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# Local News

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## Gay Utah Dads Enter Fight for Family Equality



by Ryan Oliver Hansen

A typical day in the Butterfield household includes multiple diaper changes, cleaning up scattered toys, and resolving battles — such as a tear-soaked, screaming fight over a favorite toy car — between the Butterfield’s two year-old twin boys.

But the battles between the twins are the least of Tony Butterfield and Paul Redd-Butterfield’s worries. They’ve taken on a bigger fight: the fight for gay marriage equality under the law.

They say they’re just as deserving of marriage as any heterosexual couple since they’ve been together for 12 monogamous years and their twins have been with them from the moment they were born through a surrogate mother. They’re aware of the upcoming conflict over gay marriage on a state and national level, and they’re ready for the battle.

Their weapon in the fight is their family story. They’ve opened up their family to the media because they say that most people who get to know them end up agreeing that, for the Butterfield family, marriage is only fair.

Most gay families aren’t comfortable being in the media spotlight. According to research performed by the Human Rights Campaign, 30 percent of Utah gay couples are raising children.

“We want to give a voice to all gay families. I don’t know what people think our family is like, but it’s a lot more like other families than many people think. I think many people would look at our family and be rather bored, actually,” said Tony.

The Butterfields have made raising their twins their top priority. “It’s wonderful being a father. It’s the best job I’ve ever had,” said Paul, who has chosen to be a stay-at-home dad.

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Tony believes it's unfair that his partner doesn't get recognition under the law for the work that he does in the home. "The work he does helps create a loving and supportive environment for our children. That's important for society. But the law sees Paul as a stranger living in my home working for my charity," said Tony.

Paul agrees. "I need a raise," he joked.

The Butterfields say that if people knew them, they wouldn't discriminate against them. They believe stereotypical behavior from the gay community — such as heavy promiscuity, drinking, and drug use — has made it harder for people to accept the gay community as a whole. "The overt sexuality is part of what gives us a bad name. People think they'll come to our house and see nude posters on our walls," said Tony.

Many blame societal homophobia for perpetuating negative gay stereotypes; others blame gay men themselves for the myriad challenges that hold back the gay community. But the Butterfields are anything but stereotypical. They've established a solid, committed relationship against social and political odds — and they believe a number of factors contributed to this success.

For starters, both sets of the Butterfields' "in-laws" have offered them full family support. During their Salt Lake Metro interview, Paul's father, Buddy Redd — a gruff, old-fashioned man from a small town — was in their home for a visit, and gave his input: "That's my son. I love him. That's my son-in-law. I love him. Those are my grandkids. I love them," said Redd.

Since the Butterfields have been in the media, things haven't always been easy for the Redd family. "My family gets flack," said Paul. "People brought it to their attention that they've seen me in the media. You have to be careful in small towns."

Tony believes that the unconditional love and support he's received from his family since his coming out has been a tremendous influence for good in his relationship. His mother, Bobbie Butterfield, along with many other family members, attends political events. "I tell everyone I have a gay son and that I'm proud of him and his family," said Bobbie, who considers Tony and Paul's relationship to be the strongest among the relationships of her eight children. "The gay community should look to them as an example and strive to have what they have. They had to overcome a lot of stigma, but it can be done. Gay people don't have to be promiscuous or have superficial relationships," she said.

Bobbie Butterfield says that many of her children and 32 grandchildren are members of the LDS Church, which is well-known for its disapproval of gay relationships.

Even so, none of them oppose Tony and Paul's family. "Who couldn't help but love Tony and Paul? I don't know how my LDS family members deal with the conflicts of belonging to a religion that discriminates against gay people. But they're loving and supportive and as a family it's never an issue. Gay or straight—if you have good morals a relationship is forever," said Bobbie.


Tony believes that the strong familial support adds a healthy pressure to stay together. "The family support really sets the tone. You don't want to disappoint them. You have pressure that helps you stay strong. Our families don't want us to separate," he said.

The Butterfields consider their lifestyle choices to be a large part of their success. "We haven't seen a bar in years. We've never had a partner other than each other," Tony said.

His mother believes that the Butterfield's monogamous relationship represents the ideal: "To have an open relationship, to me, is bogus," said Bobbie. "You either have commitment or you don't. Open relationships don't represent a true commitment."

Parental devotion, family support, and true commitment aside, many still believe the Butterfield children are being short-sided because there is no female parent in the home.

"I know exactly why people have that concern," said Tony. "I have a wonderful mother and father. But I think these roles can be filled by [people of] either gender. When they



talk about a mother, they talk about nurturing, care giving, and making a nice home. We're doing that. I'll go crazy if my aunt tells me one more time that we mother our kids too much!" he said, laughing.

Others worry that the Butterfield twins are more likely to become homosexual. Tony believes this thinking is flawed. "I think you'd be remiss to not expect some sort of difference. They will consider homosexuality more since they won't think it's an awful sin or taboo. But in the end, if they're heterosexual they're heterosexual," he said.

Neither Tony nor Paul is worried for their twins. "It may be an issue that they have gay parents," Tony said, "but they're already flirting with the girls."

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