



Flamingo Rampant: Celebrations!

Flamingo Rampant LGBTQ Children's Books: The Gift You Can Give Our World!

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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Flamingo Rampant is the kind of publisher our world has needed for decades. They make children's picture books that lovingly show racial and body diversity, and include feminist messaging that depicts girls and women and problem-solvers and action-takers. In the universe of children's picture books, many show LGBTQ kids and families as being targets of bullying and harassment, as being "problems" or sources of confusion, or as a situation that requires special handling. Flamingo Rampant remains dedicated to a simple goal: making fun, interesting, beautiful picture books that reflect LGBTQ people and families in joyful, inclusive ways.

Given their determination to be so diverse, and to nurture new authors and illustrators (and pay them!) you probably won't be surprised to find out they are an independent project that counts on the support of the community to do this vital work. Their current kickstarter is well on the way, but needs more support to accomplish their current goal: creating at least 6 more books, in a theme of 'Celebrations,' where all books will be written by people who are representing their own cultural/religious holidays and festivals. The new slate of books will include:

- a baby shower, featuring three parents - all superheroes - and a surprise twist ending!
- a pow wow story of a 2 Spirit kid, and the beautiful community that coalesces to support that kid's desire to live (and dance!) authentically.
- a birthday party counting book called Bell's Knock-Knock Birthday, featuring sound effects, kids, and

cake - together!

- a mischievous and magical story set at a community Eid celebration, featuring two gay dads and their twins.
- a charming Passover Seder story of two lesbian bobbies and a lost afikomen that cannot be found.
- a Christmas story of a young girl who goes to great lengths to make the holiday wonderful for her parent who has come out as trans during Advent.

I spoke to S. Bear Bergman, a widely known author in his own right, as well as the founder and publisher of Flamingo Rampant, about what this project means, and what is needed to make sure the books are created and widely available.

***PQ:** What was the catalyst for this publishing company, and how has it grown?*

Bear: It started because we were so discouraged by the existing picture books with LGBT2Q themes – they were all so grim, and made trying to read them as bedtime stories to our then-three-year-old an awful experience. Every story was basically a narrative of suspicion, bullying/harassment/violence, and then some kind of grudging tolerance or redemption. That was not what I wanted my kid to be internalizing about our family, and it wasn't what I wanted him to be dreaming about at night, either.

Also, the existing LGBTQ kids books were really limited in their depictions. The characters were overwhelmingly white, which is a big problem in children's books, but they also replicated every other place that kid lit invisibilizes people outside the mainstream – everyone was suburban and homeowners, everyone was the same small size, everyone was able-bodied, all the families were two-parent households. In no way did a trip through the extensive collection of queer/trans kids books we'd assembled represent our actual community.

Eventually I reached the end of my patience with the problem: I wanted better books, for my kids and for all kids.

***PQ:** Why Kickstarter, and what happens if you don't meet your funding goal?*

Bear: I like Kickstarter because I think it's a rigorous platform – you have to have a workable idea, they vet all the projects, and there's a lot of accountability. But it's all or nothing with them: you either get all the money or none of it, which, actually, I appreciate. I couldn't deliver what I have promised with less money than we've budgeted for.

***PQ:** So these are books for kids of LGBT2Q families?*

Bear: These are books for kids. They're for any kid, that's the point – every one of them has a story (magic! superheroes! adventure! parties! mystery!) and really charming illustrations that could be of

interest to any kid. For a kid who's gender-independent or trans, or from an LGBT2Q-headed family, they're validating, they get to see themselves or their family reflected and real in the book. But for kids who have no LGBT2Q people in their lives, the experience is normalizing, right? It's like a kid from Wichita reading a book about the seashore – here is a lovely thing you will get to experience someday if you're lucky. These are books for any grown person who wants to be sure that the kids in their world will know, beyond doubt, that they will be loved regardless of their eventual sexual orientation or gender identity.

PQ: *What about folks who don't have kids of their own? Why should they buy these books?*

Bear: They can make a donation just to support the idea, certainly. Or, they can order books as gifts for kids in their lives or to give to their local library, religious organization, community center, school district, or doctor's waiting area – all places that are always looking for great books.

PQ: *What are some of the responses you've gotten since starting this project, both from the LGBTQ2S community, and from the conservatives?*

Bear: There's been a bunch of the expected conservative pushback about “confusing” children with messages about gender or sexuality, or “forcing” beliefs on them. That's sort of usual; it's my bellweather that I'm on the right track. From LGBT2Q folks, most of the feedback has been super grateful and positive.

“Bear, I cannot thank you enough for these books...they have been a life line to my kid! Those nights that they are freaking out and scared, we talk about Tulip coming... we read books and we are not so alone... These books are one of the ways that I keep the scary stats for trans kids out of my mind.”

“We have definitely read the first set hundreds of times. Like literally. Princess of Great Daring has been read every night – sometimes twice – at bedtime for months. I bought another copy for my kid's class.”

“We have to travel with 'Love is in the Hair' because it is such a great bed time book.”

PQ: *Other than ordering books or donating, how else can people help?*

Bear: Word of mouth, as much of it as we can get. If you're someone who knows parents, grandparents, aunties/uncles, teachers, librarians or any similar folks – send them a message and let them know why this is exciting or important to you and why you think they will find it valuable. Share on Facebook and tag anyone who think would find it relevant. Tweet it out, talk about it, and ask people to keep talking about it – tell two people, and ask them to find two people to tell, and pass it on and on. The five-year-olds of today will be the 25-year-olds of tomorrow. Anyone who wants those 25-year-olds to be more inclined toward diversity and justice should be interested in getting these books made for the five-year-olds we have now, so they can learn to value and celebrate all kinds of

kids, all kinds of families, and all kinds of people that the wide and wonderful world contains.

Find the kickstarter campaign here, and please share widely! <https://kck.st/2gRSCHS>

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