

'Kids need homes now'

The Bloomington Alternative
by Kelsey Peters

Five-year-old Alicia ditches her spoon and lifts the bowl up to her mouth.

"Hey, don't do that," says her father, Frankie Presslaff. "The bowl is too big for that."

Gab, 2, is in the copycat stage and brings his bowl up to his lips.

"No, it's not soup," Presslaff scolds.

Alicia laughs, as chewed Cheerios spill out from between her crooked teeth.

Six children, ranging in age from 2 to 13, sit around the kitchen table for breakfast, and they all want something different. This one wants Cheerios. That one likes Raisin Bran – without the raisins. The next one wants Cheerios – with raisins but without milk.

This is a typical day in the Presslaff-Compton family's life, but this isn't a typical household. While Presslaff pours from two enormous boxes of cereal into colorful plastic bowls, the children's other father, Kelly Compton, prepares to leave for work.

"Bye," says Alicia, as Compton heads toward the door. "Be good, Daddy Kelly."

Fathers Frankie and Kelly may be loving parents, but they and millions of other gay men and women in Indiana and across the country may lose the right to be moms and dads.

Florida has already passed legislation banning gay adoption, and according to the USA Today, efforts to push similar bills have emerged in 16 states, including Indiana.

An Indiana Appeals Court panel that included two Bloomington judges ruled in April that unmarried couples in Indiana have the right to adopt, regardless of sexual orientation. Judge John G. Baker, a former Monroe Circuit judge, wrote the opinion in a case involving a Morgan County lesbian couple.

Indiana Attorney General Steve Carter appealed the case to the Indiana Supreme Court on May 6. And State Sen. Jeff Drozda said he will introduce



Cookies and milk are a hit at the Presslaff-Compton household, where Frankie Presslaff, above, assumes the role of stay-at-home dad. Presslaff and partner Kelly Compton would not be allowed to adopt any more kids if either a legal challenge to current adoption laws or proposed legislation to ban gay adoption succeeds.

Photograph by Steven Higgs

legislation in next year's legislative session that would bar same-sex couples from adopting.

"I think we have an obligation to address and pass something that's much more clear to judges, lawyers and families," the Westfield Republican told the Indianapolis Star on May 15.

Presslaff couldn't disagree more.

"Kids need homes now," he said. "What are they accomplishing? Nothing. They are hurting children and will rot in hell when it's all said and done."

"It's all these heterosexuals making babies they don't want," he added. "Those who are voting to ban gay adoption – how many of them have adopted?"

When Presslaff was 20, he volunteered at a homeless shelter and was asked to take in two displaced boys for a short time. The court later asked if he would foster the children, and he eventually adopted.

He raised the boys alone until he met Compton 12 years ago, when Devon and Dylan were 11 and 8.

Once Devon and Dylan grew old enough to care for themselves, Presslaff suffered severe empty nest syndrome. He convinced Compton that they should look into adopting an older child.

The couple took adoption courses through Monroe County's Office of Family and Children and adopted Nathan, now 13.

"The agency liked us, so we got another call and another one," said Presslaff.

First, it was two boys, and then it was a sibling group of three. The couple jointly adopted Bailey, Gab, Travis, Alicia and Tanner.

"It all kind of happened really quick," Presslaff said.

The 10 family members have been together for three-and-a-half years, and Presslaff became a full-time "house dad" in December.

"The Army says they can do so much before 7 a.m.," said Presslaff, 38. "They should come to my house."

Presslaff loads his youngest kids, four of whom are still in car seats, into his huge Ford Excursion. The interior is covered in debris – tiny socks, sticky coffee mugs and old candy wrappers, balloons and bookbags galore.

Presslaff wears an oversized T-shirt and sweatpants and has a scruffy goatee and two silver earrings that stick out from beneath his baseball cap.

Even from behind thick, rectangular glasses, Presslaff's eyes are what really show his personality. Somehow he hides the fatigue of running such a full household. His eyes radiate with energy and kindness. It helps he's always smiling.

The Excursion rumbles out of the driveway at 8:34 a.m. Presslaff tries to drive and entertain the kids by pointing out landmarks along the way.

"There's Grandma Red's house," he said. "My mom's big into laundry, which we try to hide. Everything has bleach stains on it." He points to a trickle of white on his navy blue SMU T-shirt.

After routine stops at Harmony and Rogers schools, it's off to the Bloomington YMCA for fitness, preschool and gymnastics classes.

"I don't raise them all by myself," said Presslaff. "It really does take a village. The people at the Y are great."

He also gets help from both his and Compton's parents and gay friends with no kids who "come play gay dad for a while."

Presslaff believes the right to adopt shouldn't be about sexual orientation but about the ability to provide a loving and supporting home for children.

"We're really not any different than anybody else," said Presslaff. "We teach right and wrong. We want the kids to be happy, healthy and get a good education, just like other parents."

Politics aside, Presslaff has a family to take care of. After the kids are safe and secure at school and the YMCA,

he has time to run errands.

"Sam's Club is dangerous," he said. "You go in there with an idea of what you need, and you come out with 80 pounds of tuna or something."

Two dozen bananas, 136 diapers and 76 roles of toilet paper later, it's back to the YMCA for a half-hour workout and then home for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

Between running here and there, Presslaff still manages to volunteer with the Bloomington Beacon and work on an as-needed basis for IU Health and Wellness. He is also taking classes online to obtain a business degree in hospital administration.

"I don't sleep a lot," he said. His days begin as early as 5 a.m. and end around 2 a.m. "I probably have ADHD myself. I think I get it from my mom. Some days I just want to crash and burn, but it's not worth it. My house would be crazy."

Nap time finally approaches, but that still doesn't signal free time for Presslaff. He uses the time to do laundry and clean while the kids are out of his way.

He doesn't complain about the work though. Steady with eight kids, plus birds, dogs and a pig, Presslaff could still potentially see room for more.

"I never say 'no more' because whenever I do, they come," he said. "But, no, I don't see more kids in the near future. It's a lot of work, and we're at a good number."

But with a flash in his eyes, he smirked and added, "It's been a good ride, and I'm not dead yet."