Teen Fears Family's Rejection

By Justin Green
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My mom and dad decided to separate 12 years ago. A year passed and my dad met a new person with whom he fell in love. They moved in together and this person became like a step-parent to me.

Four years ago, I moved from my mother's home in New York to Texas to live with my dad and his partner during school.

My dad's partner's name is Steve. My dad is gay.

Family life with my dad and Steve is similar to my friends'. We share household chores, argue, play games and go on vacations together.

There is one major difference. Fear. Fear of how my friends and community would react if they knew my father was gay. I grew up hearing — and still hear, at 18 — almost everyone around me insult homosexuals and use derogatory names for homosexuals like "faggot," "queer" and "dyke" as put-downs. So I became scared to bring my friends home or tell anyone about my father. I was scared my friends would reject me if they knew my father was gay.

As I grew older, and my friends became more open-minded, I have told some and not been rejected. But I have some friends who have gay parents who have been ostracized when they have told others, especially when they were younger. This hatred of homosexuals caused me to feel very alone at some points in my life and I am amazed by those people, people who have enough courage to face up to it. Having a gay parent has some pluses to it, too. It has opened my mind to the difference of others and made me more accepting.

Russian Youth Reveals Changes

Lots of my friends at the university are now reading POOM. We have found the articles on environmental problems and animal products especially interesting. These are the problems that worry quite a few people here as well. Unfortunately, there has been practically no information on environment in this country until only recently. That's why we think it's great that you publish such facts and they are available to all, even to kids.

Frankly speaking, I have mixed feelings about what is going on here. On the one hand, I am relieved that the period of isolation, fear, persecutions is over in our history. I can freely talk of what I think and feel which is a great achievement. Were it still the way it used to be only several years ago I wouldn't probably have so many friends abroad and I wouldn't discover POOM either! I seem to have learnt more about the world in the past year than I did during the rest of my life. There are lots of international students at my university, and it's amazing how much one can learn by just talking to people! It's enriching to discuss things with them because we all have such different backgrounds, and a new perspective on different matters is always refreshing.

On the other hand, food shortages, high prices and dire predictions about further worsening of the economic situation make all of us lose heart, I guess. The number of homeless and jobless I see in the streets seems to be growing, and that is also alarming. I don't lose hope though. I have my friends, my favorite books and music. They often serve as a refuge for me if I get depressed at what surrounds me.

But the thing that worries me much more that the economic situation is a change in people. It's amazing how despair and hopelessness affects people: all around me every day I see how they are becoming more and more pessimistic, indifferent and apathetic. Few people now believe in anything because their hopes are ruined. The situation is even worse with our teens. It seems to me that the majority of young people here don't take much trouble to think or learn. Naturally, it's easier to live that way because if one doesn't think, one doesn't have to solve problems, nor does one make any mistakes. Unfortunately, this also means no progress as a personality—besides, they seem to be too lazy to do any kind of work. They just hang around listening to music or breaking shop windows. That's all! There are a great deal of violence and youth crimes. I don't know how I can help them and if I can help them at all. I am also probably very wrong in my evaluation of them because it's difficult to generalize about the whole country, but what I meet with in my everyday life is really appalling.

To end all this I'd like to give you a piece of advice. Never, under any circumstances, lose hope! If times get really rough for you, hope will be the only thing that will help you stick it out. I know about it from my own experience!

Yours,
Maria Tarulina
Moscow, Russia

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