



UNHEARD VOICES

Stories of LGBT History



Terry Boggis and LGBT Family Rights

Introduction to the Interview (Running Time: 2:20)

Terry Boggis was one of the founding members of Center Kids, Center Families, a New York City based LGBT families program, in 1988. That same year, her son, Ned was born.

Here, Boggis talks about parenthood.

Questions to Discuss with Students Following the Interview

- Why did Terry feel like she had to “shelve motherhood” as an adult woman? What opportunities do you think existed for LGBT people who wanted to become parents in the 1970s and 1980s? What obstacles do you think they faced?
- Regarding Ned’s first experiences with school, Terry observes that “the larger culture starts weighing in.” What does she mean by this? Does this comment relate to any experiences that you have had?
- What kinds of experiences do you think led Ned to ask if there are “two kinds of gay people...good kinds and bad kinds”? In your experience, what language and/or ideas are communicated among your peers that might lead some people to believe “gay” is “bad”?
- Why did Terry assume that wearing the rainbow rings and expressing gay pride might invite a negative response from Ned’s peers? Would you assume the same thing about the people at your camp or school? Why or why not?
- Terry says that “LGBT people are really changing what families can look like.” What other groups of people or social trends are shaping the way families look today? A recent Pew poll asked if these trends are “good, bad or of no consequence to society.” What is your opinion?

Suggested Activities and Assignments for Extended Learning

- Assign students to capture and celebrate their unique family make-up in some creative fashion (brief video, portrait, poem, story, etc.). Have students post and share their pieces. Discuss experiences students have had in which their family structure has been disrespected or marginalized in some way.
- A 2011 Pew Research Center survey asked adults whether seven trends related to family structure were “good, bad or of no consequence to society” (see <http://pewsocialtrends.org/2011/02/16/the-public-renders-a-split-verdict-on-changes-in-family-structure>). Discuss the results of this study with students and have them conduct their own poll on “attitudes about the changing American family.” Generate questions as a class and have students conduct the poll with friends and family. Publish the results in the school newspaper or on the school Web site.
- The television show, *Modern Family*, is one example of current media that explores the changing face of American families, including same-sex headed families, adoptive families and multiracial families.

Have students analyze and write an essay on the ways in which media is reflecting and shaping attitudes toward various family structures and trends.

- Assign students to analyze LGBT demographic trends as reflected in the 2000 and/or 2010 Census results (see the Williams Institute’s “Census Snapshots” at <http://www2.law.ucla.edu/williamsinstitute/home.html>). Assign small groups to create a chart or graph illustrating national or state-level trends on a specific topic (e.g., number of same-sex couples, number of same-sex couples raising children, number of adopted or foster children in LGBT-headed households, etc.).
- As a follow-up, discuss the limitations of the current Census (it does not count the actual number of LGBT Americans, single LGBT parents or same-sex partners living in different homes). Assign students to investigate other demographic information that may not be reflected in the Census. Have them write letters to the Census Bureau advocating for changes to the current survey that they would like to see reflected in 2020.
- Assign students to research the current status of laws that regulate adoption by same-sex couples in your state (see http://www.hrc.org/documents/parenting_laws_maps.pdf). Have students read the actual text of the law and debate its merits and limitations. Assign small groups of students to rewrite the law to incorporate changes that they think are needed. Have them follow up by writing a letter to their state representative sharing their views and advocating for policies that they support.
- Screen the film, *That’s A Family!*, for your students (see <http://groundspark.org/our-films-and-campaigns/thatfamily>). Share that this film for elementary students has been the subject of numerous battles due to its inclusion of same-sex headed families. Have students hold a mock school board meeting in which they debate the appropriateness of the film for school settings. Assign students different roles (e.g., parents, teachers, school officials, etc.) and different positions (for or against inclusion of the film). Have them prepare by researching past controversies and taking notes on arguments for or against that resonate with them (search, for example, *That’s A Family!* and “Evesham, NJ schools” or “Vallejo, CA schools”).



UNHEARD VOICES

Stories of LGBT History



Student Handout



Terry Boggis

“I’ve always been...a baby person,” says Terry Boggis about herself. “I always wanted babies, surrounded myself with babies...and also as a little kid I had an awareness of being a lesbian really quite young, maybe five or six years old...I was aware that I had these two important dreams that I would have to figure out how to put together.”

When Terry came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, gay and lesbian people who wanted to openly form families had few options. Same-sex couples could not legally marry or adopt, and those who pushed for equal rights faced fierce opposition.

In 1977, for example, a group called Save Our Children—led by singer and former beauty queen, Anita Bryant—launched a hard-hitting campaign to repeal a law in Miami, Florida that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Bryant also helped pass a statewide law the same year that prohibited adoption by gay and lesbian people. “As a mother,” she declared, “I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce...therefore, they must recruit our children.”

Contrary to Bryant’s statement, many gay and lesbian people were “reproducing,” but within heterosexual marriages. In 1976 there were an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 gay and lesbian biological parents in the U.S. As society changed, many of these individuals gained the confidence to come out and leave their marriages. These parents faced much prejudice and were often barred from raising or even visiting their own children. At the first-ever National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in 1979, 100,000 LGBT people demanded equality, including an end to discrimination in lesbian-mother and gay-father custody cases.

In 1978 Louise Joy Brown became the world’s first “test-tube” baby. New scientific breakthroughs made it possible for couples with medical challenges to conceive a baby outside of the human body. This technology also presented new options for people – whether straight or gay – interested in having children outside of traditional heterosexual marriages. For the first time, many gay and lesbian people saw opportunities to form families on their own terms.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the adoption and foster care systems gradually opened the door to gay and lesbian parents as well. During this era the number of children in foster care rose dramatically—in part due to the AIDS and crack cocaine epidemics—and there was much pressure on child welfare agencies to find homes for tens of thousands of babies. While most people were unwilling to take in a sick or drug-addicted child, many gay and lesbian people saw an opportunity to fulfill their desire to become loving parents. As a result, some states began to allow any qualified adult to adopt, regardless of sexual orientation.

When Terry Boggis gave birth to her son, Ned, in 1988 it was a new frontier for gay and lesbian parents. Terry connected with other new parents seeking social support and before long they formed a group that would come to be called Center Families. “As soon as we started meeting in a more visible way,” remembers Terry, “we started getting a lot of questions from people who wanted [kids], like, ‘Where’d you get that baby?’; ‘How do you do that?’; ‘I didn’t know we could do that’; ‘Is it okay that we do that?’”

Center Families educated the LGBT communities about new technologies for getting pregnant, adoption, foster care, and legal and financial issues related to non-traditional families. They also helped LGBT parents find doctors and schools that would be respectful of their families, which sometimes proved challenging. In 1992, for example, the New York City school system became entangled in a nasty debate over a new multicultural curriculum that included positive references to LGBT people. Same-sex headed families were attacked by local residents and school officials and, according to Terry, “Families in our program...were frantic to get out of those school districts...Our families were scared, we were just scared.”

In response to attacks on their children and families, many LGBT people organized and demanded greater visibility and acceptance. Some activists realized that in order to become visible, LGBT people would first have to be officially recognized, so they began working toward a more inclusive census. The U.S. Constitution requires a count of everyone living in the U.S. every ten years, and this data affects how people are represented in government and how hundreds of billions of dollars in funding is spent on community services.

In 1990 the U.S. Census Bureau included a category for “unmarried partners” for the first time. In 2010 the rules were expanded to allow same-sex couples to check “husband” or “wife” on their forms, regardless of whether same-sex marriage was legal in their home state. As a result we know today that more than 700,000 same-sex couples live in the U.S., in every state and over 99% of all U.S. counties. More than 30% of these couples are raising at least 300,000 children, including over 65,000 adopted and 14,000 foster children.

Though the census does not yet count the actual number of LGBT Americans, it has helped to challenge the myth that LGBT people are “strangers” who only live in New York and San Francisco. As noted in a report by the Human Rights Campaign, “From big cities to small farming towns, from the deep South to the Pacific Northwest, gay and lesbian families are part of the American landscape.”

This increased visibility has encouraged elected officials to better represent LGBT citizens and their families. As of 2011 only two states—Utah and Mississippi—prohibit same-sex couples from adopting, and at least 18 states provide them with some form of adoption rights. In 2010 a Florida court ruled that the 1977 adoption ban – championed by Anita Bryant and Save Our Children—was unconstitutional, ending a 30-year battle over family rights in that state.

“You know how they always talk about how the arc of history bends toward justice,” reflects Terry, “If you stay in it long enough you actually get to watch it happen, and I feel like that has happened for us... [Society has] really become much more welcoming and much more expansive in their understanding of who makes a good parent.”