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## Pride Is Not Just For Brians — We've Always Felt Welcome As A Straight Family

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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In our family it has become a tradition every June to bring our three daughters to Pride.

The mood is always exuberant and inclusive. There are rainbows everywhere, people dancing and enough makeup and sparkles and ballgowns to entertain the girls for hours. It's a display of pageantry not to be missed.

**Amanda Jette Knox was surprised by the response to her family's arrival in what she believed was a conservative neighbourhood. Read what happened here (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/trans-queer-family-canada-community-party>).**

'Where's Brian?'

It's actually really fun explaining to kids what Pride means, adding layers of nuance every year as they get older. A few years ago, my family and I were exiting the subway at Wellesley Station in Toronto when Mary, our then-three-year-old, stopped to examine a rainbow banner.

"Where's Brian?" she said.

"Who?" I asked, looking at my wife with a puzzled expression.

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"Is this Brian's party?" our daughter said looking around. My wife realized what she meant: "Pride party," she clarified. "We're at the Pride Party."

In other words, Pride is not just for Brians.

We explained to our toddler that Pride is an opportunity for everyone to celebrate their weird and wonderful families, chosen or otherwise. Mary didn't need an excuse to party, though. We stopped for lunch at one of the booths on Church Street and within minutes she had taken off her shirt and was swinging it over her head, hopping up and down to the dance music.

## The Politics Of Pride

Her older sisters understand a bit more about the political purpose of Pride. One of their friends at school has two dads, and another friend on the street has two moms. They know how important it is to support their friends against the grumps of the world who want to ruin the fun. Our eldest, Sonia, is 10 now, and is keenly aware of injustice. Our goal is to channel that foot-stomping, "it's-not-fair" instinct into something positive. We've introduced the girls to the word "ally" so that they understand that even though we have a fairly traditional-looking family, we have a role to play in supporting others' rights to express themselves.

Our girls spend an inordinate amount of time dressing up: as pirates, as princesses, as animals, as old ladies, as *Harry Potter* characters, as mermaids. It is through this lens they interpret the costume-play that is often part of Pride.

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What adults interpret as kink or fetish-play, most children interpret as dress-up. And they're not wrong. Costumes, masks and makeup are used as symbols for different personas, allowing adults and children alike to experiment with different identities. If we were to tell them that some people say there are certain costumes that shouldn't be worn at Pride (excluding appropriative costumes, which I've written about (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/racist-halloween-costumes-talking-to-kids>)), they would be outraged. Supporting an adult's right to wear fairy wings if they so desire: this is how allyship can look to a small child.

## Prides Of Our Past

We usually spent most of our time at the Family Pride celebrations at Church Street Public School, where the kids can make buttons, get their face painted, try their hand at skateboarding and join Fay and Fluffy's Drag Queen Storytime (<https://www.cbc.ca/arts/toronto-drag-duo-fay-and-fluffy-are-a-beacon-of-light-for-young-hearts-and-minds-1.5451353>).

One year the girls got to create the front page of a newspaper they printed with a hand-press courtesy of Black Creek Pioneer Village. Another year there was a mobile menagerie on site courtesy of Reptilia where the kids could handle a snake and watch the dinosaur-slow movements of a giant iguana.

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"Sometimes families of all sorts just want to hang out with strange reptiles on the weekend without defending their right to exist."

To be clear, these are not explicitly LGBT-events — and that's another point we want to make to our kids.

Sometimes families of all sorts just want to hang out with strange reptiles on the weekend without defending their right to exist.

Last year, of course, because of the pandemic, there was no Pride to attend.

So a few families on our street decided they would put together their own parade that would wend its way down our road, all 600 metres of it. One of our daughter's friends made a float with a wagon and a boom box; another handed out flags and buttons. We joined the parade (complete with costumes, naturally) when they passed our house and we walked/danced together, picking up more people as we moved.

At the end of the route around sixty of us took over an intersection at the bottom of the street and we sung and chanted from our distanced bubbles, clustered by family.

## A New Pride Tradition

This year the Pride festival in our city (<https://www.pridetoronto.com/>) is running online for the entire month of June. It's tough to translate the sense of community and merriment that unfolds in person into an online environment, especially in a year where we're so desperate for human contact.

But for the little ones, it just didn't work out.

Try as I might, the girls were just not interested in sitting in front of a screen for a streamed version of what they experienced in person in previous years. They missed the waterguns, the endless temporary tattoos and competing with each other to see how many different types of free swag they can get with rainbows on them.

These are all sensory experiences that just don't translate online.

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"In addition to fighting biphobia, homophobia, transphobia, racism, misogyny and general bigotry, this year we're also fighting a coronavirus that wants to spoil the party."

So instead of trying to cram the Pride festivities into a digital box, we're going to have a dress-up party at home as a family where everybody can choose their own costume, no exceptions.

Much like the last year and a bit, we are making compromises and trying out new things.

Which adds a whole new layer of nuance to the Pride story.

In addition to fighting biphobia, homophobia, transphobia, racism, misogyny and general bigotry, this year we're also fighting a coronavirus that wants to spoil the party.

It will never win.

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