



April 1979

Lesbian Organization of Toronto

342 Jarvis St. Toronto, Ont.

Tuesday, Thursday and Friday evenings.

960-3249

Lesbian Mother Continues Fight for her Children

In an essay published by *Fireweed*, eight year old Lisa explains that people are afraid of lesbians in the same way that they are of dentists; they are afraid because they don't understand. Both she and her brother Sean (age 7) are proud of their mother's courage to be honest about her sexuality as she fights to maintain their custody. Ironically, this very openness and pride may cost their mother her children.

G. (I have been asked not to use her name, as her court case is still pending) told me about the breakup of her marriage and subsequent custody fight. On the advice of a marriage counsellor she brought charges against her husband for beating her, hoping that this would stop the beatings and save her marriage. However, it did not, and the couple eventually separated with G. having interim custody of the children.

For a while after the separation, she lived with a close woman friend with whom she became involved emotionally and on one occasion, physically. It was during this time that she came to terms with being a lesbian. One day a teacher for a class she was attending at a nearby college began lecturing on homosexuality, emphasizing that homosexuals are "sick." G. found herself standing up in class saying, "No, they are not sick. I know because I'm a lesbian. It was the first time I had said to myself that I was a lesbian. But suddenly I knew it was true." When she told her friend what she had done, the friend was horrified. Later the two women separated and G. went on to have relationships with other women.

This relationship became the center of attention when G.'s ex-husband filed for custody, basing his case on the fact that G. had had a lesbian relationship with this particular woman. The situation was frustrating; G.'s lesbianism was clearly a central issue, but it was never approached directly. She was not allowed to make a statement, but could only answer the questions asked of her. "They just kept asking me how many times I had slept with M. I kept saying that I had slept with *her* only once, leaving it wide open for them to ask about others, but they never did. The *Windsor Star* printed that I had denied being a lesbian, but that isn't true. It was quite clear to the judge that I was, but the questions always centered on my relationship with M. and nothing else."

The judge did award G. the custody of her children, but with reservations and conditions. "He said that my homosexuality was definitely a negative factor. He asked me how I thought it would affect my children and I answered that I thought the important thing was to be open and honest with them. He seemed impressed by testimony that children of homosexuals aren't any more likely to become homosexuals than those with heterosexual parents."

The conditions of custody were that G. show that she is providing a stable home environment and that the court approve any roommates. G. and her lawyer interpreted that second condition to mean simply that the court wanted to know with whom the children would be living, but a newspaper account of the

decision interpreted it to mean that the court wanted to be certain she was not living in a lesbian relationship. Whichever is the case, she faces the judge again on March 29. Having recently moved from Windsor to Toronto to take a job, she must now defend this move to court.

But even if the March 29 decision goes in her favour, the end of the battle may not yet be in sight. Her ex-husband will probably appeal the case, or may even ask for a re-trial. There is no limit to how long this could go on; there could be appeals and/or retrials until the children are old enough (14 yrs.) to decide for themselves with whom they would like to live.

How does G. feel about the prospect of the fight continuing indefinitely? "It scares me and it wears me down. But it's worth it — to keep the kids. I can't stand to even think of losing them."

And what if the judge asked her to choose between being a parent and being a lesbian? "Of course I will always be just that: a parent, and a lesbian. I can't stop being either. But if I had to make the choice...I honestly don't know. I wouldn't want to resent my kids because I had to give up my love life for them, but then..." There is no way to finish the sentence — both alternatives are unthinkable. G. is quick to point out that she did what she did because being honest is important to her and not because she wanted to make headlines or become a martyr. Nevertheless, maybe some day, because of her and others like her, other women won't have to even consider making such a choice.

by Debbie Bodinger

Open House

&

LESBIANS

LOOT opened its doors to approximately 60 women, faces both familiar and new, during this year's Open House on Sat. March 31.

The occasion provided a chance for women to talk over tea, coffee and home-baked goodies, donated by a number of members, as well as to see the house and find out about its activities.

Sue Cook made us aware of our large selection of library books available and Karen Henderson showed the various steps involved in putting out the newsletter (remember your subscription-supporter cards \$5.00). The Lesbian Conference Committee had buttons available and the proposed agenda for the big May 19-21 weekend.

WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women) and WREC (Women's Counselling Referral and Education Centre) provided leaflets on their organizations which are of interest to lesbians. The Toronto Women's Bookstore sent a large selection of reading material to sell, from Lesbian Tide to poetry by Renée Vivien to novels by Jane Rule, Marge Piercy and Rita Mae Brown, with LOOT getting ten per cent of the profits.

Isabel Smyth of Mercury Travel and 'Love Those Jeans' answered many questions about travel and provided holiday brochures and free pens with suction holders, the latter a big hit (ask Kari).

Artist and musician, Linda Robitaille, showed some colorful expression painting (semi-abstract), mostly in oils and acrylics, while Donna Marchand displayed pencil and ink portraits and sold bracelets and necklaces of coral.

Gillian Burkin brought lino-cuts, feather and leaf prints and figure drawing. Eleanor LeBourdais' abstract wooden sculptures rounded out a fine display of lesbian art. Laurie Meaden, an enamelist and silver-worker, showed rings, bowls, pins, etc.

Although it would have been good to have seen more new faces (as well as old friends), the variety of displays and the congenial atmosphere made this another successful LOOT event. The organizers would like to thank all those who helped out in every area.

by Karen Henderson

LESBIANS & FEMINISTS "a fine kettle of fish"

Last October, the LOOT Issues Committee went to both the International Women's Day Committee and Women Against Violence Against Women with the proposal of co-sponsoring with LOOT a meeting on lesbians and feminists in the women's movement.

For too long, Toronto had been sharply divided on this question and all three groups felt the need to provide a forum in which a dialogue could finally begin. These two feminist groups were the logical choice to sponsor the meeting for two reasons: they represent the political split in Toronto, each with a different constituency and within both groups are a substantial number of lesbians who would find an event of this nature to be of great value to them in their own work.

Things moved slowly over Christmas and during the activity around March 8th but a committee had been set up and began meeting every week. Over the next couple of months, our committee of six felt, at times, more like a rap group than an organizing group with a specific purpose. We were able to do the impossible — to disagree and still listen with respect. One of us suggested that we put our ideas into the form of a skit as feminist satire. Our one hope was that people would enjoy themselves as an audience as much as we enjoyed rehearsing it.

On March 24th, 120 women nervously stepped into the hall which proved to be far too small for the occasion. The attendance was impressive but the small group discussions were seriously hampered by the problem of space. While most women recognized that the brick walls dividing us are not knocked down in one day, there were still many disgruntled women who were disappointed in the lack of openness and the ability to listen to others. The three speakers immediately following the skit — on the history of lesbians in Toronto, a lesbian-feminist and a heterosexual feminist — were to provide a focus for the discussion that followed.

While helping themselves to clam chowder soup and one very large cake in the shape of a women's symbol, the meeting wound up with a general summary of opinions. A list was passed around to find women interested in organizing a similar meeting in several months. So watch for news from this committee on the next event.

The day was tape-recorded for the Women's Archives. There will be a special replay of the tape on Friday,

April 20th, 8 pm, at 342 Jarvis Street for those feminists who were unable to attend. Photographs will also be available for display.

by Pat Leslie

Have you heard about the gay conference in Ottawa?

Mercury Travel will be helping to sponsor the Ottawa conference, being held from June 27-July 2.

For information regarding the schedule of events, transportation, & accomodation, give us a call at

364-6117

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WOMEN'S BOOKSTORE

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All True Lovers — two teenage lesbians during the "great depression"

Sarah Aldridge. \$8.00

Berrigan — novel about an exuberant, archetypal middle class lesbian

Gingerlox. \$6.50

Lavender Culture — in depth, far-reaching portrait of gay and lesbian culture and creativity
Karla Jay & Allen Young. . \$2.50

General Meeting

Approximately fifteen women attended the March 25th general meeting. Business included a discussion of a letterhead and t-shirt logo, the mailing list policy, the financial report, the lesbian conference report, the open house and dance, and announcements.

LOOT Logo and Letterhead

The Task Force presented two designs that they recommended for LOOT's new letterhead and the meeting voted on which design they liked best. A design for the new LOOT t-shirts was also presented. A motion was made, and passed that the new t-shirt design appear as a pocket logo rather than as a big design across the entire front of the shirt. It was suggested that the task force should try to have samples of the colors and sizes available for the open house so that women could order their t-shirts in advance.

Mailing List

The meeting re-confirmed the policy that the LOOT mailing list should be used only for the news-

Women's Coalition Grants Funds

The Women's Fund-Raising Coalition (now simply called the Women's Fund) organized a very

The four groups to receive \$1,600 each were: Women's Counselling, Referral and Education Centre, Rape Crisis Centre, Opportunity for Advancement, and Times Change; and the last two groups, the Lesbian Mother's Defence Fund and LOOT, received \$800 each. LOOT is enormously relieved to have a sizeable donation at this time and would like to express our appreciation to the Women's Fund. LOOT has paid to become a full member within the Fund as of their general meeting. popular Dollar-Per-Woman Campaign last fall. An Allocations Committee was set up to distribute the \$8,000 raised. They sent at least 20 letters to women's groups who live in a constant state of emergency financially. Six groups responded.

At the March 12th general meeting of the Women's Fund, the sub-committee presented their recommendation for approval. The rationale for their allocation was this: they could not choose between the six groups so all six would get something; the groups with salaried people would get more; and recognition was given to LOOT's precarious summer existence.

letter and other official LOOT business. Under no circumstances will private individuals be given access to the list, which will remain outside the house at all times.

Financial Report

LOOT's financial outlook is stabilizing. We were successful in obtaining \$800 from the Women's Fund-Raising Coalition and the policy of charging \$5.00 for membership cards and newsletter subscriptions is working out well.

Lesbian Conference Report

The conference committee has reorganized; all committees are now answering to a central steering committee. Be sure to read the special conference portion of the next newsletter!

Open House

Plans for the open house, Sat. March 31, were discussed. Several organizations not directly associated with LOOT have been invited to participate this year. The open house is aimed at acquainting the Toronto lesbian community with LOOT and its activities.

Abortion Demonstration

"Women must control their fate, not the church and not the state" was one of our chants on Saturday, March 31st, a day of international protest against the cutbacks in our right to abortion. The small crowd of about 100 women and supporters made up for the lack of great numbers by our enthusiasm and our willingness to continue fighting back, and we were further inspired by the news of solidarity from such diverse places as Paris and Regina.

From Queen's Park, we marched past Women's College Hospital, down Yonge Street to Dundas where we stopped at the hospitals on University Avenue protesting the quotas on abortions from hospital committees. At times the competition from the so-called Right-to-Life group was amusing but also served to remind us that our struggle is a serious one. The march finished at Innis College with a rally and speakers.

The large number of lesbians wearing their lesbian conference buttons on this march showed a growing awareness that working together opens up the possibility of all women having more choices. We are fighting for our freedom from the church and the state.

Announcements

Cathy announced that there is a public meeting, sponsored by ReformMetro, Monday March 26, at City Hall to discuss and take action on the issues of racism and bigotry in the Toronto Police Force. Articles in the March 1979 issue of *News and Views* (published by the Metro Police Association) have attacked blacks, Jews, and homosexuals. Cathy has been asked to speak as a representative for lesbians and requested input from the meeting about points that women would like her to bring up.

Karen invited us all to come to see the productions of Macphail's theatre collective (take a wild guess who's in them!). The plays will be performed at 519 Church St., at 8:30 pm, April 19-29th.

Social Event

TORONTO'S FANTASTIC all-woman band, last heard at the LOOT New Year's Party, will be playing on April 21, 8:00 pm at St. Paul's, 121 Avenue Rd., at a benefit dance for the Women's Counselling, Referral and Education Centre (WCREC).

Conference Appeal

The Bi-national Lesbian Conference (May 19-21) needs volunteers for now and later. Now we need women to help get important mailings out; women to work in the various committees; we will need women to billet out of town lesbians, we need to know *now*; we need women who know languages and signing, we need to know *now*.

To help with mailings call Karen 961-1768 and leave your name. If you can billet women during the conference call Lillith 364-3465. The following committees need women,

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Finance _____ Margaret 925-1790

Social _____ Wiesia 366-4198

Publicity _____ Bernice 924-3123

Agenda _____ Cate 921-0648

Necessities of Life

daycare/billetting Lillith 364-3465

food _____ Natalie 463-4322

Cultural _____ Keltie 532-7963

or call Wanda 961-1768 or Cate 921-0648.

Amy Gottlieb

typeset this newsletter

at PinkType

Call 368-0715 for more info

Announcements

COMING OUT GROUPS. Are you just coming out in the lesbian community and wondering where you fit into the social life, whether to tell your non-gay friends, or what to do at work? Would you like a chance to talk about these questions with other women in the same position? If so, the LOOT Counselling Collective is organizing groups to discuss coming out. Call the LOOT phone-line 960-3249 Tuesday, Thursday or Friday night, 7-11 pm.

RAP SESSIONS are being held at 8:00 the last Tuesday of every month led by one or more of the Counselling Collective. Purpose: to introduce women to the house at 342 and each other, encouraging more women to come to LOOT.

BOTH THE NEWSLETTER committee and the community would like to thank Bonnie and Carol for keeping the mailing list and working so hard each month to get the letter in the mail to you. Your contribution to LOOT is much appreciated.

AMETHYST is a group of women committed to living alcohol-free life-styles. We meet every Tuesday evening at 7:30 to talk about ourselves and alcohol-related problems. All welcome.

THESPIAN seeking same. Anyone interested in getting together a script or in work-shopping some lesbian-feminist theatre, please contact Keltie at 532-7963.

THE MACPHAIL Theatre Collective will be putting on 2 feminists plays April 19 to 29, at the 519, 8:30 pm. A number of lesbians are involved and we need your support. Karen.

BOOKS may be borrowed from the LOOT LIBRARY. Drop in Wednesday evenings, 7-10 pm. Also, book donations willingly accepted.

THE DEADLINE for the May Newsletter is April 29. To submit a classified ad (\$2), announcements or articles, call Karen at 363-4549 or leave it in the LOOT office.

The Newsletter Collective: Debbie Bodinger, Val Edwards, Karen Henderson, Pat Leslie.

Classifieds

We are looking for a 4th lesbian to live in our co-op. Rent \$120-\$160. Phone Virginia, Mariana, or Lorna at 536-4813 if interested.

We wish to rent a spacious centrally-located house with other lesbian/feminists from May 1. If you know of such a house or are interested in joining us, call C.W. or Lynnne at 652-3626.

Women Van available for moving, etc. at good rates. Call Karen at 961-1768, a 24-hour answering service.

Professional hair styling done by Karen, \$5. Call 961-1768, a 24-hour answering service.

Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8	9	10 Task Force 7:30 *	11	12	13 Drop-in 8:00 *	14
15 Easter	16	17	18	19 All LOOT committees Mtg. 8:00 *	20 Drop-in 8:00 *	21 WCREC Benefit 8:00 St. Paul's
22	23	24 Task Force 7:30 * Rap * Session	25	26	27 Drop-in 8:00 *	28
29 General Mtg. 4:00 *	30	1	2	3	4 Drop-in 8:00 *	5
6	7	8 Task Force 7:30 *	9	10	11 Drop-in 8:00 *	12
13	14	15	16	17 Counselling Collective 8:00 *	18 Drop-in 8:00 *	19

*Events occurring at 342 Jarvis St.

Counselling Collective is now operating a phone-line on Thursday nights.