

We Are Family

By Leah Elson

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Kevin and Robert Gross realize that they might not fit the picture of a "traditional" family, but they contend that they are really no different than any other family. Robert and Kevin are a loving couple who have been together for over 24 years. They are doing their best to raise their children and they face the same triumphs and struggles in life that every other parent in America does—with love, patience, persistence and a little bit of luck.



Kevin always knew that he wanted to be a parent, but he was certain the fact that he was one half of a gay couple would prohibit him and Robert from adopting. Over the years, however, Kevin and Robert began to notice a change in societal attitudes toward gays and re-considered the possibility of building a family through adoption.

Several years ago, Kevin was in the public library in La Crosse when he picked up one of the Adopt! magazines published by the

Adoption Resources of Wisconsin (then called "Special Needs Adoption Network).

Instantly he was excited about the possibility of adoption, but he was also feeling skeptical that they would be accepted as "suitable" adoptive parents. Kevin's nerves were working overtime when he called the number for the

Special Needs Adoption Network.

The first words out of his mouth were: "can a gay couple adopt?" The person on the other end of the phone

responded with an enthusiastic "of course!" and Kevin felt relieved and elated..

Robert, however, was not so excited about the prospect of parenting. When Kevin told Robert that they would be eligible to adopt, Robert told Kevin that he didn't want to be a parent.

But Kevin is not one to give up easily. He continued to encourage the idea of children with Robert. Eventually, Robert admitted that he hadn't been fair regarding the issue

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of children and that he had decided that he was ready to become a parent with Kevin. Kevin was overjoyed.

Everything was in place for Kevin and Robert. They were both on board with parenting and they were both ready to start the adoption process. They attended their first orientation meeting in 1998.

The apprehension and fear that their gay status would overshadow any attempt to adopt a child was still there, but Kevin and Robert were also determined. They filled out all the necessary paperwork and, a short time later, they were accepted into the program and completed their homestudy.

Although procedure dictated that Kevin go through the adoption homestudy as a single parent, Robert attended all of the meetings and interviews with him. Once their study was complete, they anxiously started looking for children.

After several months, Kevin was getting frustrated. His doubts about being a gay couple and being able to adopt resurfaced. That is until October 1, 1999, when they got the call that would change their lives forever.

There was a little girl named Stephanie who needed a home. Kevin and Robert were told that Stephanie had several problems, including attachment disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), but they were not about to let her "diagnosis" scare them away.

All that really mattered was that Stephanie wanted and needed a permanent home. The trio instantly hit it off, and Stephanie became their little princess.

Stephanie has adjusted well to her new family. She is an active child and her ADHD does provide challenges at times, but Kevin and

Robert "love Stephanie just the way she is. She wouldn't be Stephanie without the ADHD."

Every day that passes by means another memory for Robert, Kevin and Stephanie. Kevin recalls the first time they experienced Mother's Day as a family. He was picking up Stephanie from school the weekend before Mother's Day.

At the end of the day, he saw Stephanie running toward the car with a potted plant in each hand. At the top of her lungs she was yelling in the schoolyard, "Happy Mother's Day, Daddy!" Kevin still gets emotional when he thinks of that day and how his daughter wanted to acknowledge his mommy skills.

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Kevin and Robert were satisfied with their little family and were not sure that they wanted to add any more children, but Stephanie insisted that she have a brother. She would sit at the dinner table and pray for a brother during grace.

After a while, Robert and Kevin knew they couldn't resist the pressure of their daughter's wish for a brother, so they started pursuing adoption again. And they didn't have too long to wait: Stephen was placed in their home in July of 2001.

Kevin and Robert were told that Stephen also had several problems, but since he has been in their home and receiving treatment for his diagnosis of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), he has been very happy and continues to thrive. His adoption was finalized on March 12, 2002.

Since both Stephen and Stephanie are seven-years old, they have a relationship that is comparable to siblings who are twins. Kevin says that they are very bonded and have a genuine love for each other. And Kevin and Robert are extremely happy with being parents and even hope to add another child to their family through adoption.

Kevin and Robert together have all the ingredients to make a very successful family. They have a committed relationship that has stood the test of time, they are nurturing, patient and understanding, and most importantly they love their children—and all the challenges of parenthood!



The Hallmark Channel aired a series on special needs adoption in 2001 in which Kevin, Robert, Stephen and Stephanie were highlighted.