



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
December 14, 2007

“That’s what a public library does, and you make the choice...We certainly want parents to make that decision for their children – not one parent making that decision for all children.”

-Kathie Rhode, Library
Director at Lower
Macungie Library in
Macungie, Pennsylvania

The Morning Call website (themorningcall.com) recently had an article about a picture book called *King & King*. This brightly illustrated book, by Linda De Haan and Stern Nijland, is about an overbearing queen who decides it is time for her son, the prince, to get married and take over the kingdom. A succession of princesses is presented to him, but it isn’t until he is introduced to the brother of one that he falls in love. The book ends with the wedding of the two princes and the words “and everyone lived happily ever after.” The final illustration shows the princes face to face, with a large red heart between them. The assumption is that they are kissing, although that isn’t actually shown.

The article tells the story of two parents – Eileen and Jeff Issa – who took the book home for their 2½ year-old son and were horrified when they read it. The Issas have tried to get the book removed from the shelves of the public library, but the

library director has made it clear she has no intentions of doing that. Two out of the three township supervisors backed her up and the book is still in the collection.

Of course, this isn’t the only time a children’s book with a gay theme has been challenged by parents. Another controversial book is Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell’s *And Tango Makes Three*, based on a true story about two male penguins raising a baby penguin. Recent challenges to this story have included an elementary school library in Shiloh, Illinois, and a public library in Savannah, Missouri. Both times the book has been left in the library, although in Missouri it was moved to the nonfiction section, since it is a true story.

When I read about *King & King*, I immediately tried to find a copy of it. My library system owns one copy, which wasn’t available, but Berkeley Public Library has several copies of it, and the sequel – *King & King & Family* – as well.

continued on page 2

The book is charming and has good intentions. But, as Wendy E. Betts says in her review of it on *Notes from the Windowsill* (windowsill.net): "I like this book so much, I wish there weren't parts of it that made me feel - to use the technical term - a little squicky."

When I first read those words, I thought that - despite the fact Betts has created a list of gay and lesbian characters and themes in children's books - she was talking about the premise. Instead, she is referring to some of the stereotyping of the other characters, in particular the queen and the visiting princesses. And I have to agree - the text isn't great and some of the illustrations are predictable and trite, although the art itself is charming and colorful.

Some of her favorites

include *And Tango Makes Three*, Johnny Valentine's *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dad*, and *Mom and Mum are Getting Married*, by Ken Setherington.

I was happy to find Betts' list, because she is so frank. She

provides the titles because there are so few for parents who want or need books on this topic, but she doesn't always praise them. I

Betts has created a list of gay and lesbian characters and themes in children's books because there are so few for parents who need books on this topic, but she doesn't always praise them. I appreciate this

appreciate this, since it would be simple to rave about all of them simply because they exist. Instead, she gives her take on each and it is an honest one. Praise from her is praise indeed.