

The State of Publishing LGBTI Themed Picture Books Today

NJLA Conference, April 2009

Bobbie Combs, Two Lives Publishing

My introduction

- History in kid's books
- Two Lives
- We Love Children's Books

History of Two Lives

- Watching, interested, seeing nothing
- ABC and 123
- Felicia's Favorite Story and Saturday is Pattyday
- Case of the Stolen Scarab
- The Harvey Milk Story
- Welcome to Our Family
- The Different Dragon
- Shopping cart, as distributor
- At no time profitable; nonprofit

The eighties and nineties

Earliest titles are either self-published:

- Is Your Family Like Mine? 1983
- Heather Has Two Mommies, 1989

Or Gay/feminist presses:

- When Megan Went Away, Lollipop Power, 1979
- Amy Has a Question: Grandma, 1996, Mother Courage
- Jenny Lives With Eric and Martin, Gay Men's Press, 1983 British
- Dragon Doctor – Feminist Press, 1995
- Asha's Mums – Canadian, Women's Press 2000
- Alyson Wonderland – 1990's division of Alyson Publishing
 - Heather Has Two Mommies (acquired)
 - Anna Day and the O Ring
 - Daddy's Roommate and Daddy's Wedding
 - One Dad, Two Dads
 - Daddy Machine
 - Duke Who Outlawed Jelly Beans
 - Beach Party with Alexis - coloring book

Mainstream Publishers come in, with "issue" or "explanation" books:

- Losing Uncle Tim – Albert Whitman, 1989
- My Two Uncles – Albert Whitman, 1995
- Zack's Story – Lerner, 1996
- Too far Away to Touch, Houghton/Ticknor, 1993
- Families, Houghton Mifflin, 1983
- Who's in a Family, Tricycle, 1995

2000 to the present

Independent presses:

- Two Lives – all, founded in 2001
- Best Best Colors – Redleaf Press, 1999
- Antonio's Card – Children's Book Press, 2005

Self published books (frustrated parents and teachers)

Challenges: high prices, uneven quality, distribution is hard

- Flying Free (OP)
- Emma and Meesha My Boy
- At My House What Makes a Family is Love
- How My Family Came To Be: Daddy, Papa and Me (OP)
- Mama Eat Ant, Yuk!
- Tanny's Meow and sequels

Imports from other countries

- Bedtime for Baby Teddy (Australia, self published)
- Manu board books and Many Colored Love (Spain, Topka books)
- My House, Going to Fair Day, Koalas on Parade, Rainbow Cubby House (early readers from Australia, Learn to Include)
- Monicka's Papa is Tall; Ryan's Mom is Tall; Not-so-Only Child (Canada, Nickname Press)
- Mom and Mum are Getting Married (Canada, Orca Books)

Mainstream Publishers

Higher quality, often challenged, "friendly" publishers persist

- **Simon & Schuster**
 - And Tango Makes Three, Simon & Schuster, 2005
- **Little Brown**
 - Buster's Sugartime
 - Todd Parr – all are inclusive
 - Family Book
 - We Belong Here
 - It's OK to Be Different
 - Daddy Book
 - Mommy Book
- **Tricycle Press**
 - Leslea Newman new board books
 - Mommy, Mama and Me
 - Daddy, Papa and Me
 - King and King
 - King and King and Family
 - Who's in a Family
- **Penguin Books for Young Readers**
 - Patricia Polacco: In Our Mothers House (Philomel)
 - Uncle Bobby's Wedding (Putnam)

- **Assorted others**
 - Everywhere Babies, 2 versions, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
 - Molly's Family, Farrar Straus Giroux
 - All Families Are Special, Albert Whitman
 - Families Kuklin, Hyperion
 - White Swan Express, Houghton Mifflin

What's next? And/or what should be next?

- **We need "normalized" stories**, like The Different Dragon: good stories where LGBT families are just part of the background of the story. With very few exceptions, all of the above are some kind of "here's how we're different" stories.
- **We need better books about gender**, and for kids/families who are struggling with that. Here's what's out there for this age:
 - Are You a Boy or a Girl? (Canada)
 - Carly: She's Still My Daddy (Transgender Network of PFLAG)
 - Rough Tough Charley (Tricycle Press)
 - 10,000 Dresses (Canada)
 - **ancillary to this are "boys who are sissies" books
- **Even though the audience is growing** (8 to 10 million children are being raised in an LGBT family), the traditional publishers are still cautious. Next wave of this publishing will include:
 - Ebooks – as a way to make the numbers work (Rainbowrumpus.org)
 - More self publishing from the audience itself
 - Small presses with a vested interest, like Two Lives
 - Non profits who see this as a social mission
 - Books for these children as they grow – there is very little for tweens and teens

Librarians have been very supportive, but it's a challenge to find and buy these books for collections – the imports, the self published, the small presses that aren't represented by your distributors.

Some resources:

- Two Lives website (www.twolives.com) – we have an email newsletter which we send every time we find a new book.
- Amazon.com – has made it easier for self publishers and small presses to make their books available.
- Rainbow List (<http://rainbowlist.wordpress.com/>) - a joint undertaking of the American Library Association's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered Round Table and Social Responsibilities Round Table; an annual compilation of books.
- InQUEERY, or Out of the Stacks – handouts from a program at the 2008 PLA conference. (<http://www.placonference.org/2008/handoutspage.cfm>)
- Worth the Trip (<http://worththetrip.wordpress.com/>) – blog by K.T. Hornig of the CCBC.



Hello from Two Lives!

Our mission is to publish and distribute quality books for LGBT families. Here and on our website (www.TwoLives.com) you'll find great books for kids that depict families like theirs, and books that will help LGBT parents with challenges unique to them.

Books for kids with LGBT parents

These books specifically depict LGBT-headed families, either in the story, in the illustrations, or with photographs.

For ages 0-3

Daddy, Papa and Me

Mommy, Mama and Me

Both by Lesléa Newman, \$7.99, board books, ages 0-2

Finally - two beautiful board books celebrating two-mom and two-dad families, respectively. It's fitting that these new gems have been written by the pioneering author of *Heather Has Two Mommies*.

Bedtime for Baby Teddy, Tamara Arc-Dekker, \$12.95, paper/coated, ages 0-2

This Australian import has pages that are stiffer than paper, but not as hard as a board book. We love the soft, full-color illustrations that show two "Mummy Teddies" spending time with their little one. It's by far the easiest story we've seen that features two mommies.

For ages 3-6

ABC A Family Alphabet Book, Bobbie Combs, \$8.95, paperback, ages 3-6, published by Two Lives

Have fun with the kids, moms, dads and pets in this delightful book that celebrates families as it teaches young children the alphabet.

The Different Dragon, by Jennifer Bryan and illustrated by Danamarie Hosler, \$10.95, paperback, ages 3-7, published by Two Lives

This bedtime story about bedtime stories shows how the wonderful curiosity and care of a little boy, with some help from his willing moms, can lead to magical and unexpected places. Join Noah and his cat, Diva, on this nighttime adventure and you too will leave with an unforgettable new dragon friend!

And Tango Makes Three, Justin Richardson & Peter Parnell, \$14.95, hard, ages 3-6

Here's a fantastic picture book that tells the story of two famous gay dads - penguins Roy and Silo from New York's Central Park Zoo... their keeper brings them an egg that needs to be cared for, the two take turns sitting on it until it hatches, and Tango is born: "Tango was the very first penguin in the zoo to have two daddies."

Best Best Colors/Los Mejores Colores, Eric Hoffman, \$10.95, paperback, ages 3-6

Nate loves all of the wonderful colors he sees in his everyday life. When his Mama Jean and Mamma Laura ask him about his favorite color, he wonders, "How can I choose just one?" Later, Nate learns that he likes all the colors best when they're together and that he can have more than one favorite color, one best friend, and one mamma. (Bilingual English/Spanish)

Daddy Machine, Johnny Valentine, \$10.95, paperback, ages 3-6

Two children with lesbian moms fantasize about what it would be like to have a father, so they make themselves a daddy machine, turn it on, and a dad pops out. Then comes another, and another, and another...

Daddy's Roommate, Michael Wilhoite, \$10.95, paperback, ages 3-6

When Nick's mom and dad divorce, his dad moves in with Frank. There are warm, sweet pictures of the two men and their son at home and away. One nice touch is that the boy's mom is great—she understands about Dad and helps her son realize that “being gay is just one more kind of love. And love is the best kind of happiness.”

Dragon and the Doctor, Barbara Danish, \$5.95, paperback, ages 3-7

A dragon with a sore tail goes to see Dr. Judy and Nurse Benjamin for help and they discover all kinds of treasures zipped into the tail. Cured, the dragon takes her new friends to a party, where they meet Lucy, a little creature who has two mothers.

Duke Who Outlawed Jelly Beans, Johnny Valentine, \$10.95, paperback, ages 5-9

Five original and enchanting fairy tales, featuring kids with LGBT parents, make up this collection, which is beautifully illustrated with paintings and drawings throughout.

Emma and Meesha My Boy, by Kaitlyn Constidine and illustrated by Binny Hobbs, \$10.95, paperback, ages 2-6.

Emma lives with her two moms and a chubby housecat; follow along as Emma gets in trouble while trying to play with Meesha Kitty - and cheer as she learns to treat him with care.

Felicia's Favorite Story, Lesléa Newman, \$9.95, paperback, ages 2 & up, published by Two Lives

It's bedtime, but before Felicia goes to sleep she wants to hear her favorite story, the story of how she was adopted by Mama Linda and Mama Nessa. And so Felicia's parents tell her how they flew off in a big silver airplane to meet the baby girl who was waiting for them, and how they loved her from the very first moment they saw her. A soothing lullaby of a story that children will want to hear again and again.

Heather Has Two Mommies, Lesléa Newman, \$10.95, paperback, ages 3-6

The first book to portray lesbian families in a positive way has been updated and edited from the original; the text is shorter, making the book more focused on the message that “the most important thing about a family is that all the people in it love each other.”

Mama Eat Ant, Yuck!, Barbara Lynn Edmonds, \$19.95, paperback, ages 3-6

Kids and parents will chuckle at the familiarity of this story, which just happens to be an incident from a two-mom household. When one mom accidentally eats some ant-covered raisins, their youngest daughter decides this is when she'll say some real words: “Mama eat ant, yuck!” To the despair of mom, she repeats the sentence all day long.

Mom and Mum Are Getting Married, by Ken Setterington and illustrated by Alice Priestley, \$11.95, hardcover, ages 3-7

When Rosie finds out that her two mothers are planning to get married, she has only one worry...will she get to be a flower girl? Fantastic, full color pictures show warm scenes of family and friends as everyone gets ready for the big day!

One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dads, Blue Dads, by Johnny Valentine and illustrated by Melody Sarecky, \$10.95, paperback, ages 3-7

Two children – one with blue dads, one from a more traditional family – compare notes in this lighthearted book about parents who are different.

Saturday Is Pattyday, Lesléa Newman, \$6.95, paperback, ages 3-6

Frankie used to live with his two moms, Allie and Patty, but they have separated. When Frankie brings Doris Delores Brontausaurus to visit Allie in her new apartment, he learns that Allie will always be part of his life.

Uncle Bobby's Wedding, Sarah Brannen, \$15.99, hardcover, ages 2-5

This book has received a whopping share of praise from reviewers and LGBT writers and illustrators of children's books. And what's not to like? The story is sweet and realistic – Chloe is upset when she learns her favorite uncle is getting married; Uncle Bobby reassures her she'll always have a place in his heart; Bobby and Jamie ask Chloe to be their flower girl and the story ends with a joyful wedding. It's all about love, connections and family and not ABOUT same-sex marriage. Featuring gentle watercolors portraying happy scenes of the guinea pig couple sharing good times with Chloe, a wedding celebration, and dancing beneath the moon, this book will become a favorite.

For ages 5-8

Buster's Sugartime, Marc Brown, \$3.99, paperback, ages 4-7

Buster and his dad go to Vermont to visit his mom's friends, Karen and Gillian, and their three kids: Emma, David, and James. References to the family are subtle - a photo of the two moms adorns an endtable, and later in the story Buster goes to dinner with some friends of Emma's family: "Lilly's moms, Tracy and Gina, were very good cooks."

My House, Brenna/Vicki Harding, \$8.95, paperback, ages 5-7

Going to Fair Day, Brenna/Vicki Harding, \$8.95, paperback, ages 5-7

Koalas on Parade, Brenna/Vicki Harding, \$8.95, paperback, ages 5-7

Rainbow CubbyHouse, Brenna/Vicki Harding, \$8.95, paperback, ages 5-7

These Australian imports are the first easy readers we've seen for two "mum" families. Bright, kid-friendly pictures accompany the simple stories about a girl, her family and her friends.

Antonio's Card/LA Tarjeta de Antonio, Rigoberto Gonzalez, \$16.95 HC, ages 6/up

When the kids at Antonio's school make Mother's Day cards, Antonio makes one for his moms, but he is shy when Ms. Mendoza wants to display the cards in the school cafeteria. (Bilingual English/Spanish)

In Our Mother's House, Patricia Polacco, \$17.99, hardcover, ages 5-8 Wow! It's going to be hard to include everything that's great about this book, but here goes:

- We love Patricia Polacco's warm pictures of this two-mom family, and her loving story that spans their life together.
- The three kids in the family are all adopted, and all of different ethnicities. The story spans many years, and near the end of the story we see two happy lesbian grandmothers with their kids and grandkids.
- There are great scenes of the extended family at holidays, around their wonderfully diverse neighborhood and just around the house.

Tanny's Meow, Ursula Ferro, \$12.95, paperback, ages 5-8

Rachel and her family - Mama Mariah, Mommy Ginny and brother Tim - find and adopt a kitten in this great short chapter book. With black-and-white illustrations.

Ryan's Mom is Tall, Heather Jopling, \$10.95, paperback, ages 2-5

Ryan's Mom and Mummy are different in many ways. See how their family puzzle fits together! This comparative book of opposites highlights the differences between Ryan's Mom and Mummy while using a puzzle motif to create a picture of families in the new millennium.

Monicka's Papa is Tall, Heather Jopling, \$10.95, paperback, ages 2-5

Monicka's Papa and Daddy are different in many ways. See how their family puzzle fits together! This comparative book of opposites highlights the differences between Papa and Daddy while using a puzzle motif to create a picture of families in the new millennium.

Books Inclusive of LGBT Families

*Most of these celebrate diversity in various ways,
and all of them include at least some mention of LGBT-headed families.*

All Families are Special, Norma Simon, \$15.95, hardcover, ages 4-8

A classroom of children, upon learning that their teacher is going to be a grandma, share their stories of their families. Very representative of many types of families, including a mom-mom household.

Everywhere Babies, Susan Meyers, \$16.00, hardcover, ages 3-6

There are dozens of delicious babies crawling through the pages of this busy picture book, and lots of family members surround them - including some of our families! In addition to babies of every hue, body type and hairstyle, the illustrations show traditional, single parent, gay/lesbian and multiethnic families.

Everywhere Babies Board Book, Susan Meyers, \$6.00, board book, ages 1-3

A fantastic board book edition of one of our favorites - sweet babies, sweet parents (including some of us!)

Families, Susan Kuklin, \$15.99, hardcover, ages 6-10

In frank, funny, and touching interviews, children from fifteen different families (including one two-dad family and one two-mom family) talk about the ups and downs of their home lives. Presented along with the children's own words are great color photographs of their families.

The Family Book, Todd Parr, \$15.95, hardcover, ages 3-6

Parr celebrates many different types of families in his typically silly and reassuring style. He includes adopted families, stepfamilies, one-parent families, "traditional" nuclear families, and - best of all - families with same-sex parents!

Molly's Family, Nancy Garden, \$16.00, hardcover, ages 4-8

While drawing pictures of their families for Open School Night, the kids in Ms. Marston's class begin debating whether it's all right that Molly has a mommy and a mama.

One Hundred Is a Family, Pam Munoz Ryan, \$4.95, paperback, ages 3-6

As readers count from 1 to 100, they see pictures of families (all types) doing things together - work, play, celebrations.

We All Sing with the Same Voice, J. Philip Miller, \$6.99, paperback, ages 2-6

This Sesame Street song has been transformed into a bright picture book packaged with a CD; the pictures show children of all colors and nations playing, singing and laughing together, and one of the lines says "you might have two dads, you might have one..."

We Belong Together, Todd Parr, \$15.99, hardcover, ages 3-6

Hooray! A new Todd Parr book is always cause for celebration - and this one is as sweet and inclusive as his other books. It's an early introduction to the idea of how families belong together...and there's a page with two dads, another with two moms.

White Swan Express, Jean Davies Okimoto, \$16.00, hardcover, ages 3-6

In China, the moon shines on four baby girls fast asleep in an orphanage. Far away in North America, the sun rises over four homes as the people inside (including a lesbian couple) get ready to start a long, exciting journey. With tenderness and humor, this lyrical story tells how they are all brought together and became four happy families on one very special day.

Who's In a Family?, Robert Skutch, \$6.95, paperback, ages 3-6

A picture book, depicting all kinds of families, human and animals - step, divorced, extended, lesbian, multi-ethnic—all happy.

Books That Promote Good Self-Esteem and Being Yourself

These books celebrate individuality and originality!

10,000 Dresses, by Marcus Ewert, \$14.95, hardcover, ages 3-6

Every night, Bailey dreams about magical dresses: dresses made of crystals and rainbow, dresses made of flowers, dresses made of windows...but when Bailey's awake, no one wants to hear about these beautiful dreams. Then Bailey meets Laurel, an older girl who is inspired by Bailey's imagination and courage. In friendship, the two of them begin making dresses together...and Bailey's dreams come true.

It's Okay to Be Different, Todd Parr, \$14.95, hardcover, ages 3-6

With bold, bright colors and vivid, simple drawings, Parr shares this message with kids: it's ok to be different. It's OK to have wheels, to be a different color, to have different Moms and different Dads. A very positive, affirming book for all kids.

The Harvey Milk Story, Kari Krakow, \$17.95, hardcover, ages 8& up, Two Lives

Harvey Milk made history by being sworn into office as the first openly gay elected city official in the United States. He showed the world that by not being afraid to be yourself, you can give others the courage to be proud of who they are.

King & King, Linda de Haan, \$14.95, hardcover, ages 3-6

When the queen decrees that it's time for the prince to marry, princesses come from far and wide hoping to catch his eye. But the one who actually charms the prince is the brother of one of the princesses, and guess what? They live happily ever after! A great way to show your kids that they can love whoever they want to love.

Oliver Button is a Sissy, Tomie dePaola, \$6.00, paperback, ages 3-6

Oliver would rather read, dance and draw pictures than play baseball with the other boys. He pays no attention when he is teased for his activities, and after he performs in the talent show, his friends begin to understand that everyone is special in their own way.

Sissy Duckling, Harvey Fierstein, \$6.99, paperback, ages 3-6

Elmer is not like the other boy ducklings. While they like to build forts, he loves to bake cakes. Based on his award-winning HBO animated special, Fierstein has crafted a heartwarming story about learning to embrace the special qualities we all possess.

Uncle Aiden, Laurel Dykstra, \$10.95, paperback, ages 3-6

The charming story of why every little girl needs a gay uncle! Anna Maria and her Uncle Aiden share their love of pretty things, tea parties and baseball - but most of all they share their love of each other.