

*DignityUSA works for respect and justice for all gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the Catholic Church and the world through education, advocacy and support.*

## President's Message

By Mark Matson, President, DignityUSA:

This issue of *QV: Quarterly Voice of DignityUSA*, has "Families" as its central theme. Four same-sex couples in our Dignity Family share their lived-experience as life partners and parents raising children. We will gain firsthand knowledge about life-giving and nurturing family life and living — signs of goodness and God's Grace — running counter to the claims by others in Church and society proclaiming such relationships as predatory and threats to family structure and nature.

You will be seeing more of these kinds of stories in the future. We will call them "Signs of Grace." I encourage you to send us a vignette from your life or from the life of someone you know that illustrates how life is or has been "yeast for change." With permission, we will publish them in a future issue of *QV: Quarterly Voice*, as well as post them on our website. If you have a photo, send it along! Send your "Signs of Grace" to our Editor, Bill Welch, at [DUSAEditor@comcast.net](mailto:DUSAEditor@comcast.net).

## Commentary

By Leo Egashira, Communications Committee. Chair

We are pleased to share with you brief glimpses in the lives of four amazing families, each of which is as unique as any family can be. The very fact that four couples have had to form their family units in a creative fashion and keep themselves together, despite the lack of institutional support from church and society, bespeaks an activism far beyond what most of us without children undertake. Not only are their own lives and livelihoods scrutinized; their children's lives assume an even bigger and more important personal responsibility.

They have remained Catholic against all odds and remained engaged with society as living testimonials to the sacredness of families. The transformational power of lived experience that is shared among neighbors, community and the broader society cannot be underestimated. Publicizing these kinds of stories will, over time, effect profound change upon the attitudes of church and society towards GLBT people and GLBT families. Thank you, Frank & Jerry, Patty & Paula, Leah & Lynne and Della & Ruth for being who you are and sharing your lives with us. Your children are fortunate and blessed to have you nurturing them!

## DIGNITYUSA FAMILIES ISSUE

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## From the Editor

By Bill Welch, DignityUSA Editor

On behalf of our Dignity Family, friends and readers, I want to express sincere appreciation to our member contributors for the content in this special "DignityUSA Families Issue."

We are fortunate and privileged that you have taken the time and energy to share with us in an intimate fashion the trials and tribulations, hilarious moments, but most of all, the faith- and love-centered core of building life-partner relationships and life-giving and nurturing familial relationships beyond what many hold forth as traditional family and family values.

Your life stories are like well-crafted swords forged with fire and honed to perfection. Amidst all, they are stories of "Catholic life and living," compassion and values inspired by the example of Jesus Christ.

I welcome you to share your family story. Many of you have built personal and extended families founded on diverse interpersonal relationships and situations. Many would welcome and profit from learning more about building life-giving, not-so-traditional families.

Please write [DUSAEditor@comcast.net](mailto:DUSAEditor@comcast.net). Thanks.



The Gold Family, Christmas 2007  
 Jerry, holding “Misty,” and Frank, surrounded by their four boys  
 “Misty” is the only girl in the family.

## The Gold Family, Denver, Colorado

By Frank Gold, January 22, 2008

I can see it as clearly as any of the most significant events in my life. Jerry, my partner, drove up to our house on a fall October day, opened the back door of the car, and lifted into his arms a beautiful 3-year old boy. He carried him, along with his one suitcase of belongings in the other hand, up the steps to the porch. As he handed Tim to me for the first time, I felt our life change. And, change it did, in more ways than we could ever have imagined! That was 13 years ago. Tim was the first of our four boys. He is now 16 going on 17, taller and smarter than both of us, and learning to drive.

Like most people do, Jerry and I have often looked back over our life together and marveled at the direction it has taken. Our life together began as a friendship over many years in the seminary and while teaching together at a Jesuit high school. As we grew closer and shared more about hopes and dreams, it was me who wanted to be the priest and Jerry who wanted to have children. When we became more than friends and began a committed relationship, we agreed that I would follow my call to priesthood, but that one day we would explore the possibility of children. The call to be a father, in one form or another, was deeply rooted in both of us and has played out in amazing ways in our life. Through our beginning years, we talked about adoption, but had no idea what form it would take some day, realizing that because of who we were there weren't many options.

As the years quickly passed, I transitioned into work as a hospital chaplain. Though I am a priest without faculties, I still preside at liturgy on a regular basis with Dignity/Denver and weekly with Jerry and our boys at home. Jerry has retired after many years as a high school counselor, and is now not only the “soccer Dad,” but also the “always in the car and whatever else is needed” Dad. Together, we are raising our four boys, ages 10 to 16, in a non-stop world of school, sports, music, overnights, DVDs, PSPs, etc., etc. The process of adoption and the experience with the boys is more than we imagined, extremely challenging at times, yet richly rewarding when we look at the bigger- and longer-term picture.

We adopted all of the boys through Denver Human Services, with the help and support of wonderful and very accepting social workers. With each of the boys, their stories and life journeys have been different, as was the experience of adoption. In Denver, as elsewhere, only one gay parent can adopt, and obviously Jerry became the official parent. (I was still an active priest at the time.) But, one of the gifts we celebrated this past year was the passing of legislation in Colorado, which now allows for second parent adoption. So, very soon, I will be a real Dad, too, even though Jerry and I have always shared the work and responsibilities in raising our boys.

Our household, whether on a weekday preparing for school, or on a weekend when we're never sure how we'll get to all the

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*The Gold Family*  
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events, is ever buzzing with life. What most straight people don't realize or want to acknowledge is how much our relationship and family life is just like theirs. We do have the added challenge, though, of appearing at soccer/basketball games as a couple, and being asked in restaurants if we are their grandparents (We could be their grandparents!). But truly, raising four boys from four different backgrounds, though very challenging, is also very much the same as it is in any family. Kids are kids, and in this time of their lives, they are all about the things that "really matter" to them (like "My Space," dating, I-pods, and cell phones), and they have the dreams and hopes of any kid who might want to be a rapper or basketball/soccer star.

Jerry and I consider ourselves very blessed as we acknowledge what has transpired in our lives. We are very clear about our desire to give our lives and energy for these boys. We are so blessed in the memory of accepting and supportive parents; and, surrounded by siblings and good friends who offer occasional respite. We are becoming more courageous all the time in being out as a couple and a family (though that's not the preference of the teenagers: Imagine, being African-American, with white dads who are gay and old!). We realize how important it is to be witness for our community and to teach people the value of relationships and the meaning of family.

When Jerry and I celebrated our marriage two years ago, after 33 years together, in a ritual of vows and rings before family and friends, we placed our rings on the "wrong hand" (the right hand), for the right reason. It was an important moment that brought so much of what we had been through and shared together into focus. It was another step in the direction we had initially been drawn to—to be a family, each of the six of us having come from very unique and different family origins.

As we look back over the years, we have never regretted our decisions, whether to become a couple, let go of the priesthood in a formal way, or welcome into our lives the gift of our boys. It has changed us, aged us, opened new doors for us, and helped us realize what this life is supposed to be all about. It has also led us to the realization that we have something important to say to our world and to our church, both of which have a difficult time understanding and accepting us. After all these years, this is obviously the place we are called to be, and yes, we have a lot to say by who we are as a family (always respecting the occasional struggle of our teenagers and a few more conservative family members). We hope to keep on living and loving, and setting an example for our boys of what really is important in life.

In welcoming Tim into our home on that first day, there was no doubt for us that the God in flesh was very present in our lives and had chosen us to be a light for others who cannot see beyond a very small world view.

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Jerry officially took my name at the end of 2007, as we prepare to become a complete family with the second parent adoption. All of us will eventually have the same last name. We will be the Gold Family. ▼



**The Vatican  
calls this violence.  
DignityUSA  
calls it Love.**



DignityUSA's ad campaign  
Newsweek Magazine June 2004  
(Clockwise top) Kerry, Paula Hills, Keegen, Patty Dolan

## The Dolan-Hills Family, Auburn, Washington

By Paula Hills, February 1, 2008

When Leo Egashira asked me to write something for the QV, I thought, "People don't want to hear about Patty, Kerry, Keegan, and me." And besides, I'm in IT (information technology for all those non-corporate folks out there) and documentation and writing skills tend to be in "code" (you know what they say - Documentation? Isn't that why they call it code?). Anyway, here I am at my computer writing about our lives — I'll let you be the judge.

Patty and I met in 1978 at a party hosted by mutual friends and acquaintances. What I remember most about that night is that I never laughed so much in my life. I think what Patty remembers most about that night is "this kid laughs at all my jokes!" I was a naïve 19 year old and she was worldly at 23, hence the "kid" reference. But as it turned out, we had a lot in common. We both came from large, Catholic families, we both liked to snow ski and play pinocle, and we both loved dogs and basketball (Go Seattle Storm!). At the time I was a sophomore at University of Buffalo (UB) and Patty had just started the master's program at UB, and much to our surprise we had an 8 o'clock class in the same building – and so the romance began over early morning breakfast meetings.

Just as our relationship was beginning to get serious, I transferred to a school five hours away, which was better suited to my academic pursuits. But that left us nurturing a long-distance relationship. There are a couple of clichés that come to mind at this point — "absence makes the heart grow fonder" and "while the cat's away, the mice will play." I'll let you decide as to how each fits in, but suffice it to say that after 30 years, we're still together!

Quite honestly, this was a tumultuous time in our budding relationship — because I wasn't really gay, (I couldn't even bring myself to say the "L" word at that time), I just happened to fall in love with a woman, right? It took me a long time to come to terms with my sexual identity, but Patty stuck with me through it all. And every day I thank God for her patience and love.

So I graduated from Potsdam and Patty earned her Masters at the Univ. of Buffalo and we moved in together in Rochester, NY in 1982, finally! But our stint under the same roof was short-lived as Patty moved to Kent, OH to pursue her PhD at Kent State University. This time, I did most of the driving in support of this long-distance relationship. And after a year and a half, I moved out to Ohio to join Patty permanently.

Once Patty earned the rights to Dr. Dolan at Kent State, we moved to Greenville, NC where she completed her postdoctoral research at East Carolina University. I was working as a consultant at that time and traveled a lot. We were both very busy, and quite honestly, kids were the last thing from my mind. Besides, we were gay (again still not able to say the "L" word) living in a very anti-gay state (I think at the time, NC had the dubious distinction of having the most gay bashings of all 50 states). How can we possibly have kids?!?! For Patty, however, it had always been a dream to raise children. So she planted the seed (not to be confused with the "other seed"), and I thought about it.

You have to understand, however, to know Patty and me is to know that she is the high energy, decisive one and I am the laid back, "gotta get my arms around it" one. So when I say I thought about it, it took me a long time to come to a decision. But one day, I was sitting in church watching this family in front of me (not paying much attention to the priest, as that does happen on occasion), and I realized that I could do this. Together Patty and I could raise children in the same loving manner that I witnessed that day. Thank goodness for boring priests! (I mean no offense by this, but we all have our gifts!)

And so in 1991 we began the long journey to getting pregnant. You might ask why we chose the biological route vs. the adoption route. And all I can say is that Patty's biological clock was in full swing and this was the option that made the most sense for us at the time. The next question: Who was going to carry the baby? On this topic, Patty and I are not from

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**The Dolan-Hills Family**  
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the same cloth. I had a very hard time admitting that I was a lesbian (there I said it). I don't think I could've handled the societal pressures of being an "unmarried," pregnant woman. And, over the years, I've come to realize that I have a very, very low tolerance for pain. Carrying a child and giving birth just wasn't going to happen to me. Patty, on the other hand, was more than willing to take this on! She sought out a fertility specialist in Greenville who, knowing our situation, accepted the challenge. There are benefits to living in a college town where diversity runs rampant.

After three years of inseminations and emotional ups and downs with no results, our stint in North Carolina was over. Patty had completed her research and it was time to move on – Seattle here we come!

When we arrived in Seattle, Patty continued to pursue the artificial inseminations even with the pressures of a new job. It didn't get any easier in Seattle — four more years of thinking, "Oh this time is it" and then having it not be it. It was hard for both of us, but especially hard for Patty. We talked about adopting, but had heard horror stories of wait times and extra difficulties for same-gender couples — and we really didn't want to hide who we were from an adoption agency. And believe it or not, we had one more option.

But by this time we are not the 19- and 23-year olds that we once were, and as it turns out, that was contributing to the problem. So as a last ditch effort, we tried in vitro fertilization. Even when all the stars align, this very scientific approach offers no guarantees; because of our age our chances were quite low. But what did we have to lose except more money! To better our chances, we used the eggs from the younger of the two of us and after a lot of praying, a miracle occurred. Actually two miracles occurred — Patty was pregnant with twins! After eight long years, we were finally going to have children!

Nine months later Patty gave birth to two beautiful babies, Kerry and Keegan. It was an incredible experience. A friend gave us a picture frame with these words etched on it: "Babies fill a hole in your heart that you never knew existed." I believe that with all my heart.

A few months after their birth, Kerry and Keegan were baptized at St Joe's in Seattle at a Dignity-sponsored mass. I know it was beautiful because people told me it was and we have a video recording, but Mommy (i.e., Patty) and Mum (i.e., me) were so sleep deprived, some things are hard to remember!

And later that year, I officially adopted the twins. Now, we have never had a commitment

ceremony, but during the adoption proceedings, Patty and I professed our love for each other and for our children in front of the judge, the lawyer, and our friends. There was no priest or clergy present, but I know we were blessed that day.

We truly are blessed and have been surrounded by neighbors and friends here in Seattle who have become part of our "village." Kerry and Keegan have more aunts than any 8-year olds I know! When the opportunity arose for Dignity's marketing campaign, we were proud to be part of it — to show that children can be raised in a loving home by committed, same-gender parents that espouse the same family values as any heterosexual household.

Kerry and Keegan are now in 3rd grade and enjoy the same things as most 8-year olds — soccer, swimming, basketball, and, of course, Mickey Mouse! We just returned from a family vacation in Disneyland where we had the time of our lives.

From baptism to First Communion, Keegan and Kerry are learning about Jesus and Christian life. They have great friends and family to support and nurture them on their faith journey. But just like any family, there's plenty of monkey business— defiance, bickering, and arguments. In the end, though, love wins out (and sometimes Nintendo!).

We have been very fortunate never having to hide our relationship — before kids and after kids. I believe that those who come to know us rethink their bias or prejudice, if it ever existed. And if by just being who we are—living together as a family in suburbia, actively involved in the church and PTA— makes someone think twice about what he or she believes, then we can make a difference one by one. ▼



Disneyland Trip Jan 2008, (L to R) Patty, Kerry, Mickey, Keegan, Paula





The Vader-Huskinson Family, 2000  
 Front (L-R) Lynne Huskinson and Leah Vader  
 Back (L-R) Jacquelyn, Benjamin, Maxfield & Maria

## Homos on the Range: The Vader-Huskinson Family, Gillette, Wyoming

By Leah Vader, January 19, 2008

Days after I was asked to write for the current Dignity QV, I came across the 4th Quarter 2007 issue, unopened yet (oops!) on my desk, and was surprised to see mention of my life and issues with the Church. Mary Hunt's strong words decrying our pastor and bishop's mistreatment of me and my spouse, Lynne Huskinson, provided great encouragement and inspiration. This January I am reflecting upon the year that has passed since my public opposition to the anti-gay "pro-family" state legislation "SF-13," which resulted in the Bishop of Cheyenne ordering our pastor to write a letter barring us from receiving Eucharist at St. Matthew Parish where we have been members since 1997. Gathering my thoughts for this article has been a valuable exercise as I formulate my goals for upcoming struggles.

Perhaps what irritates and thus motivates me most is the recent use/misuse/abuse of the word "family." We all have families of birth, no matter what the circumstance of conception or how our relationships with them unfold as we grow. The misnamed Wyoming Family Coalition and its web site bear the motto "Faith, Family and Freedom." I vigorously oppose the co-optation of these words that bear great meaning in my life. I must also protest the Diocese of Cheyenne's support of SF13, again under the "pro-family" guise. Laws like SF13 do nothing but disrespect, marginalize and undermine important freedoms for families like mine.

In collaboration with the Conference of Catholic Lesbians, I co-wrote a response to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop's letter on pastoral care of homosexuals last year: <http://cclonline.org/uploads/docs/letter-to-bishop.pdf>.

### QV: When and how did you two meet?

Lynne & I met as neighbors in Rapid City, South Dakota. I moved there with my husband and four children in 1994.

**Lynne:** "I made up a silly excuse to meet Leah like something about a loose dog in the neighborhood. It was love at first sight for me." Lynne was living part time in Rapid City when we met, but has worked in Gillette since 1979. I moved to Gillette in 1997, due to financial necessity during a lengthy and sadly contentious divorce. All four of our children were born to me (Leah) and they ranged in age from 5 to 11 when we met. **Lynne:** "When I met Leah, I met her children and also cared for them when she had appointments or when she and her husband went away together. I grew up with three little brothers and pretty much have always been good with kids. I loved Leah and her kids were definitely part of the deal."

### QV: What are each of you called by your kids?

I am Mom, Mommy, May-May, Mo, and all kinds of things to our four, fine young adult children. Lynne is.... Lynne, or for fun, Lynneball, in reference to her multiple athletic abilities, or Lynnakens. Early in our relationship, our older daughter referred to Lynne as Mom2 and we still get cards from them addressed to Moms or Mom2. We call ourselves the L-squared household.

### QV: What were your occupations before & after you met?

I was a religious studies major at the Univ. of Minnesota and focused my post college life on raising the children and doing volunteer/activist work. Lynne supported us all during the years of joint custody and kids still in grade school, making it possible for me and my children to make the most of our time together. We relished those summers—Lynne taught the kids to fish and all of us to camp, taking advantage of our nearby and beautiful Big Horn Mountains. I worked part time as a waitress, then served a year of Americorps service at our local domestic violence/sexual assault agency, leading to a position there as Prevention Education Coordinator. After leaving that agency, I became a job coach working alongside adults with disabilities at our county recycling center. I am currently the Recycling Center Supervisor for Campbell County. Lynne: "I started out in a construction labor job, but have been a coal miner since I was 19. I work at a surface coal mine and have been a heavy equipment operator at the Eagle Butte mine for almost 30 years."

### QV: How is your family accepted at school, church and the neighborhood?

Lynne and I attended school conferences, volunteered for field trips, did whatever we could for the kids when they were in school in Rapid City and we lived in Gillette, a 2-hour drive away. Faculty always treated us respectfully; they appreciated our dedication. For several years we participated in Vacation Bible School at St. Matthew's. At first that was fun and comfortable, but over the years we felt less than welcome. I taught CCD for first graders one year; then several years later took a class of ninth graders along with a liberal Catholic neighbor who has become one of our closest friends. She actually quit St. Matthew's entirely, and had a very poignant letter to the paper printed on how they treated Lynne and me.

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**The Vader-Huskinson Family**  
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We have also joined small faith-sharing groups as a couple. The reception there has been mixed. Our town is small enough that the whole place is like our neighborhood. We have been blessed to know some really wonderful women who have given us strength and perspective when it is so frequently needed.

Disturbing incidents include Lynne being lectured on morality by a store clerk: "Is she your wife or your husband?" And another time, we found our car defaced with the words "Go back to Canada" written on the dusty trunk. We have a Niagara Falls plate frame and announced our Canadian wedding in the paper. Maybe the perpetrator just didn't like our Kerry/Edwards sticker? Yet also, one of Lynne's co-workers thanked her for putting our wedding announcement in the paper, saying maybe his gay brother wouldn't have lost his life to self-destructive behaviors had there been openness and pride like we had.

**QV: Tell me about your religious backgrounds and the importance of faith in your family life.**

My faith is vital. I try to stay in a prayerful mode no matter what is going on in my life, work or home. My father keeps me subscribed to Commonweal and I delight in coming across America and NCR in my recycling work. I am a third generation Maryknoll sponsor and was thrilled to see a Maryknoll priest speaking at the Dignity/Denver Mass I attended last June.

I am very proud of my "Catholic credentials:" Second of five children born to parents who met at Mount St. Scholastica/St. Benedict's College in Atchison, Kansas, I was the one who asked to go to Mass at age four. The Catholic Church has been my gateway to many volunteer and activist opportunities, tutoring Hmong children, providing pastoral care at a youth group home, aiding Central American refugees, resisting nuclear proliferation, and now advocating for GLBT equality.

Lynne was raised in an LDS (Mormon) family but found her values out of sync with the racism and patriarchy of the Church even as a grade schooler. As soon as she left the family home, her connection to the Mormon Church ended. Lynne: "My brother John and I read all we can about how messed up the LDS church history is. The polygamy issue really bothers me and it was a part of my genealogy."

Lynne considered herself an agnostic when we met, but was certainly interested in exploring spiritual topics. She willingly accompanied me to Mass in Rapid City and Gillette, and in 2000, I sponsored her in RCIA at St. Matthew's, leading to her baptism and First Communion. One of our running jokes is that only an LDS woman would join the Catholic Church based on its greater inclusion of females! It means a lot to us to share our faith practice, note the liturgical seasons, attend Mass and discuss the scriptures and homily.

All of our children have had First Communion, and our youngest was confirmed in 2004. They were usually good Mass attendees and I assured them they did not have to believe everything they were told. After their moms were denied Communion, they have no desire to go back to Mass. They are angry and sad, knowing what this means to us. Knowing they could receive Communion but their moms could not, simply because we will not hide our love for each other or our belief in GLBT equality, was just too much.

**QV: Can you provide more details about the aftereffects of the denial of communion brouhaha?**

In the weeks following the pastor's letter denying Lynne and me the Eucharist, and the publication of the AP story nationwide in March 2007, our relationship faced challenges unlike any we had experienced in 11 years together. With church and state denying recognition of our legal Canadian marriage, maligning our commitment to each other and our children, we were sent into an emotional and spiritual tailspin. We had to re-examine what meant the most to us. Following some less than mature behavior on both of our parts, it became clear that we will always have a deep love and commitment; we will always want to spend our lives together. Several sessions of counseling helped us get back on track. By August 2007, we were able to celebrate our anniversary as a couple on the mend.

What the Catholic Church and state did not provide, family, friends, and community members did. In our darkest hours, several local churches reached out and invited us to attend their services, and to consider membership that would not stigmatize us as second-class citizens in the back of the bus as the Catholic Church has done to us. Supportive friends of many faiths and no faith are those with whom I choose to share my time and thoughts. Key among these allies is a Sister who is on the staff of our church. She has taken the time to sit with us, listen to us, and give us pastoral care as a Catholic couple. She has even written the Bishop on our behalf.

And our children, all young adults, made it abundantly clear how important their two mommies still were in their lives. Beautiful unknown allies from across the country sent us cards and letters. Leo Egashira of DignityUSA reached out when I really needed an intelligent Catholic ally. Wyoming Equality invited me to be on their statewide advisory committee, leading to email contact with Dignity members Bob Edgerly and Bob Warburton ("the two Bobs") of Casper, Wyoming, a couple of very precious gentlemen who guided me to Dignity/Denver.

**QV: What was Dignity/Denver like?**

Attending the Dignity/Denver Mass in June 2007 was a most profound spiritual experience that uplifted me beyond description! My son and his loved one picked me up from the airport and we found the church rather late, but to my relief it was a long Mass. If only I could be there each week, they would

**The Vader-Huskinson Family**  
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have a very active parishioner in me. Special thanks to the gentlemen that invited us for a meal afterward; I had to bust a move to make my flight home! Dignity/Denver welcomed us lavishly and I would love to go back— maybe if I can score some Rockies tickets.

**QV: Denver is six hours away; how important is “virtual” Dignity in your spiritual life?**

I very much appreciate the regular email from Dignity, particularly *Breath of the Spirit*. The scripture commentary helps me connect with the Word when I am not willing or able to attend Mass. I will be keeping my eye out for the next QV for obvious reasons, and was most surprised to see our saga mentioned by Mary Hunt in the last issue. Ms. Hunt, thank you for your support. But my friends, and especially my spouse, laughed when told I was supposedly not a “recalcitrant feminist!” Guess I had better try a little harder there!

The Internet is a most valuable tool here. Perhaps there is some way we can have informal contact people in the far-flung regions such as here in NE Wyoming. Yes, I am volunteering for that role.

**QV: Do you have any final thoughts?**

It is clear that Lynne and I will continue our Goddess-given mission to be “Homos on the Range” in Wyoming. We attend Mass at St. Matthew’s—or wherever we are spending Sunday morning—presenting ourselves for a blessing, not Eucharist.

Just last night, at my county employee appreciation party, an esteemed colleague and fellow parishioner commented on how she and her husband had not been married in the Church and were thus not “qualified” for the sacrament. Still, they are open communicants and fully-welcomed parishioners and certainly have not received a letter rejecting them for their relationship.

Therein lies just one of the logical fallacies in this whole discussion that I believe the Holy Spirit will make clear to our Church leadership, someday. We of DignityUSA bear the duty to speed that moment! Let my life, our lives be witness to true family values. ▼



The extended Vader-Huskinson Family, Thanksgiving 2006  
 Front (L-R) Maria, Leah & Lynne  
 Middle (L-R) Mr. & Mrs Vader, Max, Jacquelyn  
 Back (L-R) "our tall nephew, Robert FKZ," Ben





Christmas 2007, Della Nagle & Ruth Pinkham and five of eight children still at home

## When God Gives You Children: The Nagle-Pinkham Family, San Antonio, TX

By Ruth Horn Pinkham, February 4, 2008

I came from a big family and, as a child, I could only see the disadvantages of that. There are five boys, my sister and me. In my youth, I was sure that my parents had made two major mistakes. First, there were all those boys so sports always won the contest for what was going to be watched on our single TV. Also, in a large family, scarcity is often an issue. There is less time, less attention and less money per child. There are the “hand-me-downs” and “do withouts” that my friends in smaller families didn’t seem to have. So, as a young adult who knew everything, when I had children, I had only two, both girls.

Ten years later, in 1985, Della came into my life, and since I had the two girls already, I really felt that I was nearly half-done with the active, hands-on portion of parenting. My family was complete and I didn’t personally want any more children, but I did understand her desire to carry and give birth to a child so I reluctantly agreed to her having ONE. Off she went to the fertility clinic to get pregnant and I only had two requests: That she get it done quickly AND that the baby be a girl.

As usual, she listened to about half of what I said and within three months was pregnant. Good job, not too much money or time spent on the process. About half way through the pregnancy Della went for an ultrasound to check that the baby was growing well. Some babies seem rather modest and keep their “equipment” hidden from view so doctors are unable to determine the sex. Others however, seem to think that what they have is of utmost importance and want to share it with the world. Without a word Della handed me an ultrasound picture and there was no doubt that, on the other half of the instructions, Della had ignored me. That was NOT a little girl. In July 1990, our son Daniel was born. Again, I was done adding to our family. We had enough, why would anyone want more?

Now, let me explain my request for a daughter. It is not that I am a man-hating lesbian. My reasons for wanting daughters were two-fold. First, I grew up with five brothers (and a tom-boy sister) and I had watched my share of football, basketball and baseball games. I wanted some control over what would be watched on TV. Also I am a seamstress. I love to make complicated, interesting outfits with lots of embroidery, ruffles and smocking. Those are not often found on little boys and NEVER on any boy old enough to choose his own clothing.

Della will claim that she is a “language person” and math and numbers are not her strong suit, but that was what she used against me. When Danny was about a year old, she reminded me that, in just a few years, the older two would be gone and Danny would be an only child. The first two had had each other as they grew up and therefore, no matter what happened, they were not alone. Poor Danny, he wouldn’t have that. Maybe she should have one more. With some cajoling (or extortion) I agreed to just one more. She just had the same two conditions as before, get it done quickly AND have it be a girl.

Since we are both teachers, Della planned again for a summer baby so that she could have recuperation time without having to miss work. That gives her a three-month “pregnancy window.” The first year, she wasn’t successful at the “get it done quickly” part but the first try the next year worked, so at least the wait wasn’t too long. We also found out that she listened to the “be a girl” part this time as Samantha was born just a few months before Danny was three. Now, for the third time, I thought we were done adding to our family. We had two big ones and two little ones; did we need any more?

Della would have been more than willing to have more but I was finished. I was 42 and too old to be starting over, so when a girl we know asked us to take the baby she was pregnant with, we told her no. We did, however, offer to help her find a family for her baby that was due in two months. We tried, we really did.

We helped her line up two different families, one gay and one straight, that had wanted babies, but both of them changed their minds. We looked in the classifieds in the newspaper and no “we want a baby of our own” advertisements were there. The expectant mother went to an adoption agency but had a bad experience with the intake counselor and left. Della was still more than willing to parent the baby, but I wasn’t.

I am a regular attendee at Dignity/San Antonio, but don’t consider myself to be overly spiritual. I know God is there but I usually feel like I do more of the talking and He does more of the listening. One morning, about three weeks before the baby was to be born, I got up feeling like this time God talked and I had better listen. I didn’t really know the question but I got up knowing the answer—that the baby was coming home with us.

Imagine waking up to this response, “All right, Della, you win. You can bring the baby home and I will help you take care

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A Nagle-Pinkham Family Wedding, November 2007  
 Della Nagle is 2nd from L., Ruth Pinkham is third from R., All but the groom are their children

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of her. I'm too old and I know it, but I will help with raising her." So, when the birthmother went into labor, Della and I accompanied her to the hospital and were both there when Juliana, our fourth daughter was born. Twenty-seven hours later, she was home with us. Julie was a perfect baby, crying very little and sleeping through the night within a few weeks. Della claims that Julie was so brilliant, even as a baby, that she knew I needed my sleep, so she let me have it. Four daughters and one son, this was definitely enough. We were finished, done, over and complete.

We went along for the next two years thinking that we were in charge of our own lives and that we made the decisions. In 1999, we took the kids for a weekend visit to NASA in Houston and after a day of touring, went back to the hotel, tired and ready for a nap. Della's adopted sister and her family lived outside Houston, but we didn't really know where. They had broken off contact with us several years ago because of some concerns we expressed about the way the children were being treated.

As we got our little ones ready for bed, a huge feeling of dread came over me. I didn't know where those other kids were or what the problem was but I got an undeniable feeling that they needed us. I put the little ones to bed in the hotel room and Della went to look for them armed with only a post office box, the ZIP code for Liberty, TX, and a vow that I better know she loved me or there was no way she would be heading off to "who knows where" for "whatever the stupid reason."

It was way past midnight when Della called. With the help of a police officer, a neighbor of Della's sister and a full tank of gas, she had located her sister and found out that the four children were separated among three different foster homes and had been for months. Her sister's live-in boyfriend, the father of the younger two, was charged with molesting the older two.

The children were going to be split up and placed or adopted separately. We had a full house; we had more than enough children, but there was no hesitation at all. We had to do what we could to get the kids and bring them home with us.

It took most of the next eight months, with Della making almost biweekly trips to see the judge. The caseworker was adamant against giving them to us, but Della continued to call and beg for the next six months. The higher-ups got involved and we got a home study done. We made several visits in the fall and they went pretty well. Finally, we were allowed to bring three of them home (one was placed separately) for a few days during Thanksgiving to "see how things would go" and Della was granted temporary custody a week before Christmas 1999. We now have EIGHT children between us, with five living at home!

Because we don't have their birth story to repeat to them, the youngest daughter explains how she came into our family. She was our Christmas present but she wouldn't stay under the tree. I explain it another way: When God gives you children, you just say "Thank you." ▼



## What Straights Can Learn From Gays about Relationships and Parenting

By Robert-Jay Green, Ph.D., January 10, 2008

Psychological studies of lesbian and gay couples reveal two key factors that promote healthier relationships and provide examples for all couples: (1) flexibility about gender roles, and (2) equal division of parenting and household tasks.

“It all comes down to greater equality in the relationship,” says Robert-Jay Green, PhD, executive director of the Rockway Institute and a nationally recognized researcher in both family issues and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender relationships. “Research shows that lesbian and gay couples -- by virtue of being composed of two partners of the same gender -- have a head start in escaping the traditional gender role divisions that make for power imbalances and dissatisfaction in many heterosexual relationships.”

Green is Distinguished Professor at the California School of Professional Psychology at Alliant International University, the nation’s largest nonprofit training institution for doctoral clinical psychologists. In a series of studies he conducted with Michael Bettinger, PhD, and Ellie Zacks, PhD, lesbian couples were found to be emotionally closer than gay male couples who, in turn, were found to be emotionally closer than heterosexual married couples. Lesbian and gay male couples also showed dramatically more flexibility in the way they handled rules and roles in the relationship. Thus they avoided the traditional division of labor and division of expressive versus instrumental roles toward which heterosexual couple typically evolve over time despite their best intentions, especially after the birth of children.

More equal relationships for same-sex couples also were confirmed in recent studies by John Gottman, PhD, of the University of Washington, and Robert Levinson, PhD, of the University of California, Berkeley. Based on observations of couples interacting in conflict situations, these scientists found that same-sex couples were better at resolving disagreements because they approached problems from a position of peer equality, using “softer” starts in the initiation of conflict discussions and more humor during the discussion to avoid escalation of hostilities. With married heterosexual couples, the researchers observed, there was “much more of a power struggle with someone being invalidated.”

Other research on parenting also found significant advantages for same-sex couples. In three separate studies, Charlotte Patterson, PhD, at the University of Virginia, Valory Mitchell, PhD, at Alliant International University in San Francisco, and Henny Bos, PhD at the University of Amsterdam found that lesbian partners tend to share parenting and household responsibilities more equally and to be more satisfied with this division of labor. By contrast, in heterosexual dual-career families, mothers often did much more childcare and

housework compared to fathers, regardless of equal hours spent at work. This imbalance often breeds resentment over time.

Psychologist Jerry J. Bigner, PhD, of Colorado State University, found that gay fathers are more nurturing than straight fathers. They are also less likely to limit their parenting role to being only a provider. All of these family researchers concluded that the freedom to defy traditional gender-linked parenting roles helped gay men and lesbians take just as good care of their children yet preserve greater feelings of fairness in their couple relationships compared to heterosexuals.

Green’s research suggests some lessons straight men could learn from gay men. Heterosexual men need to “stand up to the pressures of conformity from their male peers and relatives” by becoming more flexible in their behavior and taking on tasks and roles more traditionally assigned to women. Green believes that heterosexual partners could learn by observing how their lesbian and gay coupled friends share housework, childcare, use softer communication of feelings in conflict situations, and more equally nurturing behaviors toward one another and their children.

“Our research found that the most successful couples demonstrate closeness and flexibility,” said Green. “We found high levels of both characteristics in 79% of lesbian couples, 56% of gay male couples, but in only 8% of heterosexual married couples. Clearly, the more egalitarian approach taken by same-sex couples is an advantage that could benefit straight couples too,” he concluded.

For further info about Professor Robert-Jay Green, PhD and the Rockway Institute, go to [www.RockwayInstitute.org](http://www.RockwayInstitute.org). ▼

