

Grapevine

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LESBIAN MOTHERS' DEFENCE FUND • WINTER 1979/80
TORONTO, ONTARIO



Robin Tyler in concert

Fund-Raising Performance by Lesbian Comic

May 18, 8PM. The air is charged with anticipation. Several hundred lesbians fill the auditorium at St. Paul's Centre in downtown Toronto. Many have lined up early to get tickets after registering to the Binational Lesbian Conference. We have been organizing for weeks -- posters, tickets, mailing lists -- Now all the last minute details -- Isn't Ruth on sound? -- What happened to the notes for the introduction?

Then at last over the loudspeaker, "And now, the woman we've all been waiting to see ... Robin Tyler!" Up the stairs she comes leaping onto the stage in leather boots, waving kisses to all the mothers in the front rows. "Hello, I was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba. For us, Minneapolis was the deep south!" Cheers and laughter fill the hall. "I came out when I was sixteen," she continues. "My best friend Sherry became the role model for every woman I ever loved: a cross between Grace Kelly, Katherine Hepburn, and Humphrey Bogart!"

For one hour Robin performs her powerful blend of humour and deep political conviction: "Anita Bryant is to music what paint-by-number is to Christianity" ... "yes, I believe in wages for housework! ... little did I know when I said 'I do' how much I'd have to" ... "I happen to agree with the Right to Life, because if you don't they'll kill you."

Afterwards, in a short lecture, she speaks passionately about the rights of lesbian mothers:

Some of my lesbian sisters reject lesbian mothers because they have dared lay with men. Yet had their mothers not lain with men, they wouldn't be

here to protest the lesbian mothers. Others object to lesbians raising some little boys, and I agree. Lesbians shouldn't raise "some" children. We should raise all children, for we understand prejudice, have compassion, and sure as hell, would do a better job!

The front rows are on their feet! Robin leans forward to clasp the hands of a lesbian mother reaching out. Her voice rising with emotion, she concludes: "I too am a lesbian mother, because I care about every child born to one of us. We need our own 'Save the Children' campaign. I want to save our children -- all the little kids out there who are going to grow up to be homosexuals and lesbians. I don't want them to suffer the way many of us did. We have to save our children from oppression and discrimination."

Then it was over. We filed out slowly, feeling stronger, richer, and more determined to fight.

A heartfelt thank you, Robin, from all of us in the Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund.

- Francie Wyland

Proceeds from Robin Tyler's performance were shared with the Winnipeg Women's Building. Our portion was allocated for production and distribution of "The Grapevine".

Be sure to see Robin Tyler in concert on Saturday November 3 -- Gay Human Rights Day -- at 8PM, at the Faculty of Education Auditorium, 371 Bloor St. West. Tickets are \$3.00 at the Toronto Women's Bookstore.

Where We've Been...

May 19-21: Binational (Canada & Quebec) Lesbian Conference, Toronto. We used our literature table as headquarters and exchanged tidings with women from all over. We led a workshop on child custody -- with a special appearance and inspiration from Robin Tyler -- and helped begin organizing for the commemorative women's issue of The Body Politic (Canada's gay liberation newspaper).

The Winnipeg contingent (from Wages Due Lesbians and the new Women's Building) included the Painted Ladies Theatre troupe. They wowed everyone at the Sunday banquet with their original and moving play about a housewife coming to terms with her daughter's lesbianism.

May 31: The Globe and Mail featured a full-page article on lesbian mothers and the LMDF; and the French CBC aired an interview with Melinda X. of the LMDF

June 3: Francie Wyland and Melinda interviewed by CHEZ Radio, Ottawa

June 10: LMDF pot-luck supper

June 30: Francie Wyland and Wendy, a law student working with the LMDF over the summer, went to Ottawa for the annual conference of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Rights Coalition. Francie spoke on a panel made up of all the defence committees working in the country, and then both joined the march to Parliament Hill, where Francie was interviewed by local newspapers and radio stations.

July 8: Francie led a public meeting on organizing around child custody, in Boston, MA, where she exchanged experiences and ideas with the Gay Parents Project and the Men's Childcare Collective. Then she was interviewed by the Boston Gay Community News about the history and goals of the LMDF (July 28,79)

August 12: LMDF pot-luck supper

August 24-26: Six LMDFer's drove to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival where we got very cold, heard terrific music, exchanged addresses and news with scores of women, and made contact with M.O.M. -- Mothers of Male children -- who are organizing for better child care for their kids at future festivals. So far, while girls are allowed in, boys over nursing age have been billeted miles away, with questionable supervision.

September 15: LMDF information table at the Cabagetown (east Toronto) Cultural Festival; lots of good will and a little financial profit. And Ellen Agger's and Francie's article on "Lesbian Custody Strategy" appears in Quest: A Feminist Quarterly, Washington, DC.

September 23: pot-luck picnic in High Park

September 27: The Special Women's Issue of The Body Politic hits the news stands, with 4 pages on lesbian mothers, co-ordinated by the LMDF

---COMING UP---

November 7: Francie appears on "Street Talk", CHCH-TV (Channel 11 in Toronto) to speak about gay adoptions, at 7PM

Sometime soon: Melinda X and Mrs. Z from the LMDF will be seen on the Joyce Davidson Show, CFTO-TV

Very soon: Francie will be part of a delegation of lesbian & gay spokespeople to Ontario Attorney General Roy McMurtry to demand inclusion of homosexuals in the Human Rights Code, and an end to discrimination against lesbian mothers in custody cases.

...And Where We're Going

Among the women from all over Ontario who have contacted the Lesbian Mothers' Defence Fund in recent months are:

-- Sally*, a welfare mother from eastern Ontario, who is trying to win back custody of her 5 year old daughter from the Children's Aid Society, and to end the CAS's supervisory power over her younger children. The oldest has had some brain damage and emotional problems since birth. The younger ones are fine. Sally hopes that no one besides her lawyer knows of her lesbianism, but she's finding it hard to maintain the level of secrecy she's decided on for now.

"I'd like to go to the local gay dances, just to get out and see people, but I'm terrified someone will see me there, and tell someone else. Maybe, when this fight is over I'll be able to have a night out with friends."

Jane, who is informally separated from her husband. She has their two children only on alternate weekends, and has decided not to fight for custody now because she could not afford to keep them on her own salary. She wants to formalize her agreement with her husband about access, and to have some control over her husband's behavior while the children are with him.

"Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but when the kids are with me, my girl-friend sleeps at her own place. My husband has had his girl-friend sleeping in the same room with him and the kids -- and it's a four-bedroom house!"

-- Helen and Pris, both mothers of pre-teenagers. They met each other through their involvement with the Boy Scouts, and secretly became lovers several years ago. Now they both want to leave their husbands but they're reluctant to disrupt their children's lives to such an extent. "We'd have to leave this part of town, our houses, our community involvement, but we could manage that. I think we'd both rather live under a bush than stay with our husbands. But the kids -- they'd have to get used to a new school, lose old friends and give up everything we can give them now because our husbands make good money -- the music lessons, summer camp, all that. I don't know."

-- Cindy and Sharon who are fighting to keep Sharon's 2 year old daughter. Her husband left her a year ago, and made no effort to see his daughter. He knew before they married that Sharon had had women lovers. Now, not knowing about Cindy, he has threatened to fight for custody and "expose" Sharon if she ever enters another gay relationship. Because he has a criminal record and a history of drug abuse, Sharon may not have to go to court: her lawyer will have a good chance to negotiate a winning settlement.

(* everyone's names have been changed in these accounts)



LESBIANS MAKE HEADLINES

CANADA -- "ALMOST HALF OF ALL CANADIANS FIND HOMOSEXUALITY EASY TO ACCEPT," the Weekend Magazine (August 18, 1979) headlined the results of their recent poll. 47% find homosexuality "very" or "fairly" easy to accept. 24% of Canadians have a more favourable view of gay people now than they had five years ago. While another study showed that people still feel uneasy about gays working as elementary school teachers, it's clear the lesbian and gay movements have shown people that we're pretty much like everyone else.

The Saskatchewan Law Reform Commission issued a report on child custody laws recommending that the strength of ties between child and parent be the basis of custody decisions. "Relationships established by caring, loving adults should be more important than financial resources, sexual conduct and, in rare cases, blood relationships." (The Globe and Mail)

INTERNATIONAL -- Was Eleanor Roosevelt a lesbian mother? The New York Times (Oct. 21, 1979) reported that a correspondence consisting of more than 3,000 letters between Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickok, a reporter and author, were discovered this year by Doris Faber, who is writing a biography of Lorena Hickok. The two women wrote to each other -- sometimes twice a day -- for thirty years, from 1932, the year FDR was first elected president until 1962, when Eleanor died.

"Hick darling," Eleanor wrote, "oh, I want to put my arms around you, I ache to hold you close. Your ring is a great comfort. I look at it and think she does love me, or I wouldn't be wearing it."

The two women often travelled together, and Ms. Hickok sometimes stayed at the White House. They lived near each other in Hyde Park from 1954 until 1962.

INTERNATIONAL - Dr. Martha Kirkpatrick conducted a study of lesbian mothers in Los Angeles. In comparing them to heterosexual mothers, she found that women in both groups tended to have the same problems, the same solutions, and to lead similar lives as parents. (from ZNS)

INTERNATIONAL - Kent County, Michigan lesbian mother Raelynn Smith won custody of her 4-year old son Jayson when Judge George Cook wrote, in his opinion, "Lesbianism was only one of several factors in deciding custody. It is rather the kind of care -- true love, security, affection and counselling of discipline -- that are important. Thus, if two female homosexuals can give that kind of care, it matters not that they are lesbian, nor does it matter that the child is male or female." Smith's ex-husband, Army Specialist 4 Stephen Smith, had based his care largely around Raelynn's homosexuality. (from Lesbian Tide, July/August, 1979)

INTERNATIONAL - The British Medical Association has advised doctors that it is not unethical to help lesbians have babies by artificial insemination. (Last year the news that some sympathetic doctors had helped impregnate dozens of gay women hit the headlines in England and North America. Other doctors treated it as a scandal and tried to have them barred from continuing the service).

This decision by the Ethical Committee of the BMA leaves the question completely to the discretion of the doctor and the patient. (Lesbian Tide)

INTERNATIONAL - Somewhere in the USA a lesbian mother was being grilled in court by her ex-husband's lawyer, about the details of her sex life. The next day the mother brought a friend along with her who had turned a few tricks with the lawyer. The friend didn't say a word, but by sitting in the courtroom she made the lawyer uncomfortable enough to stop that particular line of questioning. (from Mom's Apple Pie, the Newsletter of the Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund, Seattle, Washington)

Human Rights Begin with Gay Rights

On June 18th, 1979, Dr. Robert Elgie, Minister of Labour for Ontario, announced in the Legislature his undertaking that a new Ontario Human Rights Code "will be introduced to this Legislature, probably early in the fall".

A major effort is now being organized by the Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario, to build an effective lobby to ensure that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation will be barred in the new Code. This is a once-in-a-decade chance to gain long-sought amendments to Ontario's Human Rights Code.

A new Code will help protect lesbians and gay men from discrimination in employment, housing, and access to services. And while custody decisions fall outside the jurisdiction of the Human Rights Commission, our hand in court will be much stronger when we can point to the HRC's affirmation of our right to fair treatment in other areas.

For more information write to:

The CGRO Human Rights Campaign
29 Granby Street
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1H8

SOON

I will march
I will fight
Not today, not tomorrow
But I will.

Today I listen, I learn
I stockpile, I categorize
But that will end.

And I too will one day
be able to stand strong,
firm to fight with and for
us.

I will become
visibly and audibly -- me.

- Jenner

