



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

## Anticipating Family Week

In a few weeks my family will stuff our car with clothes, books, pads, pencils, food, first aid supplies, floats, beach toys and chairs, umbrellas, a case of sunscreen, and three bicycles. More likely, I will pack the car since I am stuck at Piaget's concrete operational stage – I'm good at arranging and manipulating objects within a confined space so that they fit. Jack will strap three bikes to the back of the car since he will swear much less than I would when things don't go well the first, second or eighteenth time. And he is less prone than I to ultimately smash the bikes into a heap on the concrete sidewalk. Mona will complain that we have packed her iPod or favorite toy or book at the bottom of everything.

Finally, we'll back our car flush against the garage, hoping that while we sleep no sugarplum fairies will undo our efforts and dance off with the contents of our car. At approximately 4:30 am, we will commence our nine-hour drive to Family Week 2007, in Provincetown and join hundreds of other queer families who will have traveled from all over the country (the world) to descend upon that fragile little foreskin at the tip of Cape Cod while televangelists pray that some unnatural disaster snips us all off to sea.

In anticipation of our trip, I begin each morning eating fresh fruit and drinking enough water to place myself at risk of water intoxication and completely upsetting the normal balance of my electrolytes, then – by evening – I gorge myself with chocolate truffle raspberry ice cream, cookies and chips. Probably an attempt to recapture memories of my pre-parent Provincetown vacations when the bulge in my little blue Speedo was not the result of my gut or love handles.

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Now the only Speedos I wear are goggles, and that's only when my ten-year-old daughter forces me into the ocean despite the fact that my hypothyroid causes me to chill easily. No sympathy from a child whose thyroid does exactly what it's supposed to do.

I will, however, eventually modify my food intake, exercise and drop about ten pounds before our trip, which is unremarkable considering I'm at least thirty pounds overweight. Unfortunately, I'm not hairy enough to pass as a beefy bear, since two years ago alopecia wiped out most of my hair, including the once black and grey curls that adorned my head. To add insult to injury, chronic back problems have resurfaced, and I now walk with a cane. I'm sure that it will come in handy to protect myself from overzealous admirers as I limp along Commercial Street.

A few days ago I was viewing old photographs. A friend of mine is a mad photographer who perpetually vows to organize her copious archives. I spotted a picture of several folks assembling a PRIDE float, taken in 1993, and was immediately attracted to the swarthy young man with bulging biceps and dark curly hair. "Who is that?" I asked. It was me. I was embarrassed and depressed. Jack said, "See why I fell for you?" I wasn't foolish enough to ask, "And you stay with me now *because?*"

On our way to the Cape, as we pass weigh stations on the Thruway, I visualize flashing neon signs: *All Fat Gay Men Exit Here!*

Lesbians are much more forgiving when it comes to body mass. Jack, Mona and I – dragging our chairs, floats, coolers and umbrellas down to the men's section of Herring Cove – will be stopped by the ghost of Frank Morgan, guarding the Gates of the Emerald City, "And where do you think you're going with all that furniture?" Then he eyes me up and down. "And I guess you've never heard of diets and gyms?" Our lesbian sisters will make room for us – some graciously, some begrudgingly. But they'll move their blankets, coolers, upholstered beach furniture and umbrellas and temporarily dispense with their conversations about cats or interventions to invite us into their circles.

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Never again will I wander down to the men's section of Herring Cove where lone perfectly greased pretty boys in thongs (or less) sit on washcloths drinking Perrier and occasionally nodding at a passerby.

The truth is, during Family Week, a group of us dads and some moms will schlep our beach paraphernalia and children to the near sections of the Herring Cove backwaters. There are no emerald gates to pass through and no weigh stations to check in. We will have a great time catching up; the kids will enjoy alternating between the colder, rougher ocean and the warmer, calmer backwaters. Maybe we'll see you there. I'll be the one with the paunch, alopecia patches and cane. Aside from that, I'm adorable.

### **Postscript**

A dear friend, Harriet Alpert, who some of you may remember – I still miss her terribly – would never wander further than the rim of the tar path spilling onto the sand at Herring Cove. Here, her partner would unpack their U-haul and arrange a mix of IKEA, Eddie Bower and flea market bargain beach accessories. All day my friend would hold court in what appeared to be a queer tailgate party, while our children did the kinds of things that made us wonder why it was we had tried so hard to become parents. Once – her last year with us (she passed away the following November) – I convinced her to leave her entourage and stroll down to the backwaters at high tide with Asa (her younger son), Mona and me. I have a lovely photograph sitting on a shelf in my bedroom of Harriet floating on a raft in the oxbows behind the dunes.