



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

---

## It Comes With The Territory

My daughter and I stood before several Georgia O'Keefe paintings in Atlanta 's High Museum , discussing the artist's use of vaginal imagery. Having had very limited exposure to female anatomy myself, beyond changing diapers, anything that I had to offer to our conversation was purely speculative and based on hearsay. Mona, however, was much more the expert, and, as usual, made her opinions known.

I couldn't help but notice that we were attracting more attention than the surrounding artwork. Maybe our voices carried a bit further than we thought. I could have told concerned onlookers not to be alarmed, after all, "I'm one of her dads, and our family is quite comfortable discussing the human body and, for that matter, sex." Such a declaration was probably better left unsaid.

Most likely, whether or not folks heard what we were discussing was of little consequence as compared to the image of a preteen African American girl locked arm and arm with her aging European American father, her full head of sister locs resting on his shoulder. Usually we ignore glances or stares; for the most part, we no longer notice them, but every once in a while it's like, "Oh yeah, we are a bit unique."

If anonymity is your thing then being part of a two-dad, transracial family might prove a bit stressful. Almost twelve years ago, Jack and I sat on a bench, cradling our newborn infant, when an elderly woman approached us, pushing a shopping cart filled with newspapers and plastic bags. She stood directly in front of us, staring and looking quite perplexed – a harbinger of our experiences to come.

Twice, when Mona was quite little, Jack and I were asked, "What are you doing with that baby?" The first time, we were at a street festival, Mona had spiked a temperature, and we rushed to our car while Mona wailed. We assured a concerned onlooker that Mona was our daughter and that she wasn't feeling well. The second time, Jack and I were about two blocks from our house. My parents had just moved in with us, and my cell phone rang then disconnected. I thought that my parents might be trying to call me, so I ran home. Mona immediately started screaming when I took off, and Jack was left to explain what had just happened to a concerned passerby. Both times, African American men questioned us. Makes sense to me.

More recently, Jack, Mona and I were shopping in a chain shoe store that had relocated from one local mall to another. "I remember you," explained the young woman at the register. Hmm... And then there was the time that a Father's Day article I had written appeared in the newspaper along with several other Father's Day articles under family photographs. We

***continued on page 2***

---

expected comments from neighbors, friends, coworkers and members of our church, but, while attending a play at the local Civic Center , we were a bit surprised when strangers in the audience told us how much they enjoyed the article, "By the way, which one of you does she call Poppy?"

Numerous times, folks we've never met or know only through an occasional nod or smile have come up to us: "I can't believe how tall she's getting... I remember when she was a baby, and you carried her in that backpack."

About two years ago – just in case, with the rise in LGBT headed families, there was any danger of our family disappearing into the crowd – Mother Nature played a little trick. I came down with a mean case of alopecia. Quite rapidly, I lost almost every hair on my body – reminiscent of Bette Davis as Fanny in the film Mr. Skeffington, when the aging Fanny suddenly lost her youthful glow to a strange illness. However, I had no host of disappointed suitors. Only Jack. And he made the best of the sudden novelty in our thirty-plus-years together. Eventually, some of my hair grew back, but I'm still without brows and lashes, and my head is spotted with random bald circles. We're here, we're queer, and one of us has a certain extraterrestrial charm. Get used to it!

As I viewed O'Keefe's labial petals at the High in Atlanta , I felt a sudden tingling along my thigh. No, it wasn't a sign of latent heterosexuality nor am I in reparative therapy. It was just my cell phone. My mother had fallen. The following morning, Mona and I returned home.

Unfortunately, our Atlanta trip was cut short, but my mother, as it turned out, was fine. Mona and I boarded the same train that we rode only two days earlier. Its final stop had been New Orleans , and it was now making its way back through Atlanta . As Mona walked through the dining car, a porter stopped her, "Weren't you just on this train?" But then I think Mona is amazingly memorable with or without her dads.