

GROUPS: PFLAG


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PARENTAL GUIDANCE

PFLAG provides support for the parents of GLBT children, writes Reg Domingo.

Narelle Phipps always knew her son Neil was different. "I'd wondered about [Neil] since he was about eight years old," she says. "He enjoyed doing rhythmic gymnastics and, when he was younger, he joined his sister's all girl jazz ballet class and he loved every minute of it. He just seemed to me to be... different. And I told myself, if he was gay, I'd be okay with that."

That moment of realisation came ten years later, in 1996, when Narelle and her husband Keith finally learned the true nature of their son's sexuality. "And to my eternal regret, I handled it very badly; I told him that I was 'devastated'," Narelle says. "To think that I'd wondered about him since he was eight, and that I didn't do anything to prepare myself for the eventuality. So I'll never be happy with the way I handled it." A harrowing period of confusion and dejection followed soon after.

"Then Keith got in touch with Mollie Smith, who was then the President of PFLAG [Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays]," Narelle says. "She brought us reading material, we got together to talk about it, and that was the beginning of sanity coming back into my life. Our first PFLAG meeting was really helpful".



Narelle Phipps

For Narelle, understanding her son's sexuality was an imperative step that had to be achieved. "We love Neil hugely and it was really important for us to come to grips with the situation because I definitely wanted him in my life. So we kept going to PFLAG. And for about six months, those monthly meetings were my monthly 'fix', if you like. It was really important to know that I wasn't the only mother of a gay kid. I really feel for people who are isolated and can't talk to understanding people about it because I think that was my salvation."

Today, Narelle has reached a point where she retains nothing but a strong sense of pride, love and happiness for her gay

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son. Nothing less. “At one stage, he was on the front page of DNA and I bought any number of copies of it,” she says. “And at the train station, there’s a very long escalator that takes you up to street level and, to my surprise and delight, the front of the magazine was featured in all these placards all the way up. I just felt so proud, I just wanted to grab the nearest person and say, ‘That’s my boy!’ So I’ve come a very long way. I really feel that it’s a privilege to be the mother of a gay son. It’s turned me upside down, inside out, but it’s just been the most amazing experience.

Narelle now serves as secretary of PFLAG, and her husband is president. It’s an involvement she hopes will enable her to help other parents and families overcome their uncertainties.

“Love your child,” she says. “This is the child that you’ve had from the word go. And this is not a choice. I firmly believe that this is the way you’re born. So if you have a child who’s gay, put your arms around them and tell them that you love them.”

For more information on PFLAG, visit www.pflagaustralia.org.au

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