of congressional pages has broader implications, potentially at the detriment of LGBT folks who live their lives openly *and* with integrity.

Unfortunately, Foley is not unique in his abuse of power, nor his political closet games. We're yet to see the fallout of this political quagmire. The Republican Party has made a mockery of National Coming Out Day and what it means to millions of us who value

living out and proud. Even publicly out members of the G.O.P. are *discrete*. Consider Mary Cheney, the vice president's daughter and campaign manager, during the 2004 Republican convention.

Granted the closet renders a powerful force, and it blurs the line between sanctuary and prison. There is also a danger for those of us who feel free of the closet to forget our own struggles and to become too self-righteous. However, excusing public figures who intentionally use the closet as a ruse to maintain positions in a regime that is hostile to gay rights is not acceptable, especially to out queer parents who know the closet is no place to raise a child.

As fledgling parents, sitting in Grand Central Station with our infant daughter, Jack and I recalled our thirty-hour train ride, filled with odd looks, some questions and a lot of welcomed support. An elderly woman approached us, pushing her shopping cart filled with newspapers and about as many bags as we had piled around us. She stood front and center, approximately three feet away. First, she stared at Mona then me then Jack then back to Mona. She continued this for several minutes, as if she was trying to solve one of those Magic Eye stereograms in the Sunday paper. Finally, another woman sitting near us yelled at her, "What the hell are you looking at?"

Maybe our ally in Grand Central Station was bold enough to say what I thought, but the truth is our two-dad and one-daughter mixed-race family is public information. And though we prefer that folks don't gawk at us, we don't discourage being noticed. Out queer families work hard to resist today's hostile political climate, and we expect leaders, especially queer leaders, to do the same.