

Unconditional Love — 401 Counterculture Talks to Gay Parents To Be

Interview With Tyffaney and Andrea Fonseca

One of the most popular attacks on the legitimacy of gay marriage is the attack on a gay couple's right to raise a family no different from the traditional (and clergy-approved) nuclear family unit that has long been a hallmark of red blooded Americana, despite its ever dwindling members. It's a hazy memory of nostalgia-poisoned, rose-colored lenses about who and what should constitute the American family. Zealots clamor on with archaic statistics, shouted by their fathers and grandfathers before, a litany of fear mongering and misinformation. "We must not allow it!" they shout from the hills. "It will be the destruction of us all."

In 2014, America is a vast and diverse landscape, where every morning parents of every size, shape, color, gender identity and sexual orientation imaginable awake and love their children unconditionally. They care for them, nurture them and educate them on their passage through the human experience. At no point does who they are change the way they love and protect these children. Despite massive advancement in gay rights and legal recognition of marriages and family building within a few short years in America — a triumphant hope for greatness to come — obstacles still abound for gay couples who wish to raise children.

I sat down with Tyffaney and Andrea Fonseca, a married couple in southern New England, who recently found out that Andrea is expecting their first child. We sat in the living room of their pretty suburban house on a quiet street over wine and pizza and talked about the hopes, dreams and fears they have about being a gay couple raising a child.

Adam J Schirling: How long have you been married?

Tyffaney Fonseca: Seven years this July. We've been together 12 years.

AJS: I suppose the first question is the most obvious. When two married women want to have a baby, how do you decide who will carry?

TF: We went through a donor program in California, which wasn't our first idea of getting pregnant. I have a very good friend who propositioned me, who didn't want any strings attached. He had two kids of his own already, but he just wanted to give us the gift of life. He knew we might need it. So we wanted to make sure legally that everything was on paper. He signed over his parental rights and we went through a lawyer who was also lesbian and married to her wife. They each had children, so she was knowledgeable. But it just didn't go. I had two miscarriages and some medical issues came up and I couldn't carry. So we took a step back and thought about it and then the decision was to go through the donor program in California.

Andrea Fonseca: We tried to get her pregnant for about 8 months. We went to a gynecologist who told

us what was going wrong.

TF: It just wasn't going to be medically possible.

AF: So that's when we decided I would carry. Originally the plan was that she would have a child and then somewhere down the road I would. But when she wasn't getting pregnant, I said I think you should have the sperm analyzed and it turned out that he was the issue.

TF: And I was, too. There were two issues.

AJS: That must have been heartbreaking after all that.

TF: I went through all the emotions — happy, sad, jealous. I don't think you can plan for getting so close to being a mother and having that go away.

AF: We aren't religious people, we are very spiritual people, and when we looked at the bigger picture, it must not have been the right time. Then we decided to go with the bank. It was overwhelming and scary.

AJS: It was like looking through a catalog?

TF: It was a menu. Everything you wanted to choose from — eye color, skin color, hair color, educational background.

AJS: Before you decided to go with a donor program, were you attempting to conceive at home rather than a doctor's office?

AF: I'm a nurse and I would bring home a specimen cup from work, he would put it in the cup, and at home we would put it in ourselves with a syringe. We wanted to conceive at home, that was important to us.

AJS: There are many heterosexual couples going through the exact same thing, facing obstacles they may not have expected. Do you think because of your status as a gay couple that you had extra challenges or do you think you had similar experiences as those couples on a personal level?

AF: Our friends and family have been so giving of themselves, helping us clear our minds of any stresses. I guess I haven't experienced anything that would be different than any other married couple.

TF: I always thought that our advantage is that we are both women. The fact that if one of us can't carry the other one can. You know? Even though that wasn't our original plan.

AF: Exactly. One woman-one man doesn't have as good of odds as we do!

TF: It was definitely stressful making sure we chose the right sperm, though.

AJS: At the beginning, did one of you want to carry more than the other?

AF: The original plan was that she would carry first because she was older, and a few years later I would have the second with the same donor. We would each carry one with the same donor and then be done.

TF: The new plan is that we will harvest my egg and she will carry surrogate. We bought four files of donor sperm and we have two on bank, so the baby will have the same genetics and hopefully both of our genes.

AJS: You said you have very supportive friends and family. Was there every any negative feedback?

TF: No. We have been very fortunate. Everyone has been in our corner, and we have been very thankful that they are interested in our story. It's not the norm and it's something they're learning. They are used to the typical heterosexual couples — mom, dad, three kids and a dog — and here we are, two hard-working, educated moms to be, who are halfway there, who have achieved so much in society as a gay couple and are still reaching. Everything we wanted has happened. That's our story. Everything we've wanted to achieve, we've went for it and they've rooted for us.

AJS: Do you think you face, as two women, different challenges than a gay male couple with the same goal?

TF: Absolutely

AF: Unfortunately, yes.

TF: Even now, lesbians seem as if it's the 'in thing,' you know? It's the cool thing. It's like, queue Katy Perry "I Kissed a Girl," but when you have two men, there's still a reaction like, "Ugh. How dare they?" Switch it to the lesbians and people react like, "Okay, I could watch this all day."

AJS: So would say you receive much more positive feedback as two women having a child than two men may?

TF: Absolutely. When we recently told a couple of our gay friends, they were startled. They couldn't even wrap their minds around that. It was if they thought "your lives are ruined." Really any of the negative feedback we've had has been from gay men, some of them our friends.

AJS: How come? Do you think it's because they've experienced a backlash?

TF: Yes.

AJS: Tell me more about picking out the donor and your apprehensions. You mentioned it was like a catalog?

AF: Yes, it was overwhelming. There were hundreds, and you could pay to see a picture.

AJS: So it's like you get the stats, but you have to pay extra for the pictures?

AF: Exactly! You had the free access that gives you all the info you need and you look through it and it's like, how do you begin to narrow this down? So we started thinking like what ethnicity, we wanted to be represented. We finally found someone. One day I came across this one catalog, he was half Irish-Italian, half African-American. It was close to representing our backgrounds, and we started reading his stats and some them even gave you celebrity look-a-likes! His medical background was good and they even write essays, so we read his essay and his words were perfect. He sounded like the perfect person, and we had probably read through like 20 or 30 essays for the hundreds that were on there, and this one just really stood out. Now, she didn't like not being able to see...

TF: I'm a visual person, I wanted to know.

AF: That was big for her, so I said we would narrow it down to a couple and then we would buy the photos to look at.

TF: One night I read over his profile and his description of himself. He just seemed well mannered, well spoken, not afraid of himself, and he started talking about his mother. The way he talked about his mother, he said that when she visits, they hang out and have a couple of beers and spend time talking. Now my grandmother was very important to me, I was raised by my grandmother. She was a drinker, she liked to kick back, sit around the table, and drink beer. Right then and there I knew I needed to see this man's pictures.

AF: As soon as we saw them, we didn't even look at anyone else's. He was the one.

AJS: Just to backtrack a bit, did you ever consider adopting?

AF: We had. We knew we wanted to try for natural, but we always said that if it didn't work out we would adopt.

TF: We were just talking about this the other night. When we first met, I told her that if I ever adopted, I would adopt a child with HIV, because they are the ones that most people don't want. I would like to experience having our own children but we are totally open to adoption.

AJS: When your child is growing up, if they expressed an interest in organized religion, how might you approach that? Seeing as most religions aren't accepting of your family dynamic?

AF: She wants to baptize the child, but if we do, we want to find a church that we can be a part of, not just baptize and never go to church again. So we are still deciding what to do with that.

AJS: With bullying usually referred to as an epidemic in our country, are you apprehensive about having young children as gay women?

TF: We know bullying is a big big issue. I try not to let it worry me, but I know there is always going to be that one kid. I hope that if they do come in contact with that, that since we are open and honest with them, we will give them the tools to deal with it ... but that's kids. I know kids who are bullied just for being a little overweight.

AF: And we've learned how to respond. It probably doesn't bother me as much as it would her, but that's just our difference in personalities. I'm more of the "I don't care what anyone thinks and I'll tell them where to go and how to get there." Even at work when people see I'm pregnant, they'll ask about the dad. And I'll say, "Well, Dad is a mom and she works in insurance." Nine times out of 10 I get positive feedback.

AJS: With this being your first child but not being the mother who's carrying, Tyffaney, do you feel like you will have less of a motherly instinct? Are you naturally gravitating toward a fatherly role? Or is that just my misjudgment of the situation as a heterosexual male?

TF: No, that's a great question. Honestly I think that I play both sides of that fence. I'm maternal because I'm a woman, I gravitate toward the baby. I want to nurture and take care. But not being the carrying mother, I also feel like I am paternal. I tell Andrea, "Don't do that, let me get that for you."

AJS: So you've adopted more of that role since she's become pregnant?

TF: Yes, it's come naturally.

AF: So it's actually forced me into the more feminine role and now since I can't do the heavy lifting or whatever, she has taken over and it has been interesting.

AJS: Do you feel like that more paternal instinct will carry on after the baby is born?

TF: I don't know, that's tricky. I really can't speak for the future.

AF: I think she will be more maternal after. I will probably be the hard ass. In some respects, she'll be more maternal but other times she will be much more paternal. It will be an interesting blend. We don't really know what to expect. We are the first of our lesbian friends to do it this way.

AJS: Everything feels like it's been fluid for you two. What do you have to say to the naysayers, or the people out there who have all these disapproving ideas and presumptions? "Your child will absolutely grow up gay." "Your child will grow up with perversions."

TF: I say you sound like an uneducated idiot. I mean you've seen kids grow up in battered homes and alcoholic homes and kids can't grow up in gay homes? If a child grows up to be gay, they were born that way. We all were.

AF: I always say I grew up with straight parents and I'm gay. I didn't grow up being exposed to any gay people, my parents aren't homophobic, I just didn't know anyone.

TF: As far as I know, I'm the only gay person in my family. I grew up raised by my traditional grandmother in the Catholic church. I go against all those odds.

AJS: What are the biggest apprehensions you have about parenthood?

TF: I'm definitely apprehensive about not carrying the baby. I'm just getting older and I know there is a plan in place for us but, where does that leave me as a woman who wants to be a biological mom? I get apprehensive that my genes haven't been passed down. At times I don't verbalize that because I don't want to be negative and selfish and interfere with this positive environment we have now. I've been reading books about other non-biological moms and what they went through, and they make it easier. It's ok to talk about it and get it off your chest. You have to communicate it.

AJS: Do you feel like if you do get to go with your plan b and she carries your biological child for you, that will help appease those feelings?

TF: Yes. Genetically seeing a baby carrying on my genes, but as a wife, a woman, a mother, it doesn't matter. I was the one who inseminated her, that is my baby, our baby. I think about that and that is what pulls me out of those feelings.

AJS: How do you feel about that Andrea?

AF: After I was pregnant, I was trying to get myself into a place where I knew my role, preparing myself, we didn't know what to expect. I wanted to know my role and how was I going to feel about that. Because the roles were reversed so quickly and now she was the one preparing for what I thought I was

going to be doing. When we talk about it, I tell her, as a women naturally we want to carry, it's what we were born to do, but it's not like we are out there in the wilderness. What we really want, when it comes down to it, is to be parents. So maybe you aren't carrying for 9 months, but we will be parents. Whether I have it, you have it, we adopt, at the end of the day we are still parents and that's what we wanted. So that's where I come from when she expresses her feelings about that. We don't just want to walk around and be pregnant forever, we want to be parents.

AJS: Do you have any ideas of the kind of role model you want to set to your children not only as gay women but as mothers? Growing up, you look to your mother for certain lessons. What do you expect to instill?

TF: I just want to be the mom I never had. I was raised by my grandmother; my mother was murdered when she was 24 and left behind three babies. I never had that one-on-one motherly relationship. I just want to be that woman in my child's life that I didn't have. I want to be the mom that my grandmother wished her daughter could have been to us. Be a straight shooter, say what's on your mind, know that you're not alone. From a paternal standpoint, I want to be the father I never had. Whatever my child needs me to be, I want to be that person and that driving force.

AJS: That was a wonderful way of putting it.

AF: I hope to instill what I learned from both of my parents. I realize that we learn male and female things from parents, but know that's just society's roles and you don't need to be a male to teach certain lessons. I want to teach hard work and education. I want to teach what's gotten us so far. I think if we can teach that to our kids, they will turn out just fine.

AJS: What do you feel are the biggest misconceptions from people who may not know any gay couples?

AF: I would love to know, what is it that we do different? Other than the way we do it, there is nothing about our lives that is any different. We are two women, but everything else we do in our day-to-day lives is the same. We get up, go to work, walk the dog, pay taxes, spend time with our families. I just honestly don't know what they see. They just don't understand that we are two women in love.

AJS: Does it ever bother you to turn on the TV to see the debate over gay marriages and gay families? Other people debating your fate and your future?

TF: Yes! It angers me. Who are you to condemn me? You point the finger and you should have four more pointing back at you. The same people coming at us, down the road you find out they do or have done horrible things.

AF: It goes to show you that your sexuality has nothing to do with the mistakes you make.

AJS: Is there one childhood moment that you are personally looking forward to as a mother?

AF: I think, for me, we have decided that I will be "mommy" and she will be "momma," but I know when the baby is old enough they will decide what to call us. I can't wait to hear what names they choose to give us.

TF: I'm looking forward to teaching my child how to ride a bike. I taught myself, I gave myself bumps and bruises. I want to be that mom to take the training wheels of the bike. But hearing who I am to

them, "Ma, Mama," however they perceive me.

AF (To TF): I like hearing that. I never knew that's one of the things you were looking forward to, teaching them to ride bikes. It's nice.

AJS: I always end my interviews with the same question. Even in the supportive environment you have, you still face adversities. What would you want the average person to know about you as first time mothers who just happen to be gay?

TF: I just want other gay couples to know that it's achievable. If you really want it that bad you can make it happen. And don't be afraid of change. If you have questions, ask them. You aren't a mental case, we all have the same fears. I want people to know that it's freeing to look outside yourself and ask for help. To know that I got this far and you can, too. Don't fall under the norm of a lesbian or a gay man if that's not what you want. Don't fall under the norm of a typical straight person. As long as you have faith and work hard, you can be in this happy place.

AF: I want people to know that I have all the same fears as any new mom. I look forward to the same milestones. I'm just as hard working. And regardless of what people think is different between our lives, I'm really going to give it my all to be the best parent and provider for this baby and any other babies we are blessed with.