

known donors, our kids' biological half-siblings and their moms, blended families and all the "aunties" and "uncles" who help out along the way. It is also becoming more rare that two women anywhere in the country will find themselves the first lesbian couple to have a child. That path has already been blazed in most places. We are no longer surprised when lesbian celebrities such as Rosie O'Donnell and *Iron Chefs* Cat Cora come out as lesbian moms. Our friends will probably no longer ask—as some of mine did 10 years ago—why we want to become moms. Lesbian motherhood is no longer a controversial topic in the queer community. Nor will anyone be ostracized if she gives birth—goddess forbid—to a male child.

So now we have more freedom to fit in, and raise our families as we see fit. We join play groups, the PTA and the swim team. We show that by planning our families and raising our kids with such a high degree of love and thoughtfulness, they grow up well. We continue to work quietly behind the scenes, reminding our schools that inclusive reading lists are important, that some families have donors, not daddies, and that little boys wearing nail polish to kindergarten will not bring down the republic. In fact, they might just help save it.

Through all this, lesbians have learned the common language of motherhood that is shared by most women who are raising children. Through pregnancy, birth, adoption, fostering, nursing, playground visits and potty training, new bonds are forged, especially with the straight women we once imagined as the potential enemy. Yes, the queer community is still home—but it is not our only home. In fact, if you pressed me, I'd have to admit that home to me is really where my kid is. We could be anywhere in the world, with nothing left to our name. But if I have her by my side, and she has me, we're going to be OK. This is perhaps motherhood's greatest gift. Knowing there is a community to back us up if we need it is a close second. Being able to take joy in life's unexpected offerings, even if they are teenage pop stars, may be a close third.

So where does all this pontificating lead me? Back into the theater with my kid and Hannah Montana. My 3-D glasses are on, Miley Cyrus just winked at me, my foot's tapping along to the song "Rock Star," and I'm feeling pretty good about my life. It's a blast of popular culture, yes, one that I might not have imagined myself fitting into when I was peeing on ovulation test sticks. Even when we do get pregnant, we don't know what little person we will give birth to. We keep them safe and guide them where we can, and often we find ourselves in unexpected places. But what I can tell you is that for me, the revolution in lesbian parenting happened nearly 10 years ago, when I gave birth to an amazing baby girl. We've been together on this journey ever since, and now she's a cute, sporty, 9-year-old kid with a passion for Hannah Montana. And you'd better believe that like most moms—lesbian or not—I'd do everything I could to get tickets to this sold-out show, sit next to her in this theater and merrily sing along. ■

MARK RYAN/ISTOCK

## Who's Your Daddy?

Twenty-six years ago, single women and lesbian couples didn't have any reproductive clinics that would serve them. Sperm banks were reserved for heterosexual couples unable to have children, and even for them the process was secretive and shameful. Couples would choose donors who looked like the father, and the truth about the donor insemination was often hidden from the child.

But all of that changed in 1982, when the Sperm Bank of California opened its doors to all families. The nonprofit organization, which started as a project for the Oakland Feminist Women's Health Center, radically changed the rules of donor programs—single mothers and lesbian couples were encouraged to participate, extensive donor information was provided and, most radically, donors could participate in an Identity Release Program that allowed the child to contact the donor.

Alice Ruby, executive director of the Sperm Bank of California, says the Identity Release Program is a groundbreaking service that allows for more transparency and gives more information to all the parties involved in the donor process.

When a child turns 18, he or she is allowed to ask the agency for the contact information. Ruby says that the reasons to contact the donor differ from child to child. "Most want to know about themselves. They're curious," she says. "Some want to know what kind of music he listens to, or if he has big feet, or just what he's like."

As for the donor, the man can opt for the anonymous or the open information program. "We pay the donor the same amount for the open and closed services," says Ruby. "We don't want to encourage the open program for the wrong reasons."

The reasons for men to participate in the open information program are as varied as the men themselves. Ruby says most of the men simply believe that their offspring have the right to know. Others, she says, "are curious just like the kids, because they are part of creating a human being."

The Identity Release Program was one of the services that attracted Tasha and her partner to the Sperm Bank of California. "It's an amazing resource," says the 37-year-old mother of a child who was conceived through the clinic. "Genetics [is] part of what makes us who we are, and the clinic recognizes that genetic connections are really important."

Tasha's son is only 2 years old, but she and her partner already talk to him about his conception. "We say, 'We are your mommies and you also have a donor daddy.'" She knows that her son does not understand this information yet, but believes being honest about the process is important.

Ruby says that most of the children have chosen to wait until they are older. "Like many adopted children," she says, "children of donors often seek the donor's identity after college or when they are considering having children of their own." A 2005 study from the journal *Human Reproduction* confirms Ruby's belief that the program is positive for children. The study found that "the majority of the youths felt comfortable with their origins and planned to obtain their donor's identity, although not necessarily at age 18."

The study adds that most of the children were not looking for a father figure, but were simply curious about the donor. The Sperm Bank of California is planning to conduct an outcome study of its own in the next few years. —Kristin A. Smith

