



Dedicated to helping LGBT people build and strengthen their families.

Fasten Your Seatbelts

A dozen ten to thirteen-year-olds – our daughter Mona being the youngest, turning eleven in two months – sat in our P'town rental while devouring PBJ sandwiches and pizza, watching Drake and Josh on Nickelodeon, gossiping and checking text messages. One thirteen-year-old with sun-bleached blond hair, resembling a fledgling Beach Boy who had traded his surfboard for a cell phone, clicked his phone and read aloud to anyone listening: "I think you're much cuter than your brother, but don't tell him I said so." A keen observation on the part of the message sender, considering that the message recipient and his brother are identical twins.

It was Friday of Family Week* in Provincetown, and the tweens and teens of queer parents shared and breached confidences – some via text messaging, but all around issues that predate modern technology. Friendships and romances shifted more than the sands at Herring Cove Beach – continuous drama, which rivaled that of the drag queens on Commercial Street .

By midweek, I suffered flashbacks of teaching sixth grade. My daughter and her peers' social tribulations reminded me that even my best instruction paled against my students' social agendas. As I looked around the kitchen/dining/living room of our cramped and overpriced P'town rental, I realized that my past had not only caught up with me, but it wasn't going home at three o'clock. Get used to it! Suspend the rational! Mona and her friends have embarked upon puberty! Some already sailed.

Much of the week's drama centered on Friday night's dance. Who's going with whom? This concern escaped me. As far as I understood, parents were to drop their kids off at the dance and pick them up when it was over. I guess I took the expression going with much too literally. But what do I know? I still think rude means impolite and it sucks means it sucks.

The kids finished their lunch and moved en masse back up Commercial Street to Town Hall to rehearse for the COLAGE** performance. Jack and I joined some long-time summer P'town friends to stuff little plastic bags with condoms, lubricant and peppermints. As part of an HIV/AIDS prevention project, these goodie bags are distributed by volunteers to gay men leaving P'town bars in the late night and early morning hours.

I thought about Mona and her friends and their smiles and tears and friendships and crushes as I sealed condoms in little plastic bags. Suddenly their preadolescent angst became harbingers of more complex social, emotional and sexual relationships. Their conflicts and concerns were not insignificant or about making life difficult for parents, but they were opportunities for parents. My opportunity came the following week.

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It was week two of our P'town vacation and only a handful of queer families remained in P'town. For the past three years, we've extended our P'town stay to two weeks. I'm still ambivalent about this second week. Though relaxing, it feels a bit morose after the buzz and love of hundreds of queer families.

Jack and I had again joined the safe-sex-goodie-bag assembly line on the deck outside our rental. We have some very busy boys in P'town and some very dedicated HIV/AIDS prevention volunteers.

I was waiting for Mona, so we could walk to the West End where she would get a third ear piercing to go with the two she already has. She mentioned that she preferred the number three, "It's odd, like my family." Cute.

When Mona joined us on the deck she was, of course, curious. "What are you doing?" Then she pointed to a condom, "What's that?" The adults at the table looked at me with a better-you-than-me expression on their faces.

On our way to the jewelry store, we engaged in a conversation we've had more than a few times, each time a bit more in depth and each time she lets me know when she's heard enough. Considering the roller coaster emotions Mona and her friends exhibited during the previous week, I eventually moved our discussion beyond plumbing to relationships.

At the risk of being didactic, I talked about responsibility, commitment and making good choices. I prefaced my comments with "When you're a woman." A feeble attempt by this worrisome parent to postpone the inevitable. I also reiterated the critical importance of protection, knowing full well that the path to good choices is too often strewn with bad choices. I tried to be brief. Regardless, I don't know how much Mona actually heard.

In two months Mona will be eleven, then twelve, then in the words of that Grand Diva Bette Davis, "Fasten your seat belts. It's going to be a bumpy night." I wonder if Bette had a child approaching puberty when she said this.

* An annual weeklong gathering of LGBT Families from around the world
familypride.org

** Children Of Lesbians & Gays Everywhere www.colage.org