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"Important. . . A refreshing compilation of children's own voices."

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How It Feels to Have a Gay or Lesbian Parent



**A Book by Kids
for Kids of All Ages**



Judith E. Snow, MA

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To my beloved friends, Douglas and Jeffrey,
whose personal plights inspired this work

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CONTENTS

Foreword	ix
<i>Felicia Park-Rogers</i>	
Preface	xiii
Acknowledgments	xvii
1. Chris, Age Seventeen	1
2. Keila, Age Seven	5
3. Meredith, Age Twenty	9
4. Trisha, Age Twelve	13
5. Sister and Brother: Taylor, Age Eight; Justin, Age Ten	17
6. Ruth, Age Twenty	21
7. Angel, Age Seven	25
8. Sophia, Age Thirteen	27
9. Jarod, Age Twenty-Six	31
10. Three Sisters: Miranda, Age Seven; Lilly, Age Nine; and Avery, Age Eleven	37
11. Erin, Age Fourteen	41
12. Stacey, Age Eighteen	43
13. Tara, Age Thirteen	45
14. Kelly, Age Twenty	47

15. Ally, Age Ten	51
16. Nicole, Age Thirty-One	53
17. Alanna, Age Eight	59
18. Lydia, Age Twenty-Five	61
19. Andrew, Age Thirteen	65
20. Chloe, Age Ten	67
21. Clara, Age Twenty	71
22. Rickey, Age Fourteen	77
23. Brother and Sister: Nathan, Age Sixteen; Rachel, Age Eighteen	79
24. Renee, Age Twenty-Eight	81
25. Brian, Age Eighteen	83
26. Bernadette, Age Fifteen	87
27. Jamie, Age Eighteen	91
28. Alicia, Age Sixteen	95
Summary	99
Resource Guide	103
Index	105

Foreword

Today the United States is experiencing vast cultural changes in family structures. One of the newest and most striking examples of these changes is the gayby boom. Social scientists estimate that there are at least 1 million children in the United States ages eighteen or younger living with a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT) parent (Stacey and Biblarz, 2001). The term *gayby boom* is most often used to refer to people who have come out of the closet as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and then had children, either on their own or with a same-sex partner. National awareness of these families and the issues that matter to them is growing. Yet many do not realize that families with a gay parent who was previously married still make up the majority of the population of children with a GLBT parent. Both groups face homophobia in society and possibly even within their own families. Kids with parents who come out later in their lives also face big transitions in their families and possibly ugly custody situations.

In a professional capacity, I have had the privilege of meeting many people with GLBT parents. This has been tremendously meaningful to me personally because I, too, have gay parents. My dad came out as gay when I was three years old and my mother came out as a lesbian when I was twelve. When I was nineteen my dad told me that he was HIV positive. I was twenty-five years old when I founded Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE) and began meeting other people with families similar to my own. Finding out that I was not alone was a profoundly transforming experience for me. I have since dedicated my life to creating forums in which people with GLBT parents or family members can connect with one another and increase the cultural visibility of our families and the experiences of children growing up in these families.

Growing up with gay parents affected my life in many ways. Some people think it is a bad idea for children to live in homes with GLBT parents. What I have learned through my studies of all major social sciences in this field, and perhaps more important from both my personal experiences and from meeting many kids, is that the quality of the parenting is what matters, not the sexual orientation of the parent. There are many good parents, and some bad ones, but none of them are good or bad due to their sexual orientation. A good parent is nurturing, consistent, loving, and appropriate. Sexual orientation simply does not affect the ability of a parent to help with homework; enforce curfew; change a diaper; dispense love, affection, and guidance; or lead a child to spiritual maturity.

What does affect our families negatively is homophobia. It is not good for children to live in a closet, to be shamed by peers or teachers, to be shunned by extended family members, or to be treated unjustly in the eyes of the law. Discriminatory public policy such as the ability to fire parents from their jobs because they are gay, deny them custody of their children because they are transgender, or deny moms the right to marry and therefore both be legally recognized parents does hurt families. It is critical that each and every person in our society work to right these wrongs.

How It Feels to Have a Gay or Lesbian Parent is an important tool to right these wrongs. It provides children with a sense of the beautiful community they are part of, thereby breaking their isolation and loneliness, building their self-esteem, and forging their connection to their unique cultural heritage. It also helps professionals and policymakers to see through the misinformation that is so often put forward and to instead learn from the real experts on growing up in GLBT families—the kids themselves.

I continually meet people with a GLBT parent or parents who say they never knew anyone else had a family like their own. A book such as this one is an important step toward making sure that no child feels that way ever again.

Felicia Park-Rogers
Executive Director
COLAGE

REFERENCE

Stacy, J. and Biblarz, T. (2001). "Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter?" *American Sociological Review*, 66, 159-193.