

# “Meet The Parents”

by Craig Washington

When you read the words, “family values” what first comes to your mind? Do you think of pathways and beliefs shared by biological kin or created families bound by love, affection and commitment? I didn't think so. And what would it take to wash off the toxic spin that has given the phrase such a bitter aftertaste. Black lgbt and sgl people were raising children and sustaining families long before we had names for our “queerness”. We must tell our stories. Stories like two Black men who meet, fall in love and lovingly raise their children in small southern towns like Grayson.

Mark Francois and Larry E. Williams are known to their two sons Malik, 9 and Takwon, 8 as Daddy and Dad. They know the significance of sharing their account with other Black gays who are dissuaded from parenting despite the disproportionate numbers of Black children who languish in foster care circuits. Mark and Larry had been together 10 years before Mark expressed his desire for the couple to have a child. They were both living in New York in 1991 when they met through the kind of gay dating service that the Net has rendered obsolete. “I was trying to meet professional executive men,” says Mark, born in Trinidad and raised mostly in Queens, New York. Larry, a native New Yorker from Queens, had slightly more relaxed standards. “I was just trying to meet a man.” In 1994, they relocated to Sandy Springs, GA where the real estate was a lot more affordable. They bought a home, established friendships and cultivated a comfortable life together. But Mark wanted something more.

“Since I was a child, I knew I would be a parent. I did not do this to be a role model. I did this because it was in me.” But Larry was not there at first. “Life had been pretty good for us over the past 10 years. I thought, ‘why do you want to add children to the mix?’ “ But when Mark stated his willingness to separate in order to realize his dream, Larry thought it was worth it to



Mark Francois is the lighter skinned brother. Larry E. Williams is the darker of the two. Malik Francois-Williams is the larger and Takwon Francois-Williams is the smaller of the two boys.

remain open to fatherhood.

Once they had agreed to parent, they had to choose the method. They considered insemination and having a friend of Mark to serve as birth mother. However they were uncomfortable about potential conflicts with the mother and Larry having no binding parental rights. Surrogacy at the time was cost prohibitive so adoption made the most sense for them. They turned to Families First, a family services organization, where they took the 10-week Model Approach to Parenting (MAP) class, a prerequisite for adoption. Since Georgia limits gay adoptions to single parents they had to look online outside the state to adopt as a couple. They met another couple Jeff and Greg in their MAP class and soon became close friends. When the four went out for dinner they

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