



**COVER STORY**

**Ryan Nickulas & Family**

*The A-List: New York star talks about parenting*



SCAN4MORE

- The Gajilan Fowler family of New Jersey on religion, Oprah and being a biracial family
- Why the Rabney Lichtman family moved from the Upper West Side to South Orange, NJ

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## Gay Parent

LGBT MAGAZINE  
New York 2018-2019 issue #16

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### COVER STORY

**Ryan Nickulas, Beauty Expert and Reality TV Star** - Nearly twenty years ago Ryan Nickulas met finance executive Desmond Smith when Ryan was a waiter. Through the years Ryan's career blossomed as a beauty expert then reality TV star on *The A-List: New York*. Now the pair are happy as parents to twins. - page 20

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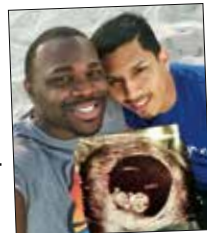
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## EMAIL & SOCIAL MEDIA



**M**e and my wife and our babygirl.  
**Daniella Bunton**



**H**opefully we'll be sharing good news with you all pretty soon!  
**Neil Glenn Alarcon**



**Family photo share from Aricia Mitchell**

**S**uch a beautiful magazine. You all are exactly what we needed. Keep up the great work. Nothing but love all the way from Brooklyn, New York....Coney Island.  
**Helen Marcano**

We love to hear from you. Send us your photos and comments by email at [gayparentmag@gmail.com](mailto:gayparentmag@gmail.com) or through facebook/[gay.parent.magazine.com](http://gay.parent.magazine.com). ▼



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## SUPPORT GROUPS

### Connecticut

• **Gay Fathers of Western Connecticut.** We meet monthly in members homes for a simple meal and mutual support. For more information email [gfwc2@optonline.net](mailto:gfwc2@optonline.net) or 914-552-2380.

### New Jersey

• **Rainbow Families of New Jersey,** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/RainbowFamiliesNJ/>

### New York

• **Center Families,** Center Families is the families program of the LGBT Community Center, 208 West 13th St., [www.gaycenter.org/family-youth/family](http://www.gaycenter.org/family-youth/family). Phone 212-620-7310 or email [centerfamilies@gaycenter.org](mailto:centerfamilies@gaycenter.org). Center Families provides long and short term counseling for LGBT couples, support and education for intended parents, pro-bono legal and financial clinics, and monthly Play Days for LGBT parents with young children.

• **Family Circle, Inc.** an organization founded by Luz Rivera and Flora Esther Chalmers in the borough of the Bronx on December 2004. Incorporated on March 2005 to service the children of LGBT parents in our community. For more information contact Luz or Esther at 347-328-7470. Email: [LRivera267@aol.com](mailto:LRivera267@aol.com).

• **Gay and Bi Fathers' Forum of New York,** The Center, 208 West 13th Street, NYC, [www.GayBiDads.org](http://www.GayBiDads.org), [info@GayBiDads.org](mailto:info@GayBiDads.org).

• **Lesbian and Gay Family Building Project/Pride and Joy Families,** Claudia Stallman, Project Director, Binghamton, NY, [prideandjoyfamilies@gmail.com](mailto:prideandjoyfamilies@gmail.com), website: [www.binghamton.edu/prideandjoyfamilies](http://www.binghamton.edu/prideandjoyfamilies). The Lesbian and Gay Family Building Project is dedicated to helping LGBTQ people in Upstate New York achieve their goals of building and sustaining healthy families. The Project offers provider trainings, educational programs, information and referral services, the Directory of Family Building Services for LGBT People, and support for LGBTQ families and prospective parents. Our network of Pride and Joy Families provides social and educational opportunities and a sense of community to LGBTQ adults and their children. The Lesbian and Gay Family Building Project was started in 2000 and is funded by a grant from the New York State Health Department.

• **Family Pride,** visit [www.capitalpridecenter.org/family-pride/](http://www.capitalpridecenter.org/family-pride/).

• **Loft Families.** A social support group for LGBT headed families in Westchester and Fairfield Counties and the Tri-State area. To find out about our events please email [loftkidsny@yahoo.com](mailto:loftkidsny@yahoo.com).

• **The Center Family Project** is an initiative of LIGALY and The Long Island LGBT Community Center. Services provided include: parenthood, family & relationship support, Long Island LGBT Foster Care Project, and family resources. The Center has partnered with the organization, You Gotta Believe, to place

teenagers in permanent adoptive homes and provides Adoptive Parent Preparation Classes every Monday at The Center at Bay Shore. For more information visit <http://lgbtnetwork.org/family>.

• **Long Island Adoption Support Group** Suffolk County, NY. Email Chemene for info at [suffolkaadopt@gmail.com](mailto:suffolkaadopt@gmail.com). Free peer-led support group for members at any stage of the adoption and foster care process. We offer a friendly and confidential environment for all to share their journey with others who understand. Visit our website, [www.LIadoption-support.com](http://www.LIadoption-support.com).

• **Park Slope Queer Parents' Group** (but not limited to Park Slope!), email: [psqpg-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:psqpg-subscribe@yahoogroups.com), visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/psqpg>.



Play Day at Center Families

• **TransParent Group** 1st and 3rd Wednesdays, 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Q Center @ ACR, 617 W. Genesee St., Syracuse, NY. For more information, call 315-701-2431 or email [QCenterCNY@ACRHealth.org](mailto:QCenterCNY@ACRHealth.org).

• **TransParent Group** 1st and 3rd Tuesdays, 6:00-8:00 p.m. at Q Center @ ACR Mohawk Valley. For more information email [QCenterMV@ACRHealth.org](mailto:QCenterMV@ACRHealth.org).

• **TransParent Group** 2nd Monday (typically) of each month, 5:00-6:30 p.m. March and April are on different Mondays based on availability at Q Center @ ACR Northern New York. For more information email [QCenterNNY@ACRHealth.org](mailto:QCenterNNY@ACRHealth.org).

**COLAGE - People with a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer Parent.** A national organization operated by and supporting children of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender parents. Provides support, social events, education, and advocacy. COLAGE, 3815 S. Othello St., Ste. 100, #310, Seattle, WA 98118, 828-782-1938, email: [colage@colage.org](mailto:colage@colage.org), visit [www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org). The following are local COLAGE chapters:

• **New York Adult COLAGE community,** contact [kaley@colage.org](mailto:kaley@colage.org)  
• **Syracuse, NY, The Q Center,** contact [tsliker@aidscommunityresources.com](mailto:tsliker@aidscommunityresources.com).

## EVENTS

**May 5, 2018 - Queer/Trans Family Building Group.** All Things Lactation: Non-Traditional Infant Feeding Relationships (Induced lactation, co-nursing, etc.). 639 Vanderbilt Ave., Brooklyn, \$20 suggested donation, questions & RSVP to: [queertransfamily@gmail.com](mailto:queertransfamily@gmail.com). or visit



Family in the New York City Pride March

Photo by Angeline Acain/Gay Parent magazine

<https://www.facebook.com/queertransfamily>.

**May 5, 2018 - 6th Annual LGBT Family Building Expo,** 10:30 AM - 5 PM. Whether you are planning on becoming a parent to a teenager or an infant, get resources you need. This full day of workshops, panels and exhibitors will provide important information on adoption, surrogacy, foster care and alternative insemination. One-on-one consultations are also available with medical and legal professionals. The Center, 208 W. 13th St., NYC. Register for free and view details at <https://gaycenter.org/lgbtqfamilyexpo>.

**May 6, 2018 - 7th International Family Equality Day.** LGBTQ family organizations from around the world will join forces to increase the international visibility of LGBTQ families. Visit <http://internationalfamilyequality-day.org/> for events. *Gay Parent Magazine* will be mailing out free copies of our latest issue that day, follow us on Facebook, [www.facebook.com/gay.parent.magazine](https://www.facebook.com/gay.parent.magazine), for details.

**May 11 - 19, 2018 - Staten Island PrideFest** culminating in a festival on May 20th on the grounds of Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Gardens. More than a week of events. Visit [www.pridecentersi.org/pridefest-events](http://www.pridecentersi.org/pridefest-events).

**June 1 - 24, 2018 - 9th Annual Harlem Pride Celebration Day** at West Harlem on 12th Avenue (between 125th and 133rd Streets) on June 23, 2018. Harlem Pride events will take place throughout the month of June. For their full schedule of events visit [www.harlempride.org](http://www.harlempride.org).

**June 2, 2018 - 2nd Annual Oneonta Pridefest 2018,** Neahwa Park, Oneonta. Rally in Neahwa Park, followed by a march up Main St. capping off the day is a family -friendly festival back at Neahwa Park. Organized by the Ostego Pride Alliance. For more information visit <https://www.otsegopridentalliance.org/pridefest/>.

**June 2, 2018 - Queer/Trans Family Building Group.** Raising Our Children: Real Life Observations from Queer Parents. 639 Vanderbilt Ave., Brooklyn, \$20 suggested donation, questions & RSVP to: [queertransfamily@gmail.com](mailto:queertransfamily@gmail.com). or visit <https://www.facebook.com/>

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**Rye Country Day School**

[www.RyeCountryDay.org](http://www.RyeCountryDay.org)

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## Upstate New York Support Group: Pride and Joy Families

By Claudia Stallman

**Pride** and Joy Families, located in Binghamton, New York and founded in 2000, offers provider trainings, educational programs, information and referral services, a Directory of LGBTQ-Inclusive Services, and social support for LGBTQ adults and families. We also work with providers to help ensure that they are offering culturally responsive care. We define our mission as helping LGBTQ individuals build and sustain healthy families. Our website and Facebook presence are resources for the



**Staff and volunteers hold down the registration table at Pride and Joy's 2017 Family Fun Day—note copies of GPM available!**

Events continued from page 9  
queertransfamily.

**June 3, 2018** - Hudson Valley LGBTQ Pride 2018 in New Paltz. Include a Pride Picnic. Visit <http://lgbtqcenter.org/pride> for details.

**June 3, 2018** - Queens Pride Parade and Festival. The parade kicks off at 12:00 in Jackson Heights. For information visit [www.queenspride.org](http://www.queenspride.org).

**June 3, 2018** - Jersey Pride, Inc.'s 27th annual Pride Celebration, Asbury Park, NJ, 12:00 - 7:00 PM. Bring your kids to their Family Zone. Visit [www.jerseypride.org](http://www.jerseypride.org) for more information.

**June 8 - 10, 2018** - Long Island Pride, Pride on the Beach, Long Beach. 28th year. For information visit <https://prideonthebeach.org/>.

**June 9, 2018** - Family Pride Social, Stepping Stones Museum for Children, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM. This social features a free breakfast, social, and visit to Stepping Stones Museum for Children. Our social also takes place right before Pride in the Park! Meet families just like yours and allies for a fun morning before Pride in the Park. For details visit [http://www.ctpridecenter.org/family\\_pride\\_social](http://www.ctpridecenter.org/family_pride_social).

**June 9, 2018** - 2018 Pride in the Park, Fairfield County, Connecticut, presented by Triangle Community Center. Free admission for all ages. Activities include a special reading circle with the Darien Library, hula hooping, face painting, and other fun activities for you and your kids!. For information visit [http://www.ctpridecenter.org/pride\\_2018](http://www.ctpridecenter.org/pride_2018).

**June 9, 2018** - Pride Day in Brooklyn. MutiCultural Festival, 11:00 AM - 5:00 PM, and Twilight Parade, 7:30 PM. For more information about visit [www.brooklynpride.org](http://www.brooklynpride.org).

**June 10, 2018** - Capital Pride Parade and Festival. For details visit <https://www.capitalpride2018.com/>.

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**Top left photo: Fun, creative childcare for those 5 years and under is always available at Pride and Joy Weekend Conferences and Family Fun Days, thanks to "Miss Lynne" Theophanis.**  
**Bottom left photo: Camp Highlight programs for children 6+ years at Pride and Joy's 2017 Family Fun Day.**



community. Pride and Joy is a longtime member of the NYS LGBT Health and Human Services Network.

### Signature events:

Family Fun Days and Weekend Conferences for LGBTQ individuals and their families - Over the years these gatherings have been held in cities throughout Upstate NY including Binghamton, Ithaca, Utica, Rochester and Oneonta. These are jam-packed days of learning, sharing and empowerment for diverse LGBTQ families and allies providing resources, information, and supportive conversations for adults. Childcare is available for 3-5 year olds. Fun, creative programming for children and teens is provided by our partner Camp Highlight. Recent workshops include: coming out later in life, re-framing parenting, self-care practices, advocacy for yourself and your loved ones, raising gender creative children, and how to talk to children about sex.

Transgender/ Gender Non - Conforming Experience Across the Lifespan Provider Trainings - Our upcoming training, with all new content this year, will take place May 10 - 11, 2018 in Binghamton: A day and a half training on T/GNC lives for health and human services providers including but not limited to medical doctors, social workers, counselors, nurses, pharma-

continued on page 12

## The Town School

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### *Pride and Joy Families continued from page 11*

cists, NGOs, students, and activists. Programs include: Form clinic (one-to-one consultation to make institutional forms more LGBTQ affirmative), transgender, non-binary, gender creative healthcare, terms and language, medical practices for T/GNC health, navigating schools, insights on substance use, therapeutic approaches to gender expansive children, trauma and affective care, solidarity, and language. Practicum session included.

### **Recent accomplishments:**

In January 2018 Pride and Joy became a host site for a student intern from the Binghamton University School of Social Work, which means that we now have an additional colleague on board to help respond to information continued bottom of page 14

*Events continued from page 10*

**June 16, 2018** - The Central New York Pride Parade & Festival, Syracuse, NY. They strive to make this a family friendly event. For event details visit [http://www.cnypride.org/festival\\_info.aspx](http://www.cnypride.org/festival_info.aspx).

**June 19, 2018** - Family Movie Night part of the NYC Pride week long events. Hudson River Park's Pier 45, cross the highway at Christopher Street and Westside Highway. Doors open 6:30 PM, movie starts at dusk. While lounging under the stars watch a special screening of Disney's *Beauty and Beast*. Free seating, blankets, and tasty treats offered. Reserved seating available. Camp Highlight will host outdoor games prior to the movie. The rally is on June 22nd and the march and PrideFest is June 24th. Visit [www.nycpride.org/events](http://www.nycpride.org/events) for their complete list of events.

**July 28 - Aug. 4, 2018** - 23rd Annual Family Week 2017, Provincetown, MA. Annual gathering of hundreds of LGBTQ families from all over the country, sponsored by Family Equality Council ([www.familyequality.org](http://www.familyequality.org)) and COLAGE ([www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org)). Visit <https://www.ptownfamilyweek.com/>.

**July 28, 2018** - Queer/Trans Family Building Group. Potluck Gathering, Greenpoint, \$20 suggested dona-

tion, questions & RSVP to: [queertransfamily@gmail.com](mailto:queertransfamily@gmail.com). or visit <https://www.facebook.com/queertransfamily>.

**Aug. 18, 2018** - Queer/Trans Family Building Group. How to Get Pregnant: Advanced. 639 Vanderbilt Ave., Brooklyn, \$20 suggested donation, questions & RSVP to: [queertransfamily@gmail.com](mailto:queertransfamily@gmail.com). or visit <https://www.facebook.com/queertransfamily>.

**Aug. 25, 2018** - 18th Annual Jersey City Pride Festival, Newark Avenue between Grove Street and Jersey Avenue in the heart of historic downtown Jersey City. Festival agenda includes great tasting food, fantastic entertainers, fun for families, youth, young adults, elders and more. For more information visit [www.jerseycitypride.com](http://www.jerseycitypride.com) or <http://hudsonpride.org>.

**Aug. 31 - Sept. 3, 2018** - 3rd annual Labor Day LGBTQ Family Camp, Berkshire Hills, NY. LGBTQ parents with children, families with gender fluid children and their allies are all welcome to come and enjoy our beautiful 640 acre site. To register and for more information visit [www.bhecamp.org/labor-day-lgbtq-family-camp](http://www.bhecamp.org/labor-day-lgbtq-family-camp).

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**Top photo: Presenters Michelle Case, Michael Hill and Pat O'Brien at the adoption workshop at Pride and Joy's 2017 Family Fun Day. Bottom photo: At Pride and Joy's 2017 Family Fun Day adults and children enjoy lunch and a slide show on LGBT Family Travel Destinations, courtesy of Ross Levi of I LOVE NY/LGBT.**

## Maplewood, New Jersey: An Oasis for LGBTQ Headed Households?

By Beverly Prince-Sayward



**H**ave you ever imagined a LGBTQ friendly community where there are multiple families in the neighborhood with gay parents? How about your child going to school and not being the only one with two moms or two dads? Maplewood, New Jersey has been rumored to be just such a place. So how true are the rumors? *Gay Parent Magazine* had the opportunity to talk to realtors Randy Rabney and Fran Lichtman, who are also a married, lesbian couple raising a son in New Jersey, about their experience there.

**Gay Parent Magazine (GPM): Tell us about the origin of your family? How did you and Fran meet? How long have you been married? How did you decide to have a child?**

**Randy Rabney (Randy):** "Fran and I met in Fire Island Pines 28 years ago. We had separate continued on page 14

**Fran Lichtman (left) and Randy Rabney with their son Alexander.**



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*Rabney Lichtman family  
continued from page 13*

rooms in a shared group house, and by the next summer, we shared a room. Along the way we lived together, became domestic partners, had a civil union, and were eventually married. We actually married in Provincetown, Massachusetts one year during Family Week. This was before the Windsor decision when New Jersey, where we lived at that time, still only offered/recognized civil unions. We married anyway so that our intent would always be clear, even if our home state didn't recognize it. We decided to have a child after we were together 10 years; we were not even domestic partners at that point, so we saw a lawyer and created several legal documents to show our intent to be committed to each other and to be a family. He was born shortly after second parent/ same sex adoption became legal in New York, where we then lived in Manhattan, so we took care of that pretty quickly. That way he was legally connected to both



*Fran Lichtman (left) and Randy Rabney.*

of us, even if we were still legal strangers."

**GPM: Why did you decide to move from Manhattan to Maplewood, New Jersey? It is rumored that there are many LGBTQ parents in Maplewood; have you found this to be true?**

**Randy:** "We moved from the Upper Westside of Manhattan when our son Alexander was 2 1/2. He was in an early part-time preschool program there and we did not feel like we wanted to negotiate the next preschool application process and the later school years. Two-year-old kids were having interviews with psychologists, parents were super stressed about getting their child into

the 'right' school and Manhattan preschool tuition was incredibly expensive. Fran was getting ready to leave her job in the music business and it was a good time for us to make a change. We began to look at communities that could possibly work for us. We had read about Maplewood and it sounded like it could be a fit. We wanted a place where our son would just be another kid and not the Jewish boy with two mothers. As native New Yorkers, we honestly drove there thinking we would rule it out and instead we fell in love with the place. Within minutes, we knew he would grow-up in this community. When we first bought our home, I would pick up gay dads in the playground and local restaurants to establish community. I would literally say, 'Do you guys live here with those babies?' If they said yes, I would say, 'We are moving here soon with our son, could we please have your number?' People were welcoming and really nice, and it made our move easy."

**GPM: Wow! Maplewood does sounds fantastic! Why then did you move to South Orange, where you now live? How has that experience been?**

**Randy:** "Maplewood and South Orange share a school district and so we are considered one community. When Alexander entered preschool at a Synagogue in South Orange, he was one of three kids with two moms and later, in public school, he almost always had at least one other child in his class with two moms or two dads; it has never been an issue here. After ten years of living in our Maplewood home, we decided that we wanted to get a smaller place. We sell real estate for a living and so it's a surprise that it didn't happen sooner. We weren't really looking when we realized that the house we live in now was actually perfect for us. It needed work and was being overlooked. Fran saw it first and when I later walked through, it reminded me of our New York apartment, and I said to Fran, 'I can totally see us living here, let's do it.' The house could have been in Maplewood or South Orange, that didn't matter to us."

**GPM: How do you think raising Alexander in a LGBTQ friendly community like Maplewood/ South Orange has helped?**

**Randy:** "We have been lucky to be a

LGBTQ headed family in a community where we are out and accepted. I would say that if it is possible to choose to live in a supportive community, do so. Parenting is not easy and if you have the ability to eliminate additional considerations and potential negative situations, why not do it.

Also, one of the most rewarding things that we have done as a family is our involvement with Family Equality Council (FEC). For those not familiar with the organization, it's the leading national organization that advocates for the rights of LGBTQ headed households. We first learned about the organization when our son was 5 or 6. We were in Provincetown for just a few days of Family Week, which is planned and hosted by FEC. Through the years, we have hosted several local parties in our home to raise money and awareness for FEC. Our son is now old enough that he has spoken at several of the parties. We have made amazing relationships through our work with this organization and have seen the children of our friends in the organization grow up to be fantastic young adults.

Our work with FEC has given us an opportunity to *continued bottom of page 16*

*Pride and Joy Families  
continued from page 12*

and referral requests, do case management when necessary, help fill the demand for cultural responsiveness trainings, and keep our provider directory up to date.

In November 2017 Pride and Joy Families held an LGBTQ Family Carnival in Kingston, New York in collaboration with the Hudson Valley LGBTQ Center and Camp Highlight. We had a terrific turnout (68 people!) of adults and children at this low-stress, super fun event at Old Dutch Church.

We invite folks to learn more about us at [www.prideandjoyfamilies.org](http://www.prideandjoyfamilies.org) and on Facebook at [PrideAndJoyFamilies](https://www.facebook.com/PrideAndJoyFamilies). ▼

Photos courtesy of Claudia Stallman



*Resource Fair participants Mary Dykeman, Jackie Kelly and Lisa Greenmills at Pride and Joy's 2017 Family Fun Day.*



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# The Journey to Leonia

By Deadra Albrecht-Frasch

"It would be rare not to have conflict", said Chris Gajilan when asked about giving any advice to new parents. Gajilan and her wife, Leah Fowler, have been married since 2007, legally since 2013. They have a 5-year-old daughter named Kai, and a 12-year-old "Heinz 57" mutt dog named Lucy as Fowler says. The family recently has settled into life in Leonia, New Jersey but their journey both professionally and personally to get there is quite fascinating.

Gajilan grew up in Queens, New York and her father owned a small Filipino-American newspaper in New Jersey. The expectation in her household was that you helped in the family business, so Gajilan would often help by editing her father's paper. She attended Smith College in Massachusetts obtaining a degree in Sociology and Film Studies. During this time, she began volunteering at a cable network and developed a love for journalism and documentaries. She discovered that she had a love for storytelling. In her senior year of college, she was recruited by a major media outlet and upon graduation started

Rabney Lichtman family  
continued from page 15

make a difference for families who are not lucky enough to live in a place as welcoming as our community and to support national change, while bonding with other families like our own. I highly recommend getting involved with Family Equality Council, if you can."

**GPM: Family Equality Council is definitely a great organization and it is good to hear how it has positively impacted your family by being involved. Being realtors, if people are interested in moving to Maplewood or South Orange, how can they contact you?**



Reverend Leah Fowler (left) and Chris Gajilan holding their daughter Kai

working for them in Atlanta, Georgia.

It's important to mention that Gajilan was raised Catholic and attended a progressive catholic high school in Manhattan. She often found herself thinking about religion and the potential that it had but was somewhat cynical about it. In college, she

**Randy:** "Fran and I can be reached through our office The Lichtman-Rabney Group, Keller Williams® Mid-Town Direct Realty. Our website is NJisHome.com; my e-mail is Randy@NJisHome.com; and our office number is 973-762-5400. We would love to help families find a new home in our friendly community."

**GPM: Thank you so much for sharing with Gay Parent Magazine about your family and your community in New Jersey. If anyone is interested in finding more about Family Equality Council, their website is [familyequality.org](http://familyequality.org).** ▼

Photos courtesy of Randy Rabney

still struggled with her feelings about organized religion. Later for a class assignment, she ended up following a group that spent time at a Unitarian Church. There, Gajilan saw that they were coming together as a community to try to make the world a better place. After meeting Fowler who was in Seminary in Georgia, they attended Fowler's church in Atlanta where during the week the church transformed into a homeless shelter, and on Sunday's it transformed into a church, to Gajilan that made sense to her.

Fowler on the other hand grew up in Georgia and attended Agnes Scott College also in Georgia. Growing up, she was always involved in the church. Her parents divorced when Fowler was two, and her mom often struggled financially. The church she grew up in was a very wealthy church, almost a mega church. She described al-

ways feeling that wealth was a sign of god's favor, so she learned to associate wealth with morality and felt a lot of shame that her family was struggling financially. In college, she took a couple religion classes. In one class, they volunteered with the homeless and her thinking changed.

"It really flipped my understanding and I started to see Jesus in the face of the people who struggle the most; the poor and oppressed. I got really inspired on how churches can work for positive social change, and instead of seeing the experience of poverty as something to be ashamed of, it changed in my head, that it's more the existence of poverty is shameful and society has so much wealth. Since then, I've been drawn to communities that are working on positive social change.... in the current church they host a safe home for

victims of domestic violence, and offer ESL [English as a Second Language] classes taught by volunteers."

Fowler attended divinity school at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. During this time, she had the opportunity to study with Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Archbishop Tutu is a well-known South African clergyman who is a human rights and social activist. Fowler said that Tutu was a guest lecturer and taught a wonderful class using a lot of storytelling. She described that the class was about 80 people and that by the second week of class, he had learned everyone's name, which she discovered after sneezing in the class. Fowler said that Archbishop Tutu was also very publicly supportive of gay ordination, which she appreciated.

Fowler ex- continued on page 18



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Gajilan Fowler family  
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plained that in the early 1990's in the Presbyterian Church, marriage was only between a man and a woman and the church wouldn't recognize same-sex marriage. Therefore, Fowler couldn't be ordained and married to a woman without hiding who she was. She ended up leaving the Presbyterian Church and joining the United Church of Christ, which has similar theology and historical roots as the Presbyterian Church but much more progressive.

How did they meet? Gajilan and Fowler met in Georgia at a film festival through mutual friends when they were in their early 20's. Eventually, Leah ended up serving as an associate pastor for a church in Montclair, New Jersey for four years while Gajilan continued her career as a senior producer in the media world. After relocating to Illinois for Gajilan's career, Fowler became an associate pastor in Oak Park, Illinois. Fowler explained that the church in Illinois was dually aligned with both the Presbyterian Church and the United Church of Christ. She went on to explain that in 2013 the rules changed within the Presbyterian-



Rev. Leah Fowler (left) and Chris Gajilan holding their daughter Kai.

an Church and allowed gay and lesbian people to serve as ministers. She petitioned for standing within the Presbyterian Church and has maintained standing to this

day with both the Presbyterian and UCC churches. She currently serves as Pastor at the Presbyterian Church in Leonia.

The reason for relocation to Illinois was

because Gajilan was recruited by Harpo Studios. Gajilan worked as a producer for Oprah Winfrey for eight years up until the show ended. Like most people, I'm sure you're wondering what life was like working for Oprah? She described that as a producer for Oprah, one of her responsibilities was to call people to learn more about their stories. Gajilan explained that she would call people.

"...It was as if they were getting a call from God.... they would be so incredibly amazed and shocked that somebody wanted to listen to their story, and the level of trust that immediately came with saying Oprah's name, it still is jaw dropping to me. I have always been humbled by that and I've always been honored by the fact that I was even part of something or someone who so many people trusted...I don't think I would have been prepared mentally to be a parent had I not worked at Harpo...in all honesty working there and being around Oprah and the things that she stands for...I really recognize the value of what she stood for. I've seen time and time again of her choosing integrity over profiting over something, and working in TV you don't see a lot of that."

Gajilan's website lists several awards that she has received throughout her career including but not limited to, a Peabody award, GLAAD awards, National Emmy Awards, a Gracie Allen Award, and National Headliner awards. Today, Gajilan continues to enjoy storytelling, producing and writing while working for a major media outlet.

As the time came for Gajilan and Fowler to want to start a family, the decision to use a known donor or an unknown donor had to be made. Ultimately they ended up choosing an unknown donor that would be willing to be contacted later in life. Since Fowler would be the one carrying, it was important to them that the donor had a Filipino heritage like Gajilan. Fowler also struggled with fertility issues, so between career changes and the cost of fertility, etc., the decision to not have other children was made and both Moms agree that they feel blessed and happy with Kai.

As an interracial couple with a biracial child, being with Gajilan has opened Fowler's eyes to racial prejudice that she didn't necessarily realize before. With the current political climate, they do admit to being more on edge and want to protect their daughter and their family's place in the community. They feel as though their current community is very supportive and believe their community would rally around them if needed. Gajilan described growing up in Queens and that her experiences exposed her to harsh words and made her somewhat cynical of people throughout life. Gajilan went on to describe Leah as a very kind, good person and had concerns coming back to the New York/New Jersey area that Kai would be exposed to a harder world.

Both Gajilan and Fowler admit to feeling grateful for never having felt uncomfortable as a same-sex family or for never having to think about feeling unsafe. Fowler said that part of who they are as a couple is that they aren't going to apologize for their family or hide. They have made choices to not put themselves in situations where they would need to hide. They also recognize that it is a privilege to feel that way and acknowledge that they are lucky to have had good career opportunities.

Gajilan did describe an experience that happened very recently where she was out with her family and a woman told them to "shush", to which Gajilan responded and then the woman immediately began spewing racial slurs toward her. Gajilan responded without vulgarity and told the woman she should be

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# Ryan Nickulas, Beauty Expert from The A-List: New York Chooses Family Life Over Reality TV

By Gary Hurtubise

It was eighteen years ago, in 2000, when a 20-year-old Ryan Nickulas met his future husband, Desmond Smith, at the Club Café on Columbus Avenue in Boston. It wasn't a date – Ryan was working, and the two men only chatted awkwardly before Desmond passed the young waiter his business card.

Was Ryan left speechless by this handsome man's advances? "I told him his business card was ugly, and that he should take the stage coach off of it," Ryan recalls saying. Desmond, a finance executive, kindly informed him that the stagecoach was part of the Wells Fargo logo, and that removing it was not an option.

It took five years from that somewhat rocky start for things between the two men to blossom into a serious summer romance; this, in turn, became a rather frank fall discussion about the risks and rewards of continuing to stay together. "When we 'rekindled' in late 2005, we were both so different," Ryan explains. "With a little more life



Photo above, Desmond Smith holding Sebastian (left) and Ryan Nickulas holding Cynthia. Photo below publicity photo of Ryan.

experience, we both talked about goals we shared. Not your normal conversation on a third date." After some convincing, Ryan decided to move in with Desmond in New York City. Shortly thereafter, the two men were engaged.

"We were married at the Red Inn in Provincetown, Massachusetts, on October 20th 2007." Ryan describes the venue as being filled with lots of hydrangeas and white pumpkins. "It was a quick ceremony, followed by dinner and dancing."

Once settled in New York City, Ryan set himself up as a beauty expert and entrepreneur, opening his boutique-chic 'Ryan Darius' in downtown Manhattan. He built up his résumé over the years with editorial work in *Allure*, *Elle*, and *Town & Country* magazines, just to name a few. He appeared on a number of television morning and news shows, where he has highlighted his skills and the products he features, including such brands as Oribe and Pantene. Additionally, Ryan has contributed to AOL.com, sharing beauty tips and tricks.

Despite this impressive list of accomplishments, Ryan's greatest claim to fame could be his casting in Logo's *The A-List: New York*: a



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Gajilan Fowler family continued from page 19

ashamed of herself. She did not engage the woman choosing to take the higher ground especially with Kai around. However, that situation made her realize that it's been so long since she's had to be in that position that she can't help but think part of it is due to the current political climate. After sharing her experience on social media many



Chris Gajilan (left) and Rev. Leah Fowler with their daughter Kai (middle).

multi-ethnic friends commented that they too had experienced or seen more racial micro-aggressions in the past few years.

Overall though, both Fowler and Gajilan enjoy living in their small community of around ten thousand people. Their daughter Kai attends public school and is in kindergarten. They tell a story about Kai in which they were in an elevator and Kai turned to a stranger and said, "I have two moms"; what a strong and confident girl they are raising. To her, her family isn't different it just is. They did say there aren't many other LGBT families in the school system but everything has been pleasant and positive and they hope the LGBT community will continue to grow there. Both women absolutely love their town because it's very culturally and economically diverse and very accepting of other cultures. Leo-

nia, New Jersey is only about 40 minutes from New York City, which allows them to have the best of both worlds, urban and suburban. The family also enjoys having extended family in the New York area including Gajilan's sister and her wife and their son who live in Manhattan.

Gajilan and Fowler just bought a house in July and recently renovated, so they are very excited to stay put both residentially and vocationally. Fowler said that they are starting to feel a sense of close connection with the community and the nice thing about a small town is that people already know who they are before they meet. They have also seen some growth in Fowler's church, which is exciting.

Gajilan did have some advice for parents and/or future parents:

"In terms of interacting with your spouse...everyone comes out of situations with their own baggage and experiences. For the first year and a half of Kai's life, Leah and I had a rough time...we had a rough time finding common ground. Kai was a very colicky baby so she cried a lot. I didn't know much about babies, Leah did.... so fast-forward to Kai being a very colicky baby, and I would be like 'um, this doesn't seem right'...and she'd be like 'you don't know anything about babies'...and that kind of went on for the first year and a half. Looking back on it, it was because we came at it from such different places.... my advice would be to recognize everything in life; you're coming at it from two different perspectives. Even though you might think that you're on the same page on so many things, child-rearing brings up all these emotions of like what was done right or wrong with your own, what you judge your partner for, and what their parents' role is and it's so complex and tangled, I feel like it would be rare not to have conflict."

While deciding whether to be interviewed for this article, Gajilan said they ultimately decided it was important so that other same-sex parents wouldn't feel alone, and hopes that their family's story can offer support to readers. At the end of the day, it is evident to see that the Gajilan/Fowler household is a family that anybody would be lucky to be a part of. ▼

Photos courtesy of Chris Gajilan

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Ryan Nickulas continued from page 20

reality TV series, described by Logo as the gay version of Bravo's *Real Housewives*, and which ran for two seasons in 2010 and 2011.

The cast included Ryan, Mike Ruiz (film director, fashion photographer, and regular guest judge on *Rupaul's Drag Race*), Reichen Lehmkuhl (winner of the 4th season of *The Amazing Race*, and known for his relationship to Lance Bass), and a trio of models living in New York



Photo above, Desmond Smith holding Cynthia (left) and Ryan Nickulas holding Sebastian. Photo on facing page of Ryan working as a beauty expert for Vidov salon.

City. It followed the men in their personal and business lives, and featured all the usual drama that is expected in reality shows.

At the time of release, *The A-List: New York* became Logo's second-highest watched show ever, though it also had its share of controversy. A Washington Post review stated that the show "invites Logo's gay and straight audiences to indulge in a spirited form of dissociative gay-bashing." An Entertainment Weekly recap described it as follows: "the show is full of stereotypes. We see all of them (except Ryan) shirtless very

soon after they're introduced; they talk constantly about being fabulous and partying; they're bitchy to each other; (and) at least one seems ready to pounce on another one's boyfriend."

When asked about the negative stereotypes that were portrayed in the show during an interview for the blog Fameology, Ryan replied: "Yes, we are catty, yes, we can be shallow, but that's real life, sugar."

Ryan avoided much of the negative reviews

children quite early on in their relationship, only deciding to pursue it several years into their marriage. When they made the decision, they opted for surrogacy.

For Desmond, it was important to be biologically connected to his children for both personal and legal reasons. For Ryan, however, he was just grateful that he was going to have children, and didn't care about the 'how'. "The fact that I was going to be a father was beyond my wildest dreams!"

The two men chose to work with Dr. Michael Doyle of Connecticut Fertility Associates, choosing an egg donor, and a surrogate to carry their babies. As Ryan mentioned in a June 2017 Gays With Kids article, "it was not all baby showers and candy; there were some definite hurdles."

The first major hurdle the men faced was the health of their surrogate. "After we transferred the babies into our surrogate, she had some issues and went to the ER." Ryan goes on to explain how the first two weeks after transferring the embryos into the surrogate is crucial. An appointment after that initial period is to confirm a positive pregnancy, and number of heartbeats.

"No one can prepare you for the waiting game," Ryan insists. "We got a call around 9:30 pm, one week after the transfer. Our surrogate thought she had miscarried and called us, crying. It's at that moment when you realize how powerless you are in that situation." Ryan considers that to be the worst night of his life, having thought to himself: "I have lost these babies before I could even meet them."

Fast forward to 9 AM the next morning. After visiting their surrogate's local fertility clinic, they learned from the medical staff that the babies had been located, and were safe and sound. "I'm pretty sure my first grey hair appeared that day. The worst night of my life turned into the day I found out I was a father."

It was around that time that Ryan began having second thoughts about staying in New York City. "The funny thing is," he explains, "once it was confirmed that we were having twins, I kind of freaked out – I wanted a *home*. I wanted a yard, and a house, and a car. I felt ready to start that next process as soon as possible!"

Ryan and Desmond managed to find their new home in the Boston area, unpacking and settling in only a month before their twin babies were born. Once everything was in place, Ryan remembers wondering, "So, when are we going to get 'the call'?"

"The call" came early in July of 2013; twins Cynthia and Sebastian were delivered to the happy new fathers. Today – almost five years old



– brother Sebastian and sister Cynthia are a pair of vibrant, happy kids who love school and their friends. They keep the two men busy too. "A four year old's social calendar is stacked these days!" Ryan admits with a chuckle. "Play dates and birthday parties are the favorites. They also love karate and swimming."

The children have a strong bond with each other, and with their fathers. "Sebastian is so caring for others, and is always looking out for his sister; Cynthia is so helpful at home. She often volunteers to clean up and organize."

When an opportunity arose to return to *The A-List: New York* for a third season, Ryan had an important decision to make. In a *Huffington Post* interview with Martin Berusch several years back, Ryan explained how he chose not to return to television, in part because of his children.

"You know, it's one thing for me to sign on to a reality show – and we all know what that means," he explained. "I can always take care of myself in that field, and whether or not I look in the most positive light or not, I can always own it or not, whatever."

"I *can't* make that decision for my children," Ryan continued. "No disrespect for people who put their children on television, but personally for myself, I don't want my children on TV."

When asked about how the couple divide their parenting duties, Ryan is quite frank. "We defiantly *don't* share when it comes to responsibilities. When both parents have careers, you just get it done." The two men do not have a lot of family nearby, so they gratefully depend on their nanny, who is their "main set of extra hands!"

The family enjoys a relaxed routine on the weekends in their DC neighbourhood (where

they recently moved to). "Generally, we chill out... *if* we don't have a birthday party with the kids' classmates, or a visit from Grandma that is." Sundays are special too: "We go to the same diner and have breakfast. After the sugar sets in from the pancakes, we walk it off with a visit to the farmers market."

Now that the kids are getting older, Ryan and Desmond have had to field a few questions regarding their origins. "They have asked a few times if they have a mommy because the other children at school and playdates have a mommy." Ryan admits he had not seen that question coming. "I just said 'you have two daddies that love you very much, and that everyone's family is different. In our family we have two daddies and you guys, and that is our family.'" Seemingly satisfied with that response, the twins moved onto the next page in the coloring book.

Despite the responsibilities of fatherhood, Ryan hasn't let kids change his lifestyle all that much. In the *Huffington Post* interview, he declared, "a lot hasn't changed from my former life. I can still get out to dinner on a Friday night, after the kids go to bed. I still have all my same friends. I don't make it to every party or every celebration like I used to, but my friends understand."

Ryan has also adopted a fitness routine, when he can fit it into his busy schedule as a father and beauty expert. About his workouts, he declares, "I like to break it up! Love a spin class or a quick weight session. I often have a small amount of time so it needs to be fun, efficient and scheduled."

A busy life has not made Ryan forget his roots, though, or his responsibility as a gay ce-

lebrity. "I am so grateful for the youth group organization I belonged to when I was coming out and coming of age. My hometown group was called CIYSYA."

During his time on *The A-List: New York*, Ryan would be sent correspondences from kids around the country. He recounted in his Fameology interview how he received "the most beautiful letters from kids asking for help and advice, every day."

Nowadays, Ryan takes a more active role in reaching out to fans and youth. In New York, Ryan has spoken with the Green Chimneys organization, The Ali Forney Center, NYU and The New School. "I have visited many beauty schools too!" he includes. "Sharing my story of hardship and hard work with kids is very important to me. It's important to let kids know that if they want it – they can have it! Hard work and dedication is the only way, no one will hand it to you!"

Ryan – who now works as a beauty expert for Vickie Vidov, at her salon in the heart of the West Village – shows us that you really can have it all: health, wealth, fame, a husband, and two beautiful children to boot! Keep up with Ryan on Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook @Ryan-Nickulas. ▼

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## MICHAEL S. GOLDSTEIN, ESQ.



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#### **HAGUE APPROVED PERSON**

♥ **Michael S. Goldstein, Esq., LCSW**, is an Attorney admitted in New York and Florida, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and a Hague Approved Person. He has been practicing adoption law for 30+ years, and is the proud adoptive father of three. Michael has helped thousands of adoptive families and birth parents create permanent, loving families through adoption. He is a Founder and Current Fellow of the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys, Governor Emeritus and Legal Advisor of the Adoptive Parents Committee, Member of the Joint Council on International Children's Services, Board Member of the New York State Citizens Coalition for Children, and Co-Founder of Forever Families Through Adoption, Inc.

♥ While focusing on helping domestic families, Michael is one of only three attorneys in the country approved to provide **HAGUE** international incoming and outgoing adoption services.

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Joy S. Goldstein, LCSW, ACSW, the Co-Founder and Executive Director of FFTA, is an adoptive mother of three boys and has been working with her husband, Michael, for approximately 30 years as an Adoption Consultant. She is the recipient of the 2012 Congressional "Angels in Adoption" Award, nominated by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand. FFTA is staffed by caring and experienced social workers, attorneys, adoptive parents, and adoptees who are here to assist you.

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