



Dedicated to helping LGBT people build and strengthen their families.

Second Thoughts

At a Pride & Joy Family gathering, Jackie, a lesbian mom, mentioned that she and her not-quite-eight-year-old daughter, Orla, had attended the local LGBTQ youth holiday party. They had a great time. So much so that when Orla went shopping a few days after the party, with two of her mom's friends, and stood in the checkout line, she was compelled to express her glowing review of the event. "We went to the LGBTQ party. L is for lesbian, B is for bisexual..." Orla continued to rattle off what each initial stood for as if she was auditioning for Sesame Street – Bert and Ernie would have been thrilled. She then proceeded to sing, "I saw Daddy kissing Santa Clause..." Clearly Orla enjoyed the party, and she saw no reason not to share her pleasure with all interested customers and employees in The Dollar Store. After all, they might want to attend next year's party.

Jackie's story reminded me of the many times that Mona, like Orla, spoke freely about our lives and queer events, without any concern or even awareness that others might be critical. About seven years ago - Mona's first day back in daycare, after we had returned from Family Week in Provincetown - one of the daycare employees asked Mona if she had enjoyed her vacation. "I loved it, but I was afraid of the drag queens," I heard Mona answer, as I not-too-inconspicuously exited the daycare center.

Another time, approximately three years ago, our family went to Disneyworld. We were disembarking the train in Orlando. Jack was at the front of the line with Mona. Our god-kids, Ana and Mario, and their mom, Kate, were next, and I was last. Amid the confusion of adults looking for their luggage, coats and children, and trying to inch out of their seats into the line, Mona decided to introduce Jack to a little boy she had been playing with. She yelled, while pointing in my direction, "And that's my other father, Vince."

I'll always remember when Mona, as a third grader, asked me to speak to her class about our family. I did, and, afterward, she hugged me as if I had just given her the world. But, as a fifth grader, Mona seems to be sporting a queer version of what W.E.B. DuBois referred to as double-consciousness, "...this sense of always looking at one's self

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through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." Double-consciousness, initially used to describe the internalized voice that challenges the self-esteem and confidence of blacks surrounded by white privilege, also teaches us something about the internalized voice that challenges queer families surrounded by heterosexual privilege. Mona, my onetime champion of the rights of queer families, is having second thoughts.

Several weeks ago, on the feast of the Epiphany, Mona received a gift from two friends Mike and Nick. These men run a Catholic Worker house in Syracuse for people suffering through the final stages of AIDS related complications. On this particular Sunday, as Jack, Mona and I were about to leave their home after enjoying mass, a delicious dinner and the company of Mike and Nick's other guests, Mike handed Mona a beautifully wrapped gift.

When we got home, Mona opened what turned out to be two presents: first a book, *Ten Amazing People and How They Changed the World*; next, a T-shirt with *Love Thy Neighbor*, printed across the front. On the back of the T-shirt was a list: *Thy Homeless Neighbor, Thy Muslim Neighbor, Thy Black Neighbor, Thy Gay Neighbor, Thy White Neighbor, Thy Jewish Neighbor, Thy Transgendered Neighbor, Thy Christian Neighbor, Thy Atheist Neighbor, Thy Racist Neighbor, Thy Addicted Neighbor*. Mona held up the T-shirt, eyed the list and said, "I guess, I'm not wearing *this* shirt to school." Of course I knew why, but I still questioned her. She pointed to and read the words *gay* and *transgendered*, "the kids will go eww."

On the heels of the T-shirt incident came another example of Mona's budding ambivalence about being *too* open. Mona's teacher, eliciting the support of local writers and performers, immersed her students in playwriting. Until a few nights ago, Mona had shared three of her plays with Jack and me. The fourth, she shared with us this past weekend. She had titled this one *Gay*. In her introduction, she wrote: *A boy finds out that he has feelings for other guys. Find out what he has to deal with and how he still comes through*. She even included the archetypal bully, taunting: *And if you get*

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married, what will people sing? Here come the fags. Mona ended her play with a same-sex marriage, and the preacher stating, I now pronounce you wed. You may kiss the bride. I mean groom. I mean...oh just kiss each other.

Mona explained that she wrote this play in her classroom, or sometimes during recess, but none of her classmates were aware of its content. She shared her other three plays with various students – one she read to the whole class. However, she told us, “I just couldn’t read *Gay* to them, because that – you know – would cause problems.”

I recall the experiences shared by wise teenagers and young adults (children of queer parents), speaking on panels during Family Week in P’town, or at Pride and Joy conferences: *middle school years were the most challenging*. Having taught sixth graders and recalling my own rocky transition into adolescence, the young panelists’ comments made perfect sense to me. Early adolescence is a time when dominant narratives loom. Am I liked *enough*, pretty *enough*, strong *enough*, talented *enough*, smart *enough*, popular *enough*? Am I the *right* color? Is my hair the *right* texture? Do I wear the *right* clothes, or live in the *right* house? And for our children and for millions of children: Do I have the *right* family? Talk about looking at oneself through the eyes of others.

For Mona, middle school is on the horizon and her not wanting to wear a T-shirt with the words gay and transgendered on it to school and not sharing her queer writing with classmates seem logical, but I can’t help but wonder if these decisions are harbingers of things to come. In the meantime, I love how Orla enthusiastically shared her LGBTQ holiday experience. I treasure the many similar stories I hear from other queer parents and, of course, my own memories of a less guarded Mona. I also know that the teenage and young adult panelists who told queer parents about their challenging middle school years are now strong, confident and proud. So maybe someday, when Mona comfortably speaks and writes openly about her experiences, she’ll join the panel at Family Week and tell queer parents about the time she hid her play about two gay boys. Queerer things have happened.