

## Beginning the Conversation Modern Jewish Families in Their Own Words

ANDREA (AND PAULA)

### One Mailing ... Finally

*Lesbian families, unlike straight families, still have to be accepted.*

Back in the mid-'70s being an open lesbian just wasn't done in my very conservative Conservative synagogue. I never felt discriminated against, how could I... I was so far in the closet. Besides, it was the shul where I grew up. My parents were married there. My brother had his bar mitzvah there. I had my bat mitzvah there. My brother got married there (with my then girlfriend in attendance - thanks Mom!). I knew everyone and everyone knew me. Out of respect for my parents, I didn't come out. Out of respect for my religion, I participated, although in a much lesser capacity than my brother and my parents. I had to stay away more than I wanted, just for my own sanity and to avoid the inevitable and constant question: *are you dating?*



I was always there for the High Holidays and special occasions. *Always alone.* Then time passes and things begin to change. My mother starts to relax, realizing that family is family ... so when my father was honored as the out-going congregation president in the mid-90s, my girlfriend Paula was in attendance. The questions stop from people in the congregation ... they like my "friend." My dad never needed time to adjust - he was always loving and supportive and there for me. Everyone in our community knows me. Everyone (so it seems) still likes me. No one says anything that is disparaging or rude. (I don't believe anyone said anything to my parents, but you'd have to ask my mother about that.)

Today, Paula, my girlfriend of almost 23 years, and I are active participants in my family shul. Now people in the synagogue always ask about Paula when she doesn't attend a function and today I truly believe they do accept us. No words need to be said about who she is, who *we* are, because when you feel accepted and loved, that is enough. The synagogue's "official" acceptance of our relationship was confirmed when we began to receive only one mailing. To me, this says a lot, especially in a synagogue that still does not give aliyot to women.

That is not to say that everything has been easy. Staying closeted for so long was very difficult. Lesbian families, unlike straight families, still have to be accepted. Although the current rabbi won't marry us, I understand ... but I don't understand. Many of the congregants are always asking when we'll get married (amazing, considering...) and now with DOMA being overturned, it sure would be nice to have our synagogue allow us to marry there. For Paula and me that would be a dream come true. And I think my mom would like it too. I sure know my dad would be there.