



Gilbert, Sara (b. 1975)

by Tina Gianoulis

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Sara Gilbert first came to the notice of queer television viewers when she was cast in the role of younger daughter Darlene on the long-running television series *Roseanne* (1988-1997). Gilbert's Darlene was a devilishly sarcastic tomboy who became an immediate favorite with lesbian audiences. Queer viewers who had watched her grow up on *Roseanne* and sighed with guilty pleasure when she kissed Drew Barrymore in Katt Shea's creepy *Poison Ivy* (1992) felt only the slightest surprise when Gilbert came out publicly as a lesbian in 2004.

Gilbert was born Sara Rebecca Abeles on January 29, 1975 into a theatrical family in Santa Monica, California. Her grandfather Harry Crane had helped create the pioneering 1950s comedy series *The Honeymooners*, her grandmother Julia Crane was a dancer who had won the Miss Brooklyn title, and her mother Barbara Crane was a talent agent and producer in Hollywood.

In 1981, when her older sister Melissa Gilbert was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame for her role as Laura Ingalls on *Little House on the Prairie* (1974-1983), Sara determined that she would be an actor too. (Her older brother Jonathan Gilbert played Willy Olsen in *Little House on the Prairie*, but did not pursue an acting career as an adult.)

Sara, then using her birth name Abeles, began with commercials and, in 1982, got a role in the television series *Tales of the Apple Dumpling Gang*. In 1984, she adopted Sara Gilbert as her stage name and appeared in the made-for-television movie *Calamity Jane*. She was called back for five auditions for a recurring role on the popular boarding school sitcom *Facts of Life*, but did not get the role. However, this early disappointment soon turned into good news when Gilbert was cast in 1988 for a role on the new ABC sitcom *Roseanne*.

With a cast headed by irrepressible comic Roseanne Barr, *Roseanne* brought an irreverent feminist and genuinely working-class flavor to the old prime time staple, the family situation comedy. The show reached number one in the Nielsen ratings by its second season and remained on the air through 1997.

Gilbert played Darlene, the middle child in the wisecracking Connor family. Even at the age of thirteen, she was able to make Darlene a complex character--a tomboy with a sharp tongue and a vulnerable center. Audiences warmed to Darlene as she grew from a smart-alecky kid to a cynical adolescent to a nervous young mother. She was twice nominated for an Emmy Award as Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series.

While she was portraying Darlene having her first period, her first kiss, and her first baby, Sara Gilbert was also growing up herself. Like Darlene, she became a vegetarian and animal rights activist. She also experimented with other kinds of creative work, writing a well-received fourth season episode of *Roseanne* called "Don't Make Me Over."

Gilbert was so popular on the show that the producers wrote around her when she attended Yale University,



Sara Gilbert in 2008. Image courtesy Kristin Dos Santos. Photograph by Kristin Dos Santos or her staff. Image appears under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license.

where she earned a B.A. in art in 1997 while still working on *Roseanne*. She also appeared in a number of films, including *Poison Ivy*, which starred Drew Barrymore as a teenage temptress who seduces both Gilbert's character and her screen father.

After *Roseanne*'s final season, Gilbert took a brief break from high-profile acting jobs. She directed a short film called *Persona Non Grata* that was presented at the 1998 Sundance Film Festival and a made-for-television film that she co-wrote entitled *Even the Losers* (1998).

Since then, she has continued to work regularly as an actress, garnering roles on television series such as *ER*, where she appeared in 14 episodes from 2004 to 2007, *Will and Grace*, and *Strong Medicine*, and in films, such as her 2001 reunion with Drew Barrymore, Penny Marshall's *Riding in Cars With Boys*.

In 2005, Gilbert joined the cast of the WB series *Twins*, in a role that had been created with her in mind, the brainy, socially awkward half of a pair of fraternal twins. The series was canceled after a single year, but in 2006 Gilbert joined the supporting cast of the CBS series *The Class*.

Since 2007, Gilbert has appeared as a recurring character in the CBS comedy series, *The Big Bang Theory*.

Since 2010, she has served as an executive producer and co-host of a talk show, *The Talk*.

As her career progressed, Gilbert kept her personal life strictly private, refusing to answer reporters' questions about boyfriends and relationships. This reticence ended in 2004, however, when she publicly announced that she and her partner, television writer and producer Allison Adler, were in a committed relationship and that they were the parents of a baby boy, Levi Hank Gilbert-Adler. Adler gave birth to the child, who was conceived with the aid of an anonymous sperm donor.

Since then, Gilbert has treated her lifestyle with open matter-of-factness. In 2007, she announced that she is pregnant with her and Adler's second child.

Indeed, her openness has extended to discussing her private life on her talk show. In 2011, her sister Melissa appeared on *The Talk* and reminisced with her about her coming out. She also confirmed rumors that she and Adler had separated on *The Talk* and that she is now involved in a romantic relationship with songwriter and singer Linda Perry.

In April 2013, Gilbert revealed on *The Talk* that she and Perry were engaged to marry. She described Perry's elaborate and thoughtful proposal in a Los Angeles park.

The couple wed on March 30, 2014 in Los Angeles in a sunset ceremony overlooking the ocean. Gilbert's co-hosts on *The Talk* attended the ceremony and then reported on the following segment of the show.

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About the Author

Tina Gianoulis is an essayist and free-lance writer who has contributed to a number of encyclopedias and anthologies, as well as to journals such as *Sinister Wisdom*.