

Grapevine

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

FALL/WINTER 1984

Child custody and money: Psychological assessments and the facts of lesbian life

by Jeanne

On Sunday, August 26th, three LMDF members and one representative of Gay Fathers met with the Gay/Lesbian Interest Group of the American Psychological Association, at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto.

This was an exciting opportunity to bring up some of the problems we've experienced in the area of psychological assessments of mom-child relationships. These evaluations are ordered or independently arranged when there is a custody dispute.

Because of the high regard the courts have for expert testimony, and the particular respect accorded psychologists in cases involving children, it is extremely important that the psychologist carrying out such assessments be aware of stresses that a lesbian mom usually feels in 1) struggling to maintain a regular home routine for the children when her life has probably undergone a recent, sudden and large-scale change; 2) having her parenting skills, psychological health and most private thoughts scrutinized in interviews and tests with a powerful and unknown professional person, and, probably most importantly; 3) having to contend daily with relative poverty (and consequent guilt) in comparison to her husband — the well-known discrepancy between men's and women's earning power in the labour force.

We emphasized this last point because, if a psychologist feels that the parent who earns more money can better raise the children, well — any time men's and women's wallets/bank accounts/future financial prospects are compared, we're usually gonna lose. And if a psychologist denies s/he is influenced by economic factors, but fails to use compassion and imagination when s/he sees the emotional effects of the mother's poverty, then we're usually gonna lose there, too.

We asked this group of lesbian and gay psychologists from all over the United States (some of them gay parents themselves) to assume some responsibility for educating their colleagues in the lesbian mother's facts of life. If more psychologists understood the effects on us of the financial disparity between women and men, they might conduct lesbian mothers' assessments more fairly.

We kept hammering on this point of economics, mainly because it's one of the most important assets women lack. If we don't have the independence and security that comes from having money, we are often trapped into staying in situations that are detrimental to our mental health, which in turn affects the



way we relate to our children.

There's clearly a difference between a woman who has the means to choose a different lifestyle and one who doesn't. But children may prefer to live with a mother who loves and cares for them than with a father who can afford to buy them everything they want.

Another aspect of the economic issue is that many women in marriages had a standard of living that consisted of two salaries if she worked outside the home, or a pretty decent man's salary to rely on even if she didn't. This standard of living is left behind when the woman leaves, with or without her kids, and it's a difficult thing to have to adjust to. It's one hell of a stress, and it's hard, when you are really tired, and wondering if you can meet all the monthly expenses, to present yourself to a psychologist as the totally "together" mother the courts demand in a case involving lesbianism.

Unfortunately, so much weight is put on psychological assessments that undergoing them feels like a frightening gamble — with custody or interim custody of the children as the stakes. And the gamble becomes stacked against the woman whenever

• *Continued on page 2*

The (Toronto) Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund was set up six years ago to provide assistance to mothers who are fighting for child custody or visiting rights, and as a peer counseling/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

Psychological assessments

• *Continued from page 1*

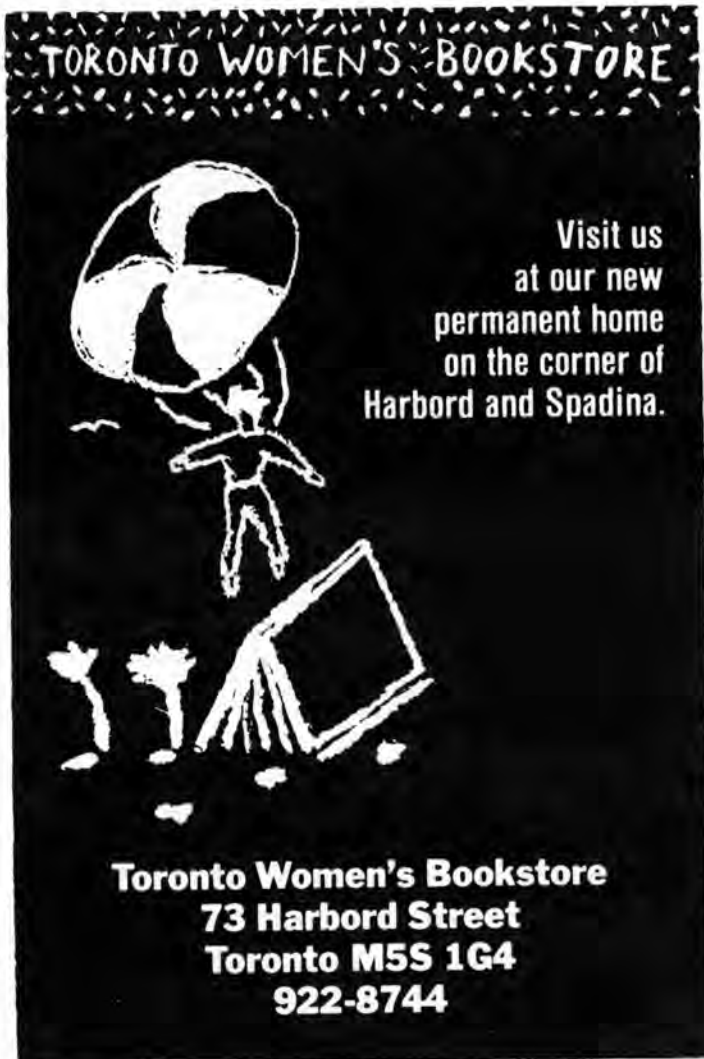
a psychologist values middle-class trappings more than the emotional bond between the parent and child.

One of today's follies, I suppose, is the assumption made by too many people in positions of authority that the women's movement has ended women's economic dependence. This is not so! We may be considered "equal" but if the salary a woman earns is 59% of the average man's, then she also usually has 59% of the choices, mobility, opportunity and peace of mind. This is an important area to keep raising in whatever arena we have an opportunity to address. We were fortunate to get a chance to really put our concerns across to these psychologists.

When so damn much hangs on the results of a lesbian mother's psychological assessment, there really isn't room to kid around about equality. Lesbian moms face the same economic hardships any single mother does. But if you have to stand in front of a judge and have a major decision affecting the lives of a whole family based on expert testimony about what a psychologist thinks is in the best interest of the children, then we have to educate the professionals on the reality of women's and lesbian issues.

We have no objection to evaluating the relationships between us and our children — the quality of the bond, our children's well-being and sense of security, our real strengths and weaknesses as parents. But when criteria are used that strike us out because they assume an "equality" that doesn't in fact exist, we object, strongly!

Write to the Grapevine with your ideas on this or any other subject relating to lesbian mothers!



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Reports from Canada's LMDFs

Montreal

October 6th is always a big day of workshops and other events for women in Montreal. This year Carolle from the LMDF organized a workshop for lesbian mothers (with child care) which combined with another on legal issues. Not only was the discussion great — Carolle found a lawyer there who is interested in working on custody cases. The Montreal LMDF is beginning support work on its first case now, and will send information to the *Grapevine* as it unfolds.

In the meantime, they have printed flyers about the LMDF and continue to meet regularly, spending part of the time answering letters. Some members are also working on a submission to the government recommending changes in Quebec's civil code.

The Montreal LMDF needs more women to help out in all these areas. If you would like to find out more, call Carolle at the number in the box on this page on Tuesday or Thursday between 8 and 10 pm.

Calgary

Lynn and Vickie, and Lynn's son Dustin, from the Alberta LMDF came to Toronto in September for a long-awaited and too-short visit. They told us the LMDF had taken a break for a few months so members could work on other projects, spend vacation time with kids, and generally re-build resources for another busy year.

Alberta LMDF members helped organize Calgary's Take-Back-the-Night march in September and a dance whose profits went to help support a new prostitutes' rights group in Vancouver. In October they resumed LMDF pot-lucks and made plans for expanding their program of speaking engagements at area high schools and colleges.

To contact them, for assistance, literature, speakers or to find out about LMDF pot-lucks, see the address and phone number in the box on this page.



In eastern Canada, contact:
Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund
PO Box 38, Station E
Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E1
416/465-6822

**L'association des meres lesbiennes
de Quebec**
CP 222, Succ. De Lorimier
Montreal, Quebec H2H 2N6
514/524-1040 (Monday evenings)

In western Canada:
Alberta Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund
#124, 320-5 Avenue S.E.
Calgary, Alberta T2G 0E5
403/264-6328

Custody news

Ontario

We have news for Grapevine readers about three local custody cases we wrote about in the Fall 1983 issue:

Marilyn

Marilyn and her husband Peter both underwent a psychological assessment that turned out to be very favourable to Marilyn, recommending that her two boys should continue to live with her.

On the day of the trial this summer — several grueling years after Peter first launched his fight — his lawyer informed Marilyn and Cathy that Peter was withdrawing the custody issue from the contested points in their separation agreement.

This was an enormous relief for Marilyn and her family. They had all been prepared to go through an explicit defence of their lesbian lifestyle, and had witnesses — including the children's teachers — with them, ready to testify that the children are doing well with their mother. In the end, the issue of Marilyn's lesbianism didn't arise.

Now her family can get back to day to day life and worry about moving into their new home. The boys are doing well; the stress they experienced during more than half a dozen court appearances and a psychological assessment is diminishing. And they are still in regular contact with their father.

Val

Val's custody fight for her two sons, 5 and 6, is over at last! The suits filed by her husband and his parents that have dragged on for two years, through many court appearances, threats and actual violence, ended in a fizzle when her in-laws dropped their suit and Val's husband failed to show up in court several times in a row.

The judge who presided over Val's final Ontario Supreme Court appearance in May awarded her unconditional custody. She and her boys will have a long convalescence from a history of battery and emotional terrorism in her marriage, but one major worry is gone, and if courage and determination are needed, Val's got more than enough to go around. Congratulations!

The LMDF and Gay Fathers' of Toronto are having a shared Christmas/Chanuka party for our children on December 15th.

If you and/or your kids would like to join us, call the LMDF at 465-6822 for time and place, and info about presents.

We need donations of stocking-stuffers & a Santa Claus suit for the occasion — and we're looking for entertainers (mime artists, puppeteers, magicians) who'd like to do a short stint. Please call if you can help. Thanks!

Hope

In the Fall 1983 Grapevine we reported on Hope's fight for custody. Her husband, an evangelical minister, had had interim custody since Hope signed an agreement with him in 1982. Later, when she decided to try to win them back, she faced one of the most serious handicaps in such cases — the established residence of the children with the other parent.

After four years of living in limbo, the trauma of my custody battle has finally been quelled. After two Official Guardian reports, a psychological assessment, written accusations by my husband that I was sexually abusing my daughter (designed to scare the psychologist who wrote the assessment), and constant worry about my kids, I made one of the most difficult decisions of my life.

The OG's report was not terribly favourable, and the court-appointed psychologist strongly recommended that my husband have sole custody of both my son and daughter. With my husband and me at each other's throats the court would not have recommended joint-custody. I had a choice: I could go to court, fight, and have a slim chance of winning sole custody; or, I could use the high power of negotiation I had at my finger-tips — my husband was in an incredible furor to re-marry, and until custody was settled the divorce could not be obtained, without a massive fight.

I drew up a detailed contract listing my conditions for surrendering my fight for custody, including unlimited visitation, holidays and many other things which I deemed important to the welfare of my children. To my shock, he signed it without haggling over anything.

I still hang on to the hope that with continuous involvement in their lives I will see the day when Ruth and Bobby will decide for themselves, without court interference, with whom they wish to live. For now, the fact that we have called a "cease-fire" has had a terrific calming effect on their emotions.

My thanks to Ellen Murray (my lawyer) and the Fund-family for the support and practical advice offered when emotions were running too high to see circumstances clearly! *Hope*

• a festival of •
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MUSIC: The Ring Ensemble The Paradise Women	THEATRE: Monique Mojica & Makka Kleist — Members of Native Earth Performing Arts
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Networking with gay dads

Last Christmas Toronto's lesbian moms and gay fathers got together for a seasonal party with our kids, our first cooperative venture. Since then, in the course of lots of talks, both groups have agreed that as gay parents we can develop a stronger voice on some issues by working together, and build our children's sense of community by bringing them together more often.

It's been a lively year of information sharing, working jointly on our brief to the Board of Education, going together to speaking engagements and, most recently, presenting a panel discussion for both groups on parenting issues.

We've also enjoyed frolicking with our children at a summer picnic and a roller-skating afternoon. Now, once again, we're planning a Christmas party — see our notice about the party elsewhere in this issue — and the agenda for 1985 looks full of lots more goings-on for the kids and our two groups.

Though our lives differ in their general patterns — for instance, most of the gay fathers have their children with them on weekends or for short stretches, while most of us have our children with us most of the time — we're finding we can learn from each other.

The kids, of course, are just having fun!

Jeanne

US Defence Fund started it all

This summer I visited Seattle, Washington, where I met the women behind the Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund. The LMNDF is the only permanent defence fund in the States, so I expected to find a massive office with lots of women running around doing the incredible amount of work we know they do. I was surprised to walk into the cozy home that Jean shares with her lover and 18-month-old son, to see a desk, 2 filing cabinets, tons of envelopes in the basement and a handful of women volunteers — this was my formal tour of the LMNDF!

Three very dedicated women and some steady helpers handle all the US requests for assistance from lesbian mothers. They offer information, help women fund-raise in their communities, and print and mail out their outstanding newsletter *Mom's Apple Pie*. Sound incredible? It is!

This group has been together for 10 years. They served as a model for the Canadian LMDFs and helped us establish our library of legal and psychological resources. It was a wonderful visit, exchanging ideas and information about current custody struggles.

One woman they're helping lives in Alaska where she raised her child without any contact with the father who left before the child was born. Later he reappeared, petitioning for custody on the sole grounds of her lesbianism. After an eight-day trial, he won. Now she is appealing the decision, but needs financial assistance to help cover legal costs. If you wish to make a donation, please send a cheque to the LMDF (address on page 2) with a note earmarking your donation to the "Alaska mom" and we'll forward it to her.

Congratulations on your 10th anniversary of pioneering work!

Jeanne



Logo of the Lesbian Mothers' National Defence Fund, Seattle WA, USA



Supporting ourselves

The Gay Community Appeal raises funds for lesbian and gay groups and special projects in Toronto, filling the gap left by umbrella organizations like the United Way which have yet to recognize the needs of our community.

The GCA has kicked off its 1985 campaign with hopes of raising \$60,000 dollars, half of which will go to support women's projects or services oriented to lesbians.

The campaign runs until December 15th, 1984, and consists mainly of S.O.S. (Support Our Selves) evenings in people's homes — you provide your living room and a group of friends or co-workers and the GCA provides a lively video tape about the Appeal and all the activities it supports, video equipment, and a speaker to fill out the picture and take your donations or pledges.

This is *our* umbrella. If you can, contact them to host an evening, or send a cheque to the Gay Community Appeal, PO Box 2212, Station P, Toronto M5S 2T2. Call them at (416) 869-3036.

Happy 5th from all of us!

Jeanne

Q:

- Should pornography be censored?
- Do feminist therapists exploit their clients?
- Is abortion 'free and easy' in Canada?
- Are feminist classics still being read?

A:

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Letters

Northern Ontario

Some lesbian moms may never make the move to a big urban centre — to feel strength in numbers. Their own personal show of strength can be fantastic. Here are some excerpts from a letter sent by a lesbian mother in a small Ontario city to her local daily newspaper:

I would appreciate your printing my letter in order to help make known some of the needs of a number of lesbian mothers here in town. We are women who, being forced to live under the stress of isolation, find that we have a need for fellowship and support as we work through difficult and often painful problems. For most of us, we face a daily fear of being "found out," which places us in a terribly lonely position in our places of work, recreation and worship

Being mothers, we naturally worry for our children. We want, as every mother wants, for them to feel the warmth of security and affirmation within their neighborhoods and schools. Yet we know that the word lesbian conjures up myths and mis-information about our lifestyles, so our need to protect our children from harsh and cruel consequences holds priority over all else. We are happy within our homes, living quiet, non-militant lives, building and teaching the values that love, respect and stability command. It is important for us that our children know that the relationships we have with our partners are responsible

We know that the only way we can feel affirmed as persons is to accept ourselves the way we are We ask that people in our community take a view of homosexuality that will allow for the beginnings of education and understanding of the meanings and implications of sexual orientation. We don't claim to have all the answers but we want to claim a place for our families

Claudia

Eastern Ontario

"Grapevine" means "the unofficial transmission of information, usually from person to person." As a direct result of the *Grapevine's* publication, we are able to touch base with many lesbian mothers, who, under ordinary circumstances would not have access to valuable information concerning child custody cases. An excerpt from a recent letter will give you a clear indication of the imperative need for making the LMDF known via the "vine."

I had a first-hand opportunity to read the Grapevine and noted that the LMDF will offer pre-legal advice and information to mothers fighting for child custody. Two years ago my ex-husband and I separated due to my relationship with another woman. Six months later, my lover and I were served with divorce papers on the grounds of homosexuality. Over the next year our lives changed drastically. As the legal process took over we were forced to fight for 2½ year old Terry. I write to you now in desperation to seek any type of information and/or advice that you have!

.... I retained daily contact with my son, never being able to keep him overnight. My husband used our child to further perpetuate my guilt, hoping to bring me back home. Our divorce became final and after initially promising to return Terry to me, my husband telephoned the day before Terry would arrive back (he had been with my husband's parents while my husband honeymooned with his newly acquired wife) and informed me that Terry indeed would NOT be living with me and I would be denied all access to him completely! I took it to court and the judge ordered void my husband's previous care and control (Terry now resides with my lover and me), until an assessment is completed by the Family Court Clinic.

Terry is happy and carefree while he resides with us and becomes agitated and anxious when Sunday comes and it's time to be returned to his father. I need some legal advice/information. This weighs heavily on my mind as the court has yet to decide with whom Terry will live permanently. Under his father's rules, Terry must call me by my first name and his step-mother "Mama."

This letter is typical of the task we as the LMDF face. It is a tremendous responsibility to fulfill the expectations of a mother who has exhausted most other avenues of support. This mother has been contacted by telephone, and we are collecting material and information relevant to the specific aspects of her case.

If you can provide any current legal information, law or psychological journal articles, etc. that pertain to lesbian mothers and child custody cases, contact us at the address given on page 2. If you feel a donation is in order, that would be super also and very much appreciated! Let's "value the vine!"

Van

Oklahoma

To the Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund

I am a gay parent involved in a custody case. My divorce has been ruled on and my children are in foster care. They are: a girl, Tracy, age 7, a girl, Selena, age 5, and a boy, Jeremiah, age 3. As a result of an in-home investigation, I was considered the better parent for placement, "if it were not for the single moral issue of being a lesbian."

The judge in my case decided that being raised by lesbians in Enid, Oklahoma would do definite psychological damage to my children. In order to get my children out of foster care, my lover and I have established separate residences and I am in the process of filing a motion to modify the judge's decree.

I am a librarian's aide and a student at Phillips University. This case has cost me about \$3,000 at this point, and I didn't even have an expert witness. I still owe most of this money to my lawyer as my resources are very limited. What can your organization do or suggest to help me in this situation? I need any help I can get.

*Sincerely,
Danna*

The Toronto LMDF has sent Danna a contribution, but she needs much more financial support than we or the Lesbian Mothers' National Defence Fund in Seattle can provide. If you can afford to make a donation of any size, please send a cheque to the Toronto LMDF earmarked for Danna (see our address on page 2) and we will forward it to her for you. Thank you.



Etiquette for "aunts"

At our house there are three dykes, two kids and four cats ... plus, at any given time, at least seven other friends, relatives and their pets. Door-to-door salespeople avoid us. The mail is dropped discreetly in the grass three doors down. Federal candidates wave from across the street, pitching pamphlets at us as they walk briskly by. We are, however, in control ... most of the time.

Our position in this three-storey zoo requires the skill and daring of a lion-tamer, the patience of a sculptor, the ingeniousness of a mechanical engineer, and the desperate energy of the truly crazy.

Yes, we are honorary aunts.

An honorary aunt is someone close to a lesbian mother, although not necessarily a lover. The aunt often lives with Mom and brood, as we do, or is with brood often enough to have her own mug and closet. Auntie babysits, takes kids to the Ex, and introduces kids to camping ("you want me to pee *there?*"). Auntie also feeds Mom beer and comfort, gives spiritual guidance on how best to punch out a younger sibling and tears her hair out by the handful.

What should you know if aunt-dom is your lot in life? Well, always remember these rules.

"Rules of Thumb" for the Honourary Aunt

1) Keep in mind that when the little person (people) comes to spend the night they have always forgotten something at home that they cannot possibly live without. Ignore, unless it's their junior ranger binoculars for their field trip the next day.



- 2) "But Mother told me I could ..." usually means Mother has not, as yet, voiced an opinion on the subject (usually because Mother has not yet been informed).
- 3) It will be very difficult to explain your exact relationship with the children to strangers. ("Well, no, they're not mine, but we live together sometimes, and we kinda share them, sort of ... like, I'm very close to their mom, but, not, you know, uh ...")
- 4) Make sure when you say "I've already discussed it with your mother" that you do! Preferably *before* the kids get a chance to!
- 5) "Unity in the control booth" is of utmost importance. Back mother on *everything* in front of the children. (What you say in private is, of course, another matter!)
- 6) Do not refer to the children as "rentals." The children will be offended.
- 7) Do not expect your more mature friends to believe that the pile of broken egg shells, mud and half-melted ice on your kitchen table is really an Eskimo village for the science fair.

* * *

And remember, if you're at the end of your rope, you can always (a) purchase a few tiny strait jackets, (b) smoke lots of funny cigarettes, or, (c) send them to boarding school after you save a few bucks. Or, (d) you can give them a hug and a sigh. Because, although they're not "your" kids, you do get to share them for a while.

Deborah Randall & Shelley Hobbs

Some of us

Several Grapevines ago we decided to introduce readers to the women who make up the LMDF, by printing a few lines on different volunteers in each issue. Some of Us gives us a chance to thank the women who work so hard to extend our rights, but we're also writing this column as a substitute for being able to meet all the lesbian mothers out there who read the Grapevine. Here's who we are — and we thank you who've written to us about yourselves.

Vangie has been involved with the Fund for almost two years. She keeps herself busy at our dances, bazaars, speaking engagements, steering committee meetings and handling all the LMDF's bookkeeping with tremendously contagious good humor! On top of all that she holds down a hectic full time job, frequent freelance jobs singing and arranging music, and has her two children with her on weekends. We don't know how we got along without Vangie before her move to Toronto!

Jenny is one of the non-mothers in the LMDF. She goes to gay community meetings on our behalf, co-ordinates advertising for our dances and the *Grapevine*, and is *always* there when we need her to pitch in. She refers to herself as an LMDF "groupie" but it'd be just as accurate to call the Fund a Jenny Fan Club!

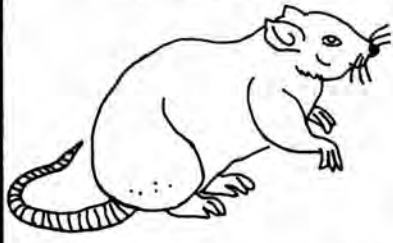
Gail joined the Defence Fund shortly after her second son was born a year and a half ago. (Number One Son Bradley's work can be seen on the children's page.) Not only is Gail a down-to-earth fun person to be around — everybody gets to play with the baby at our potlucks!

Bonnie works part-time and studies nursing in a full-time program. Recently she moved to Toronto with her teenage daughter and both are avid participants in LMDF projects. (When? In all their *spare* time.) We know Bonnie for the smile on her face and the intensity and energy she brings to our meetings.

Pam and **Denise** are both lawyers who joined the LMDF out of professional interest in the issue of lesbian custody rights and a personal interest in children. And they stayed long enough to get drawn into a growing number of jobs (and friendships). Their support means a lot to us.



de Martine Ruddy



Je suis un souris gris
 Qui part dans la nuit.
 Je vais au magasin
 Pour acheter du pain.



Ma As A Tree

In summer I was all green and all
 the other trees were all colours.
 Now it is fall and sill I'm green knowbody
 looks at me and they look at
 all the other tree.
 Now I am turning abit of colour no
 wait I am all colour.
 Look I see people looking at me.
 Now it is winter all my leaves are
 all gone but I know it will come
 back.

A deers, by Willie



Lennie AGE 6



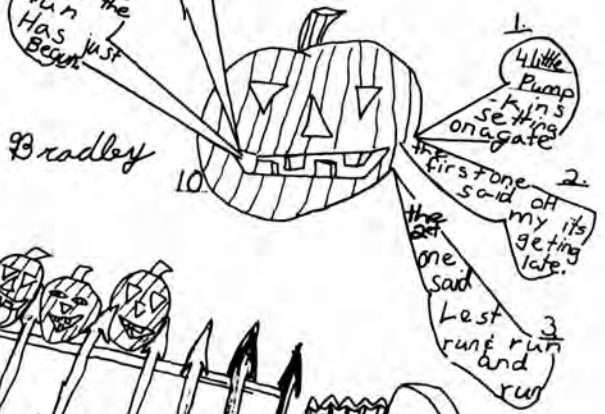
By Jolene



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Bradley 10

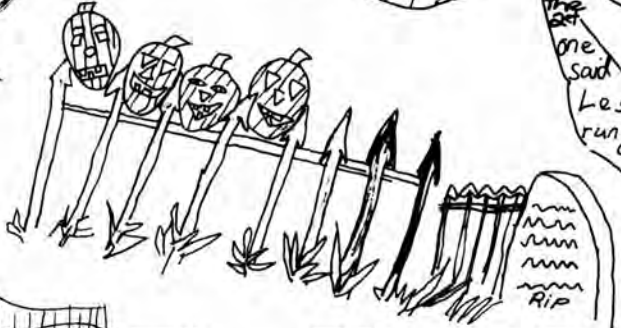
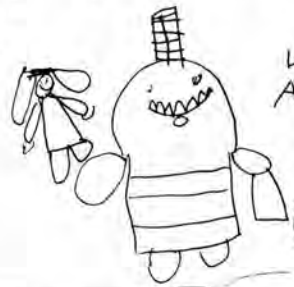


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Lennie AGE 6



the lesbian mothers' defence fund warmly invites you to

A Winter Carnival!

... a dance party

Saturday December 1st

9 pm-1 am at the

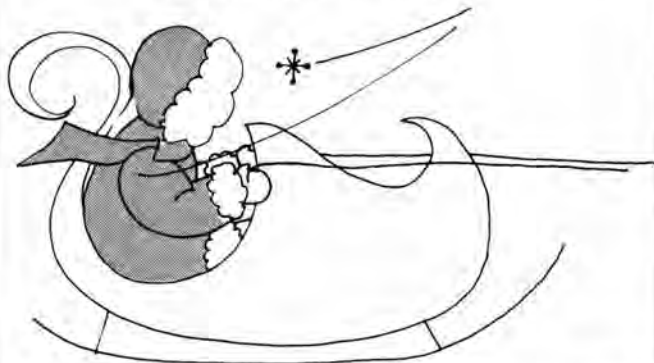
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We will contribute to help cover your babysitting costs.

All Women Welcome!



TOGETHER

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2.90 Soup du jour
2.25 French onion soup
5.50 Bouleah soup
5.50
5.50

Salade

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Caesar Salad 3.50
Greek Salad 3.75

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Lamb chops 7.95
Breaded chicken 6.95
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7.50

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Book reviews

ANOTHER MOTHER TONGUE: GAY WORDS, GAY WORLDS by Judy Grahn, Beacon Press, Boston MA, USA, 324 pages, \$27.50 hard cover.

When you read this book, and you must, you will be stunned by the volume of information Judy Grahn has compiled. But this is no litany of dates and places enlivened by the occasional verb. This is a gift of love.

Terms like gay, queer, dyke, femme, butch and others are inseparable from the culture of homosexuality. Intrigued, Grahn set out to trace twelve of them. Simple enough, one would think. Of course it wasn't. At every turn new aspects of gay culture, both modern and ancient, revealed themselves. Her research took years.

This compelling work presents her findings interspersed with legends, anecdotes, segments of personal history and selections of poetry. It is dedicated to her first lover, Yvonne, and it is Grahn's tender reminiscences that lead us through the narrative to a heartbreaking elegy.

Judy Grahn delivers her message with pride and conviction. We are as old as history. We are everyWHEN. — Susan

LILY BRISCOE: A SELF-PORTRAIT by Mary Meigs, Talonbooks, Vancouver BC, \$6.95 paper

"How strange it is that the purest element of a relationship between women is seen as the most threatening, the love that binds them together; and yet, a daughter's love for another woman is condemned by society, and a mother simply cannot believe that her daughter loves another woman more than she loves her own mother."

This is from a book that you should plan on spending some quiet time with. Mary Meigs will introduce you to her inner, realistic world. She presents Marie-Claire Blais, exposing the intricate qualities and delightful quirks that preside over her erratic and artistic life. Meet Barbara Deming, the lover, writer and political activist, whose voice "sounds like a ship in the night, steady and relentless ... I see her as a hieratical figure, like a sage in a Chinese painting."

You will feel raw and uncovered at times reading this, but Lily will salve old wounds inflicted by a society that stubbornly refuses to accept our lesbianism. Van Young



NEWSLETTER OF THE LESBIAN MOTHERS' DEFENCE FUND

CANADA

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