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From left, Nanette Gartrell, George Bush, Diane Mosbacher and Robert Mosbacher. Later Nanette and Diane added a caption, "George Bush Meets Lesbians 1989"

Dan Quayle and Rob Mosbacher Jr. in 1990.

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The Lesbian in the GOP Family

Robert Mosbacher Is Caught Between the Party Line and His Daughter Diane

By Laura Blumenfeld
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Family snapshots plaster her wall. There's Grandpa wearing funny shorts. Dad on a sailboat. The four siblings squished together on a piano bench. And this picture in the corner, an official photo: Diane Mosbacher flanked by her dad and his pal George Bush. Next to the president smiles Diane's spouse of 17 years—a tall, gregarious doctor. Nanette, a woman. "To Nanette, Best wishes, George," says the black marker scrawl.

Later Nanette and Diane added a caption, "George Bush Meets Lesbians 1989."

Later still, they stuck a cartoon bubble to the president's cardboard grin: "CAN THIS BE USED AS EVIDENCE?"

A joke. But they're not laughing much these days following last month's Republican National Convention, where homosexuals were pilloried. Pat Buchanan declared a "cultural war" that stuck gay couples in enemy trenches. Placards reading "Family Rights Forever/Gay Rights Never" waved for television cameras. And Barbara Bush's AIDS-awareness ribbon mysteriously disappeared.

Like millions of American lesbians and gay men, Mosbacher, 43, found the onslaught difficult to watch. But for this gay-rights activist there was an extra twist in her gut.

Her brother, Rob Mosbacher Jr., 41, is running the Republican reelection effort in Texas. Robert Mosbacher, 65, her beloved and respected dad, was heading President Bush's national reelection campaign. (He now serves as chief fundraiser.)

"I would like my father to understand, I would like my brother to understand, I would like the Bushes to understand, that it's neither expedient nor ethical what they're doing," Diane Mosbacher says.

They are a family caught in the contradiction of Republican-championed "family values."

Mosbacher's lesbianism is no secret. Her family supports her and adores her spouse, as they have come to call Nanette Gartrell, 43. They visit the couple in their San Francisco home, share holidays.

Robert Mosbacher plays a vital role in a campaign that has vilified homosexuals, yet he has a lesbian daughter he cherishes. One more chafing example of the divergence of political rhetoric and reality. Preach Ozzie and Harriet till you're red, white and blue in the face. But talk to just about anyone in America and they'll tell you about a cousin, an aunt, a brother who is gay, who is loved by his family.

"I would suspect the conflict has been pretty tough on Dad," says Diane.

And tough on her. The jam of strong white teeth, the same as her father's, flashes less frequently. Diane, known as Dee to friends and family, holds her father and brother

close to her heart. Now she hasn't spoken to either since the convention.

But Robert Mosbacher says, "I sleep fine at night." He says it is unfair to characterize the president, the party or the convention as anything but tolerant of homosexuals. "I haven't been worried about Dee. I know she's going to be fine."

Gay leaders take strong exception.

"How can he be committed to something that is set on destroying his daughter?" asks Robert Bray, spokesman for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. The group has called Bush the most anti-gay president in American history. "If Bush wins on that platform, it will be open season on gays. What does that mean for [Robert] Mosbacher, who funded and greased that machine? What does that mean for him and his daughter?"

Dee Mosbacher is a private person who rarely gives interviews, a psychiatrist more comfortable scribbling notes than dictating them to reporters. The call is urgent, though.

"I think they really don't know—I hope they don't—that this affects people in the street, that people can get beat up, people can get killed, teenagers can commit suicide."

All this because of a political strategy, she says. She

See MOSBACHER, D9, Col. 1

The Other Mosbacher

MOSBACHER, From D1

touches her temple, taps a thought. "That's not family values. That's fatal values."

The Commitment

The roar of a closed dryer, muffled upstairs, behind glass doors, clicks off. Someone is slithering down the stairs. "Nanette," Dee calls from the kitchen. "Come on in and say hi."

In walks a pretty, confident redhead. She is just back from a game of tennis and has thrown on a purple sweat shirt and a pair of jeans that flatter her willowy figure.

"People think lesbians are such weird creatures," Dee says, laughing.

In fact their life is rather mundane. Dee rises at 6 a.m. to huff on her Aerobycle. She takes off for her job as regional medical chief for mental health in San Mateo County, a suburb of San Francisco. After work, she donates huge amounts of time and money to a host of projects involving lesbian and gay men. Nanette, also an apostate from her Republican family, teaches at a medical school and has a private practice on the ground floor of their four-story home that overlooks San Francisco Bay.

The couple collect little elephants (although not Republican ones), read *People* and grow purple flowers; eight different shades bloom in their front yard. On weekends, they sail, play tennis, hike. They don't plan on having children. They delight in visiting nieces and nephews.

There hasn't been any wedding ceremony, no sanction by church or state. But the women hope to go gray together. "In spite of everything, we'll survive," Nanette says brightly. "Dee might become a little old lady, and I'll be a tall old lady."

Last night, Nanette and Dee rented a white Miata convertible and drove through the cool San Francisco evening. They ate at a favorite French restaurant. They celebrated their 17th anniversary. It is the longest-lasting relationship in the Mosbacher family.

The Dilemma

Flashback to Houston, early 1960s. Look here for clues about how Robert and Rob Jr., compassionate yet pragmatic men, found themselves 30 years later caught in a vise between the personal and the political.

Robert, the favorite son of a millionaire stock trader, left his home in Mount Vernon, N.Y., to set up the family oil business in Texas. There he met another young man from the Northeast, determined to make it in the oil industry with help from a wealthy father. His name was George Herbert Walker Bush.

The men became friends. As a girl, Dee played touch football with Bush on the neighborhood team. Bush's good friend, Jim Baker, lived across the street from the Mosbachers. Dee remembers hearing them all in her living room, laughing together at grown-up parties while she, her brother and her sisters, Kathi and Lisa, played upstairs.

Then Robert's wife, Jane (Dee's mother), became sick with leukemia. At the same time, Baker's first wife, Mary, developed cancer. They spent hour after grim hour together at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, visiting their ailing wives. The Bush-Mosbacher friendship solidified when Robert's wife died in 1970, and Bush helped the widower through his grief.

It was that year that Bush first ran for the U.S. Senate. Robert had helped raise money for his House races and did the same for the Senate race. Young Rob Jr. swung through Texas with George Jr. on a bus, jumping off at courthouse squares to hand out Bush campaign literature.

Later, Robert served as chief fundraiser for President Gerald Ford's 1976 campaign, and for Bush's 1980 and 1988 presidential campaigns. He helped fatten Bush's own billfold, letting Bush in on an oil-barge investment that paid off handsomely. Robert married again, divorced, and married Georgette, the flame-haired temptress. He amassed a net worth estimated at more than \$200 million. Bush amassed political victories.

Bush appointed Robert Mosbacher his commerce secretary in 1989 and chairman of his reelection campaign earlier this year. Last week he moved over to chief fundraiser. Rob Jr. now chairs Victory '92, the statewide Republican campaign effort in Texas.

And here they are. Robert and Rob Jr., the toasts of the party. Only problem—some of the other guests are hating their Dee.

What to do?

Rob Jr., a conservative antiabortion advocate, has tried to distance himself from the gay-baiting element of the GOP campaign, which he calls "mean-spirited."

"I differ with my sister politically, but out of respect for my sister, I won't be part of it," he says. "I would be hesitant to call for affirmative rights for gays, but I don't want to empower people to discriminate."

In Texas, Rob Jr. says, he will try to steer the debate back to economics and not dwell on polarizing social issues. They make people so . . . fidgety.

"I'm not personally comfortable with the lifestyle, obviously. I mean, I'm not anxious to encourage it, but that's her life," he says.



Robert Mosbacher and his daughter Diane on a sailboat several years ago.

He and his father tread a ballot-thin line.

"Dad wants to be supportive to Dee without being a burden to the president or the campaign," Rob Jr. says. "It's a little scary because there are some who may argue that we're a liability."

Robert Mosbacher says he isn't concerned.

"Pat Buchanan doesn't represent many, many, many people in the party who feel very differently," Robert says. "When the story first came out about Dee's, you know, being a lesbian, he sent me a note saying it was wonderful I was so supportive."

How knotty family-values issues become when personalized.

"I'm very comfortable and happy with my daughter. That doesn't mean that I would want to lead her lifestyle," Robert says.

Does he feel any conflict between his professional life and his loyalty to his daughter?

"I'd rather not answer that."

Does he feel bad?

"I know Dee's fine, and Rob is fine and Kathi is fine and Lisa is fine. And Georgette—is just great."

But the usual upbeat twang in his voice subsides. "I really don't like talking about all of this, I gotta tell you."

Dee's younger sister, Kathi, 37, is an abortion-rights activist in the Texas Republican Party. She says she was so sickened by the tenor of the GOP platform discussions that she spent the convention "in the hills of Umbria where there's no CNN." She explains her father's and brother's actions this way:

"To me it's personal, but to them politics is business, the business of getting the president elected," Kathi says. "For them, if your daughter is gay, you love her."

And then get on with your business, she says.

"Nothing personal."

Change of Heart

If you were looking for Dee when she was small, you'd try the woods. There she'd be churning up the earth, digging for snakes with the neighborhood boys.

"She was more boyish than girlish, never did like most things most little girls like," recalls the Mosbachers' housekeeper, Cardella Smith, 83, who has worked for the family in Houston for 44 years.

Or you might follow her doctor's kit. You'd find Dee playing Dr. Mosbacher, scribbling wacky prescriptions for anyone who'd act sick or dissecting frogs with the boys, in the name of science.

But most likely you'd find Dee out somewhere kicking butt. In school, out-grading her three younger siblings. On the tennis court, slamming balls past guys. On the basketball court, short but playing big. Out on Galveston Bay, yachting-sailing champion dad watched from the pier. On the slopes of Aspen, tearing down the mountains with her father.

"I'd be riding up on the ski lift and look down and see Dee and Dad skiing like possessed people," Kathi recalls. "They competed with each other. They're both incredibly competitive."

They're both incredibly affable and blaze-tempered and driven and chisel-chinned. And both eventually ended up with redheaded women.

But first there would be boys for Dee. Even a fiance.

In high school, she brushed on plenty of blue eye shadow for the tall sailing instructor, the dark football player, the basketball player who courted her with jokes. At Pitzer College in California she got engaged, but "something just said no, this doesn't feel right," she says. "Looking back I realize I probably knew I was a lesbian for years, but back then there was little I could read, it was not a category you wanted to put yourself in. I was exercising a bit of denial."

Her parents had raised her to be an activist, to think independently—if the Mosbachers had a motto it would be "Individual Ethics Over All."

So Dee struck out for Washington after college in 1971 and honed her own identity. Different from her businessman dad, different from her button-down brother, different from Republican sister Kathi, different from apolitical sister Lisa.

Dee joined the Young Socialist Alliance. While enrolled in premed courses, the heiress took jobs as a construction worker, a garage mechanic, a volunteer paramedic, paid \$15 a month rent in a roach-infested group house. She organized national marches against the Vietnam War, helped found the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition and spoke out for racial equality. Revolution blew through Washington. Dee soared.

Then one day someone handed her a leaflet. A panel discussion in favor of abortion featuring a lawyer, a physician, a lesbian activist.

"I thought, 'Oh, God, I've never seen a real lesbian before,'" she recalls. "I thought I would go and see what they look like, if it was okay, 'cause I was thinking maybe I was one."

The meeting proved disappointing—no telling which speaker was the lesbian activist. Though soon she became one herself. "I saw that we are all these positive role models. Suddenly I felt it was okay."

Christmas 1971, Colorado. Dee pulled Kathi aside. A secret.

"She told me she had a relationship with a woman, and she was really happy and felt more fulfilled," Kathi recalls. "She talked about it differently than she had ever talked about a man. She asked if I was shocked. I wasn't shocked. It seemed right."

"I just wanted you to know," Dee had said.

"I'm happy if you're happy," said Kathi.

But her father wasn't. Not because of her sexuality—he didn't know yet—but because of her politics.

"Dad thought I was a communist," Dee says, laughing now. Once when she'd just returned from an anti-war demonstration, her father phoned, fuming.

Dad: "I bet you were in Harrisburg with those communists and socialists!"

Daughter: "Yeah, I was!"

Dad: "Well, why don't you just become a doctor and leave the politics to the men in the family!"

Meanwhile, Rob Jr. was trying to get a job as a legislative assistant for then-Sen. Howard Baker of Tennessee. During his investigation for a security clearance, officers questioned the young Republican about his sister, the lesbian anti-war activist.

For a while, Dee lost touch with her family. "I thought she was sort of withdrawing," Rob Jr. says. "She was concerned about her family accepting her, she knew I had real problems with her lifestyle. But I wanted Dee to know I loved her."

Robert Mosbacher, who heard of Dee's sexual identity through the family grapevine, sweated through the typical questions that heat up parents of homosexuals: *Was it my fault? What did I do wrong?*

In 1975, Nanette Gartrell, a young psychiatrist on rotation at the National Institutes of Health, moved into Dee's group house. Nanette liked Dee's Texas accent. Dee liked Nanette's scientific mind. The women became friends and fell in love. By the time Dee was ready to take Nanette to dinner with her dad, she says, he was more than ready to meet her.

The couple stuck it out. Through Dee's PhD program in psychology. And through a long-distance period while Dee attended medical school in Texas. Dee had figured she'd go back into the closet for medical school, buckle down and focus on her studies.

She listened while professors and students called homosexuals "abnormal" and "perverse," saw signs on lockers and bulletin boards that said "KILL THE QUEERS." This was 1979, six years after homosexuality had been struck from the official roster of mental disorders.

Finally Gary, the class geek, a guy with glasses so thick his blue eyes looked like robin's eggs, braved up, stood up and defended gays. He gave Dee courage. For a class project, she produced a slide-and-video show called "Closets Are Health Hazards: Gay and Lesbian Physicians Come Out." Medical schools nationwide now show it.

"It is a tremendous burden off to be out, to know that I'm very clear about my sexual orientation," Dee says. "To get rid of that constant anxiety."

And to win the approval of her family.

"Given the lifestyle that Dee has chosen," says Rob Jr., "she couldn't have done better."

Dee doesn't see her sexuality as a matter of choice, but never mind, yes, the whole family welcomes Nanette. Even Georgette. Although the tension between her and the Mosbacher kids crackles during interviews. When asked about her stepdaughter, Georgette, two years older than Dee, snaps: "Not my stepdaughter. You mean my husband's daughter."

Is that not the definition of stepdaughter?

"I don't know what the definition of that is."

Affiliations

All the light in the sky above the San Francisco Bay is shining in Dee Mosbacher's eyes. They are sea green, flooded a shade or two brighter as she faces a glass wall in her home with its view of the Golden Gate

Bridge. Mosbacher wears no makeup, only light.

She is seated on the top floor, on a black leather couch. Gray hairs loop through her brown curls. Gold molars flicker when she breaks into smiles.

"I feel like I have this big responsibility. I was nervous when you called. But I would like people to understand the meaning of their actions," she says. There is no bitterness in her voice. Only a thread of anxiety as she pulls on an earlobe.

"I hope my father and brother understand that the party that they're working with could mean that I could lose my job, other people could lose their jobs just because they're lesbian and gay and that's scary."

"When you have the president of the United States and vice president standing up and making homophobic remarks it goes beyond just denying us our basic civil rights."

Sometimes, even, it's hard to believe. "I don't think that President and Mrs. Bush really feel that way," she says, but the campaign needed a scapegoat to divert attention from the economy.

"Oh, it's the doctors from California!" Bush had said in 1989, greeting Dee and Nanette. They were first off the elevators at the White House at a lunch honoring Robert Mosbacher's swearing in to the Cabinet. The women wore pantsuits, breaking the White House dresses-only code. And Dee introduced Nanette to Jim and Susan Baker and Barbara Bush: "I'd like you to meet my lover."

Dee's father suggested that "spouse" was more appropriate, since it implied a stronger commitment.

Later, Dee checked "spouse" in the dictionary and agreed. She and her father were finding it much easier to get along. Tempers had cooled since the early '70s. When the United States entered the Persian Gulf War last year, Dee marched in the protest in Washington. Father and daughter discussed it calmly for about five minutes, she against war, he pro, and then settled into a couch together to watch the Super Bowl.

"It's been a little bit"—she laughs nervously—"strained, though, over the last few weeks between us," Dee says. The two haven't spoken. "It's gotten harder to say anything nice, actually, honestly."

A year ago Dee and her dad first made the papers together when they simultaneously gave commencement speeches at neighboring colleges in California. Dee's speech began: "Dad and I had breakfast this morning. We had a look at each other's speeches. He would have used mine, but he's not a lesbian. I would have used his, but I am not a Republican."

Robert Mosbacher was speaking about the need for free trade, a hearty economy and a strong nation. Later, when he watched his daughter's speech on tape, his eyes welled with tears. It was Dee's first major coming-out speech. Not only to the straight world, but also to the lesbian community, which has been known for its ambivalence toward women of wealth.

"I was pleased and shocked that instead of tomatoes, I got a standing ovation," she says.

What she also got was the attention of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Last winter, when the group heard homophobic hoofbeats in the Republican campaign, members asked Dee if she could help arrange a meeting with the GOP.

Robert Mosbacher agreed to meet with the gay leaders himself. And on a snowy February morning, for the first time in American history, the task force says, openly gay activists briefed

an incumbent presidential campaign on gay issues.

The evangelical right went ballistic. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater called it a purely personal gesture and said the president had no knowledge of the meeting.

"I feel like they hung him out to dry," Dee says. "Dad said that he was really upset at people acting like he doesn't have family values. He said he didn't know what else family values is, if it's not supporting your kids and who they are."

The anti-gay stampede gained momentum. Unlike in 1988, the Republican platform committee refused to hear gay-rights representatives. The platform itself opposes treatment of homosexuals as a protected minority, homosexual marriage and homosexuals in the military. By the time the convention aired, Dee couldn't turn on her set.

"I feel like Dad's sort of caught, it's bigger than him, it's bigger than all of them," she says. "And it's going to backfire."

How does she cope?

"I try to use denial a fair amount. It's really hard, because intellectually I know what they're trying to do even though Dad and my brother Rob say they want to distance themselves from that part . . ."

The sentence trails off. A bird chirps beyond the glass wall, out there, in the trees, out where the bay stretches below her. This is where Dee flies to, steers her 13-foot Sunfish through choppy waters and ridiculous winds, pitting herself against the unambiguous elements. After hours of getting whipped, she comes home to Nanette, frozen, bedraggled, exhilarated.

"I think if my mother had lived, things might have evolved differently," Dee says finally. "I'm not sure my mother would still identify herself as a Republican."

And all the light from the sky above the San Francisco Bay can't brighten Dee Mosbacher's face.

Reunion

She's planning the family reunion.

Dee is sizing up her dining room, walking around her polished mahogany table, thinking out loud about this Thanksgiving: "I imagine a lot bigger table, maybe some smaller round ones too. The kids at one table. The adults at another. And chaos, utter chaos."

Dee laughs with delicious anticipation. Behind her sit the sailing trophies she won as a girl, as her father cheered her from the pier. Next to them shines a new silver trophy, earned with Nanette, a charity tennis tournament for a lesbian health clinic.

"Everybody's coming," Dee says. The siblings, Dad and Georgette, her spouse's family. With a sweep of her hand, she seats the imaginary guests. "Either way, it's going to be a little tough. I sure am planning a Democratic victory. I'll try not to say, 'I told you so.'"

Nanette will be there: "I'm not angry at them. I just feel sad at times," she says.

Rob Jr. too: "It's just another campaign," he says. "After it's over we'll just carry on."

And Kathi: "I'm sick that this is happening with the Republicans but the Mosbacher family values are to respect our individual differences."

And Lisa, the youngest: "I want it to work out for Dad, and I want it to work out for Dee. I feel like I'm balancing between the two."

And their father: "I'm sure it'll be a fun Thanksgiving, looking forward to teasing each other."

All their voices will mix in this room. All their faces will be here together, more snapshots for a family gallery.