



P.O. Box 24565 Los Angeles, CA 90024 (310) 472-8952 <http://www.pflagla.org>

October-November 2002

Newsletter 219

### OUR MISSION

Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) promotes the health and well being of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered persons, their families and friends through: **support**, to cope with an adverse society; **education**, to enlighten an ill-informed public, and **advocacy**, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. PFLAG provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

Our meetings are always held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of each month at the Westwood United Methodist Church, 10497 Wilshire Bl., NE corner of Wilshire and Warner. Take 405 Freeway to Wilshire Bl. East exit. Continue 1.5 miles. The entry on Warner has an elevator; another entry is through the sanctuary to the corridor, then upstairs to the Fellowship Hall - 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. There is also easy access from the north driveway. Doors open at 6:30 pm; general meeting begins at 7:25 pm.

PFLAG starts each meeting with a rap group where individuals can share their concerns, questions and understanding about and with the gay person or persons in their families. After the rap session, we generally have a speaker or panel of speakers whose topic includes subjects pertinent to the families, gays and lesbians.

### OUR NEXT SPEAKERS

October 15, 2002

**D**r. Walter L. Williams, Ph.D. is a professor of anthropology at the University of Southern California, where he teaches class on American Indian Studies, Prejudice, as well as Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender Studies. He has served as director of the ONE Institute and Archives and has authored several books including "The Spirit and the Flesh". Come hear Professor Williams speak about this book and his studies on sexuality diversity in Native Americans.

November 19, 2002

**T**BA - please check our WebSite later in October for details - [www.pflagla.org](http://www.pflagla.org)

### Models of Pride Conference October 12, 2002

Occidental College 1600 Campus Road, Eagle Rock district of Los Angeles, CA 90041

Models of Pride focuses on the interests and concerns of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender youth and straight allies, ages 14-23. The conference is filled with workshops, entertainment, a resource faire, food, networking opportunities, live music, and a dance party finale. The conference is FREE for all participants.

(323) 692-9320 <http://www.modelsofpride.org>

**HELPLINES, CHAPTERS & CONTACTS 9 am to 9 pm****Area Code 310**

West LA: 454 6681 (Liz) LIZARM@aol.com

West LA: 472 8952 (Adele)

South Bay Chapter: 373 2351

**Area Code 323**

291 2990 (Elfi Martin)

**Area Code 562**

Long Beach Chapter: 403 1234

**Area Code 626**

Pasadena Chapter: 914 1241 (Denny)

**Area Code 661**

Santa Clarita Chapter: 254 2177 (Peggy)

**Area Code 714**

Orange County Chapter: 997 8047

**Area Code 805**

Ventura Chapter: 498 4964 (Rita or Steve)

**Area Code 818**

Studio City: 788 8678 (Lynette) Lynette114@aol.com

Woodland Hills: 340 8945 (Irene &amp; Alvin)

**Area Code 909**

Claremont Chapter: 624 6134 or 981 2332

Colton: 825 8368 (Norma)

Redlands Chapter: 335 2005 (Kathy)

**Area Code 949**

South Orange County: 459 2834 (Karyl)

**NOTE FROM THE EDITOR**

If there is anything you would like to see in the newsletter, please e-mail me at haichi\_ca@hotmail.com, call me at (323) 460-4849, or just drop me a note at our PFLAG meetings! Gender bender greetings, Chris Haiss

Deadline for submissions: November 1  
(December/January issue)

**OTHER HELPLINES / RESOURCES**

Spanish Speaking:

(310) 453 8506 (Angela)

African American:

(323) 731 0888 (Shirley)

(323) 305 1853 (Glynis)

Asian Pacific Islander:

(818) 368 2008 (Ellen) HKameya@juno.com

LA Gay &amp; Lesbian Center:

(323) 993 7400

Straight Spouses:

(626) 449 3267 (Onnolee)

TREVOR - 24 hr suicide prevention line

for gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning youth:

(800) 850 8078 [www.trevorproject.com](http://www.trevorproject.com)

Merging Identities:

One of the National Conference for Community & Justice's programs that helps gay, lesbian and bisexual youth develop positive identities relative to sexual orientation, culture, religion and family.

(213) 250 8787 [www.nccjla.org](http://www.nccjla.org)

Hablando Entre Hombres

Spanish support group for Latino Gay Men

(213) 273 8723 (Ramon Ramirez)

PFLAG National

(202) 467 8180 [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

PFLAG's Transgender Special Outreach Network (TSO):

Karen Gross (216) 691 HELP / KittenGr@aol.com

Mary Boenke (540) 890 3957 / maryboenke@aol.com

[www.transfamily.org](http://www.transfamily.org)

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

## "Busy Truisms"

It never rains, but our cup runneth over, or some combination of relevant and irreverent truisms might fit here.

I had sorta thought that the Fall would be a quiet prewinter season this year, with leisurely reflection on things past and yet to come, but then other realities crept in. A big one, for me, was my deciding to run the Honolulu Marathon in December, under the AIDS Marathon training program, sponsored by APLA (AIDS Project Los Angeles). The challenge to me (an OOS -out of shape- non runner) of running 26.2 miles seemed so thoroughly impossible that I thought I'd give it a try, and we could write the sequel to "Impossible Dream's" about it. After all, there'd be ample time and a myriad of excuses by which I could pull out. Now, I've done 16 miles in my longest training run, and am actually looking forward to the next long one (18 miles!).

My fund raising is still lagging and you might go to [www.aidsmarathon.com](http://www.aidsmarathon.com), follow the "sponsor a runner" then "Greater LA" and make a donation using my runner number, 0545. And better yet, pick an impossible challenge for yourself and see how amazing it can be.

Late in September, Rosemary (my wife and a board member) and I will be going to the National PFLAG convention in Columbus Ohio, to see what's new and challenging. Your suggestions in this regard are always welcome.

In October, we'll be representing PFLAG at an all day Occidental College panel on GLBT issues.

On October 4-6, GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network) is sponsoring a local TRA (Teaching Respect for All) conference that looks of interest to educators especially ([www.GLSEN.org](http://www.GLSEN.org) - info on the home page) and UCLA has a 10/5 conference on GLBT issues, just to provide some competition.

Then training for Hawaii should keep me busy.

If you can make some time to educate yourself or others, support and advocate on issues that matter in this arena, that would be great.

Joel Hendler - Co-President, PFLAG Los Angeles

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Letter: Denying jobs to gays won't make them straight

(In response to a letter about Tacoma's new (trans-inclusive) anti-discrimination in employment policy)

Judy Nelson (letter, 7-23) wrote, "Is it really loving to give support to a lifestyle that is often promiscuous, leads to deadly diseases and shortens life?"

As the mother of a gay son, I get so weary explaining to people that there is no "gay lifestyle." Just as a heterosexual person does not become one by having sex, neither does a homosexual. Gays can practice a monogamous lifestyle or a celibate one, and many do. Gays can live a rural lifestyle or a suburban one. And gays can certainly practice a healthy lifestyle the same as anyone else.

Comparing gays to smokers, drinkers and gamblers and saying that laws restricting these addictions are similar to the issue at hand is demeaning. No smoker, drinker or gambler can be denied a job if his job performance is satisfactory. Allowing someone gay to keep a job is not giving any support to a mythical gay lifestyle, but is supporting a life. Denying my son a job won't make him straight.

- Wendy Wartes, Woodinville [PFLAG member]

**GAY HISTORY with LISA DIGUARDI**

July 13, 1970:

In response to a letter asking if she considered homosexuality a disease, advice columnist Dear Abby responded "No! It is the inability to love at all which I consider an emotional illness."

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Federal statistics from 1997, the most recent available, reveal that 54% of confirmed cases of child sexual abuse were committed by parents or by "parent substitutes in a caretaker role."

Another 40% of the cases were committed by a group that includes other family members.

**PERMANENT PARTNERS IMMIGRATION ACT GAINS 100TH CONGRESSIONAL COSPONSOR**

September 6, 2002. The Permanent Partners Immigration Act (PPIA) reached one hundred cosponsors in the House of Representatives today, marking an unprecedented amount of bipartisan support for this bill that will allow U.S. citizens and permanent residents to sponsor their same-sex partners for immigration to the U.S.

Currently U.S. citizens can sponsor their foreign national husbands or wives to immigrate on the basis of the spousal relationship. Gay and lesbian U.S. citizens in committed relationships with foreigners of the same sex, however, can under no circumstances sponsor their partners, no matter how long the couple has been together nor how committed their relationship.

"The fact that one hundred people have now signed onto this bill is tremendously encouraging," said Rep. Nadler. "Members of Congress are becoming aware of the gratuitous cruelty in allowing the government to tear apart committed and loving couples through discriminatory immigration laws, and are taking action to correct this injustice."

"One hundred cosponsors demonstrates the critical need for reform of our immigration laws to end this discrimination against a significant group of American families," said Suzanne B. Goldberg, LGIRTF Board Chairperson. "As we approach the anniversary of the events of September 11th, we are encouraged by this commitment from members of Congress to ensure equal rights and freedoms for all Americans."

**Remembrance Day in California**

It is anticipated that Gray Davis, Governor of the State of California, will proclaim October 20, 2002, "Remembrance Day". Verbal confirmation was received from Governor Davis' Chief Deputy Communications Director on June 22nd. Remembrance Day is in observance of those who have died violent deaths as a result of their sexual orientation or gender expression. The proclamation is in response to a request by Sacramento PFLAG in association with the Fourth Annual Service of Remembrance - a memorial service for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered victims of hate crime based murder. Further, the Proclamation is for the entire state of California. PFLAG chapters throughout the state are welcome to use the proclamation as a vehicle to promote initiatives and events designed to further the cause of respect, dignity and safety for all as well as the PFLAG organization as a whole.

**GAY HISTORY with LISA DIGUARDI**

August 10, 1970:

Rita Hauser, Republican US representative to the United Nations, spoke to the American Bar Association in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage, saying laws against it were based on the mistaken notion that the purpose of marriage must be procreation.

**GAY HISTORY with LISA DIGUARDI**

August 26, 1993:

Defense secretary Les Aspin released a study saying the ban on lesbians and gays should be lifted. The study was conducted by the Rand Corp. and cost \$1.3 million. It concluded that the ban could be dropped without damaging order and discipline. Several previous Pentagon studies had reached similar conclusions.

### **German Supreme Court Backs Gay Marriage**

17 July 2002

Germany's supreme court has upheld a law allowing gay couples to marry.

Judges at the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe voted 5-3 to back the law, which was challenged last year by Bavaria and two eastern states.

The court has rejected a lawsuit by conservatives who argued gay marriage violates constitutional provisions protecting marriage and the family

The law, in effect since August, allows gay couples to 'marry' at registry offices and requires a court decision for divorce. Same-sex couples also receive rights given to heterosexual couples in areas such as inheritance, health insurance and immigration.

However, parliament's upper house withheld some tax privileges granted to heterosexual couples.

The legislation brought Germany in line with countries such as Denmark, which was the first to grant rights to gay couples in 1989, France and Sweden.

### **Ontario marriage victory**

On January 14, 2001, two same-sex couples were married pursuant to a publication of banns at the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto. The Province refused to register their marriage licences. These couples are represented by Douglas Elliott, Trent Morris and Victoria Paris of McGowan, Elliott & Kim.

The two cases were heard together on November 5, 2001 by Regional Senior Justice Blair, Associate Chief Justice Smith, and Justice Laforme, of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice (Divisional Court), Toronto.

The applicants' cases for equal marriage were vigorously opposed by the federal government, which has jurisdiction over capacity to marry.

Today, the Ontario Divisional Court has unanimously ruled that the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage is discriminatory and unconstitutional.

Justice Blair wrote: There is thus a short answer to the question posed by the Applicants in these two proceedings. It is this: the constitutional and Charter-inspired values which underlie Canadian society today dictate that the status and incidents inherent in the foundational institution of marriage must be open to same-sex couples who live in long-term, committed, relationships - marriage-like in everything but name- just as it is to heterosexual couples. Each is entitled to full and equal recognition, and the law must therefore be adapted accordingly. (p. 20)

Justice LaForme wrote: The restriction against same-sex marriage is an offense to the dignity of lesbians and gays because it limits the range of relationship options available to them. The result is they are denied the autonomy to choose whether they wish to marry. This in turn conveys the ominous message that they are unworthy of marriage. For those same-sex couples who do wish to marry, impugned restriction represents a rejection of their personal aspirations and the denial of their dreams. (p. 118)

Further, I find that there is no merit to the argument that the rights and interests of heterosexuals would be affected by granting same-sex couples the freedom to marry. ... I cannot conclude that freedom of religion would be threatened or jeopardized by legally sanctioning same-sex marriage. (p. 118)

[T]he denial of equal marriage can - and no doubt does - reflect and reinforce existing, inaccurate understandings of the merits, capabilities and worth of lesbian and gay relationships within Canadian society. ... Excluding gays and lesbians from marriage disregards the needs, capacities, and circumstances of same-sex spouses and their children. It declares an entire class of persons unworthy of the recognition and support of state sanction for their marriages. (p. 204)

I do not accept that the objective of procreation is a basis that can support the restriction against same-sex marriage. Rather, it could reasonably be argued ... that it appears to be a mere pretext used to rationalize discrimination against lesbians and gays. (p. 114)



## She fights bias for gay son's sake (Excerpts)

(By Magaly Morales / Knight Ridder Tribune  
Tallahassee Democrat, July 23, 2002)

If there is one thing Eva Leivas-Andino has gained from having a gay son, it is that she now knows with certainty that she is capable of unconditional love.

"It is easy to love your children when they meet your expectations," the Miami mother says. "But when they are something that you don't like, then you have to ask yourself if you are capable of loving them just the same."

It took Leivas-Andino, a Cuban-American mother of four, seven years to overcome her religious and cultural prejudices and to accept the fact that her son, Paolo Andino, was gay.

Her own struggle led her to become a full-time advocate for gay youth in South Florida. "I don't want people to think that here I am playing the part of 'mother of the year,'" she says. "Not at all. When I first learned Paolo was gay, I was afraid, I freaked out, and I didn't know what to do."

In May she became one of four recipients nationwide of the 2002 Courage Award from the Colin Higgins Foundation. The award recognizes people who fight discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The award came with a \$10,000 check, which she is donating to Project YES, a Miami educational organization whose mission is to prevent gay teen suicide and where she works as program manager and Hispanic liaison.

While she suspected early on that Paolo may be gay, Leivas-Andino chose to ignore the possibility. "It was such a horrendous, horrific, incredibly impossible idea, that I wouldn't even entertain it," she remembers.

When Paolo told his mother at the age of 20, the first thing she felt was relief, because she finally knew what was "wrong" with her son. But her next reaction put a wedge between them.

There were times, she admits, when she didn't even want her son to be around because she worried people might suspect something.

"I feared what people would say if they knew Paolo was gay." Paolo shattered her notion of the perfect family. The traditional Latin mother wished for her traditionally raised children to become doctors and engineers, get married and have children.

"We were quite 'normal,' you know, your typical upper-middle class Catholic Cuban-American family in Miami," she says. "The gay thing was just not part of that perfect picture."

"Many Latino gays and lesbians come from a culture where gender roles are strictly defined, and religion and family traditions are an important factor," she says. "Males are supposed to be masculine, macho, strong and are not even allowed to cry. If you are a female, you are expected to be mother, wife and the one who takes care of the house."

"The rigid gender roles, at least in the older generations, is what makes being Latino and gay particularly difficult."

Leivas-Andino's feelings changed five years ago when she went to New York to visit Paolo, who was by then an aspiring actor. They attended a play about Oscar Wilde and the trials he endured for being homosexual. At the end of the play, Paolo whispered in his mother's ear, "A hundred years later, and nothing has changed."

Over dinner and a bottle of merlot, Paolo - then 27 - told his mother for the first time in his life about the pain, the alienation and loneliness that he suffered while growing up gay in Miami.

That conversation changed Leivas-Andino, who had been blinded by her fears for so long. "It couldn't any longer be about me," she says, revealing the sadness the memory still causes. "This was my baby, he was hurting, and where was I all that time?"

That night, Paolo told his mother that by the time he was 14, he was convinced that if somebody knew he was gay, he would be killed. He also told her about the teasing at school, and the shame and guilt he felt when he attended Mass with his family.

"These were the kinds of things that my son had carried with him for 27 years," Leivas-Andino recalls with tears in her eyes. "This desperation, this fear of being surrounded by a society that repelled and punished people like him."

Leivas-Andino cites studies that indicate 33 percent of all teen suicides are committed by gay and lesbian kids. But she clarifies that gay kids don't commit suicide just because they are gay. "They commit suicide because society tells them they are evil and an abomination, that they are not natural and being gay is a horrible sin," she says.

She says detractors have told her that other children are also harassed and abused at school, for many reasons, because of their weight, skin color or simply because they have acne. But, she says, most of these kids have the support of their parents, and when they get home most likely they will find a safe haven.

"The kids are fine," says Leivas-Andino. "What is not OK is the community around them." Leivas-Andino - who also makes appearances on Spanish-language television and radio to discuss homosexuality in the Latin community - says she felt like dying the first time she had to talk in public about her gay son.

"It has been very difficult for our family, not only to accept the fact that Paolo is gay, but also that I am so open about it and I'm out there on national television talking to anybody who would listen."

Talking about it is helping Leivas-Andino ease the pain and guilt she feels for not being there for Paolo as he was growing up. But it is Paolo's compassion for his mother that is helping her most.

"He said to me once that it took him 20 years to figure out and accept who he was," says Leivas-Andino, "and he thought he could give me a little time to accept him and learn."

**Don't miss Arthur Dong's documentary "Family Fundamentals"  
- featuring our own Brett Matthews -  
at Music Hall Theaters, 9036 Wilshire Blvd, Beverly Hills.**

**Opening with Arthur Dong in attendance:  
October 12 and 13 evening.**

**For more information check [www.laemmle.com](http://www.laemmle.com),  
call 310.274.6869,  
or see enclosed flyer.**

I had the honor of meeting Arthur Dong and talking to him about his newest documentary "Family Fundamentals."

I was interested in finding out how he came up with the idea for this documentary. This is what he shared with me:

When he did "Licensed to Kill", a documentary about individuals who feel free to kill gays because of biblical and societal justifications, it was striking that people use religion as a motivating factor to kill human beings and to take those lives without remorse. How could a gay/lesbian kid survive in a setting that teaches that being gay/lesbian is immoral because the Bible says so? Arthur Dong wanted to make a documentary about the conflicts that come from fundamentalist values and the result is presented in "Family Fundamentals."

Now one would think that it would have been hard to find people who would volunteer to be part of the documentary, but only a few turned him down. In one case it was the gay son himself who said no because he was too ashamed of his parents' anti-gay views. Arthur ended up researching about 30 stories and finally found his three families: one who supports reparative therapy, one where the head of the household is a church leader, and one in the political conservative arena. In other words, three very different stories in a worldly setting.

And how did Arthur feel meeting with the participants' families? Being a documentary filmer for 20 years he just jumped in as a journalist. "You just do it!" He approached the families with a sincere desire to learn and understand their points of view. Arthur told all of them that they probably wouldn't like half of the film, but that the other half would be a reflection of their own stories. Since Brett's family backed out he had to cut scenes which actually showed the family as a loving one. However, at no point did he ever feel that his project was in danger.

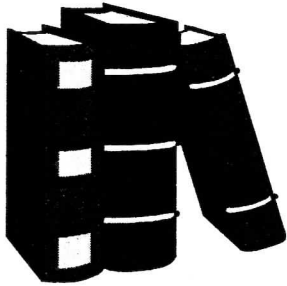
This obviously being a very intense subject, I was wondering how Arthur deals with the pain of the gay/lesbian children and how it might impact him: He shoots the film, takes it back to the editing room, views the material, and this is the time when he has spontaneous reactions to the footage. And, yes, there are moments when the eyes get teary. Then it is important to distance himself and see himself in the different roles such as writer and editor.

The message Arthur Dong wants to convey to his audience with "Family Fundamentals" is this:

This is a political issue. And while this documentary focuses on only three families, it is still a global issue impacting lots of families where their religious beliefs clash with the sexual orientation of one of their children. The use of hate language needs to stop because gay/lesbian children are suffering from the consequences. The denial that there is no connection has to stop.

Check out Arthur Dong's web site at <http://www.deepfocusproductions.com>

# OFF THE BOOK-RACK



## "The Phallus Palace"

Female To Male Transsexuals

Dean Kotula

253 pages, paperback, ISBN 1-55583-654-2

Alyson Publications

Now you're curious what "Phallus Palace" stands for, aren't you? Well, I won't tell, but I will tell you this: Dean Kotula's book lets you dive into the relatively unknown world of female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs). The book, divided into six parts, is meant to be an overview to supplement current information available on the topic of transsexuality and is written in easy to understand language. In his introduction he explains why he objects to the term *transgender* when applied to transsexuals, since "we are not changing our gender but are instead changing our body's sex."

Part One deals with "Perspectives and Viewpoints I". "FTM 101" by Katherine Rachlin dispels myths such as FTMs were women before they became men, all FTMs want the currently available sex-reassignment surgery, there are not as many FTMs as MTFs in the world, FTMs are the same as MTFs only in reverse, FTMs share a sexual orientation, and significant others of FTMs undergo the same experiences as significant others of MTFs; "Seeking Manhood" by Diane Ellaborn takes a closer look at the theories of transsexualism, key adolescent issues like independence, identity and intimacy, risk factors like confusion, body betrayal, hopelessness, social withdrawal, medical risks, school/career choices, and early assessment; Milton Diamond points out the differences between intersex and transsexual in his interview ("To put it as simple as possible, a *transsexual* is a male or female individual who thinks he or she is more suited or meant to live as a member of the opposite sex. An *intersexual*, in distinction, has recognized combinations of male and female biological characteristics.")

Part Two shows pre- and post-transitioning pictures of 19 men who share their individual stories.

Part Three deals with "Perspectives and Viewpoints II" divided into "The Transsexual Book of the Dead" by Rachel Pollack, which looks into the mystic world of ancient Greece and Egypt; "We Were There" by Ken Morris which focuses on female-to-male transsexuals in the Civil War; and "Alan Hart" by Margaret Deidre O'Hartigan describing the life of Dr. Alan Hart who was born in 1890 as Alberta Lucille Hart.

Part Four takes a closer look at the different types of surgeries that are available for female-to-male transsexuals. Toby Meltzer, MD, who specializes in sex-reassignment surgery, and James Reardon, MD, who has been doing gender-transition chest reconstruction for 22 years, answer Dean Kotula's critical questions in a straight-forward way. This part also includes surgical photographs (nothing for a meek mind!): liposuctioning breast tissue performed by Dr. Meltzer; bilateral mastectomy performed by Dr. Michael Brownstein; metoidioplasty performed by Dr. Meltzer; and a radial forearm phalloplasty performed by Drs. Meltzer and Shaefer (Dr. Meltzer is no longer doing radial forearm phalloplasties. "I believe the inherent risk and cost associated with the procedure are too great.").

Part Five are the "Gender Memories" of Dean Kotula himself and the "Metamorphosis of a Sibling", by Sharon Kotula, one of Dean's sisters.

Part Six are the final perspectives and viewpoints in which Jeff Brody compares transitioning to creative arts; E.C. shares a Parent's Perspective (followed by L.C.'s self-portrait at age 10 and a poem); and ends with Emily Yoffe's "Postscript" and her (learning) experience when she attended a support group meeting for FTMs.



From the director of *Licensed to Kill* & *Coming Out Under Fire*

*What happens* when  
three *Christian families*  
have *children* who  
“*become homosexual?*”



A mature, graceful &  
extraordinary accomplishment.”

FilmThreat.com

“**GRIPPING!**”

Village Voice

“**INTELLIGENT!**  
An intimate chronicle.”

Boston Globe

“**DRAMATIC...RAW!**”

Religion News Service

an ARTHUR DONG film

[www.deepfocusproductions.com](http://www.deepfocusproductions.com)

A black and white photograph of three women and a young child. The woman at the top has blonde, wavy hair and a serious expression. The child on the left is smiling. The woman at the bottom has blonde hair and is smiling. The title "Family Fundamentals" is overlaid on the bottom half of the photo.

# Family Fundamentals

**Opens  
Oct. 11**

NEW YORK CITY: Quad Cinema  
34 West 13th St, 212/255-8800  
[www.quadcinema.com](http://www.quadcinema.com)

LOS ANGELES: Music Hall Theaters  
9036 Wilshire Bl., Beverly Hills, 310/274 6869  
[www.laemmle.com](http://www.laemmle.com)  
Filmmaker in attendance Oct 12 & 13 evening

SAN FRANCISCO: Opera Plaza Cinema  
601 Van Ness Avenue, 415/352-0810  
[www.landmarktheatres.com](http://www.landmarktheatres.com)  
Filmmaker in attendance Oct 11 evening

BERKELEY: Shattuck Cinemas  
2230 Shattuck Avenue, 510/843-FILM  
[www.landmarktheatres.com](http://www.landmarktheatres.com)

## Movies

## Life Without Family Acceptance

By KEVIN MAYNARD  
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Arthur Dong's new film finds parents who do anything  
to change their gay children

"My films aren't for everybody," says Arthur Dong from his Silver Lake home office. "I don't get the 'Star Wars' type of crowds."

While the 48-year-old Sundance award-winning documentarian doesn't expect blockbuster box office, the films he makes about real-life battles are arguably more compelling than any effects-laden spectacle you're likely to see all summer.

Beginning with "Public," a five-minute animated short he made in 1970 at age 16, Dong has always been fascinated with sexual repression, oppression and violence, specifically in relation to homosexuality. Though full of compassion and insight, films like "Coming Out Under Fire" (1994) and "Licensed to Kill" (1997) are far from the self-affirming (and sometimes self-congratulatory) fare often seen at gay and lesbian film festivals. And he examines tough issues to illustrate that the fight for gay civil rights is far from over. His latest film, "Family Fundamentals," looks at the crossfire between fundamentalist Christian parents and their gay and lesbian children.

Don't use the word "homophobia" to describe Dong's focus. He began to reexamine the word while making "Coming Out Under Fire," adapted from Alan Berube's non-fiction book on nine gay soldiers in World War II. These Americans served at a time when the military established a specific anti-gay policy; not coincidentally, the film was released during the furor over then-President Clinton's "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

Dong and Berube "were writing the opening narration for the film and we just thought the word wasn't quite right," says Dong. "The word 'homophobia' implies fear and psychology as opposed to looking at other issues like conditioning from church, education, family upbringing or the media. All of these other factors are important in constructing society's anti-gay beliefs. We finally decided the right word was 'contempt,' contempt for homosexuality. Contempt, disgust, disdain. How does that get constructed? How does it play out in our daily lives?"

"I think a lot of the work I do reflects that questioning."

In 1977, Dong was the victim of a gay bashing by four teenagers in

his hometown of San Francisco. Though he managed to escape his attackers, the incident made headlines after the same teens bludgeoned a priest the same night. The incident motivated Dong to make "Licensed to Kill," a look at murderers of gay men that puts human faces to the perpetrators of hate crimes. Dong's subjects aren't monsters; they're articulate, disturbed and real. "I don't choose people to be in my films to get that visceral ugliness that Jerry Springer goes after on purpose," says Dong. "I purposely work the other end. I'm mindful of getting different points of view."

Dong took the same approach in making "Family Fundamentals." As with his other films, the "casting" process came first. To find the subjects he needed, he assembled a panel of religious advisors that included everyone from the openly gay Rev. Mel White to Philip Yancey, the editor at large of Christianity Today, a magazine started by Billy Graham in the 1950s.

Dong found three sets of parents and children. To achieve a sense of

comfort with these potentially difficult interviewees, Dong worked without a crew. "It was really liberating," he says. "I just went to people's houses and said, 'Here I am, let me hook a mic to your shirt' and that's it. No lights, no other people, it's just you and me, so let's talk."

One was a political family, though not related: Brian Bennett shared a father-son bond with conservative Republican congressman Bob Dornan until Bennett came out. He was ostracized by his mentor and the gay community for being a gay Republican.

The second was a church family: Brett Matthews, the son of a Mormon bishop in Erda, Utah, was honorably discharged from the Air Force in 1998 but stripped of veteran's benefits for coming out as gay. Telling his parents in 1999 was even more difficult.

"I came out to my mom while I was driving my car on the freeway," Matthews recounts. "She said she decided that it would be better if we were both dead than for me to live a gay lifestyle and she tried to wreck the car." Both sur-

vived. Matthews was understandably surprised when his parents agreed to participate in "Family Fundamentals," though they had second thoughts.

"I sat down with them at the kitchen table to sign the releases, which they had agreed to sign," says Dong. "And they said they could only participate if I made a film that encouraged their son to change his sexual orientation. But I kept on shooting anyway without showing their faces. They still allowed me to shoot, I'm not sure why. But they didn't actually say no, they said they needed to pray about it."

For the third family, Dong focused on Kathleen Bremner, an 82-year-old San Diego grandmother who advocates therapy to change the orientation of gays. Bremner conducts a monthly support-group meeting for parents with children who have "become homosexual."

She also runs a chapter of Spatula Ministries, a Southern California organization so named

by founder Barbara Johnson, who said, "I need about a dozen big spatulas to pull these frantic moms off the ceiling when they first learn their kid is homosexual." It may sound cute, but Spatula's mission is serious about "providing restoration to the family."

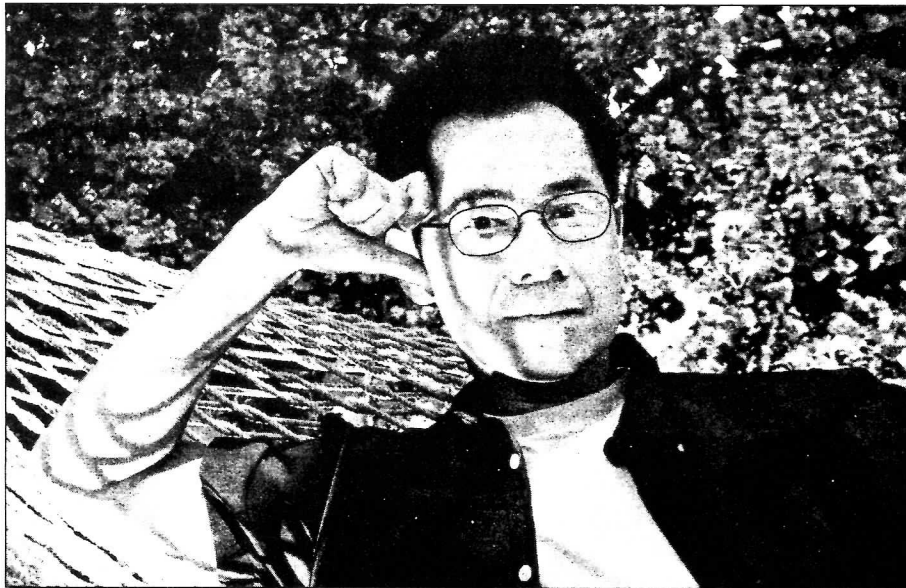
For the past 15 years, Bremner has also organized the San Diego Christian Trauma and Sexuality Conferences in collaboration with "ex-gay" groups like Exodus and Focus to encourage homosexuals to give up their lifestyle. Bremner's reasons for joining Spatula were personal; her only daughter, Susan Jester, is a lesbian, and her grandson David is gay.

"My position on both my grandson and my daughter is that I love them very dearly," says Bremner. "It's disappointing for me that they chose a lifestyle that I don't think can bring them the joy and happiness that the Lord wants for them. He created each one of us for a loving abundant life, and if we veer into some wrong direction, well, we have problems."

"Kathleen Bremner says she loves her child, and I believe she does," Dong says. "But then you look at her love, and I suppose it's semantics, but where does that love go? Is that love able to transcend the principle?"

As Dong takes his film across the country, he isn't interested in preaching to the converted. Recently, he persuaded Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, to reschedule a screening of "Family Fundamentals" from Oct. 11—National Coming Out Day—to a week earlier for Parents Day. College officials told him "they separated the two events because parents complained about it. And I said this is a film that speaks to this exact conflict."

Not only did the college agree to the date change but it will also show "Licensed to Kill" and will host panels and seminars for students and visiting parents. "We all need to be nurtured and inspired for equality," Dong says. "But we also need to create some dialogue on both sides of the conflict because it's escalating."



RICK LOOMIS / Los Angeles Times

'Contempt, disgust, disdain [for homosexuality]. How does that get constructed? How does it play out in our daily lives? . . . I think a lot of the work I do reflects that questioning.'

ARTHUR DONG

Director of "Family Fundamentals"

*Family Fundamentals* screens at Outfest Sunday, 5:15 p.m.; Tuesday, 5 p.m.; and July 21, 2:15 p.m. All screenings will be at the DGA. The film will open Oct. 11, National Coming Out Day, at the Laemmle Music Hall in Beverly Hills. Information: [www.deepfocusproductions.com](http://www.deepfocusproductions.com)

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