

Grapevine

NEWSLETTER OF THE LESBIAN MOTHERS' DEFENCE FUND
TORONTO, CALGARY & VANCOUVER, CANADA

FALL 1982

Two Canadian Mothers Fighting for our right to lesbian families

Alice

Alice W. hadn't seen her 13-year-old son for a year when we told you about her fight for visiting rights in the last issue of the *Grapevine*. Her husband, from whom she has been separated for almost three years, stopped allowing her to see Jackie as soon as he found out she had started a relationship with a woman.

Alice's lawyer, Alison Fraser, wrote to his lawyer protesting the lack of access and asking for an immediate visit. That visit took place in early June, but for weeks afterwards Alice was again unable to see Jackie, though she was now supposed to have him every second Sunday.

For the past month the visits have occurred according to schedule, though her husband complains that Sunday visits are inconvenient for his home life and wants them changed to one weekday evening every second week.

Alice is happy to be seeing her son, but wants longer visits and a legally enforced access agreement so she won't have to fight for each visit or conversation.

"Jackie and Bev and I have a great time when we're together. We go to see Bev's family and go swimming, or to the park with my brother and his two girls; we've gone to movies and watched ball games. We don't talk about his dad, or about what's going on legally. I don't want to put him on the spot. But I need more time with him. And we all need to know we've got a right to be with each other.

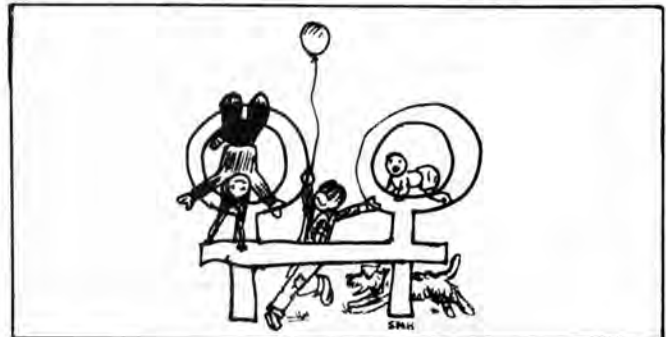
"I bought Jackie some new running shoes a few weeks ago. Right away his dad sent them back, saying they were girls' shoes. They weren't! He just doesn't want me to have anything to do with Jackie. Who does that really hurt?

"It made me so mad I couldn't go to work that day. Jackie's dad and I have worked in the same plant for years. I don't think I can stand working there any more. I'm aiming to take a re-training course so I can find a job somewhere else.

"And as soon as the Official Guardian's report comes through, about their assessment of how much I

should be allowed to see Jackie, Alison says we can go to court to get whole weekends."

Alice could be going to court soon, to show that she as a lesbian mother has a right to regular and substantial access to her son. In the meantime, the costs related to fighting her case are about \$150 a month. You can help the LMDF help Alice, by sending any size donation to the LMDF, PO Box 38, Station E, Toronto M6H 4E1, Ontario, Canada. Please indicate that your donation is for Alice.



Jane

In the last issue of the *Grapevine* you read about Jane T. from New Brunswick, her lover Kate, and their fight for custody of Jane's two sons, aged 7 and 11. "I desperately want to keep the kids," Jane said then. "But the pressure is getting worse and worse ... the kids have already been through so much with the separation. Will they be able to take it?"

Grapevine readers, LMDF supporters and New Brunswick gay organizations rallied around Jane's case and helped with donations and moral support. Her lawyer told Jane he was convinced that they could win, even if it meant going to the Supreme Court. But at the end of August Jane gave the boys to their father. In a telephone interview, she explained why.

"Jack has the kids. He just wouldn't let up. The boys were being affected. Their daycare workers

continued on page 2

The Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund was set up in March 1978 to provide a permanent resource for mothers who are fighting for child custody. We can offer:

- Pre-legal advice and info on successful cases
- Referrals to sympathetic, expert lawyers
- Financial help in building a strong court case
- Personal and emotional support

JANE (continued from page 1)

were calling to find out why they were so troubled. I knew why: Jack had the boys alternate weekends and while they were there they lived by completely different rules. And Jack was constantly telling them they'd be living with him soon, that it was bad for them to be living with lesbians, that he could give them so much more materially.

"The boys only want to be boys--to live a normal life. They didn't want to be at the centre of a storm all their lives. I thought and thought. Even if I won custody it wouldn't be for months. The heat would continue that long, and then there was no guarantee that Jack would ever let up and let us get on with life.

"There were only one and a half weeks til school started. I called Jack and told him if he was going to take the kids to take them now. They had to be settled somewhere before the new school year. I had to do something to help that happen. Jack wasn't going to.

"He won't raise them my way. It's hard. And I'm not seeing them for whole weekends yet. I don't want to have them for that long until they've had a chance to adjust. Jack doesn't understand and keeps calling me to get me to take them off his hands for weekends, but it would be so much harder for the boys right now. That's a consideration Jack never gave us when he was in my position. He absolutely refused us our right to be a family.

"I'm going to wait and see, now. Jack may think I'm going to sign a custody agreement, but I'm not signing any papers until I know this is the right thing to do.

"I had to try this--I couldn't see any other way for the boys to have a good shot at being happy. But it's not over yet. I'll either have custody in the end, or good visiting rights."

Francie Wyland

Reports from Canada's new LMDFs: Calgary

More good news to report. We have had more and more women attending our potlucks the first Sunday of each month. We held our first dance August 14th, which was a lot of fun for everyone. The music was great for dancing thanks to our D.J. Barb, and I'm sure the word will get around. The hall will be overflowing at our next dance on October 16th. We've booked a big Christmas dance for December 4th at 8pm at the Hillhurst-Sunnyside Community Association on 14th St. and 5 AvenueNW. This dance will be open to gay men as well as womyn. We plan to have a dance there the first Saturday of every other month, so check with us as to details of time, date and whether it will be mixed or womyn-only.

We now also have lawyers in Calgary and Edmonton and are continuing to work on the legal aspects of custody, as well as a grant application for funding to do a province-wide outreach and educational project.

We were really pleased and proud to have Cheryl and Carol arrive back in Calgary after their cross-country cycle. They made a lot of contacts on their

trip and certainly made a big contribution to the LMDFs in Canada, both in money (several hundred dollars raised) and in the networking and publicity arising from the trip. (If you made a pledge destined for Alberta's LMDF and haven't yet sent it in, you can send in your money to the address below. If you haven't made a pledge yet it would be really appreciated. Ontario is ahead of us by a few hundred dollars yet, so we have some catching up to do.) Now that their ride is over Cheryl is back to work in Calgary, as a lift-operator on a high-rise and as a volunteer for the LMDF. Carol has moved to Ottawa and is doing very well. We'd like to thank them both.

I think that's about it for news. We are trying to contact lesbian mothers or other womyn interested in our group. Our Sunday brunches are informal and friendly, so give us a call if you'd like to come. We are also looking for more lawyers and psychologists, so if you know of any, please let us know.

Our address is Rm 314 - 223 12 Ave. SW. Phone (403)265-9458 (Lesbian Line - 24 hour answering service) or call Lynn at 264-6328 for more information.

Lynn Fraser

**In eastern Canada, call:
Lesbian Mothers' Defence
Fund (Toronto) 416 465-6822**

**In western Canada:
Alberta LMDF 403 264-6328**

**Vancouver LMDF
604 255-6910**

Vancouver

We're concentrating on building our group and our resources. We now have a member who is working on research--compiling transcripts, articles from law journals, and other materials on lesbian mothers.

We're working on organizing a central storage and cataloguing location for all the information that we're pulling together. This would be a place we could refer mothers and lawyers to, instead of having everything in one of our homes. The Vancouver Public Library and the local branch of the Department of Justice are both possibilities.

Our book on mothering, lesbianism and the feminist movement is still in the process of being readied for publication, with an expanded section on Canadian custody cases.

In sum, we're reaching out for help with the work of being a resource for lesbian mothers, and we're finding it. People who would like to contact us to volunteer time, money or skills can write to Vancouver LMDF, c/o PO Box 65563, Station F, Vancouver, BC. Or call (604) 876-0953.

Mary

Montréal

Montréal organizers declared October 2nd Lesbian Day, and held a series of workshops, films and fes-

tivities at their YWCA. More than 650 women attended! Among them were lesbian mothers, about 25 of whom came to a workshop led by Carolle, who has been working toward the formation of a lesbian mothers' group there.

"More wanted to join the workshop, but we ran out of space. It was fantastic! For three hours everyone spoke out. Many talked about having waited years for a chance to be open; in meetings of sole-support mothers they could be mothers, and among lesbians they could be lesbian, but the two stayed separate. They said they felt at home at last.

"Some women described living under the threat from ex-husbands, that if they moved in with a woman or told the children about their lesbianism, they would take the children away. Others worried about how and when to tell the children, and how to help them deal with it.

"A few women came because they want to have children in the future. One of these offered free babysitting, for the experience. I don't need to tell you how welcome that is!

"We are forming a group for lesbian mothers which we're calling 'Croissant'. Because the name doesn't say lesbian in it, women feel safer. A croissant, too, is sort of special. It's not something you have every day of the week.

"We'll have two types of activities: social times with the children, like potlucks (the next one is October 10th) and others, like dances without the children. And we'll have discussion/work sessions as well.

"Montréal's new monthly lesbian paper *ça s'attrape* is holding a Halloween dance on October 22nd at the Dorchester YWCA, at 9:00 pm. Admission is \$2. Costumes are in order!

"To find out more about 'Croissant' or the Halloween dance, call me at (514)524-1040 or write c/o CP 384, Succ. La Cité, Montréal, Québec H2W 2N9.

Carolle

Bikers cross Canada!

In the last issue of the Grapevine (Summer 1982) we wrote about Carol and Cheryl, who set out on their bicycles to ride across Canada, to satisfy a personal ambition and to raise money and build contacts for the Lesbian Mothers' Defence Funds in Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver.

They really did it! The cross-country cycle for custody is over, a physical and financial success. But the most important results may also be the longest lasting: the tremendous network of supporters they met along the way. Here, Lynn Fraser from the Alberta LMDF interviews Cheryl about her summer on the road.



Carol Splett and Cheryl Kehoe

From Vancouver on May 2nd to St. John's, Newfoundland on July 24th--how many miles would you cover every day?

On the average, 80 to 90, but we had a few 100-mile days.

What part of the trip was the hardest?

The Rocky Mountains! High in the passes there was snow all around. The days were long and hard, considering it was the beginning and we weren't as fit as at the end. We froze at night!

The prairies were a big relief. No more snow or hills, and the road conditions were excellent. But the headwinds were frustrating; with a good tailwind you can just fly.

We'd been warned by some other cyclists that northern Ontario would be a very difficult stretch. But really, the worst was behind us by then.

Did it rain?

Yes! Leaving Vancouver it rained continually. After cycling for an hour or two our feet and hands would go numb, so we'd head to the nearest laundromat, strip off all our wet clothes and throw everything in the drier. It was so nice to put on warm,

continued on page 6

crispins

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Custody round-up

US news

In the Fall 1981 *Grapevine* Kathy Allgood from Bergen NY wrote about her fight for custody of her two sons, Mark and David. The boys have lived with Kathy since her separation in 1975, and since 1979 with Kathy's lover Wendy, as well. Now, one year later, we're glad to be able to report their victory.

"We won! We won! We got the decision Friday the 25th of June. I had good feelings about the judge during the three and a half day trial. He was very perceptive--I wish there were more judges around like him.

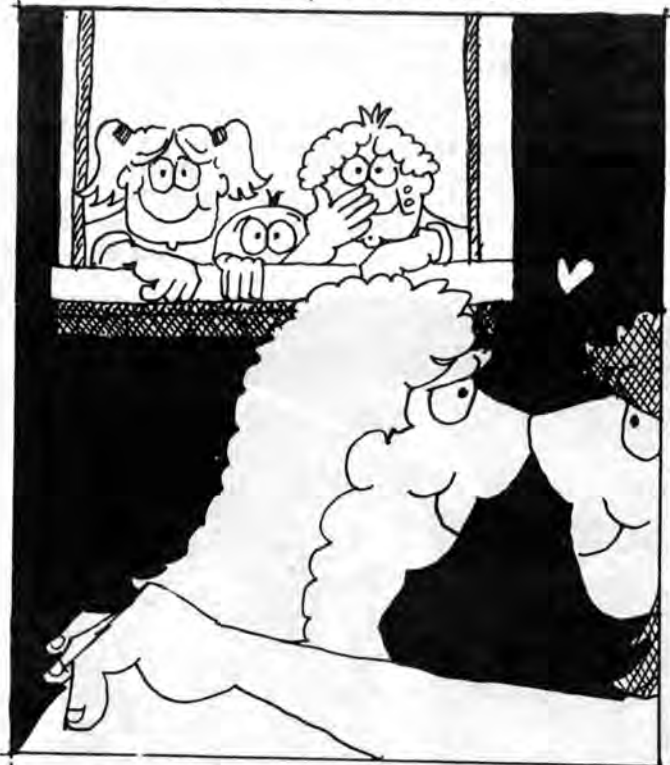
"Alice Lenahan, our attorney, did a very good job."

Justice Charles F. Graney of the Family Court of the State of New York, Genesee County, wrote:

"A major issue in the case was the mother's lesbianism...The father indicated he was disgusted with the situation...and his testimony indicates his main motivation in bringing his petition was to remove his sons...He fears it will have a negative influence upon the boys' development and emotional well being, especially since the mother is an outspoken advocate for lesbian rights and has involved her boys, especially Mark, in public appearances. The father contends the mother is constantly discussing her homosexual lifestyle and issues with the children...."

"The Court finds that lesbianism is not a constant, or even regular, topic of conversation with the boys...Four mental health professionals who have interviewed or treated the boys in recent

IT'S A QUIET SUNDAY AFTERNOON...



... AND THE KIDS ARE OUTSIDE PLAYING.

months were called as witnesses...All agreed that there was no evidence that...the mother's lesbian lifestyle was having a negative effect on them.

"...The Court finds that the mother's lesbian lifestyle has the potential to be harmful to the boys because of the lack of a male role model in the home and because of social pressures which may come to bear on the boys because of the unorthodox living arrangement in the home. The Court feels that the more traditional mother-father household would usually be a better environment for the boys to grow up in. The court further finds that the evidence indicates that the mother's lifestyle has had no significant negative effect on the boys and that there is no basis to presume that there necessarily will be any in the future should the boys continue in the mother's home.

"The Court finds that the mother has been unreasonably inflexible in regards to visitation--though not to the extent contended by the father. Her negative stance toward the father and visitation with him is readily picked up by the sons even when it is not overt...."

"Despite these negative factors...the Court finds that the boys have lived with their mother for seven years since the parents separated. They are secure, happy and content. The mother's home has been stabilized for a number of years now. The boys are well adjusted and integrated into the school and community. They are doing very well academically and healthwise. Their relationship with Wendy Richardson is a positive one.

"...There is a very real chance of emotional damage should the boys be required to live with their father.

"Although the situation in the mother's home is less than perfect, the boys' relationship with their father is also not perfect. From the time the mother moved to Rochester in 1977 until the father moved to Florida in 1982 he did not take full advantage of his visitation rights...the father clearly did not demonstrate the commitment to building a father-son relationship that he might have...Indeed, the Court could not help but get the impression that his main motivation in obtaining custody of the children was not to expend love and affection on them, but to reprogram them...."

"The boys have expressed a clear and strong desire to remain with their mother...."

"The Court concludes that it would not be in the best interest of the children to grant the father's petition since the current custodial arrangement is a stable and supportive one. (And further) that it is in the boys' best interest to have unimpeded visitation with the father...."

Congratulations from all of us in Canada! We're happy about every US victory; progress anywhere has an effect here. We're especially happy about this case because we were able to help a little financially, and to get to know Kathy and Wendy during their visit to Toronto in August.

US news *continued*

NEW YORK--Employees of the *Village Voice* have won an agreement in their union contract to extend medical benefits to their "spouse equivalents."

According to the agreement, spouse equivalents of present employees, who are lovers of either gender sharing the employee's household, must sign

an affidavit to be eligible for immediate coverage. Future employee's lovers must be registered for a year before coverage takes effect.

The contract provision, possibly the first of its kind, thus recognizes gay couples and unmarried straight couples as valid economic and social units.

The agreement between District 65 of the United Auto Workers, which represents the employees, and Voice and News Group Publications, which owns the paper was ratified on July 8th.

*Jil Clark, Gay Community News (Boston)
July 24, 1982*

NEW YORK--An appeals court ruled four-to-one in July that a man may legally adopt his lover. The judge ruled that "the best description of a family is a continuing relationship of love and caring and an assumption of responsibility for some other person. Certainly that is present in the instant case."

The two lovers sought the adoption two years ago when their landlord began enforcing a city lease law which allows lessors to evict lessees who are living with non-family members.

The couple's lawyer explained, "Being members of the same family will make things easier for them. They'll be able to take advantage of family plans for things like travel. If one wants to take out life insurance on the other, it will be easier."

An attorney with Lambda Legal Defence and Education Fund added that the strongly progressive opinion in this case may be useful to lesbians and gay men fighting custody battles or laws which discriminate against non-traditional families.

*Gay Community News (Boston)
August 21, 1982*

KANSAS CITY, MO--A gay father has recently appealed a district court ruling which denied him overnight visitation with his 13-year-old son and forbade him to take the boy to any Metropolitan Community Church services or to any "gay activist social gatherings."

Last month the father challenged the year-old ruling on the grounds that it violates his freedom of association and worship. The lawyer for the mother pointed out that the Missouri Court of Appeals should be concerned with the best interests of the child and not the constitutional rights of the father.

The attorney for the father, David Gries, argued that the protection of the father's constitutional rights is also in the best interests of the child. "It's a protection of the son's constitutional rights, too ... He (the boy) told the judge he loves his dad and wants to see more of him and to be able to stay overnight with him."

Results of the appeal are pending.

*Jil Clark, Gay Community News (Boston)
July 31, 1982*

Grapevine is published 2-3 times yearly by the Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund in Toronto. Other publications are welcome to reprint articles or excerpts, with acknowledgement.

Editor: Francie Wyland

Advertising coordinator: Jane

Distribution coordinator: Helen

People who worked on this issue: Connie, Helen, Jane, Cathy W., Mary, Val and Francie

No children allowed

In the summer of 1981 I was interviewed by *The Body Politic* for an article on artificial insemination and lesbian mothers. The article appeared next to a piece on the baths which seemed to claim that the more dissociated sex is from love, responsibility and intimacy, the more revolutionary it is.

My letter (below) was written not only in dissatisfaction with the A.I. article, but to challenge the idea that fragmentation is really the healthiest way of living we can aim for.

Fran Schechter

I am one of the lesbian mothers interviewed in "Conception by Choice" (TBP, July/August 1981). The article stated that I was "hard pressed" to say why I became a mother. My point was that no woman should have to have the "correct" reason or justification for having children any more than we should have to have one for remaining childless.

I think it is important to share information on the mechanical aspects of AI. But by focussing only on insemination, the article leaves out a lot -- birth, babies, nursing, children. This is the world of mothers, a world that the childless are only marginally aware of. It could be part of the lesbian world.


Taking childbearing out of the context of heterosexuality is a step toward a new definition of mothering. As women claim our own experience of birth and mothering, we are dispensing with the traditional male roles around children -- the patriarchal father giving his "name" to the offspring but absent from the home; the ob-gyn doctor controlling the births he can never experience; the experts advising and blaming mothers. How men will change in relation to the joy and hard work of being with children is up to them to decide. In a society where nurturing is highly valued, changing a diaper may become a very important task.

Patriarchy has regarded the connection between generations as one of property. Although we may step outside the family by coming out, we still often see ourselves as marketable objects, trading off our needs in a competitive and predatory environment. To be gay is spoken of as a challenge to the family, but does it provide any real alternatives? Does it provide satisfying relationships with strong commitments, connections between generations, community support?

The promises held out by the family are rarely fulfilled either in the straight or gay communities, but I feel they represent real human needs that we must begin to define and realize. I don't want to have to choose between an adults-only world of homosexuality and the empowering experience of giving birth to and loving a child. Why is there no space for both to exist together?


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BIKERS (continued from page 3)

semi-dry clothes, and we'd head out again.

Were people friendly?

We met a lot of really nice people, but it was especially good to meet so many other lesbians who cared about our ride so much.

The women in Winnipeg were very friendly and warm. When we arrived we locked all our gear in a locker at the train station and went to the bar. We started talking to women and told them what we were doing, and before the end of the evening we had a place to stay.

Because Carol and I established different paces, we didn't usually ride together. We came into Thunder Bay, Ontario separately, on different roads, and didn't find each other til four hours later, with the help of the police! Women there gave us a warm welcome.

We had a supportive push from the Sault Ste. Marie Women's Centre, too. And from North Bay, where we stayed with Cathy and Val, who wanted to hear all about our travels so far.

Arriving in Toronto we headed for Yonge Street, just like everybody else. We found a place called the Hard Rock Cafe which looked like a good spot to try out Toronto beer, and talked to some people sitting near us about what we were doing, who then bought us a couple.

In Ottawa we went to a women's evening at the Gay's of Ottawa (GO) Centre. In Montreal, we stayed with Marie-Michele, who had translated the bike-a-thon pledge form into French. We went out with her to distribute them around town and at a dance! She also mentioned our fund-raising cycle trip on a French radio show. This work she did, and more, helped to start a lesbian mothers' group in Montreal. (See page 2) The people in Halifax were also great.

How did you feel about finishing the trip?

It was hard to believe we were at the end. Newfoundland was a real high. Our last day cycling was beautiful. The wind was behind us all the way from Argentia. The sun was out and we soared straight to the waterfront in St. John's where we watched the ships and the ocean for a while.

Then we went for a beer, to celebrate, and met some women there who were involved with the Gay Association in Newfoundland (GAIN). There's a lot of history in St. John's and we had the perfect guide driving us around recounting it. We went on a "terror" and were "screeched in." Screech is a rum drink found in Newfoundland which was new to Carol and me.

The women's centre in St. John's was very supportive. They held a successful benefit brunch for the LMDF on our last day there.

Would you do it again?

We'd do another long trip but not over the same terrain. Maybe to Mexico?

Why did you, as two women without children, choose to do the trip as a fund-raiser for the LMDFs?

When lesbian mothers lose their children just because they're gay, it affects all gay people. It tells us that we're abnormal, inadequate and incompetent as people and as parents. A lot of lesbian mothers can't be vocal or obvious about who they are for fear of losing their kids.

So we feel it's important that women without children should do what we can to help their fight against injustice.

kids

BIRTHDAY STORY

Jeremy: It was my mom's birthday on Sunday and we wanted to give her something really good.

John: So we got her Kathleen. When Kathleen was sleeping in her bed we wrapped her up and put an inflated dinghy underneath her, and then floated her out into the middle of an olympic-sized swimming pool...

Gay: And the olympic-sized swimming pool was out in the back yard! We opened the back door, and, SURPRISE! There was a great big swimming pool! And in it was...

Paul: Kathleen -- and a water bomb! and...

Jeremy: And Lynda said "Where did you get the money to pay for this? It must be expensive." But Gay said, "Only ten dollars!"

John: And there was a water-bomb at the bottom of the pool and if Lynda didn't get there in time it would blow up. So she jumped in and swam up to save Kathleen and they were at the edge when KAA-BOOM! and they went flying up on the roof and then they got down and -- had a party!

Everybody: Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday dear Lynda,
Happy birthday to you!

ANNOUNCEMENT!

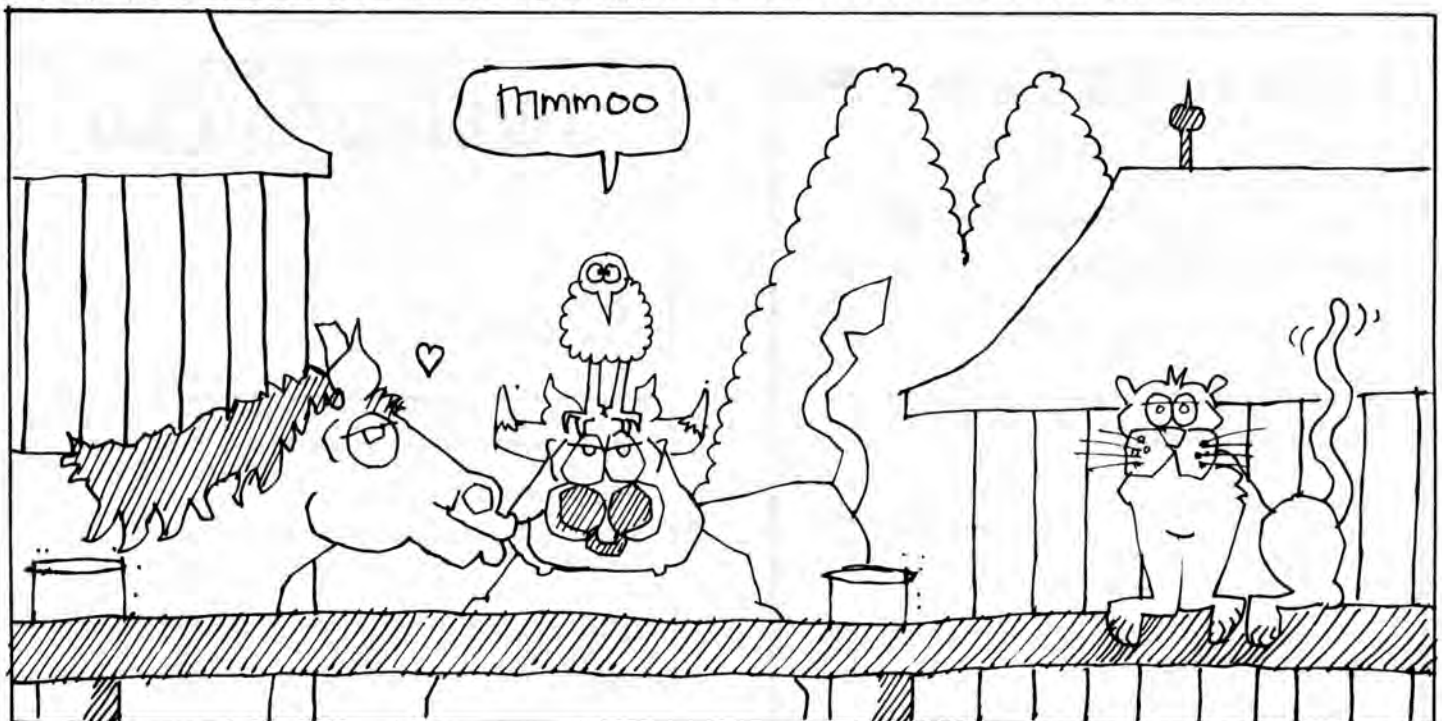
If any children would like to write a short story, a poem, a joke or draw a picture, send it in to the Grapevine and we'll publish it on the Children's Page!

drawing of the month



COLOURING CONTEST!

For all GRAPEVINE readers 14 and under. Send your coloured barnyard pictures to the LMDF before Christmas. Look for the name of the prize winner in your copy of the next GRAPEVINE. THE PRIZE IS A SURPRIZE!



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The Toronto Women's Bookstore is a storehouse of current and classic feminist books, magazines and records. Shop in their back room full of non-sexist children's literature for Christmas and Chanukka presents.

Crispin's, at Gerrard and Church, welcomes diners (and lunchers) with smart decor, reasonable prices and wonderful food (including the best cappuccino pie in the world!) Clip their ad on page 3 for a 10% discount.

The Gay Counselling Centre of Toronto, Canada's only counselling facility for lesbians and gay men staffed entirely by professional lesbian and gay therapists. They respect clients' confidentiality and provide service on a sliding fee scale, according to ability to pay.

Together is a women's bar and restaurant open every day from noon. It's a friendly, relaxed place that feels like home to many of us. Brunch among familiar faces on Sundays from 12 to 3.

The Toronto Clarion, this city's progressive monthly newspaper, has a new, more approachable format and a continuing commitment to covering women's and gay movement matters. Check out their subscription form below.

Womynly Way produces women's music, theatre and dance with flair. Thanks to them we see and hear the best--Holly Near sings October 15th. See their ad on page 6.

The Family Benefits Work Group helps women and their children on welfare and family benefits get a better deal. Their winter coat campaign is coming up. Call them to make a donation, for info, or for coats for the kids.

Gay Community News, published in Boston every week, is North America's newspaper of record when it comes to gay parents and custody. They welcome Canadian subscribers and, having just lost their offices to fire, any size donation.

Toronto Clarion

Subscription Rates

- Individual — 1 year \$15
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