

# What Makes a Family

In his new book, **Zach Wahls**, an activist and son of two moms from Iowa, talks about the challenges which the kids of gay couples face.

**MINE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A** sit-down-dinner kind of family. So when I announced at a Sunday night supper that I was preparing to testify the following night at a state hearing on gay marriage, the four of us launched into a hearty conversation on the topic.

My moms always used our dinner table conversations to prepare my sister and me for the daily challenges of life. From simple reminders to do our homework and practice the piano to the more complex task of teaching us how to deal with a school bully, these nightly dialogues were both a safe harbor and a staging ground.

It was around the dinner table that they introduced the book *Teaching Your Children Values* by Richard and Linda Eyre, which gives

parents a yearlong, month-by-month plan for teaching children values such as self-discipline, perseverance, kindness, and honesty. Every night since I was a young child, we'd share examples of that month's value. Although I'd usually just toss out a quick example en route to whatever was on my plate, over the course of the nearly two decades, these moral explorations sank in. My moms equipped me with a strong sense of right and wrong and taught me that the world is rarely black and white.

A month after my moms' public wedding, I decided it was time for me to start giving back, to do my good turn, so to speak. I decided to attend an event for LGBT families in Des Moines called "Around the Table." It was hosted by the organizations One Iowa and Lambda Legal to answer questions about the ruling winning marriage equality in Iowa and what people could do to help keep the momentum going. I was there to work with the kids of LGBT couples in attendance.

These kids were all pretty young, most about seven or eight. I'm not a particularly emotional guy, but I got choked up listening to these kids talk about their experiences. Some didn't even realize they had gay parents. They "just have two moms." I remember one little kid who didn't understand why he was even there. So normal was his life experience that it wasn't until after lunch that he came back and said, "Oh, yeah, I am one of those."

## "I WAS NORMAL UNTIL SOCIETY TOLD ME I WASN'T."

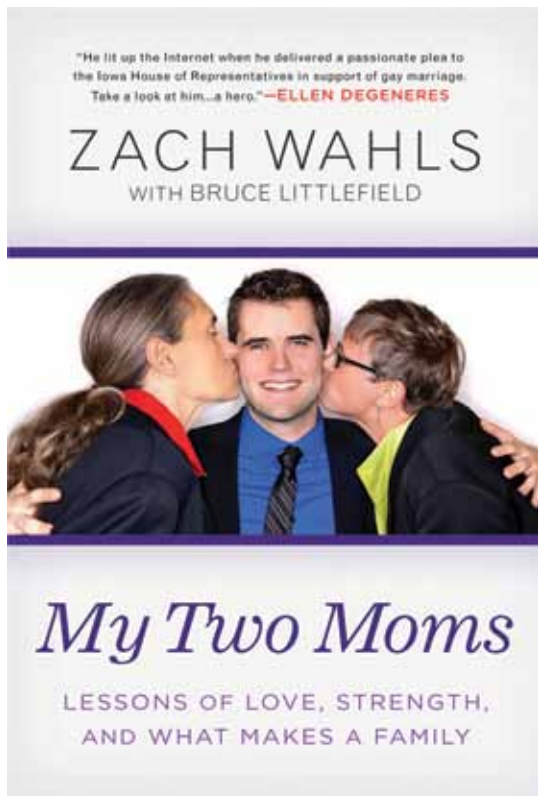
Another young boy who had two mothers was very confused and got pretty upset. He couldn't comprehend why some people didn't want his moms to get married. He kept saying his family was normal. I looked in his eyes and could see genuine concern. He believed that kids from families run by gay couples were really—in every single way that mattered—not any different from families run by heterosexual people.

Then it dawned on me as this boy talked: I was normal until society told me I wasn't. I realized that the little kid looking up at us, with his brown hair, large eyes, and big smile, was me.

My heart went out to him, because I knew that at some point in his life he was going to come face to face with people who thought he would need "fixing." I knew the pain he was going feel.

Opponents often talk about the struggles and challenges that children of gay couples have to go through. I will say only this: We go through those challenges because you put us through them. We only experience that pain because you insist on inflicting it. Knowing the challenges that child will face and the things he will have to deal with—that we're still not at a point where he can live a childhood untouched by fear and unsullied by hate—breaks my heart.

This book is for him. **L**



From *MY TWO MOMS: Lessons of Love, Strength, and What Makes a Family* by Zach Wahls with Bruce Littlefield. Published by arrangement with Gotham Books, a member of Penguin Group (USA), Inc. © 2012 by Zach Wahls LLC