

# Grapevine

NEWSLETTER OF THE LESBIAN MOTHERS' DEFENCE FUND  
Toronto, Calgary & Montreal, Canada

FALL 1985

## Lesbian spouses: emerging parents

The fight for lesbian mothers' rights has opened the door for other struggles that were unheard of even seven years ago, when we began publishing the *Grapevine*. Lesbians who are having children by artificial insemination (AI), and women who choose to co-parent with lesbian mothers are two new groups fighting for recognition as parents and for their own chance to keep custody or visiting rights. Lesbian spouses (or co-parents), in particular, are becoming more vocal in demanding rights that, until now, were just a dream.

When a lesbian mother leaves her marriage or common-law heterosexual relationship she faces a multitude of challenges in trying to raise her children. She faces not only the ordinary difficulties of being a single mother, but the constant worry that she will have to defend her parenting skills as well as her sexuality in court. Whether or not she ever has to make a legal fight for custody or access she is continually reminded by a straight world that she is vulnerable to prejudice.

But even as we discuss the difficulties of lesbian mothers there is a growing group of lesbian parents whose right to look after their children are even more tenuous, whose relationships with their kids are even more vulnerable. These are the women who become spouses of lesbian mothers, and then co-parents of their children. The failure of the straight world to legitimize lesbian and gay spousal relationships, combined with the problems of any non-birth parent (or step-parent), make the lot of lesbian spouses a harsh one indeed.

Many of the things mothers take for granted are not allowed lesbian spouses. Important elements of parenting — signing the ten-year-old's report card, visiting a seriously ill child in the hospital, putting the child on the company dental plan, having the right to consent to medical treatment of the child when the birth mother is incapacitated — are still out of bounds for co-parents.

If a lesbian couple breaks up, the lesbian spouse has no recourse to the courts in Canada to attempt to gain access, let alone custody. A recent British Columbia case (*Grapevine*, spring 1985) held that B.C.'s family law legislation does not apply to lesbian couples, but only to relationships between a man and a woman. This means that the lesbian spouse has no standing regarding property rights, support, or "exclusive possession" of the couple's home. In the matter of custody this delegitimizing of lesbian relationships gives the application of a lesbian spouse for custody or access a poor chance. Even in those jurisdictions such as Ontario's which allow "anyone" to apply to the courts for clarification and a determination in custody/access matters, the case law belies the wording of the statute and indicates that parental blood ties to



the child are tremendously important. Even grandparents who try to get an order for access fight an uphill battle; a woman who is "only" the lover of the mother must contend with the blood-tie dogma as well as prejudice against her sexuality.

In the U.S.A., in California, the courts recently allowed a lesbian spouse to apply for an order for access, with the same status as a biological parent. The lesbian mother in this case had had her children by artificial insemination, but the ruling might also be applied in California to give at least step-parent rights to any lesbian spouse. There has been no such precedent here, but similar cases will begin to be brought forward here too, in time.

If the biological mother becomes incapacitated or dies, a lesbian spouse remains vulnerable. Child welfare law generally places a child in the category of "in need of protection" when the "single" parent is no longer able to care for the child and no provisions have been made for the child's care on the death of the parent. While child welfare officials are unlikely to apprehend a child on the grounds of the parent's sexuality alone, there is a danger of their involvement if they perceive that the children have no one who is "suitable," i.e. the blood relative and/or heterosexual argument again. A step-parent by marriage has at least a legally recognized relationship to the mother, but the lesbian spouse does not yet have that.

Even where the child welfare authorities do not step in, the lesbian spouse has the ex-husband, grand-parents, aunts and uncles, and other well-meaning straight relatives to deal with. A child who has been raised for the past five years by a lesbian spouse and the mother could be given by the courts to the father as the "nearest surviving relative," irrespective of his parenting skills, or the quality of the bond between the lesbian co-parent and the child.

Custody law does not allow the long-term passing on of custody rights after death. In Ontario, for example, a mother can note in her will that she wishes her lesbian spouse to have custody of the

*Continued on page 2*

The (Toronto) Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund was set up seven years ago to provide assistance to mothers who are fighting for child custody or visiting rights, and as a peer counselling/ support group for all lesbian mothers. We can offer:

- Pre-legal advice and information on current/past cases
- Referrals to sympathetic, expert lawyers
- Financial help in building strong court cases
- Personal and emotional support
- Literature and speakers on lesbian custody rights

## Emerging parents *Continued from page 1*

children after her death, but other relatives can still apply to court for a hearing and even if they don't the "testamentary" or will-given custody rights are only effective for 90 days after the death. This means the lesbian spouse, in order to protect herself and the children from kidnapping attempts by, say, the father or grandparents, has to herself apply for a custody order which will continue past the 90 days.

If all of this sounds discouraging, there is hope to be noted. For example, in October, 1985 new Ontario child welfare legislation may open the door for "step-parent" adoptions by lesbian spouses, the automatic placing of children with lesbian spouses after the death of their mothers, and even the adoption of children by lesbian couples unable or unwilling to undergo artificial insemination. The new *Child and Family Services Act* states as one of its principles that the "least restrictive or disruptive course of action that is appropriate should be followed." Even if a child is deemed by the courts to be "in need of protection," the child can be placed with either the "parents" or "other persons." This could include the lesbian spouse in either category, or even a friend of the mother who is willing to take the children. To be eligible to adopt a child under the new act, one no longer has to be part of a stereotypical white, middle-class, married couple. "Any person" might apply, including common-law heterosexual couples, single parents, widowed people and, if the legislation is read inclusively, lesbians and gay men. When read along side the federal *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the new act has the potential to be the most progressive document of its kind in Canada.

For lesbian spouses it could mean the legal ability to adopt or step-parent-adopt the children to whom they have committed themselves. Adoption would give lesbian spouses all the parental rights and the standing of biological parents in matters of custody, access, and in keeping the children in the event of something happening to the birth-mother. It could end the present fear and vulnerability. It cannot happen soon enough.

Just as the law once relegated "illegitimate" children to second-class citizenship, it now places lesbian and gay relationships in legal limbo. But our relationships must be given at least the same recognition as common-law heterosexual partnerships. All legal remedies available to heterosexuals regarding their children, including custody, access and adoption rights, must be given to lesbian and gay parents and spouses as well. *Shelley M. Hobbs-Randall*



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CP 222, Succ. De Lorimier, Montreal, Que H2H 2N6  
514/524-1041 (Monday evenings)

In western Canada:

**Alberta Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund**  
#124, 320-5 Avenue SE, Calgary, Alberta T2G 0E5

## Reports from Canada's LMDFs

### Calgary

*The Alberta Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund writes about the "Just For Us" lesbian conference they sponsored in Calgary on April 26 and 27, 1985, and about upcoming events this fall.*

Approximately 250 women attended the opening concert of the conference weekend and the dance on Saturday night, and about 125 women attended workshops during the day. Many women commented about how much they enjoyed the conference and how well organized things were.

The conference was organized by the Lesbian Mothers with the help of other women from the community who joined the steering committee for this event. The conference was part of a project which included the formation of the Lesbian and Gay Workshop Collective here which is doing public education outreach to various agencies and groups in the region. The rest of the project involved organizing the conference.

We were able to hire two people to work on this, through a grant from the Alberta government under the STEP employment program. The other grant we applied for was from the Secretary of State/Women's Programs, to cover costs of the conference and the workshops. Although we had been given verbal approval to go ahead, they ended up vetoing the funding on the grounds of "shifting national priorities." We're not sure what that means exactly. We have written to try to get a better answer, but have not heard back from them yet. It doesn't appear that we're the kind of group that our new government wants to be associated with. If you believe differently, you should drop them a line in Ottawa and let them know. The basic guideline of the Secretary of State's grants program is that groups should be working for equality for women, which we certainly are. The money for those grants comes from our taxes, and women actively trying to promote equality should have more say in how it is spent, not a bunch of men in Ottawa whose motives are questionable, to say the least.

Despite the Sec State disappointment all was not lost. The great attendance throughout the weekend ensured a financial success. Through generous donations as well we were able to better than cover costs. We also passed the hat (helmets) to gather money for the Lesbian Information Line and Library (403/265-9458). We're pleased to report that \$400 was donated for that purpose.

In June we held a women's dance, and a camping trip. In July and August we threw two more dances and another camping trip. And in September we participated in organizing Calgary's Fourth Annual Take Back the Night March.

On October 26 we invite all women to come to our Halloween Dance at the CUPE Hall, 120 13 Avenue SE, at 8:00 pm. The Status of Women Action Committee (SWAC) is sponsoring a sexuality conference on November 1 & 2. For more info about it write SWAC at 1240 1320 5 Avenue SE, Calgary, Alta or phone 403/262-1873. For information about the Alberta LMDF call the same number or write to the address in the box below. *Lynn Fraser*

In the USA:

**Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund**  
PO Box 21567, Seattle WA 98111  
206/325-2643

**Lesbian Rights Project**  
1370 Mission St, 4th Floor, San Francisco CA 94103

# Family news

## Canada

A Toronto lesbian living with her lover and two children is seeking a ruling that the arrangement can be considered a family for the purpose of paying employee benefits such as medical & dental coverage. Karen Andrews, a library worker, says her employer — the Toronto Library Board — should provide the benefits to her whole household and she's being backed by her union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

Andrews' grievance, believed to be the first of its kind in Canada, is an important test of the increasingly common clause in collective agreements barring discrimination by employers on the basis of sexual orientation.

Andrews, 25, has lived for seven years with the same woman who has 2 daughters, 13 and 15. The girls have accumulated \$1,100 in orthodontist's bills which would normally be covered by the benefit plan arranged under the contract between CUPE and the Library Board.

The board has refused to pay, saying same-sex family groups aren't covered in its contract with Cumba, Ontario's second largest carrier of benefit plans. The Library Board pays the full premiums for the benefit plans.

CUPE's lawyer, Harold Goldblatt says, "The employer has agreed to provide a certain level of benefits and it has to enter into a contract with an insurer to provide those benefits." No date has yet been set for an arbitration hearing.

"My family is a valid family," says Andrews. "After seven years I'm just like a step-parent. This is a gay rights issue as well as a benefits issue." She adds that the Library Board hasn't objected if she takes a day off when one of the children is sick. Mary Cools, the head of Andrews' CUPE local, says unmarried heterosexual couples have no trouble getting their benefits paid.

Cook says that although the grievance is only against the Library Board, the union's fight is also against Cumba and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), which do not recognize gay couples as families. Toronto chief librarian Les Fowley refused to comment on the specific grievance but said the board had applied to Cumba for coverage and was refused. Donald Tripp, Cumba's general manager, says Cumba merely follows the OHIP definition of a family, which is prescribed by government regulation. The definition includes a common-law relationship but not a homosexual couple.

"I don't get involved in moral issues," Tripp added.

Cook says that Andrews' whole household should be eligible for all benefits provided in the contract between CUPE and the Library Board, including medical, dental, orthodontic, vision care and pensions.

She says the issue is simply discrimination against homosexuals, which is prohibited in the contract. *The Globe & Mail, Sept 27/1985*

## USA

DENVER, COLORADO — A Denver lesbian mother died recently, leaving behind her lover of 13 years and their six year old daughter. This child was conceived through artificial insemination and since her birth has lived with and been equally raised by the two women.

The child's biological grandparents have now decided that she must not be allowed to continue living with her surviving parent, due to the lesbian "influence" in the household. They have filed for guardianship of this child, even though they realize this move is in direct opposition to their deceased daughter's own wishes, as well as the desperate desire of the child herself.

It is estimated that legal fees will amount to \$10,000 to fight this threat and insure that permanent custody is awarded to the lesbian parent. There is optimism in the legal community that

this case can be won.

Local women have organized a fund-raising and support group. They welcome donations of any size. Please send a cheque to: Defense Fund, PO Box 6597, Denver, Colorado, USA 80206. If you would like more information about this case, write the above address or call 303/333-9133.

*Information from Off Our Backs, Aug/Sept 1985*

BOSTON — The two boys who were removed from the home of their gay foster parents, Don Babets and David Jean, were moved for the fourth time on August 2, 1985. The boys, aged two and three and a half, have now been placed with five families since late April.

Babets told *Gay Community News* (GCN) that he was led to believe that the Department of Social Services (DSS) has turned the children over to a private agency because DSS did not have "enough mom and pop homes to care for them." According to a reliable source, of the five placements, only one has been in a "traditional" family setting.

A spokesperson for DSS, Margaret Cruise, was unable to confirm or deny the report at GCN's press time, but said that she was "not aware" of the move and believed she would be unable to give out such information if she did have it because it is "case specific."

The boys were removed from the Babets/Jean home when a *Boston Globe* article spotlighted the placement and alleged that neighbors were upset that two gay men were foster parents. Amid a storm of publicity, DSS Commissioner Marie Matava at first defended the placement, and then later removed the children, saying the publicity was putting "pressure" on them.

*Christine Guilfoxy, Gay Community News, Boston, MA  
August 17, 1985*

## UNDER 18: YOUR RIGHTS A Guide for Young Persons in Ontario

Justice For Children announces the publication of an easy-to-read booklet explaining the basic legal rights of young people in Ontario.

The law affecting young people is concisely summarized in the following areas: education, employment, welfare, parental support, custody and access, medical treatment, counselling, child protection (the *Child Welfare Act*, the *Young Offenders Act*), residential placements, and rights when in detention, custody or residential care.

The text includes, where appropriate, reference to new rights created by the *Child and Family Act* (Bill 77). The booklet is 40 pages (with illustrations).

Price: \$2.00 to institutions (\$1.50 for orders of 10 or more); \$1.00 to individuals (one copy limit).

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# Charting my own course

## Marriage, motherhood, sex and love from a lesbian n

*Gayle, 31, is the mother of two sons (Bradley, 10, and Stuart, 2) and has been separated from her husband Ralph for two and a half years. She works full time as an accountant and is one of the women who make up the backbone of the Toronto Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund. Her story is printed here because she and the rest of us feel it's representative of the experiences of many mothers who have won the fight for independent lives. But for every lesbian who has succeeded in making her way out of a marriage there are many more who haven't been able to leave. By recalling her married years she's reminding all of us to keep fighting against the obstacles that keep women unfree, never to blame the women — or our own old selves — for their unfreedom.*

I was raised by my grandparents, my father and my aunt. My grandmother was the dominant figure in my life, and also the most traditional. I was always a tomboy, uninterested in boys, and I had ideas of my own about my future — I wanted to be a doctor, very strongly. But as the end of high school approached my family started increasing their pressure on me to marry Ralph, whom I'd known since I was 14. He was four years older, working steadily and close to his family. My family thought he was the best I would ever do. They couldn't take my resistance seriously, and I couldn't keep it up, especially because my grandmother was ill, and my dad had moved. I was feeling insecure and began to believe that marrying Ralph would answer all my problems. I felt more and more dependent on him.

I graduated from high school in June and married Ralph in September 1972. The first part of my marriage was shocking — the end of my pie-in-the-sky ideals about living happily ever after. It wasn't that anything dramatically bad happened. I just wasn't happy, and I'd thought I would be, that marriage made people happy and so I would be too.

I played the game for years. We both worked, bought a house, and we had Bradley (I hoped *that* was the answer). It was while I was home with Bradley that I started soul-searching. I realized in those two years that I was suffering, and that I wanted to be with women. I was discontented and full of guilt — an unhappy person. I began to have secret lesbian experiences, and felt more guilty. When I went to a psychiatrist for help he made it even worse. One of the things he advised me to do was to have sex with Ralph any time I felt trapped and attracted to a woman. He also suggested Ralph and I see his wife for couple counselling, and though we went for a few months my heart wasn't in it. I felt guilty about that too, that I couldn't even try to save our marriage.

I think it was that experience with the psychiatrist that set me back so far. I sat on my desperation for another four or five years while I went through the motions of marriage. But gradually I began to take steps. For the last five years Ralph knew I had lesbian feelings. He suggested a threesome, to satisfy me, but I knew that wasn't what I wanted. Instead I got involved with a woman on my own, through a classified advertisement. It was solely physical at first. I made it as clear to the woman as I could that that was all I had to offer — I was drained emotionally by my efforts to keep my equilibrium — but I needed to find out if the physical side of lesbianism was as good as I'd imagined. (I already *knew* all the rest would be.) I was ecstatic that the sex was so good. I remember coming home and discussing it with Ralph, feeling so good for the first time that I *couldn't* feel guilty about it. I was too hopeful.

I wasn't sure about how to get out of my marriage. I wasn't

working then and hadn't for a few years, so I was financially dependent and not self-confident about my job prospects. The other big obstacle was custody. Ralph began threatening that if I did ever leave to become a lesbian I'd lose my son. I'd lie awake nights trying to figure out how to get out with Bradley. Ralph became more violent during this period. I think he was afraid, and violence was all he felt he had left to control me. Bradley was about six then.

Then we moved. I know now I was subconsciously trying to put together the money and other supports I needed to get out. I talked Ralph into selling our house and renting instead. I went back to work and soon earned as much as he did. But as fast as I earned Ralph would spend, trying to undo the foundation I was building. Toward the end I was really scrambling. I hid my money — we didn't eat or pay the bills. I had tried to negotiate a settlement, but he wouldn't accept anything but surrender, so there was no other way.

In September 1982 I conceived Stuart. He was a conscious, deliberate decision. I wanted to have another baby, for the opposite reasons I'd wanted Bradley. The conscious reasons were my age and — what I told Ralph — that it might be a last-ditch way to save our marriage. Ralph didn't object, maybe because he welcomed it as an ego-support at that point. He probably needed it. Subconsciously I knew that I was on my way out of the marriage and this was my last opportunity to have a baby.

The Toronto Sun printed a letter in December 1982 from a woman in exactly my situation. She gave the name and telephone number of a group for married lesbians founded by a therapist named Caryn Miller. (I don't think the group exists any more.) I called and went to my first meeting in January 1983. I found kinship, support, confidence, and everything else I needed to get out of my marriage there, as well as some private counselling for Bradley. Caryn helped him express his fears and gave him what reassurance she could — that his father would always be his father, and that it was okay to be worried, but things wouldn't stay this bad. Caryn herself was wonderful and so comfortable to talk to. I knew that whatever I was feeling was okay with her. She never told anyone what the right thing to do was, but listened, asked and provided a setting for figuring out what we wanted. I couldn't yet see myself leaving my marriage when I started going to the group. I was too afraid and not at all sure that I should. Should! God, when I hear that word!

I quickly found out that if I did decide to leave, I could. Other women in the group were making that decision, making their plans and surviving. I wrestled and wrestled with myself for months. It felt like years. It was a real struggle. I knew that it was the only thing I would ever do all by myself, for myself, that it was my responsibility only.

Then things began happening very fast. Ralph went away on a business trip in March 1983 for a week. When I'd told Caryn he was leaving she suggested moving then. I was shocked at the idea. Leave? So soon? But I realized I could. My aunt (who was in effect my mother) was in the hospital dying of cancer. Her house which would belong to my sister and I was empty, and when I told my sister I wanted to move into it she agreed. I moved with Bradley in March. My aunt died in April. Stuart was born in June. I went back to work in September, at the job I still have.

For the first six months after I left, Ralph refused to see Stuart or even acknowledge his existence. He was very good, over-compensating, with Bradley, but I put my foot down and insisted that both kids should have a relationship with him. If he didn't take both on his visits, he wouldn't see either. For a while he

## mother's point of view

stopped seeing Bradley, but I stuck to my guns and he relented. I'm sure the woman he started seeing about then made all the difference. She encouraged him to include Stuart, and while in the beginning Ralph often threatened to sue for custody she's gradually put a stop to that.

He's never given me any money for child support. My own guilt feelings, his threats about custody and my need for some peace between us have kept me from asking for financial support so far. But this year he's looking forward to getting a divorce. I think I will fight for support now. He should be helping with money. His attitude is still that he's doing me a favour if he buys them anything.

I don't know why so many fathers don't care about their children. Maybe because society says mom's the main caretaker, and dad's just extra baggage. They buy it and stay so distant from their children, so antagonistic to responsibility.

About his time with the kids I've ended up saying, 'I need help. I count on it. And I want the kids to know you.' But other times I feel like taking them away altogether. Would that be enough of a shock to make him value his time with them and start wondering if they're okay? I've stopped asking him for any unscheduled help because he just can't handle it.

For a long time after I'd moved out I kept going to the married lesbians group once a week. I was all alone now with two kids, and I needed help in feeling I could make a secure home. I really threw myself into my work too, to get my feet on the ground. I kept feeling surprised and scared about having my freedom. Now I knew it was just a matter of guts in going out to look for what I wanted. I didn't have my marriage stopping me any more, and there weren't any more shoulds. My very last excuse for standing still was my feeling that maybe I couldn't be a real lesbian if I had children, that I was a living contradiction and couldn't be what I knew I was.



Caryn suggested I contact the Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund. So I called and I want to a pot-luck. That was a *big* step. It was the last barrier! I was so scared, and so glad to have the kids with me at that meeting because they took some of the focus off me. Everyone was thrilled to have a baby there. I'd never been exposed to such women. I sat back and drank them in. These women on their own, with kids. They're doing it! It can be done! Jeanne was there, Lynda, Kathleen, Van, Val, Shelly and Deborah. All those different viewpoints ...

Then I went to an LMDF night out at the Cameo. It was my first time in a lesbian bar. I sat back again. I'd been so anxious.

What to wear? How to behave? I think I danced. I know it was wonderful. I was on my way to coming out.

Afterwards I felt 'what next?' I started wanting it *all* right away. I guess I became pretty wild, for me. I wanted to experience everything at once. I didn't know how to get involved sexually with a woman and felt tremendously frustrated because I wasn't having sex, and felt I'd never learn the ropes.

I was able to relax a little about sex, but it was a really lonely and hard time for months. I fooled around with roles, and was butch for a while. I figured, 'I guess I shouldn't wear dresses now.' I was hunting for how to be a lesbian. But I gradually became more involved with the LMDF and found it was really important to me. I got more comfortable at bars and parties. There were some very intense highs and lows: 'I can do anything!' and 'I'll never make it,' but meanwhile my friendships were growing. I was able to throw away my ideals about meeting the perfect woman in a bar one night and living happily ever after. And when that went I really began to relax. I wasn't quite as excited, but I wasn't desperate either. I was able to stay home on a Saturday night if I felt like it! Through all of this, no matter how miserable I was, I knew I'd done the right thing. There was no question of going back.

Jan and I met at the Cameo. It was a bizarre meeting. We were pretty crazy that night. We started fooling around on the dance floor and then went home together. The next morning I started to see how much there was to her and that it might be an important relationship. We saw each other the next night and two days later she came out to meet the kids. She loved them. We got closer and closer, it got better and better. I'm still in awe about it — it works so well. It's such a comfortable thing for both of us. We've been together a year and two months, since July '84, and have lived together since March.

It's a totally different relationship. First, there's friendship, understanding and communication. Then, we're equal. No one gets to assume their needs come first. And she *likes* spending time with the kids and all together as a family. We're both open to the other needing time away on her own, and we're open to changes too. There's no need to guard or censor what we say to each other. I'm just in awe.

Jan helps me deal with Ralph too. She began by trying to be neutral. She wanted to meet Ralph on his own terms, to judge for herself what he was like and to be fair to him. She's friendly to him but he's been rude from the first — he won't give her the time of day. She still helps me get my anger under control, and not get frantic over trifles but now that she knows him she knows what I'm up against and helps me figure out what's best for me and the kids.

Bradley's really comfortable with us at home. Once Jan and I held hands when we were all downtown and he said he was embarrassed. So we respect that. Sometimes I wonder if Stuart will have the same need for discretion. He and Bradley have a very special, close relationship, but he'll grow up without questioning Jan's and my relationship. What will it be like as he grows older?

Jan wondered briefly if she should be a parent. 'No,' I said. 'Be Jan!'

I'm still dazzled that it can be done. I want to say to women who are in situations like the one I was in a few years ago: Believe in yourself. For so long I doubted that decision to go for what I wanted, a relationship with a woman. I couldn't acknowledge that what I felt was okay. That changed when I was able to believe I was entitled to be happy. After that it's a matter of determination.

It's hard for me not to be scared of my own strength sometimes. I've had to struggle with my patterns of emotional and financial dependency. The old patterns feel familiar and attractive. But I'm beginning to feel at home with the idea that I can and will make my own life on the terms I want. And our relationship is based on a new set of assumptions about who I am. That helps me keep the course I've set myself, to keep building the self-respect I've won.

# Choosing motherhood

Since the early 1970s lesbian mothers have been leading opponents of the idea that homosexuality must be punished by childlessness. At the same time skyrocketing divorce rates have given rise to a new reality: single motherhood is as widespread as the nuclear family. The assumption that women can have children only when married and living with men is beginning to give way to a new claim: women want the right to choose whether, how, when and with whom they will become mothers.

More and more lesbians who, five or ten years ago, may have believed they didn't want children are now deciding to get pregnant. There are several routes open to them, the most popular method being artificial insemination (AI). AI can be carried out in a doctor's office or it can be done in a woman's own home, without medical supervision.



Support groups are being formed where would-be and new mothers can talk about everything from the mechanics of AI to issues like telling their families, decisions about the degree of the father's involvement in child-rearing and the financial realities of motherhood.

At the International Gay Association conference this summer in Toronto there was a crowded workshop on lesbians and pregnancy which resulted in plans for a new service geared to finding healthy, willing donors for lesbians who can't or don't want to go the medical route. Within the Toronto area there are very few doctors who will inseminate single women, and the cost of the course of treatment in Ontario is \$95 for the first insemination and about \$70 for each subsequent try. OHIP (the Ontario Health Insurance Plan) will reimburse part of the cost, but even among women who can afford to pay for AI there are many who want more control over the circumstances surrounding conception than standard medical procedures allow. Through an independent service a prospective mother can share information with others on ovulation, pregnancy and the politics of lesbian motherhood and have access to all the information she may want about the father.

Women involved in launching the Toronto support group hope it will also combat the isolation faced by new lesbian mothers. It could become a network of women who can together face the problems of constructing personal support systems — will they be alone with the child? do they have a lover or others in their lives ready to share the commitment of care? — and all the other issues involved in parenting.

The support group is in the beginning stages of organizing and has plenty of work cut out for itself. Readers interested in helping or in getting more information can call (416) 964-7477. Ask for Lois or Dini.

Jeanne

# Book reviews

**LONG WAY HOME: *The Odyssey of a Lesbian Mother and Her Children***, by Jeanne Jullion, Clais Press, Pittsburg, PA, 1985, 261 pages, \$8.95 paperback.

Long Way Home is the true story of the custody battle for her two sons fought by Jeanne Jullion in San Francisco in 1977. Her battle takes place out of court as much as in the courts. Upon separating from her husband, circumstances are such that the older son is with his father and the younger with Jullion. Newly out as a lesbian, she naively begins with the belief that she will obtain custody of her oldest son, but quickly realizes she's fighting for both.

Jullion gains the support of the gay community, decides to try to publicize her case and organizes a defence committee. The trial judge punishes her for this, saying it will "harm the children," and awards both boys to their father. On appeal, Jullion wins custody of her younger son.

But the fight doesn't end there. Her husband kidnaps both boys and takes them to Italy where his wealthy family lives. Kidnapping had been one of Jullion's constant fears. When the court allows the father to keep the boys' passports Jullion asks, "But what if he takes them to Italy?" The judge answers that if that happens he will give custody of both boys to her — an empty promise, since the U.S. has no legal agreement with Italy to honour each other's custody rulings.

Over the next three years Jullion makes several attempts to kidnap the children, alone, without financial resources. She finally succeeds in bringing the younger boy home, but sees that her older son will be happier where he is.

As these events unfold Jullion finds herself in a position where the legal system is meaningless.

Long Way Home is an important book, a gripping story of desperate heroism. But Jullion's personal, emotional struggle is what spoke to me most and what I think other lesbian mothers will find most moving. She has to face decisions about what will be best for her children and herself that only she can make, and for which she alone can take responsibility. She won't allow herself to be motivated by despair or vengefulness, but only by self-respect and her love for her children. Her book is a signpost for all of us.

Gayle



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# The Kids' Page!



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STUART (age 1)  
his first drawing

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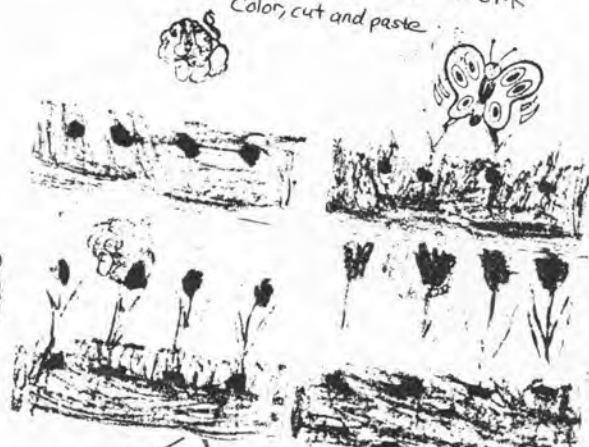


BACK TO SCHOOL!

VELVET



Tissy Y my school work  
Color, cut and paste.



Rached & Mermaid

**Q:**

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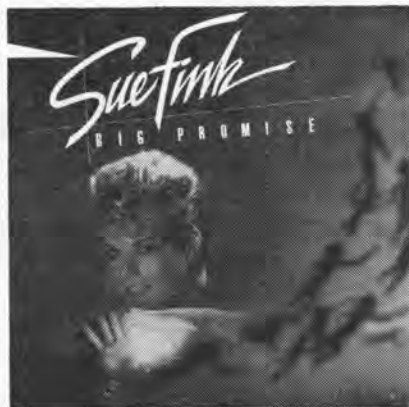
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## "Looking Forward, Reaching Back" Women's Archives In Canada Project

The Canadian Women's Movement Archives has been collecting material on the women's movement in Canada since 1977. The bulk of archival material, though is being saved by individuals and women's groups across the country.

During the next year, the CWMA will be researching and compiling a directory of Women's Archival Collections in Canada. A collective member will be travelling across the country to meet with individuals and women's groups.

If you or your organization have any material on the women's movement in Canada, please contact the CWMA. Help ensure that our history is saved.

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