



I Still Love You

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My name is Rodrigo and I was born in the East Village. My roots were laid in Brooklyn when my father bought a house in Sunset Park back in the 70s. Both of my parents were originally from Puerto Rico. At 53, I can say I have led a full life — I have an ex-wife and 13 kids to show for it! I love and care for all my kids equally, including my oldest son Julio, who is gay. This was something that was difficult for me to accept in the beginning... I remember being at work one day and getting a call from my wife. She told me Julio was caught kissing another boy — he was about 9 years old. She was like, “What are we going to do?” My wife had him call me and he said, “Dad, I need to talk to you.” I was angry. I asked him, “What, you’re gay?” All I heard was a click on the phone.

Throughout the day, a rush of thoughts went through my mind. We have a saying in Spanish, “Tell me who you walk with and I’ll tell you who you are.” That was the first thought that came to my mind — that

people were going to say, “That’s Rodrigo’s kid — he’s gay.” I thought about how my dad would have reacted. He was raised that old Puerto Rican way — very strict, very stern. He would have said to me, “Pack your bags.” But how could I tell my son, “Because you’re gay, you’ve got to leave?” I’ve heard too many stories of what some kids have had to do to survive. I didn’t want my son to go through that. I had to be a good parent regardless of what my mind was thinking.

When I got home that night and asked him, “Is it true?” he said, “I think I am.” I looked at him — flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood — and told him, “OK, I still love you.”

Julio is 33 now, living in Florida and working for the airlines. I keep things real with him and I make sure that he can talk to me about anything. And he keeps me up to date about what’s going on in his life. He’s a good man and I wouldn’t have him any other way. My son is my son and I love him dearly.