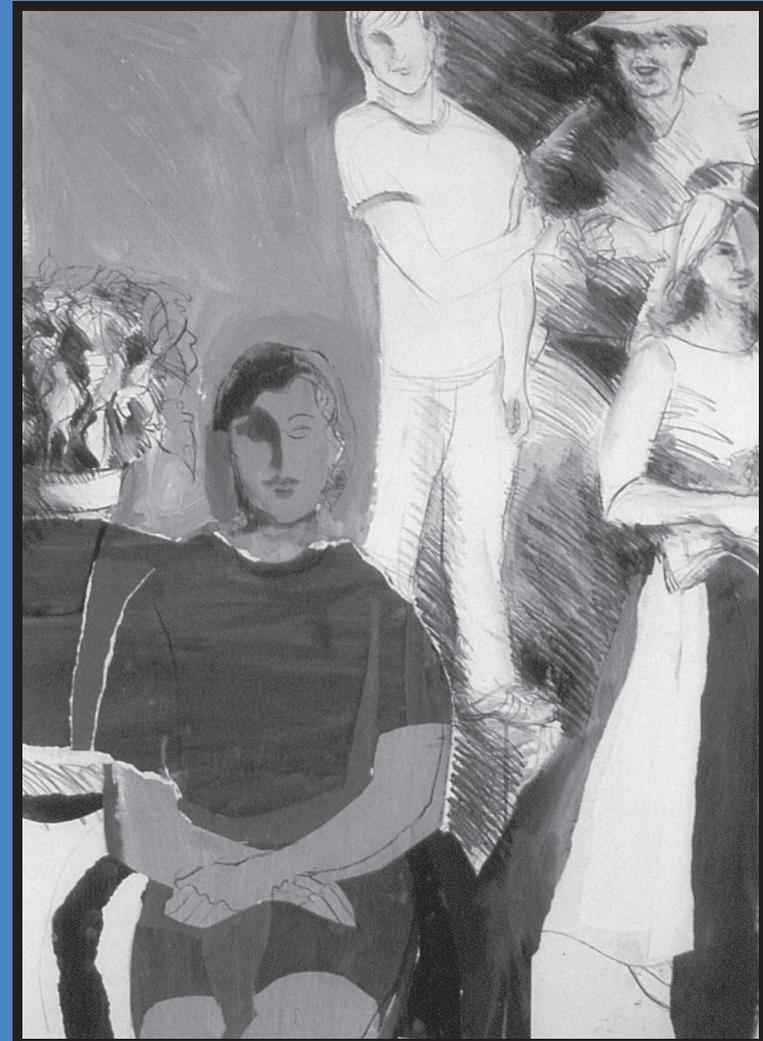


sinister wisdom

65

Lesbian Mothers



& Grandmothers

Sinister Wisdom 65

Autumn 2005



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Sinister Wisdom is a multicultural, multi-class, female-born lesbian space. We seek to open, consider and advance the exploration of community issues. We recognize the power of language to reflect our diverse experiences and to enhance our ability to develop critical judgement, as lesbians evaluating our community and our world.

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Submission Guidelines

Submissions and correspondence for SW #67 should be sent to fran@sonic.net or mailed to SW c/o Fran Day, POB 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473-1180. Submissions for SW #68 should be sent to Guest Editors Judith Witherow and Sue Lenaerts. See pages 6-7 for details. Please read the submission guidelines below before sending material.

Everything else should be sent to Sinister Wisdom, POB 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703. Check our website at www.sinisterwisdom.org.

Submission Guidelines: Please read carefully.

Submissions may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum submission: five poems, two short stories or essays, or one longer piece of up to 2,500 words. We prefer that you send your work by email in Word. If sent by mail, submissions must be mailed flat (not folded) with your name and address on each page. We prefer you type your work but short legible handwritten pieces will be considered; tapes accepted from print-impaired women. All work must be on white paper. Please proofread your work carefully; do not send changes after the deadline. A self-addressed stamped business-sized envelope must be enclosed. If you want acknowledgement of receipt, enclose a separate self-addressed stamped postcard. GRAPHIC ARTISTS should send B&W photos or drawings (duplicates) of their work (no slides.) Images sent electronically must have a resolution of 300 for photos and art, and 600 for line drawings. TIFF's are preferred. Include a short biographical sketch written exactly as you want it printed. Selection may take up to nine months.

We publish only Lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as Lesbians of color, ethnic Lesbians, Jewish, Arab, old, young, working class, poverty class, disabled, fat. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to Lesbians or women, or that perpetuates stereotypes. We do intend to keep an open and critical dialogue on all the issues that affect our lives, joy, and survival. Please contact us if you have a new theme you would like to see explored.

Sinister Wisdom, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. We provide free subscriptions to women in prison and mental institutions (20% of our mailing list), as well as reduced price subscriptions for Lesbians with limited/fixed incomes. •Enclose an extra \$10 on your renewal to help cover publishing costs (larger donations accepted). •Give *Sinister Wisdom* for birthdays, holidays, and special occasions. •Please consider doing a benefit or subscription drive for *Sinister Wisdom* in your area.

A Journal by and for Lesbians

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Notes for a Magazine

Being a lesbian grandmother in those days would have been unheard of, at least I never heard of any. In the first place it was impossible. If you were a lesbian, in a lesbian couple, how could you have children? If you were a lesbian grandmother you would be in the closet. You would not be talking about it as I am.

—Ruth Mountaingrove

I was nervous about this project: *Sinister Wisdom* hadn't produced an issue on this topic and I wondered how well the subject would be received in a post-radical-lesbian-feminist-separatist world. As a "female-born lesbian space," I wondered how an issue, which would obviously contain direct references to male children, and indirect references to fathers and men, be received by its readership. I fretted a bit about the quantity and quality of the submissions, at times visualizing that my call for submissions was a message in a bottle, still floating, unopened, on the currents. But as the deadline for submissions drew nearer, I found myself bemused, moved, and excited at the writing that slipped into my email and my mailbox.

Alison Prine's haunting poems to the daughter she never had: "Daughters, they grow wings like bats,/ like swallows at dusk,/ startling and graceful./ How do I know if you are darting away?/ How do I ready myself for your return?"

Janell Moon's tender memories about her little boy: "when I was tired, he'd pat me/ say he'd sing me to sleep/ start with a little hum noise/ then his head nodding would start/ snoozing, leaving me to tuck his feet in."

Mary Merium's stark verses about her closeted mother: "She isn't straight/ pretends to be, and now it's far too late/ to melt the twisted iron cage of my/ gay mother's life."

Ferrara-Loris' multi-layered narrative of the day Nicholas arrived. Confessional in tone, she explores her memories through a story told simply, but with brilliant honesty. And when you look at the picture of Nicholas in the pool, the blazing sun backlighting his vibrant, healthy body, maybe you'll get that tight feeling in your throat, and wonder at the emotion.

Maggie Harrison's irreverent, post-modern vignettes blandly underscore a familiar, mundane frustration of parenting: "The kids are finally asleep—though two of them are nursing—and it's the first

chance we've had to talk in forty-eight hours. My would-be wife doesn't look at me. She flips through pictures in a year-old *Life Magazine* spread on space travel."

The diversity of voice, context, and perspective in this issue is informative and reassuring in the messages that echo loud and clear from every one of the writers who sent in their poems, stories, and essays. As lesbians, mothers, and co-parents, we underscore our incredible capacity to carve out an authentic space to speak our truths. How clearly Ruth Mountaingrove reminds us: "There is such a variety of choices now open to anyone." And how candid Harrison is when she says: "Of course we wanted a girl; every lesbian wants a girl-child to nurture, to offer the full range of human experience that we do to our penis child. Oh yes, a girl, but the revolution will be brought about by male children of lesbians, if we can get enough of them out there."

The radical lesbian-feminist critique of the nuclear family, which was prominent in lesbian discourse throughout the 60s, 70s, and 80s, has largely evaporated, as more and more lesbians assimilate into mainstream culture. The era of excluding male children is now being addressed, and Judith Witherow is right on target when she pointedly tells us: "Some Lesbian activists and activities shunned children, especially boy children and their Queer mothers. Lesbian mothers of the 70s were often deprived of sharing social and cultural life with their children."

Times have changed! Many lesbians are making conscious decisions to establish families that some might view as weird, limited imitations of the traditional family paradigm the Religious Right has so successfully promoted and moralized to the point of legislation. We see this in The Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman. (Bet those radical, polygamous, child-bride-loving Mormon men are incensed about the "one woman" clause!!)

Yet, what is it about the discourse of lesbian mothers (co-parents included), that is so complex? Why would any lesbian, who clearly knows she is a lesbian, choose to have children? After all, as my cynical side mutters often enough, motherhood is highly overrated; women either glorify their children to the point of illusion, or label them as the bane of their existence. Idyllic mother-child relationships are few and far between, and anyway, what are they

but figments of someone's imagination? How significant is income and social status, when love, positive interaction, empathy, and consistency are the basics that nurture children? What's hidden behind the curtains of lesbian homes? Is lesbian motherhood another commercial fairytale that will leave too many lesbians and their children both trapped and overburdened? And how will lesbian families cope with the escalating hostility of the Religious Right, which is supported by the atavistic Bush administration and hundreds of faith-based organizations that, in the current federal budget, benefit from more than \$2 billion in federal funds.

How do we cope with fanatical, vindictive Christian lawmakers, such as the Texas legislators, who passed the "Chisum amendment," which, like the odious federal bill it mimics, defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman. But Chisum contains some nasty provisions that will strip lesbian (and gay) adoptive parents of their children; in fact, children adopted by lesbians (and gays) will be removed from their homes and put into state orphanages rather than leave them with their homosexual parents. Existing legal contracts made between homosexual partners, including wills, power of attorney, and medical power of attorney will be null and void. This bill, with its rabid homophobic amendment will be a ballot referendum in the upcoming November 2005 elections in Texas.

But despite my bouts of middle-age cynicism, I know the world has changed dramatically in the 25 years since I came out. If I had been asleep for those 25 years, I would be astounded at the numbers of lesbians living openly and self-sufficiently; lives that are not virtual or contrived but vibrant, fluid, informed, and chosen. Visibility, activism, courage, and persistence opened the doors for this. And if you gaze at Tee Corinne's photos, you will see commonality and universality; you will see confidence, pride, and love reflected in the countenances of Margaret Sloan-Hunter and Nî Aüdagain: women, lesbians, and mothers.

Merry Gangemi

Note:

See: Ivans, Molly. "Duck and Cover Time: Texas legislature enshrines anti-gay provision in state constitution." *Working for Change*, May 24, 2005.

Upcoming Issues

See submission guidelines on the inside back cover.
Please help spread the word about these themes.

#66 Activism

Forthcoming Winter 2005-2006

Editor: Fran Day

#67 Lesbians and Work

Deadline: December 1, 2005

Editor: Fran Day

As Lesbians, how do we cope with heterosexism, lesbophobia, ageism, racism, classism, ableism and other oppressive policies and attitudes at work? How do we maintain our integrity (asserting our needs, defending our rights) without being penalized or losing our jobs? How do we cope with work that we find degrading, unethical, boring, stressful, dangerous, disabling, and/or unsatisfying? How do we cope with the myth that there is meaningful, well-paid work out there for everyone if we only try hard enough? What experiences have we had with successful alliances with other Lesbians at work? What positive experiences have we had at work where we felt we were doing something useful, where we were acknowledged for our unique contributions, and/or where we had a reasonable workload, healthy working conditions, and adequate compensation and benefits? What can be done to improve the work world for Lesbians and other oppressed people? Other work topics: unions, workaholism, exploitation of workers, having to work as a child, while chronically ill, while caregiving a sick/disabled partner, and/or finding ways to sustain ourselves outside the patriarchal work world, etc.

Please read the submission guidelines on the inside back cover very carefully.

#68 Death, Grief, and Surviving

Deadline: March 1, 2006

Guest Editors: Judith Witherow and Sue Lenaerts

If there is an event that touches our life so profoundly as the death of a loved one, the imagination has yet to fathom what it could possibly be. We all pay an emotional price whether it is the loss of someone we've admired greatly, the beloved partner of short or long duration, a family member, a cherished pet—or—the mental and physical pain of watching your own life slip away leaving you powerless to stop the loss of self—or—the daily toll on caregivers or Hospice workers. And sometimes, as Lesbians, we carry an extra burden when our relationships are not valued equally by others in society. As overwhelming as this subject is, we need you to share your most intimate, and painful thoughts in dealing with the issue of loss. Our hope is that by discussing what has or hasn't worked for you will ease the suffering of others. Non-fiction, poetry, and artwork that details what can only be shared by those who have experienced this trauma. Correspondence and submissions for #68 only should be sent to: Twin Spirits Publishing, PO Box 1237, Clinton, MD 20735. Email to Judith at judith@jkwitherow.com or Sue at sue_lenaerts@hotmail.com



Photo of Margaret Sloan-Hunter and her daughter Cathy by Tee Corinne.

Tee A. Corinne

How Lesbian Feminist Photographers Visually Constructed Lesbian Motherhood

At First there were No Images at All

For my grandmother's generation and my mother's, lesbian motherhood was considered an oxymoron, words that couldn't fit together in a meaningful way. Lesbians were depraved and decadent. Mothers were, in theory, close to sacred. There were no identifiable images of lesbian mothers, with or without children. The 1960s, which saw the rise of a new wave of feminism, supported a women's movement with homophobic leadership. By the early 1970s, lesbian and gay activism was exploding across the U.S., in the United Kingdom, and elsewhere around the world, especially in English-speaking countries.

Photographers and artists were part of this groundswell. Their images gave visual shape to the times, defining new parameters and filling voids which often, previously, had gone unnoticed.

Cathy Cade in California

The earliest photograph of lesbian mothers I remember seeing was taken by Cathy Cade (b. 1942) and published in a book called *Lesbians Speak Out* (1974). It showed a group of women, children, and dogs gathered on a California beach. Centered, a naked child, back to the viewer, runs toward a smiling woman who holds another child on her lap. One woman is brushing sand from a child who leans forward to join the runner. Women are watching, talking, and busy. No one is resting or sunbathing. All are alert and engaged.¹

On the far side of the group, a woman stands facing the distant misty cliffs. Situated in time during the early, heady days of lesbian feminism, the sun-filled picture appears to forecast the promise of political, social, and cultural gains to come.

Another Cade image in *Lesbians Speak Out* shows a hippy-appearing mother with her two young sons. The mother smiles as the boys balance on the arms of the well-worn overstuffed chair in which she sits. One boy, in particular, seems to be full

of mischief. Around them are the plants and fabrics that signal a comfortable early 1970s-era nest. ²

Self-taught as a photographer, Cade, who holds a Ph.D. in sociology, began taking photographs in 1971, the same year she came out. She continued working as a photographer, publishing in regional and national women's periodicals. In 1987, she self-published *A Lesbian Photo Album: the Lives of Seven Lesbian Feminists*, a book of her own pictures coupled with oral histories and archival photographs. *A Lesbian Photo Album* includes a sequence of images of a lesbian couple over a period of three years: before, during, and after a chosen pregnancy. In some of the photographs, the pregnant mom is pictured nude (resting, laughing, receiving a massage, and being held by her lover).

Between the publication of *Lesbians Speak Out* and *A Lesbian Photo Album*, Cade herself had given birth to the first of her two sons. She writes, "In 1976, at thirty-four, I was without commitments and asking myself, what is it that, if I come to the end of my life, I will regret not having done? Having a baby came through loud and clear...After eight months of trying, I got pregnant by donor insemination." ³

In her book, Cade shows herself playing with her son, with him and her lover eating dinner, and with her lesbian mothers group, some of whom were having second children.

JEB (Joan E. Biren) in Washington, DC

Photographs by JEB (Joan E. Biren, b. 1944) were first published in *The Furies* newspaper (1972–1973) and then in the monthly *off our backs*, both based, as she was, in Washington, DC. In her self-published book, *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians* (1979), a lesbian couple and their two children make silly faces, as if flaunting the repressive legal and social systems that labeled them a less-than-ideal family group. In another image from the same book, mother and daughter face each other, almost rubbing noses in a moment of light-filled intimacy. ⁴

JEB received a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Mount Holyoke in 1966, studied political science and sociology at Oxford University in England and came out in 1971. She was part of the influential Furies Collective from 1971–1973. While active with

the Furies, she learned photography through a correspondence course and professional work experiences.

Like Cade, she is interested in public as well as private lesbian activities. In JEB's second self-published book, *Making a Way: Lesbians Out Front* (1987), she includes three photographs dealing with lesbian parenting. Her interest in political activism shows up in the choice and ordering of photographs in her book: the first image shows a contingent of lesbian mothers with babies in strollers at a pro-choice March for Women's Lives.

Beneath the image of the demonstration is a photograph of a birthday party held by a Washington, DC mothers' group. The delight of the birthday child is palpable. On the facing page is a photograph of an African-American lesbian grandmother holding her infant granddaughter. Taken outside, backed by a stone wall, both faces are delicately illuminated by natural light.

Brenda Prince in England

In Britain, the feminist newspaper *Spare Rib* published photographs by many lesbians including Brenda Prince (b. 1950). In 1982, while in her last year at the Polytechnic of Central London, Prince created a series titled "The Politics of Lesbian Motherhood." According to photo historian Val Williams, "Prince, who had worked on the Lesbian Line telephone advice service for seven years, wished to document aspects of the experience of lesbian women who risked losing their children in custody cases. She had perceived that lesbianism was a frightening taboo to many people, and so adopted a method of presenting the women through the means of large-format colored family photographs juxtaposed with a text which outlined the women's fears and anxieties of losing their children."⁵

In 1983, Prince, along with three other lesbians, Val Wimer (1941–), Maggie Murray (1942–), and Pam Isherwood (1949–), founded Format, the first feminist photo agency. One Prince image, taken in 1982, reached an international audience in 1986 when it was published in Val Williams' history *Women Photographers: The Other Observers 1900 to the Present* (p.176). Titled "Jill and Laura with baby Rowan, aged three months," it shows two casually-dressed women—one carrying an infant in a sling—standing on a grassy hillside. The women are smiling and seem

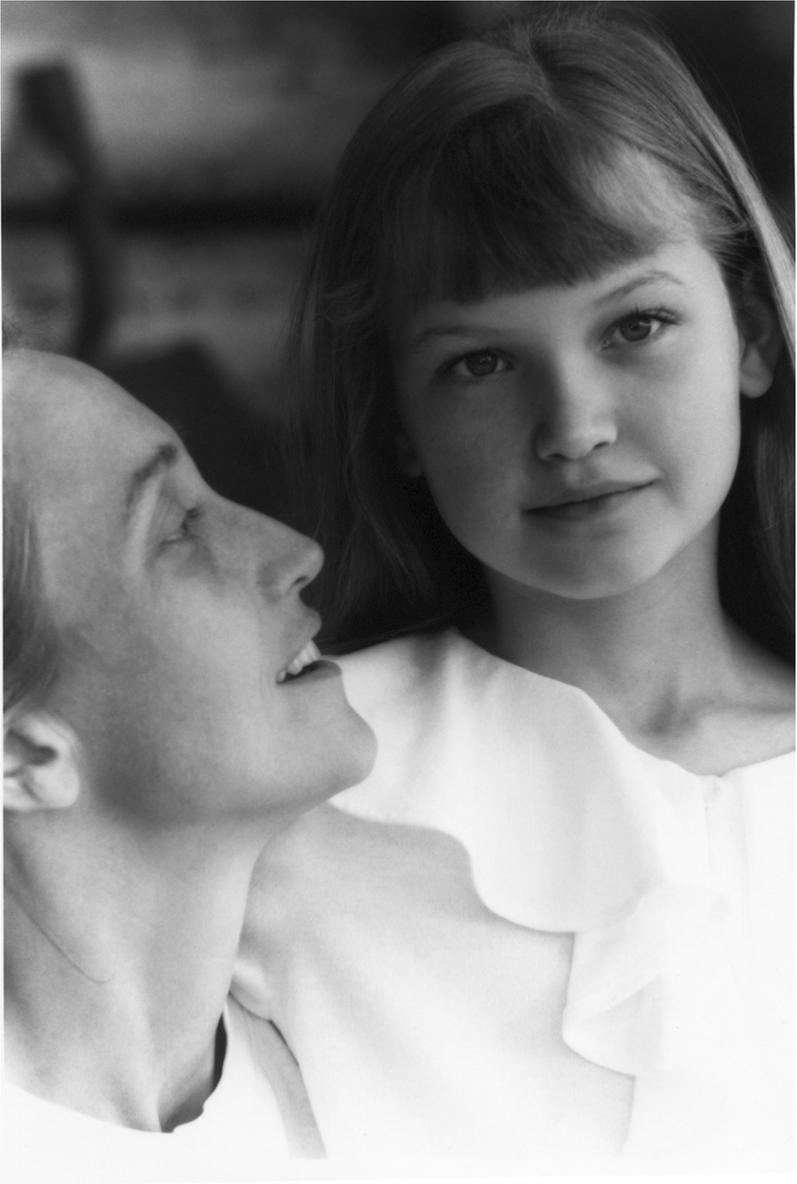


Photo of Ní Aódagáin & FeliceAna by Tee Corinne

comfortable within their bodies and with their role as dual moms. Roof tops can be seen behind and below them. Like many of the images of JEB and Cathy Cade, Prince has positioned lesbian mothers in the sunshine in an apparently public place.

Rollie McKenna in New England

Rollie McKenna (1918–2003) was an anomaly among older professional photographers. Most of those born before 1940 have remained closeted, but in 1991, McKenna included photos and information about her three-decade relationship with Patricia Duell Willson, which ended with Willson's death in 1990. Willson had four children and McKenna became O.M. (Other Mother) to this brood. Although the photographs in the book do not show McKenna, Willson, and the children together, individual images convey a sense of warmth and joy.⁶

Marion Moore in Australia

In 1991, Word of Mouth, an Australian lesbian art collective, began with a goal of providing an outlet for artists with and without formal training. In 1993, the group designed a series of posters titled "The Lovely Mothers" to showcase lesbians with their children and lesbian families. The following year, funded by the Community Cultural Development Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, images from the poster series were expanded into billboards which were prominently displayed.

Sidney-based lesbian art historian Elizabeth Ashburn writes: "By encouraging the inclusion of lesbian-based families under the broader spectrum of the constitution of family, these artists hoped to decrease the violence, negativity and homophobia surrounding lesbians."⁷

Images by Sidney-born lesbian photographer Marion Moore (1958) were prominently featured in both the poster and billboard series. With titles such as "Some Kids Have Two Mums" and "She Loves Me," the pictures show the smiling women of traditional ads but with a twist. Some of the women have unusually short hair. One rides a motorcycle; another has a prominent tattoo at a time when tattoos were still uncommon for women.

Moore, a freelance photographer and lecturer, studied visual arts at the University of Tasmania and received a Graphic Design Certificate at Randwick Technical College in Sydney. One of her posters shows a mother and preteen daughter. Paralleling the photo, sans-serif lettering asks, “How can we possibly be worse role models for our children than a mainstream society which condones the rape of everything from babies to the planet.”⁸

Nancy Andrews in Washington, DC

By 1994 in the United States, *Family: a Portrait of Gay and Lesbian America* by Nancy Andrews (b. 1963) was published by HarperSanFrancisco, a mainstream press. Andrews, an award winning staff photographer at *The Washington Post*, writes: “This is the book I looked for eight years ago when I began to realize that I was gay. I was in college, all my friends appeared straight, and my head was filled with only gay stereotypes. These stereotypes didn’t fit my self-image, and I began to feel the need to learn more about myself and others like me. Gay men and lesbians were all around me, but with their chameleon-like quality, I didn’t realize they were there.”⁹

Family includes a photo of the second birthday of Jacob Deutsch Williams whose two mothers were, respectively, a massage therapist and a lobbyist working in the nation’s capital. Of the three lesbian family groups shown in the book, two are white and one is black.

Barbara Seyda in the Southwest United States

1998 marked the mainstream press publication of *Women in Love: Portraits of Lesbian Mothers & Their Families*. Created by Barbara Seyda (photographer) and Diana Herrera (a lesbian couple) the book includes images and interviews with racially and ethnically-diverse women. In 1999, the book won a Lambda Literary Award, a form of recognition which was not available when JEB and Cathy Cade produced their books. Seyda writes in the introduction: “In most parts of the United States, non-biological mothers are denied any power, authority, and rights to make decisions concerning their children. Legislative changes need to be made responding to the reality of our families, to protect the future of the children involved and the rights of all

mothers. These photographs and stories are the umbilical cords that connect us to each other. Through them, we can trace the infinite contours of the human heart.”¹⁰

Times Have Changed

With *Women in Love*, the work of Cade, JEB, Moore, Prince, and countless other well- and lesser-known lesbian photographers came to fruition. Determination and vision on the part of the photographers and the cooperation of a daring and passionate group of mothers made all of these images discussed possible.

NOTES

1. Judy Grahn, Wendy Cadden, Brenda Crider, Sunny, Jane Lawhon, and Anne Leonard, eds. *Lesbians Speak Out*. (Oakland, CA: The Women's Press Collective, 1974), p. 114.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

3. Cathy Cade. *A Lesbian Photo Album: The Lives of Seven Lesbian Feminists* (Oakland, CA: Waterwomen Books, 1987), p. 64.

4. JEB (Joan E. Biren). *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians* (Washington, DC: Glad Hag Books, 1979) and *Making A Way: Lesbians out Front* (Washington, DC: Glad Hag Books, 1987).

5. Val Williams. *Women Photographers: The Other Observers 1900 to the Present*. (London: Virago Press Limited, 1986) and *The Other Observers: Women Photographers in Britain 1900 to the Present, 1991*. rev. ed., p. 178.

6. Rollie McKenna. *A Life in Photography/Rollie McKenna* (New York: Knopf, 1991), pp.216–219, 235–237.

7. Elizabeth Ashburn. “Stirred Heart and Soul: The Visual Representation of Lesbian Sexuality” in *Sex in Public, Australian Sexual Cultures*, edited by Jill Julius Matthews (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd.), 1997, p. 163.

8. Elizabeth Ashburn. *Lesbian Art: An Encounter with Power* (NSW, Australia: Craftsman House, 1996), p. 46.

9. Nancy Andrews. *Family: A Portrait of Gay and Lesbian America*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), from the author's introduction, unpaginated.

10. Barbara Seyda and Diana Herrera. *Women in Love: Portraits of Lesbian Mothers & Their Families* (Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1998), p. xi.

Alison Prine

Half-circle

They are curled in a pale knot of cells
buried in the sweep of her pelvis.

Never to be woken,
no fingers will pull
the fine snarls from their hair.

A woman who doesn't have children
isn't a woman at all.

She's a three-legged stool
at a desk by the window
worn smooth with wear.

She's a black crow
in the middle of the road
walking that black crow walk.

The barren woman
is a field of golden rod
about to be plowed under.

Who will remember
how the afternoon sun
bent over her, stirring?

Alison Prine

The daughter I would have had

Maklin, your hair, rising up around you
in an electricity of such softness and disorder—
how do I resist putting my hands on either side
of your angry,
earnest face?

In February, my most fertile month
You betrayed me in all the ways I predicted
when you were nothing but a cluster
of quivering berries I held beneath my ribs.

With everyone now I talk
about the cold. And with me
everyone talks
about the cold.

Daughters, they grow wings like bats,
like swallows at dusk, startling and graceful.
How do I know if you are darting away?
How do I ready myself for your return?

I am the railroad bridge, the shale cliff,
the sagging barn on Route 27.
It's February, and cold.
Colder than it has ever been before,
and Maklin, you walk in from it
without so much as a knock, and stand here
pulling off your coat in my foyer.

Alison Prine

Blue ink

Blurred in my mind
like sugar poured into tea
moths in the dim porch light
like a feral cat slipping into the mist

my daughter is shimmering, my daughter
made from my own rib, my daughter made
from my blacksmith's hammer

she turns on a spindle
a needle's prick of blood
she is a porcelain chip
a plum's pit

she slips like a buckeye
into my pocket
falls like pages
behind my desk,
like a flock of starlings plunges
into the blue ink of dusk.

Jane Mara

Fiona and the Donkey

These two stories are from a book I'm writing to my son, Michael, from my treasured memories of his childhood. Now thirty-two and a Zen Buddhist monk, he recently married a Zen Buddhist nun. They live at a Zen monastery in Oregon, where I also live at times.

You were nine when you joined me in Ireland in September 1982. I became lovers with Fiona, an Australian woman, shortly after we met at a Halloween ritual I organized at the Women's Center in Dublin. Fiona lived in Dublin and visited us on the Dingle Peninsula for a few days at a time. She came to live with us when we moved to the *Maharis*, but that was not until February.

Our cottage perched all alone on the side of Mt. Eagle at a crossroads known as the *Clasach*. Constructed of brown and grey stone, it was shaped like a loaf of bread with a rounded roof. It had been built by an eccentric sculptor who put nooks in the walls for small sculptures or vases of flowers. The only door, of heavy wood at least two inches thick, opened to a low, dark narrow hall. On the right side were two very small rooms. The first was extremely narrow and harbored a single rough wooden bed frame. We stored our suitcases and bicycles in there, the bikes just barely fitting in beside the bed. The next room, separated from the first by a very thin wall covered with faded blue flowered wallpaper, we used as a bedroom. Over the bed was an area that could have been turned into a loft but was unfinished. You and your friend Deidre often hung out in there, giggling and playing make believe. It was a perfect hidey place for kids.

At the end of the hall was a small dingy room containing—although it makes no sense, as we had no hot running water—a bathtub. It also housed a toilet. Quite sophisticated to have a toilet. It had been put in, like most of the toilets “back west” where we lived, because *Ryan's Daughter*, a Hollywood movie from the seventies, had been filmed there. All the homes on the Dingle Peninsula got toilets thanks to that film because the cast and crew—well, they needed toilets! Outside the bathroom in

the hall was a deep utility sink where I did all the laundry by hand. Over it was a single shelf and a small mirror.

The rest of the cottage was a comfortable room where we hung out, cooked, and ate. The kitchen area had a tall rough wooden counter and small propane stove with a tiny oven. There was no fridge—few people had them “back west.” I guess the film crew hadn’t needed fridges. There was a small, round peat or coal burning stove in the middle of the room on which we kept a kettle for hot water, and sometimes cooked. It was our only source of heat. There was one stuffed, comfortable chair I’d bought from a traveling furniture salesman who had knocked on the door one day, a straight-backed chair, and a couple of simple homemade backless wooden benches sitting against the walls.

A homemade wooden ladder that went straight up and down reached a low loft, which butted up against the hidey place in the other room. I could just sit up in bed without bumping my head. Below the loft was a single bed with a rough wooden frame that we used as a couch by day. Our sleeping places weren’t fixed; sometimes I slept in the bed below and you slept in the loft. At some point, I think, I slept in the larger bedroom, and you might have slept in the tiny one for a while. We had such few belongings that if we decided to change rooms, it took only a few minutes to move our stuff. We rotated around as the mood struck us.

A worn wooden table that served as desk and dining table looked out the big south-facing window, the frames around its many panes painted fire engine red. The view was spectacular! It looked out over Ventry Harbor and Dingle Bay to McGillicuddy’s Reeks on the Ring of Kerry. Before you arrived, and often after, I’d stay up through the night watching the moon make her nocturnal journey across that airy landscape. She seemed to be in an intense *ménage à trois*: with the clouds—through which she sailed, lighting them up, hiding behind them, and emerging suddenly with a burst of silent song only to disappear again, and the water—who joined in by dramatically reflecting it all from her own perspective. This was a love affair I watched with great delight.

The smaller west window opened to the steep ascent of Mt. Eagle. Through the east front window we could see the crossroad where our biscuit tin mailbox lay under a heavy rock. Before you

arrived I'd watch longingly out that window for the postman. In those days mail was my only form of communication with you and everyone else in the States, (hard to imagine now with email and cell phones). There was also a fake *dolmen*, sign of an ancient Celtic burial gravesite that the sculptor had built, perhaps as a joke, along with a fake beehive hut. Because of these, tourists sometimes stopped to stare or even knocked on the door, thinking the cottage was a museum.

The beehive hut had a windmill on top hooked to a battery inside. We had been told, when we first looked at this cottage the year before—on that incredible evening when we walked for hours in a gale along the sea cliff road and the wind was so strong you could lean back and it would hold you up, and you were such a trooper trudging along goodheartedly for miles and miles with your sweet face raised to the wind and rain—ah, but that's another story—we had been told the windmill produced enough electricity for a couple of lights but I was never able to get the system to work so we used kerosene lanterns and candles. Once, when I asked you what you remembered about that year, you said you would look down from the loft after going to bed to see me reading or writing with the lanterns giving off their soft light, and it looked like fairy land. Well, we were in faerie land.

When Fiona visited she and I usually slept in the loft, and often we would make love. She was especially vocal during moments of orgasm. One day when you and I were by ourselves, you asked me about the loud noise that sometimes happened in the night. You sounded concerned. I explained that when people make love one of the things that happens is a really intense and pleasurable series of sensations called an orgasm, during which it was not uncommon to make loud noises of one sort or another. Everyone is different, I said, and Fiona is especially loud. This seemed to satisfy you; whatever worries you'd had were alleviated by this matter of fact explanation.

A number of weeks later, you and I were taking a hike, perhaps to the castle that wasn't too far away. We were ambling across one of the ubiquitous green fields, our black 'wellys' protecting our feet from the cow pies, wet grass, and mud, when the bray of a donkey sailed over the stone walls. We paused to listen.

“What’s that?” you wanted to know.

“That’s a donkey.” I replied. We scanned the area but couldn’t see one.

The donkey continued making its racket as we hiked on. You turned to me and remarked innocently, “It sounds just like Fiona having an orgasm.”

I must admit to being somewhat taken aback. Now it was your turn to be matter of fact.

I listened more closely.

“You’re right!” I grinned. “It sounds exactly like Fiona having an orgasm.”

We listened again, each with our own associations.

“But,” I said thoughtfully, “I’m not sure Fiona would be pleased to be compared to a donkey. Is it OK with you if we don’t tell her? Just keep it to ourselves?” I was giggling a bit and you joined in, nodding agreement.

When Fiona visited again, and the three of us were out walking, the call of a donkey reached us. We all cocked our heads in response. You and I sneaked knowing looks and winked at each other behind Fiona’s back. I was often concerned that you felt left out when Fiona came and was particularly glad for this special connection between us, unusual as it was.

Jane Mara

Son of a Lesbian

When you were nine, I was invited to be a guest speaker in a Woman's Studies class as the specimen lesbian. The year was 1981, in the middle of the women's movement, and lesbians were enjoying making ourselves visible to the larger culture. This was a huge relief after decades of shame and fear and hiding.

The invitation came through a friend of the straight teacher of the Women's Studies class who wanted her mostly straight students to have the opportunity to see and hear and question a real live lesbian. Would I be she?

I was happy to do it. I well remembered how affected I had been when I met my first real live lesbian.

You were just a baby then and I was depressed. Your father and I had never been a good match and I had lost much of my sense of self in trying to be a businessman's wife. Now that you were here, I unknowingly felt caught between my enormous love for you and my terror that whatever was left of me would be completely subsumed in the dual role of wife and mother. On top of that, I felt guilty for not being happy, since you were such a wonderful baby, and afraid I could not be a good enough mother for you, who deserved the very best. None of this was conscious then. All I knew was that I was unhappy much of the time.

My comfort station at home was a worn, pink, overstuffed wing chair. Tucked into this nest, I read, in the Washington Post of all places, an announcement of a training program for para-professional facilitators of low cost counseling groups for women. It was being offered by the Feminist Counseling Collective. I was reading feminist literature and had started a consciousness-raising group with a friend, and I was familiar with counseling, but I had no idea what a collective was. Nonetheless, I applied.

There was an all day group interview at the Woman's Center in Washington, DC In spite of your Dad's repeated warnings about the dangers of the city, (it was on a Saturday during the day and I had grown up in that city!), I ventured forth alone from our ugly tract house in a lily-white, Arlington, Virginia suburb. (Its saving

grace was a huge forested park with a creek right behind the house.) As I backed my VW bus out of the driveway, I wondered, dimly, “What is he so afraid of?” and “How have I ended up living like this?”

The interview was conducted mostly through experiential exercises. In one, twenty of us sat in a circle and listened as each of us, collective members as well as interviewees, said something vulnerable about herself to the group. After each woman spoke, the rest of us responded, in turn, as compassionately as we could. Then the woman who had been vulnerable said which response felt most compassionate.

One of the collective members shared that she was a lesbian. She felt vulnerable because she had never before come out in a group that included straight women. I was surprised that she looked astonishingly ordinary, and then shocked at my surprise. Whenever I told the story later I would say, ‘I don’t know what I expected... something like horns growing out of her head or green smoke coming out of her ears.’ It sounded ridiculous, but on some level it was true.

After the interview I drove back to Arlington across the Potomac River. In the middle of Memorial Bridge, I knew. In my deepest self, I knew. I even said aloud, “If I get accepted into this collective, my whole life will change completely.”

I was accepted. Although it took three years before I finally gathered the inner strength and courage to end the marriage and come out as a lesbian, the way was laid out before me when Mary said those magic words, “I am a lesbian.”

Not only did my life change completely, yours did too. Now your parents were separated and you had a lesbian mom.

For the first couple of years, you often begged me to get back together with your Dad. I would focus on your feelings about the separation and how it affected your life. I’d hold you if you cried and try to be understanding if you were angry. My heart hurt seeing how hard it was for you, which was in sharp contrast to the delight I felt for myself.

One day, when you were about five, we were driving in the car and you were asking me again, “Mommy, when can Daddy come home and live with us?” I turned and looked you right in the eyes and said, “Honey, I’m sorry to tell you this, but it isn’t going to

happen. You might as well stop wishing for it. I know that's not what you want to hear, but it's the way it is. I am not going to get back with your Dad." Traffic must have stopped because I remember looking into your eyes the whole time. I don't remember what you said next, but I know that I replied, "And I am not going to be with another man. I love women. I'm going to be with women." I could feel the pain of your longing, and I wanted you to be able to cease being disappointed and find a way to accept the way things were.

You seemed to relax. It was probably a relief to be told so clearly, because you stopped asking, except very occasionally. We still talked about your feelings, but I think you gave up hoping. Maybe that was your first experience of the Buddha's teaching that suffering comes from wanting what is not, and the end of suffering comes from accepting what is.

Now it was four years later, and we were again in the car. It was early evening, autumn dark already, and I had parked on a side street. We both sat up front, turned towards each other, your face shining in the glow of the amber streetlight. I had stopped to ask if you'd like to come to the Women's Studies class with me.

I had been the specimen lesbian for a different Woman's Studies class the previous year. Standing in front of a group of strangers I had smiled inwardly as I uttered those magic words, "I am a lesbian." I had led the students through a guided meditation in which they imagined they were lesbian. How would they tell—or not—their parents, friends, co-workers, children? How would their lives be different? Afterwards, a woman had told me she realized, for the very first time, that she was a lesbian. This hadn't really surprised me; I felt like I was passing a torch.

What did surprise me was the number of questions about you. The students were very concerned about a boy having a lesbian mother. It just didn't seem right. Most of their concerns were based on the assumption that you would be unhappy without a man in the home, even though I told them your Dad and I shared custody and you lived with him half time. I had responded to their doubts as best I could, but they still couldn't understand how you could be happy living with me since I was lesbian. I think the unexpressed assumptions were that lesbians are weird, as I had unconsciously believed, and that no one wants a weird mom.

I explained to you about the class and that when I had taught it before, the students had wondered how it was for you to be the son of a lesbian. I asked if you would like to come along and tell them yourself. You were alert and interested, and wanted to know more. How many students were in the class? How old were they? When I said there would be 30 or 40 adult students your eyes got huge.

“Me?” you said, awed, “stand up in front of 30 or 40 grown-ups?” I assured you I would be right there with you. You were silent for a few moments, eyes downcast, thinking. Then you turned your sweet, innocent face to me and said with great determination, “I’ll do it!” I remember your blue eyes were bright and shining, and your generous mouth made a distinct circle on the word *do!* You were resolved.

And so a few weeks later we headed off to the University of Maryland. We got to the classroom a little early and walked around to make ourselves comfortable. The room was unusually wide and shallow, with only four very long rows of seats. We met the teacher, who said she would introduce us and then sit in the back of the room.

I began with some remarks and then opened it to questions. The students were full of them. Sometimes they involved you, and sometimes they didn’t. Because of the layout of the room, I’d walk to be close to the questioner. If the question was for you, you would too. Sometimes you just stayed where you were when I went to answer one for me. When I’d come back we’d put our arms around each other in a half hug. You were a bit shy and mostly answered *yes* or *no*, or in other single words, or very brief sentences rather than giving the fullness of your deep and careful thinking as you might have in a more relaxed situation. I felt a bit sorry about that, because you were so thoughtful and I was so often impressed with your take on things, but I understood and didn’t push you.

Afterwards, the teacher commented that she felt no one could have observed us without being entirely satisfied that being the son of a lesbian, this son of this lesbian anyway, was just fine. The visual imagery of us moving apart and coming back together, our arms going around each other, was clear evidence of our mutually affectionate and respectful relationship, which dispelled, she was sure, any doubts about the dangers of you having a lesbian mom. This was great to hear! I’d never even thought about that.

The adrenalin that had been keeping you awake began to wear off as we walked to the car in the crisp autumn air. You said sleepily that you'd really enjoyed it and would like to do it again. I wasn't surprised. After all, to be nine and stand up in front of a room full of grownups while they listen to you respectfully—why being the son of a lesbian meant you got to be famous!

Your sense of pride and feeling special as the son of a lesbian continued. I remember one conversation you reported in which some of your classmates were confused about what a lesbian was.

"I know what a lesbian is!" you had said with pride, this time in knowing something that the others didn't. In response to their challenges of "No you don't" and "How would you know?" you replied triumphantly, "I know because my Mom's a lesbian!"

That was the end of the story for you. But I wanted to know more.

"So what did you tell them?"

"I told them a lesbian is a woman who loves women and is very spiritual." You were very matter of fact.

I hugged you and laughed. "You've got the first part right, alright. Not all lesbians are spiritual, but the ones you know are. That was a great answer."

During your adolescence things changed as my hairy legs and armpits became a source of serious embarrassment. Your comfort returned in college, though, with more maturity and new friends. When you and a bunch of your dorm mates were coming to stay at my beach house, I offered to remove all the lesbian books from my bookcase—something I wouldn't have done when I was first out. You checked with a close friend and told me lightheartedly not to bother. It didn't matter to anyone.

Recently, when I was performing in a theatre piece with a strong lesbian focus, you were enthusiastic about coming to see the show, (and bringing half the monastery and a Zen master with you). I was delighted when you remarked, "I'm really looking forward to being in lesbian energy again!"

Looking back, I wonder how much the experience of being a young "expert" son of a lesbian influenced your easy acceptance of my lesbianism. Perhaps it was the view from your eyes of a room full of adults looking at you with interest and respect that let you know, as they knew from watching us, that being the son of a lesbian, at least this son of this lesbian, was just fine.

Janelle Moon

Child in Mind

I tried not to spoil him,
answer only every third question
give in to every third request.
He was an only child.

It was just that he screamed so loud
caught all three fishes
ate them whole the pitch so high, I got swept
into the shrill of it
my mouth too close to the hole.

He was very small then
very busy building towns, cities really
pieces for me to clap over
and clap I did. Stamp even.
I wanted him proud.

The teachers at Happy Tiny Tots
let him come to play school
dressed in his pajama top
hair uncombed
this was a boy in a hurry
paintings to do
pot holders to make
with long straight snake mistakes
forget to weave quite a bit there
big holes for fingers to slip through.
Even so, he liked the colors and the giving.

At night, he'd beg to hear stories
of that monkey and the yellow hatted man

when I was tired, he'd pat me
 say he'd sing me to sleep
 start with a little hum noise
 then his head nodding would start
 snoozing, leaving me to tuck his feet in.

But what I remember most about my mothering days
 was the warm place he left on my skin every day
 after I hugged him even today you can find
 soft places where my skin sags in from those times

how he scanned the room for me his safety, before
 he wandered off how my life revolved around him
 so many years now he says he's growing out
 of being a momma's boy well.

Janelle Moon

Strawberry Markings

It is three a.m.
 together for the first time
 I lift the blue blanket
 my eyes follow your delicate bones
 go over your skin
 stomach wrinkled above your round pouch
 genitals I examine
 your hip line, an arc
 your fine legs
 each toe I count.

I am the inspector.
Flip you over on your back
hold your falling head
careful not to disturb
the black sore, the source of life
check your bottom, straight spine.

On the backs of your legs, two tiny spots.
I run my fingers over the birthmarks.
This is not the last time I'll see a flaw
and touch it.

This poem is to you.
I wish it had been this way.
I wish I could have loved your body
right away. I wish I hadn't been afraid
to touch you but I wasn't in love
wasn't using my body for love.
I was repelled by sex with a man
afraid of what my body would give
from such a shudder
first a miscarriage, then a stillborn
all that blood, now you come
full of cries reaching for me.

Cherie James

That Carmen Morning

Lucy truly laughed when Charlotte was around. I especially noticed her laughter when the three of us spent our mornings together. She had an affectionate burble for me which she thought suitable for a child, but the full floating laughter that flows from a secret inner joy was reserved for Charlotte.

Other images from that long ago time come to mind. Charlotte and Lucy in the kitchen, their grey heads close together, dark eyes flashing messages I didn't understand. They looked alike, somehow, these two women I loved, although Charlotte was tall, sturdy, with steely gray hair and what were called "handsome" features and Lucy was short and would have been elegant had she ever finished dressing. There was always something not done about her, a metal hairclip she used to make waves in her beautiful silver hair forgotten on the back of her head or the hem of a beautiful dress hanging crooked; that was Lucy, stylish but never quite finished.

They talked with great animation, their faces mobile, their hands moving, shoulders shrugging. They had, over the years, almost choreographed these movements so that they were in a constant dance together, the music for which was the sound of their voices rising and falling, filling the space between them with more than words.

In the big kitchen, where the old-fashioned black coal and wood stove presided over the house, heating the rooms, heating the water and cooking our food, we had a Saturday morning ritual, Charlotte, Lucy, and I. It began with tending to the stove. As demanding as any child, it needed to be fed and cleaned before we could proceed. The smell of wood smoke circled the breakfast table and after we had eaten, I would check the stove to see if it was still burning well. Then I would check the kindling box to be sure we had enough wood. If not, I'd take my tiny hatchet, presented to me by Charlotte last year on my seventh birthday and go through the yard to the wood box. I would split only the smallest logs and pile them up in the old tin bucket until there were enough to keep the stove going for the morning.

Once back in the kitchen, I gathered the rest of the supplies. First, I placed the book with its red and black cover and gold lettering on the creaky red stool next to the cracked, dirty, ivory-colored radio. Then I laid out the red checked oilcloth-covered table the large green bowl with cracked glaze, boxes of sugar, white and brown—Crisco, vanilla, two eggs, flour, and the red, white, and blue box of Quaker Oats. I poured water, ice-cold from the tap and cleansed only by the mountain rocks over which it rushed, into a large cup to help measure the shortening.

As I began to cream the butter and sugar with a wooden spoon, Charlotte and Lucy got out the cookie sheets, greased them and laid out clean tea-towels on which to place the cookies we were about to bake. I almost always gave up on the wooden spoon and mixed with my hands. As I slid the smooth, creamy Crisco between my fingers until it took on the granular texture of the sugar I added, I thought of Lucy and Charlotte sliding their arms around each other, lacing their fingers together or gently sliding their palms over each other's faces. They were very formal in public but not around me. Their affection made me slightly uncomfortable, although I longed to be part of it.

I added the eggs, vanilla, and salt and began the really difficult task of mixing in the oatmeal. Gram, who I usually called Lucy, would turn the radio this way and that to get the reception as clear as possible, a difficult task at 10,000 feet high in the Colorado Rockies. When everything was mixed together, Charlotte and Lucy took over, rolling the dough into tiny balls and filling each cookie sheet. My job was to read the story of the opera that was to be broadcast that morning from the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York City. I would climb on the stool, pick up the *Milton Cross Stories of the Great Operas* and begin to read. I not only learned to read from that book, but the morning they broadcast *Carmen*, I learned that grand passion doesn't last and, in fact, can get you stabbed to death.

That *Carmen* morning, when I had finished my reading lesson, Charlotte presented me with a gift. A white ruffled blouse and a black skirt pinned up at the hem with a red rose to show a white petticoat. Lucy told me that they were singing *Carmen* at the opera house down the street and that we were all going that evening. I was ecstatic, my first live opera, a grown-up at last.

The cookies were done. We always managed to finish the last batch just as the opera ended. We washed up the dishes and pans which took just the right amount of time for the cookies to be cool enough to eat. The three of us would carefully survey them until we each found just the right cookie. I would tear mine in half as evenly as I could and eat it in two bites. The dough was still warm and the sweetness spread throughout my mouth.



"Sarah" by Sudie Rakusin

Sarah is known as the greatest of the ancient matriarchs. The Persian form of her name refers to matriarchal government and has evolved into Temple of Woman. She is considered Queen, and the maternal goddess of the tribe of Abraham. Sarah was astonishingly beautiful and ageless. When she bore her first child at 100 years of age, instead of being exhausted, she was invigorated.

In this image, the light of Spirit radiates from Sarah's visage. She is believed to have conversed with the Divine; and she is acknowledged as prescient, and a seer. As long as Sarah lived, her land was fertile and her husband, Abraham, did not age. When she died, land lay barren, and Abraham aged and died.



“Baba Yaga” by Sudie Rakusin.

Baba Yaga is the ancient Birth/Death Goddess. She lives in the last sheaf of harvested grain and the woman who eats the kernel gives birth to the spring.

Baba Yaga is the prototype of today’s witch. A loner, she lives outside of society, hovering on the fringe, uncensored and free. Her code embodies honor, integrity, and truth. When Baba Yaga visits us, we go deep into ourselves and have dark days of deep internal work. Baba Yaga welcomes our cycles of PMS and invites us to shed our pent up tears. We all need Baba Yaga time; if we do not initiate it, she will bring her energy into our lives. The moon moves through a cycle of waxing and waning, and then goes dark. We, like the moon, need to travel into dark, dank recesses to meet the chaos of our unconscious, face our karmic responsibilities, and surrender to death and resurrection.

Lesléa Newman

Heather and Her Critics.

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As an out lesbian author of six picture books, five of which depict families with gay or lesbian members, I have been called one of the most dangerous writers living in America today. In fact, in 1994, my book *Heather Has Two Mommies* was the second most challenged book in the nation, following closely on the coattails of Michael Willhoite's *Daddy's Roommate*, another book about a family that includes a gay parent. When I wrote *Heather* in 1998, I had no idea my work would cause such a fuss. Though I have been repeatedly accused of having a political agenda, my goal was simply to tell a story.

The idea for *Heather* came about one day when I was walking down Main Street in Northampton, Massachusetts, a town that bears the slogan "small town charm, big city excitement." Northampton is also known for its liberalism, tolerance of difference, and large lesbian population. On this particular day, I ran into a woman who along with her female partner had recently welcomed a child into their home. "We have no books to read our daughter that show our type of family," the woman said. "Somebody should write one." Is it important for children to see their own image reflected back to themselves within the culture at large? Speaking from personal experience, my answer is a resounding YES.

As a child, I grew up in a Jewish family, in a Jewish neighborhood. I was surrounded with families that looked like my family, families that dressed in similar clothes, families that ate similar foods, families that spoke in similar phrases. Yet I asked my parents over and over, "Why can't we have a Christmas tree? Why can't I hunt for Easter eggs?" Since I had never read a book or seen a TV show or movie about a young Jewish girl with frizzy brown hair eating matzo ball soup with her Bubbe on a Friday night, I was convinced there was something the matter with my family. My family didn't look like any of the families I saw in

my picture books or on my television set. My family was different. My family was wrong.

Of course, as a child, I was not aware of the power of the media. I was not aware of this yearning to see a family like my own reflected in the culture at large. Nor could I articulate this need. As a grown woman who happens to be a Jewish lesbian, I am painfully aware of the lack of positive images, or even any images of myself in the media. I believe that had I had those images and role models at an early age, they would have greatly enhanced my self-esteem.

And so I took on the challenge of writing *Heather Has Two Mommies*, hoping to create a book that would help children with lesbian mothers feel good about themselves and their families.

Heather was written in 1988. The premise of the book is that Heather's favorite number is two. She has two hands, two feet, two pets, and two moms. Her family goes on picnics together and celebrates holidays together. When Heather goes to day care for the first time, she realizes that her family is not the same as everyone else's family. Her teacher has all the children draw pictures of their families, explaining that "the most important thing about a family is that all the people in it love each other."

I sent *Heather* to over fifty publishers. Children's book presses told me to try lesbian publishers. Lesbian publishers told me to try children's book presses. When a whole year had gone by with no luck, a friend and I decided to publish the book ourselves. We sent out a fundraising letter, promising a copy of the book in exchange for a donation of ten dollars or more. Four thousand dollars later, my theory was proven: there was an enthusiastic audience eager for a book that displayed a child and her two lesbian mothers in a positive way.

In December of 1989 the first copies of *Heather Has Two Mommies* rolled off the presses. There wasn't a huge reaction to the book. I got a few letters from lesbian mothers telling me how grateful they were, and one letter from a six-year-old named Tasha who wrote, "Thank you for writing *Heather Has Two Mommies*. I know that you wrote it JUST FOR ME!" I heard about a little boy who received three copies of the book for his birthday and slept with all of them under his pillow every night. I also spoke with a heterosexual woman whose child was en-

thrilled with the book. "He asks to hear it every night," she told me, "and he wants to know why he only has one mom." A sophisticated child who lives with her lesbian mom and her mom's partner asked, "Why does Heather have two mommies, and I have one mommy and one parent?" Another child with two moms was completely nonchalant about the whole thing. When his mothers read him the book and asked him what he thought, he simply said, "Can we get a dog and a cat, like Heather?" I have not yet heard of a child having an adverse reaction to the book. Adults, however, are another story.

In 1990, Alyson Publications, a gay and lesbian publishing house, started Alyson Wonderland, a line of books for children with gay and lesbian parents. Alyson bought the rights to *Heather* and also published *Daddy's Roommate*. The books got a little more publicity at that time, but all remained quiet until 1992, when three major conflicts arose surrounding *Heather* and *Daddy*.

The first conflict occurred in Portland, Oregon, where Lon Mabon had launched an anti-gay campaign, trying to amend the state constitution to allow discrimination against lesbians and gay men. During meetings of his organization, the Oregon Citizen Alliance (OCA), copies of *Heather* and *Daddy* were passed around as evidence of "the militant homosexual agenda" Mabon felt was sweeping the nation. In 1992, the citizens of Oregon defeated the OCA measure, though anti-gay legislation was voted into effect that same year in Colorado. (In 1996, Colorado's anti-gay amendment was declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court.)

The second arena of controversy surrounding *Heather Has Two Mommies*, *Daddy's Roommate*, and another title of mine, *Gloria Goes to Gay Pride*, took place in school and public libraries around the country when the books began disappearing from library shelves from coast to coast. When Alyson Publications learned of this, the company offered to send free replacement copies to the first five hundred libraries who called. Almost as soon as word went out, five hundred calls came in. Librarians, for the most part, rallied around the books and defended freedom of expression as a vital principle upon which this country is based. Some libraries moved the books to the adult section, and some libraries put the books in a special request section.

One of the most extreme battles took place in Fayetteville, North Carolina. When a campaign to remove *Heather and Daddy* was unsuccessful, the people who tried to get the books banned ran ads in local papers urging citizens to vote against an 11.4 million dollar library bond issue that, if passed, would be used to construct five new branch libraries in the area. According to the December 1992 issue of *American Libraries*, these ads stated that the library had taken the lead in pursuit of legitimizing homosexuality” and asked, “can prostitution, bestiality or incest be far behind?” Happily, the bond issue passed, though the margin was slim (more than 64,000 ballots were cast, and the measure passed by 304 votes).

I continue to be amazed by all this fuss. It seems to me that a disproportionate number of parents live in fear of their child reading just one book with a gay character in it, for such exposure will, in these parents, minds, cause their child to grow up to be lesbian or gay. It is usually useless to point out that the vast majority of lesbians and gay men were brought up by heterosexual parents and spent countless hours of their childhood reading books with heterosexual characters. Fear is irrational. It is also about control. I have no problem with parents deciding their child cannot read *Heather Has Two Mommies*. I do have a problem with these same parents deciding that nobody can have access to it, or to any other book, for that matter.

The third area of controversy took place in New York City around a first-grade curriculum guide called “Children of the Rainbow.” This 443-page bibliography, commonly known as the *Rainbow Curriculum*, was designed to teach first graders respect for all racial and ethnic groups. In these 443 pages, three paragraphs mention books with gay characters and themes. These books were not mandated or required to be taught or read in the classroom. They, along with hundreds of other books, were merely suggestions.

School Chancellor Joseph Fernandez was a staunch supporter of the *Rainbow Curriculum*. In a *Daily News* interview dated September 6, 1992, he said, “If we’re ever going to get this country together, we have to deal with these issues of hate. Kids learn biases from us, from adults. We have to teach them [tolerance] through education.”

Unfortunately, many people did not agree with Chancellor Fernandez, including Mary Cummins, president of School District 24 in Queens. In an interview dated April 23, 1992, with *New York Newsday*, she said the *Rainbow Curriculum* “says teachers must tell [students] that all families are not heterosexual. We can’t do that in the first grade.” In a *60 Minutes* report, Ms. Cummins stated that she “will not expand her curriculum to include materials that promote sodomy” and further stated that “though they don’t like the word, homosexuals are sodomists.”

I look at Heather and her two mommies enjoying a family picnic and wonder how Mary Cummins got from point A to point B. *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy’s Roommate* are not about sex. They’re about families. Clearly it’s the adults, not the children, who can’t take the sex out of homosexuality.

After a long and bitter battle, the *Rainbow Curriculum* was amended, and *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy’s Roommate* were removed from its pages. For those who do not want children exposed to this type of family, I ask this: what leads you to believe that every child sitting in your child’s classroom or library comes from a home with a mother and father? Why do you think that there are no children in your child’s classroom or library with lesbian or gay parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbors and friends? What messages are you giving to all children, when you pretend there is only one type of family, and render the rest invisible?

Minnie Bruce Pratt

One Good Mother to Another

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In the *New York Times* photo, a young blonde woman sits staring, stunned. She holds up a large picture of her cherubic, smiling little boy. At first this looks like a moment with which everyone sympathizes: a mother publicly grieving her child killed in a tragic accident or lost in a nightmare kidnapping. But in this photo, something jars slightly. There is no father next to the mother; her companion is a woman. The caption reads: "A Virginia court's decision to remove a child from his mother because of her lesbianism is stirring controversy. Sharon Bottoms, left, lost custody of her two-year-old son, Tyler Doustou, to her mother." At that moment, perhaps the reader's sympathy wanes or turns to animosity.

But I know her look. I've sat in that desolate place. I've had my children taken from my arms, and I've felt that my children were almost dead to me because I could not hold them or touch them.

I had two boys whom I saw emerge, bloody and beautiful, from my body. I nursed them at my breast. I bathed their perfect tiny bodies and changed their diapers. I spoon-fed them baby food spinach. I taught them how to tie their shoes. I rocked them through ear aches and bad dreams. I drove them to their first day in kindergarten.

Then, suddenly, when they were five and six, when I fell in love with another woman and left my marriage to live as a lesbian, the world looked at me and saw an unfit mother. Suddenly, my husband had legal grounds to take my children away from me and never let me see them again.

Like Bottoms, I was also a "somewhat immature and undisciplined, though loving, mother" after all, we were both mothers at twenty-one, barely out of girlhood. Like Bottoms, I was an "irregular job holder" finishing a Ph.D. in English literature. When I applied for teaching positions, the male interviewers

would inquire, “How will you arrange child care? Are you planning to have more children? What will your husband do if we hire you?” And they never did.

But the standard for my being a “good mother” was not my parenting ability or financial stability. After all, my husband, a father at twenty-three and an unemployed graduate student, was no more mature in his role than I was in mine. No, I was considered a fit mother as long as I was married and loyal to the man who was my husband. As soon as I asserted my independence, as soon as I began a life in which I claimed the human right to form intimate social and sexual relations with whom-ever I chose, specifically with other women, I was seen to be a perverted, unnatural woman by my husband, my mother, the people of the town I lived in. and the legal system.

The letter from my husband’s lawyer said he was seeking custody because of my “unorthodox ideas about the place of the father in the home”...my heresy consisted of disagreeing with the idea that men were superior to, and should govern, women.

Though more than fifteen years passed between my agony at losing my children and that of Sharon Bottoms, the issues remain the same. This is true despite the fact that I lost custody of my boys to my ex-husband, their biological father, while Sharon has, at least for now, lost her boy to her mother, the child’s biological grandmother, who sued for custody. The reason for denying us our children was the same: simply because we were in lesbian relationships.

In the words of Judge Parsons, who ruled in Henrico County Circuit Court against Sharon: “The mother’s conduct is illegal and immoral and renders her unfit to parent.” Illegal, because in Virginia (and more than twenty other states and the District of Columbia), sodomy—the “crime against nature” of lesbians and gay men—is still prohibited. And the 1987 U.S. Supreme Court, in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, actually stated in its majority opinion that it was maintaining the illegality of sodomy because that particular set of justices considered this kind of sex immoral, based on “traditional values.”

Sharon Bottoms, as a lesbian in a committed relationship with another woman, is perceived as less fit to parent than her mother, whose live-in boyfriend for seventeen years was a man

who, according to Sharon, sexually abused her twice a week during her teen years. Under the law and in the eyes of many people, Sharon's mother is more fit because she endorses heterosexuality as an institution and female subservience as a tradition, and presumably will pass these values along to her grandson. This arrangement is seen as being in the child's "best interests."

But should we not ask what kind of damage will be done to a boy if his sense of self depends on dominating another person? Should we not inquire about the immorality of teaching a child that love can only occur with state-sanctioned approval?

Much was made in the courtroom of the fact that Sharon's child calls her lover and partner "Dada." In most two-partner lesbian families, the children call one woman Mama or Mom or Mother, and the other woman some different maternal variation, or perhaps by her given name; often, these women lose custody of their children anyway. Certainly, Sharon could have been challenged for custody no matter what her child called April, Sharon's partner. But the word "Dada" evokes a truth about lesbian parenting that opponents violently condemn: Two women can raise children in a home together and challenge the very idea that gender roles, or gender expression, are irrevocably matched to biological gender.

Opponents of lesbian/gay parenting often present the "damage" to the child as a danger of him or her "becoming" gay. But this is only part of a larger fear that no matter what sexuality the child develops, the child might learn that rigid gender roles are not required. The child might learn the joy of possibility that comes when biological gender does not have to match socially mandated gender in jobs or thoughts or love.

Psychiatric specialists testified for Sharon by outlining studies that showed no noticeable difference between children reared in lesbian households and those reared in heterosexual ones. Nevertheless, Judge Parsons concurred with Sharon's mother that the child would be "mentally and physically harmed" by the lesbian relationship; he "stated there was a strong possibility the boy would carry "an intolerable burden" for "the rest of his life."

Sharon can see her child on Mondays and Tuesdays but not in her own home, and not in the presence of her lover. By my

divorce settlement (“And lucky to get it!” my lawyer said), I was forbidden to have the boys in my home if I shared the house with any person; I could take them out of their home state only if we went to be with my mother, whom my husband had threatened to call as a character witness for him.

To see my boys, sometimes I drove roundtrip on three-day weekends, fourteen hours nonstop there, fourteen hours non-stop back. The youngest boy wrote in his school journal how he wished he could be with me more; the oldest boy talked to me late at night, on long distance phone calls, about his depression, about how sometimes he just wanted to die.

I loved them, I called them, I saw them as much as I had time and money to do. We got through their baby years, pre-adolescence, and teens. When I finally asked the oldest, “What effect do you think my being a lesbian had on you?” he answered: “None. I think my personality was most shaped by not having you with me as a mother all those years, by having you taken away from me.”

It is ironic that Sharon Bottoms’ case was tried in Virginia, a state that enforced its law against racial intermarriage as late as 1967, until in *Loving v. Virginia* the U.S. Supreme Court declared unconstitutional all such laws. The determined political struggle of the African-American community, in the courts and in civil-rights battles in the streets, abolished a law that codified the prejudices of white Southerners.

When I fought for custody of my children in Fayetteville, North Carolina, as I struggled to live as a self-reliant woman, not dependent, not submissive, the tide of women’s liberation was rising through the South. Women were beginning to challenge an economic system that uses the threat of competition between the sexes as a way to limit working people’s wages, benefits, and job conditions.

Now, with cases like that of Sharon Bottoms, the gay and lesbian community is fighting to end other inhumane limits on how all of us can live and love. And now we have allies, like Sharon’s ex-husband, Dennis Doustou, who asked to testify for her and who says, “Tyler means the world to her.”

In 1976, when I went to a lawyer for help in my struggle for my children, he said to me, “This country is not ready for some-

one like you.” Can we say now, in 1993, that we are ready for someone like Sharon Bottoms, just an ordinary woman, a part-time grocery clerk trying to raise a child on not enough money, but with the love and support of another woman who cares about both of them?

Let us declare, finally, that we are ready for this ordinary extraordinary woman who is saying to us, with her life, that to guarantee her right to be a lesbian and a mother is to take one more step toward liberation for all of us.

Marjorie Norris

Someone's Mother

Is the lesbian in the mother or the mother in the lesbian? Somehow, the life of ancestors is where the answer lies: the connection with the old Mother, my own mother, my grandmother, and the other ancients who comprised my life, brought me up out of innocence and into the grace of knowledge. My watching led me to know them and to know myself, to know I could not live their life (lives) just as they could never invent mine. But Mother was a natural lesbian out of touch with the messages she sent me from her favorite authors, Collette, to name the most impressive. And I passed on Gloria Steinem to my daughter, and Emma Goldman, and Andrea Dworkin, the leaves of turning books, and walks, the goldness of trees and the gladness of nature. She and I were so close when she was little that she sometimes read my mind just as I was reading hers. Always, her mind-reading seemed relational, a wondering about a female friend, in intimate. My daughter, at fifteen, that bitter age, would toss me away with the women, and begin her voyage into makeup and weighing in high school boys at track meets. She saw me as ridiculous, or at least foolish, and favored her father and other men. Somehow, she was lost to me for awhile, and my divorce from men's worlds made her anxious and contrary. She began as girls in school will to discredit herself, she stopped reading, competing, and loving learning, but did go on to college to get professional knowledge and skills on "how to make a living," she told me. I had always wanted her to know her own independence, and she told me bitterly later, it was I who made her independent, after all, she had to get away from me! My son, four years younger, inherited music, a mild manner and a simpler way of presenting himself, despite his introvert's many inner layers, and his beautiful nurturing spirit. Someday, should he have a child, he'd like to stay home to raise his baby. On March 3, 2005, my daughter, at age 36, became a mother of a son so beautiful I see the sky in him. At eight weeks of age, I wonder at his auburn tonsure of hair, his bright wise eyes, his knowledge from the deep. And my daughter is wonderful mother,

an earth mother, her breast at the ready, and her smile and her contact constant. She is in love with the world, just the way I wanted her to be. In her child, she sees the future, and it is wide and bright. In my children, I saw the wonder of personality and power, an individuated path forward. So, I am a mother and a grandmother! I have been headstrong, loving, vulnerable, mistaken, strong, and mortal, and unsure. But my daughter has invited me back to share herself and her life as a mother. Other than the earnest spiritual devotions of my own mother, and the memory of fore-mothers, there have been no guidebooks, not even a compass, just the call of earth and sky, and this has made all the difference.

Kendra Brooks

The Other Mother

There is no proof I was even there, on the day of my daughter's birth. After twenty-six hours of labor she was delivered, cesarean section, under bright lights and some confusion. But there is no record of me being there—nothing to tie us together as parent and child on her birth day. She did not exit my body, nor did she grow inside it. She is not of my blood and bone. I was an observer at her birth, dressed in sky blue hospital scrubs, bottoms rolled and tucked into athletic socks around my ankles, foam rubber booties covering my Nike's. On top I wore the smallest shirt available for expectant fathers, although it still hung down to my thighs and the wide neck opening showed most of the name on the thick red sweatshirt I was wearing beneath it.

To anyone present, I must have seemed little more than a bundle of hospital laundry next to the birthing mother. The surgical cap billowing out around my head only reinforced my freakish, out of place feeling. In the hospital-issued outfit, I felt veiled yet exposed, more like a misfit and interloper, than the proud parent I was about to become. I'd been included in the event at the behest of the pregnant mother, my live-in companion of seven years, we were, are lovers. In any case, they have no surgical garments for lesbian lovers who attend their lover's childbirth.

An indifferent nurse handed me the "Dad's kit." I dressed or covered myself in the ladies room, and in full expectant-father regalia I waited in an empty hallway, where I paced, afraid they had forgotten me, or worse, had decided to leave me out of the whole event entirely. After what seemed like hours, the automatic doors swooshed open and a masked surgical nurse signaled me with her eyebrows to follow her. Fully compliant, I followed her. Inside the operating room, I stepped over bundles of wiring on the floor, and was instructed, by a muffled voice through a surgical mask, to get as close as possible to the patient without being in the way. I sidled in close to the gurney where mother and unborn child had begun their ascent.

The operating room bustled with busy medical technicians, nurses, and doctors, all preparing for the C-section. Monitors buzzed and clicked, air vents hummed, the bare whiteness of the lights felt like they were shining right through me. I would have agreed to disappear into vapor under my surgical mask and glasses if it could have been possible. I wore no name tag; since no one spoke to me, it wasn't needed. But I was quite content in my anonymity among the monitors and stainless steel equipment. I felt more like an astronaut in transit or a deep-sea diver looking up.

After all I wasn't pregnant. I wasn't the one who had suffered and celebrated the endurance of a pregnancy, although there were a number of minutes when I wished I had. I wished, briefly, it was me, if only to be connected physically to the baby. Something deep-rooted made me think that was necessary.

How had we come to the choice of which of us would carry the baby anyway? I couldn't recall. I felt a wave of nausea sweep through me. I was sweating and cold at the same time. I concentrated on my breathing and I could feel my hot breath under the surgical mask.

Jammed in next to the head of my pregnant partner, who was strapped onto an execution-like apparatus, arms fully extended on padded boards, body restrained in every conceivable way, I leaned into her whispering reassurance, and kissing her forehead from through my mask. She was barely conscious, groggy from the anesthesia and exhausted from the hours of contractions. Her cervix hadn't dilated enough to continue a natural birth. Deciding on the C-section had been another agony. I crouched down next to her behind the hospital green linens that had walled us off from her body from the neck down.

She smiled up at me, her eyes soft and clear, much like the eyes of someone who knows she is about to die, I imagined. Until then I wasn't sure she even knew I was there, but in that instant, in her gaze, I became a parent too. In the minutes before our baby's first cry, even before the spattering of blood, or before anyone could see inside my lover's body, I became the other parent. She had seen me, seen through all the layers the world had heaped on me, and through all I had taken on to keep myself hidden from view as my daughter, our daughter,

was about to draw her first breath. Only she knew what I hid from the rest of the world: my wish to be a mother, my potential to be a mother, the other mother.

Sterile environments have their own smells. Lingering, heavy, medicinal odors take precedent, infect the air with cleanliness. It was as if the sights, smells, and sounds of that moment landed on my tongue all at once as a metallic taste. Wet, tearing, and slicing sounds oozed and echoed up from my lover's midsection. I wanted to look. I wanted to see the slippery, bloody birth. My hand was on her shoulder and we could both feel the pulling and final release, the tug-of-war before life begins. Our eyes locked in the small quiet space behind the green linen wall.

"It's a beautiful girl, and she's perfect," the doctor announced.

Tears streaming down our faces, we waited together to hear our baby's first cry. Her lungs had to be drained, and she was placed under a heat lamp before the nurse instructed me to take her. I brought her to her mother. She resembled a tiny shriveled dolphin, pale purple and withered. She was choking on her first breaths of air, but she was filled with life, the proof of our love.

Linda Markin

Tia

It is 1979. I'm twenty-four-years-old and courting a beautiful woman ten years my senior who happens to have four children between the ages of six and eleven. I am young, romantic, lusty, self-centered and completely naïve. Four children? How could they be a serious concern when true love is at stake? I should have been clued in when I arrived at her home the first night we were to spend together, expecting to be greeted... what? in sexy lingerie? And instead I found Marie sitting at the kitchen table playing board games with her children. But no, it was years, I am embarrassed to say, before I fully got it that Marie was a mother before she was my lover and partner, and, even more importantly, that I had committed myself to her family, not simply to her, by becoming her lover and partner.

In 1979, it had been ten years since Stonewall. I was well read in Rich, Lorde, Daly, and *Sinister Wisdom*. I had walked bare-breasted in the sunshine at the *Michigan Womyn's Music Festival*. I was an out-loud dyke, had my work boots, jeans, flannel shirt, my anger at the patriarchy, and my distrust of men. Marie, well, she had four children—two girls and two boys, an angry, controlling ex-husband, no money, and enough love to adopt one more foundling—me.

The early years: the 1980s. The two youngest, both boys, Joe and Christopher had gone to live with their father, step-mother, and stepbrothers in Northampton, Massachusetts. Marie decided, shortly after we moved in together, that she was not doing an adequate job giving all the children what they needed. Though she had serious misgivings about their father, she figured his new wife and a home with brothers the same age, would provide a more boy-centric and financially comfortable home for her sons. She also rightly deduced that I would not hold up long in a household with four young children and she wanted our new relationship to have a whisper of hope at success.

Marie fully intended that the boys' move to their father's home be temporary. But year followed year. The boys got involved in sports, and school, and had the physical things Marie



"Linda and Joe Playing Board Game" by Marie LaPre'Grabon.

longed for them to have. Meanwhile, she and I struggled to provide for the girls and to have enough money left over to finish refurbishing the old farmhouse we owned together. On holidays, a weekend a month and for a few weeks in the summer, we arranged to trade kids—for the boys to visit us, and the girls to visit their father. Every month, there were angry, frightened phone conversations between Marie and the children's father about late child-support payments and negotiations about where to meet in order to make the kid exchanges.

With new obligations—a home, mortgage, responsible job, and a partner with children—I began to grow up. The going was painfully slow for all of us. Ten years difference in age between Marie and me meant that she had a more fully developed identity than I. By the time we met, she was an artist, a teacher, and a community organizer, as well as a mother. I was still discovering how I might apply my skills and energy in ways that expressed my values, while trying to leave behind the behaviors and attitudes I associated with youth. At home, I worked at controlling my jealousy about the time and energy raising children demanded. It seemed there was always a basketball game or a play performance or simply a ride needed to a friend's house, and never enough time to process some need or hurt I felt. And yet I knew that being less central to Marie than I felt she was to me, was more a function of lack of definition in my own life than it was a consequence of her motherhood. Though I stumbled frequently, I strove to be a second adult in our household, rather than another child.

I wrestled with understanding my role as a figure in the children's lives—not mother, not father, not friend. It was easier to describe what I was *not*, than what I was to them. It felt more natural to me to be a sounding board for Marie to work through difficult child raising questions, rather than be a joint decision maker. There were times she wanted me to be more involved in the kids' lives, even though we agreed it was easier for her to make decisions affecting their lives without having to consult me.

Gay baby boom? Not in rural Vermont in the early 1980s. It was difficult to find any other lesbians with children. We never even considered gay men might have children; their hearts were

so full with the care of other loved ones. There were no protections for gay and lesbian Vermonters in employment, housing, adoption—legislation we would work on, and protections that would not be written into law until ten years later. The kids grew up in a homophobic world. They managed their friends' ignorance, their friends' parents' fears, found their own courage, and began to shape the values that would carry them into adulthood—compassion, tolerance, and respect.

The challenging years of the 1990s: Little kids, little problems; big kids, big problems. Marie and I frequently said these words, or words like them, to each other during the kids' early adulthood years, often clutching each other in our own fear for them. They were grappling with issues we had barely sorted out for ourselves. We had little to offer them other than sanctuary and compassion in working through the problems for themselves. And though we might have known that was all there was to do, it didn't seem enough. The sometimes traumatic results of being a sexual being, an ectopic pregnancy, an abusive relationship, an eating disorder, panic attacks, drug-induced psychological problems—these were challenges we had not expected and that took everything we had to offer. In fact, they took more than we had. The fallout forced Marie and me to examine our past decisions and actions. We each suffered the guilt, in our own ways, of finding those decisions and actions lacking. For a time we took that shame out on one another, blaming the other for the current pain our family felt. We sought professional help that provided its own challenges. We learned enough in a few sessions with a counselor to begin again to talk with the love and respect inherent in our relationship. We made the decision to stay together. That decision entailed making changes in behavior before feeling the emotions from which they would naturally emanate. The decision required deep belief in our relationship, and, in itself, helped us overcome guilt and renew our commitment to each other.

One of the most significant changes in behavior had to do with the organization, control, and distribution of money. Because Marie and I came from different socio-economic backgrounds and had such different personal obligations when we began our relationship, issues surrounding money matters were

enormously divisive for us. We knew intuitively that having some approximation of equal distribution of power in our relationship depended upon resolving those conflicts. However, it still took years of building trust, and finally a leap of faith, before we put aside the little red ledger book that tracked who owed what to whom, in favor of joint accounts and attitudes that better reflected a family than separate individuals.

When the kids went to college, we still had too little money to be of any serious help to them. Moreover I was not emotionally ready to assume the responsibility for their tuition bills, an obligation I believed belonged to their father, a well-paid engineer. As a result, the kids left college with large debts. Their father continued to evade his obligations to them. So though I still struggled with resentment about his lack of support, Marie and I decided to give the kids gifts to help retire some of their debt. I knew that his contributions (had they been made) would not have lessened the need for my own. And waiting until I was without conflict, was no longer an option.

Shepping naches (Yiddish: Getting proud pleasure, particularly from the achievements of one's children).

Eldest daughter, Michelle, an ardent and articulate defender of diversity and tolerance makes us proud in ways that touch us personally. She gives her time to her daughter's school's PTA. And then a donation from Michelle arrives at the office of the Samara Foundation of Vermont—the LGBT organization on whose board I serve—revealing she has made the ethics of service and philanthropy—that Marie and I value so highly—her own as well.

We visit son Joe at his first apartment and see he has posted a pink triangle on his refrigerator emblazoned with the words "Ally" and "Safe Space."

Daughter Linda tells us a story about encouraging her well-loved lesbian boss to have the child her partner so wants. She explains that the woman was fearful about subjecting a child to the bigotry certainly encountered by a child of lesbian parents. Linda told her, "I won't lie to you. It wasn't easy for me. But I am who I am today because I grew up with Mom and Linda. I'm stronger, more tolerant, and I like myself better than I think I would have, if I had grown up in a straight family."

Youngest son, Christopher, tells us a story about bravely confronting a co-worker's homophobia, clearly proud that in having done so, he had rounded a major corner in his own development.

December 1999. Just weeks after Marie and I had celebrated our twentieth anniversary, the Vermont Supreme Court issued the *Baker* decision, which ruled that the Vermont constitution guaranteed same-sex couples equal rights under state law. However, by choosing not to grant the full legal remedy of marriage to the plaintiffs, instead sending the solution to the State Legislature to craft, Marie and I were catapulted into action along with the rest of our community of friends and allies.

For months, we made regular trips to the Statehouse to listen to the debates for and against same-sex marriage. Proving himself again the ally he had claimed to be years earlier, Joe enthusiastically accompanied us on the first of those trips when I gave testimony before the Judiciary Committee. He handed out "Marriage Rights for Same-Sex Couples" stickers at the front door, and struck up a conversation with a female reporter from the local television station. Later on he told Marie, "Mom, I hope you don't mind. I think I just outed you on Channel 22 News, and here's the card for a reporter who wants to interview you both!"

For a year, no matter where we were, in restaurants, work places, even sporting events, we overheard and took part in conversations between Vermonters discussing the rights of gay and lesbian couples. Public conversations precipitated private ones. Although, Marie and I had made huge advances in sharing money and power before legal union became an option, it was not until we began discussing civil union for ourselves, that we resolved issues that had prevented us from drafting wills and making estate plans. In the broader context of a legal union previously off limits and unconsidered by us, we found answers that made a shared legacy possible. We were able to accommodate our desires to provide for Marie's children, and still recognize my nephews, and support organizations we feel passionately about.

December 2000, Marie and I, and eighty-five of our closest friends and relatives, celebrated our twenty-first anniversary at our civil union. Instead of vows, we spoke words that evoked the ways we had both pushed and supported each other to become

all we could be, and promised to continue to do so. All four kids took active parts in the ceremony, as did others from our families of origin. Joe wrote a beautiful tribute to our relationship, one that startled and moved me. In a statement he called “Magic,” he managed to convey the influence our relationship had had on him. He called us inspiring role models for “a happy, healthy, and functional relationship.” He told me that I had given him “the security of knowing that [his] mother had someone who loved her and would support her through life’s troubling times.” And in his honest insightful way, he explained, “There was no one particular moment that told me my family had an additional member. It was the gradual realization that I could not imagine life without these two together.”

Today we have three grandchildren. I’ve known these children since their births. My relationships with these little ones are not complicated by the responsibility and jealousy that weighed down mine with their parents. I am no longer an unformed person. I have a career, rewarding associations with organizations and people committed to social change, a large network of friends, and many cultural and recreational interests. The time and energy I allocate to this third generation is less than a closely engaged grandparent would. These grandchildren know me as Tia (aunt)—a name and an identity I wear more comfortably than Nana or Memere, as Marie is called.

Their parents phone me sometimes to ask specific advice about financial matters or similar concerns, but not for personal questions. They reserve those for their mother. I am ambivalent about the distance between us, sometimes sad that we don’t share more intimate conversations. But I realize the opportunity for more closeness lies mostly with me. The kids have moved as close to me as I have let them, so far.

So when my usually conscious friend, David, forwarded this journal’s request for submissions to an issue called “Lesbian Mothers and Grandmothers” to six lesbians including Marie and me and included a note that made it clear he recognized only Marie as a parent, I felt confused and hurt. I responded as though I completely believed in myself as a parent. My email shouted back, “So, what am I, chopped liver? I’ve been a non-biological parent of four kids for twenty-five years, but still I’m invisible!”

That was the moment I recognized my ambivalence. I had couched the word “parent” in quotation marks. On the one hand I thought I had not been enough of a parent to the kids to claim the sense of outrage sparked in me by David’s omission. The ambiguity of those quotation marks seemed an appropriate indicator of my emotional distance from the title. And on the other hand, even as I wrote “parent,” I felt that my inability to fully claim the title should not render me invisible, nor did that qualified noun convey the depth of feeling and concern I have for this family, my family, or do justice to the complexity of our connections and long history together.

What does do justice to our long history together, these kids and grandchildren and me, is our continued exploration of the ways we can be close, honest, and vulnerable with each other. What am I to them, and they to me? I don’t fully know. I am not simply friend, not father, not mother, not grandparent. Adding the prefix “step” does not help me to understand either. What I do know is that I could not have imagined that night so many years ago as I sat down at Marie’s kitchen table and took up my place in the Monopoly game, what it would mean to me to have a family as I turn fifty.

Judith K. Witherow

No Space Like Home

There was a time when Lesbian, Mother and Grandmother did not appear in the same article. Various Queer theories were devoted to how these titles couldn't be seriously melded together. Separatism came into being as a valid way to solidify a movement dedicated to eradicating sexism and heterosexism. Some Lesbian activists and activities shunned children, especially boy children and their Queer mothers. Lesbian mothers of the 70s were often deprived of sharing social and cultural life with their children.

When these exclusionary sentiments are written, discussed or practiced, I view them as another form of racism that belittles my tribal/clan lifestyle. I am no less queer than my never-married, less-understanding sisters in struggle.

It makes me wonder: "Ain't I a full-time Lesbian?"

From the age of five I knew that I held a special feeling towards women. This feeling did not change as I became older. My desire to have children of my own did not change either. In my family you didn't leave home until you married. It was the tribal manner of staying together forever.

Who I married wasn't really of importance to me. It should have been in all fairness, but it wasn't. During the marriage I gave birth to three sons. The relationship lasted for ten years. It lasted until I couldn't bear to have the boys or myself the recipients of ongoing abuse.

In 1975, I met my partner, Sue. We have been together for 29 years. During this time we endured just about everything except abuse in our family of five. From the beginning we recognized that mutual love, laughter, and respect would take us through our life together because of the strong bond we formed.

My three sons are now grown. Two of them are married and they each have two children. Two sons live a few streets away from us. Our daughters-in-law and our four grandchildren are very special. The two teenage grandkids know that we are Lesbians and have no problem dealing with this fact. Our lifestyle

isn't the center of all that takes place. It's just a part of our being the mothers and grandmothers of the family unit.

As children, our three sons didn't participate with us in Lesbian activities. But we purposely made sure this lack in their lives wasn't brought to their attention. Life was already dealing them more discrimination than their young shoulders could carry. They would have assumed they weren't welcome because of race or class. It would have been impossible to explain the reason was because they were males.

They have a deep love and respect for our friends, women who have always been an ongoing presence in their life. Whenever any of them need something fixed, our guys are the first ones they call. If they have questions about cost they check with the boys. The boys want to make sure if they have a discount on any service that the women in our life use it. My sons are in the construction or mechanical fields, and they put our friends in the family/tribal group who come first when a need for home repair arises.

Lesbians and feminist activists can debate this issue decade after decade, and, in the end, the same question will still be asked: "Where are all of the women of color?" The answer: we're with what is descriptively known as our family unit. If one of us isn't welcome the mat won't be put out for any of us. The words of the question will remain an echo, repeated until only the wind will continue to whisper it, until it fades into the sadness of silence.

The practice of exclusion has cost us untold sharing of experiences with our sons in the Lesbian community. It's not too late to include our grandsons this time around. If we're forced to deny an important part of our lives with the blood of our blood, it will cut us deeper than any knife ever could.

To illustrate the importance of maintaining family I've described some holiday get-togethers. We always bring out the silliness in each other. I'm often accused of being the instigator. Perhaps. You be the judge.

Holiday Magic 2002

Throughout the year I email jokes and articles that I find entertaining to friends and family. Some might think that I don't hold a number of things sacred. That's often true in this jaded



(L to R) Judith and Sue. By Deb Friedman.



Judith with grandchildren Constance and Marky. By Sue Lenaerts.

world. What I do hold close to my Queer occasionally irreverent heart are my grandchildren. I love them each for the unique, precious beings they are.

On the 24th of December we always get together as a family. We eat and exchange presents and love. Thanks is given that we have survived another year.

This year's celebration touched the better part of me deeply. The two youngest grandchildren—Constance age eight, and Marky age five, generated this emotion. On that evening the door flew open and the two of them blew in like the wind. They were clutching a small gold bag.

Before I knew it they were both seated on my lap. Mark and Dawn were saying, "Get off your Grandmother before you hurt her." Like that was possible. The two of them kept whispering, "Grandmother, open your present. Hurry, Grandma."

Meanwhile the adults were more into doing things in order. (Did I raise this bunch?) It was decided that the little ones wishes would come first. I opened the bag then closed it and covered my mouth in feigned disbelief. The two of them started giggling. "Open it! Go ahead Grandmother. You're allowed." I peeked in again, playing along. They didn't know that I was buying time to pull myself together.

Inside the bag were a number of small toys. (I collect small female characters from different shows and movies.) I might add these gifts were not ones—at that time—that were members of my collection.

I am now the proud owner of the Rugrats characters. Yes, those bizarre...er, beautiful...creatures will now be known by name in case I'm ever quizzed. There is Angelica, Baby Dil, and Chuckie. As I pulled each toy out I would say, "No way! This is just too wonderful! These must be someone else's present." I would be rewarded with the widest smiles and phrases like—"Do you really love them Grandmother?" Or, "We could move some of your "old" stuff and help you put them on a shelf." Grandmother is not a total fool. These children confuse old and semi-costly.

To say that it was a toss up between who was the happiest would be an understatement. This is the part of my holiday that I like to share with those I care enough to share other things that fill my head and heart.

Winter Holiday 2003

Yesterday was our day to exchange presents. I thought, by having our get together early, that it would free my three sons and their families (and two invited friends), to celebrate the holidays at their homes. The word “CHAOS” doesn’t begin to describe the day. My insides hurt from laughing so much, and I’m sure that everyone else feels the same.

It started when Stacey and Andrea gave Sue a carved flamingo for her collection of every flamingo ever made. I swear that I am always careful about keeping my true feelings to myself—when it counts. But not yesterday; when Sue unwrapped her “object ‘d art” I lost it. It was one of the ugliest things I’ve ever seen—and I’m on intimate terms with ugly!

Andi tried to explain that Stacey picked out the present. Mark made a statement about it looking like one of the creatures from the bar scene in Star Wars. From there on it was “Merry Chaos.”

I was still laughing when my present was opened. It was the cousin of the flamingo, but it was a pig with a Christmas stocking hanging out of its mouth. The rear end was life like. My turn to be the “butt” of the laughter. The pig was double ugly. Again they tried to pass it off as costly artwork. If so, that was the gene they got from their father’s side of the family.

Before the night of our get together, Sue and I went shopping. I told her that I’d pick out the guys’ gifts. She went in another direction to choose presents for the daughters-in-law and grandchildren.

I found the most amazing toilet plungers in the whole wide world! They had Lucite handles and brightly colored rubber suction cups. To keep the three from bickering I bought them each a different color. To get something of a more personal nature, I bought them each nose and ear hair trimmers. Sue kept saying, “Judith, I don’t know about those presents. Are you sure?” Was I sure! Didn’t I give birth to them? You bet I was sure!

No one could have imagined the scenario that followed. I know these guys, and when they saw that each had received such wonderful gifts, the rest of the evening was a blur.

Grown men! Steve, the oldest son, insisted that he receive first pick by the mere fact of age. They started wetting the plung-

ers and sticking them on their stomachs and chests. Then it moved on to chasing each other around the house and sticking them on each other's body. (The grandchildren were totally amazed at their dad and uncles' behavior.)

We have plunger marks on the kitchen ceiling that resemble crop circles. There was a contest to see who could get their plungers to stick the longest. Then someone got the bright idea to suction them onto the ceiling fan and turn it on.

Before I get the lecture that I know that I'm going to receive tonight from Sue I'd like to say: "Wasn't I correct about what would entertain them?" I don't know how much Sue spent but I know that I won the contest of most appreciated presents, and the cheapest. I haven't checked the digital pictures yet, but undoubtedly, there is verification of the gift that stole this winter holiday.

Let's Do Colored Eggs At Your House Next Year

There's something about any holiday that always stirs up the creative juices in our house. Sue found the directions that incited this event in the Sunday newspaper. When she showed the article to me I immediately recognized the potential.

This one required sucking the yolks and whites out of an eggshell—Sue got to do that part. I'm not going to suck an egg for any reason—much less six, and it has nothing to do with me being immune suppressed.

We dried the barren eggs for a week. On Saturday we shredded tissue paper of all colors into confetti—thank goodness for those shredder machines. We then used sponges to color the eggs with a mixture of glue and dye. (Who would have thought that the glue would make them harder?) The hardest part—speaking of hard—was stuffing all of that danged confetti inside each egg without breakage. Jeez—in lieu of a more colorful word!!!

Next, we pasted decorative stickers on the shell, and over the hole in the bottom where the egg came out. They were truly semi-works of art.

After everyone arrived and was feeling comfortable, Sue and I staged an argument over where the eggs should be placed until after we ate dinner. After a back and forth discussion of place-

ment I said, “I don’t care where you put the stupid things.” (We both try not to swear around the little ones—I try really hard.)

Sue grabbed one of the eggs and cracked it on top of my head. Everyone was shocked into silence—no small feat. I need to remember this fact in the future, along with the fact that glue hardens whatever it comes in contact with. (A bit of information you can use without quoting me.) Confetti and eggshells went flying everywhere when the egg all but fractured my skull.

When we started to laugh they saw that it was a joke—they had never seen us get angry with each other so their shock was genuine. Even the confetti and eggshells flying everywhere wasn’t a clue until we both started laughing. Bless their non-violent hearts. At that point everyone got into the Egg Battle of 2004.

Our only regret was that we didn’t pull this stunt at one of their homes. We’ll be finding colored paper and shells for a long time to come, but it was one of the best stunts yet.

There is always someone who tries to get the better of me—no matter what bright idea I try to pull.

My 81-year-old aunt gave us a recipe for pineapple pie with meringue topping. I made the pies, and Sue made the meringue. The two pies were beautiful. After we had eaten dinner, and picked up as much of the confetti and shells as possible, we were sitting around talking while awaiting space for dessert.

I looked up at one point, and there was Marky, age 6, walking into the living room carefully, carrying one of the pies. He said, “Grandma Judy, go ahead and hit me in the face with the pie. Go on! Pie me!” He was grinning from ear to ear, and everyone started to laugh at the second surprise of the day. Why couldn’t that child have been sixteen? I wasn’t even tempted to do as he requested. It was too precious that he wanted to create some chaos along with me. He is definitely his grandmother’s boy.

Ruth Mountaingrove

On Being a Lesbian Grandmother

I see in the program that I am listed as a lesbian grandmother, and it's true that I am. I have a grandson, Jeffy, who will be eleven next month, and a granddaughter, Hannah Michelle, who will be two in December.

It occurs to me that since so many of us are living into our 70s and even into our 90s that I may live to see my grandson graduate from college, perhaps even my granddaughter.

Both of my sons, the fathers of these children, chose to wait to have children till they were in their mid-30s or late-40s, unlike my generation, who started to have children in their 20s, or as in my case into my late 30s. My daughter, 36, is only three years shy of my age when I gave birth to her. She too has chosen to wait, and possibly not have children, which is her choice.

I became a lesbian in my late 40s and I credit the feminist movement for giving me that space to become the lesbian I am and have been for 28 years.

There are many ways of being parents. There was my lover's and my partnership way, which when we began our 13 year relationship, had two children on her side and four on mine. We both came out of a heterosexual divorced marriage. There are lesbian couples with children not from heterosexual marriages, there are gay male couples with children, there are bi-sexuals, living in het marriages with children. There are heterosexual unmarried couples with children.

There is such a variety of choices now open to anyone. The one child per family which was the standard when I was growing up in the depression, with one male, one female in the unit, made for a suffocating atmosphere and led us, the children to have large families though not as large as the ones our parents came from. Being a lesbian grandmother in those days would have been unheard of, at least I never heard of any. In the first place it was impossible. If you were a lesbian, in a lesbian couple, how could you have children? If you were a lesbian grandmother you would be in the closet. You would not be talking about it as I am.

But then came sperm banks, and in the 70s and 80s it began to occur to lesbian couples that they too could have children. This sometimes led to complications, with a sperm donor claiming patrimony, but mostly the anonymous-donor method worked out fine. Gay male couples began to adopt. There have always been marriages of convenience between lesbians and gay men and those marriages sometimes also produce children.

Bloodline is part of the patriarchal package. Inheritance—who gets the castle and the land—almost always a male—hinges on knowing who the father is. We know who the mother is. In my case my grandson is in my bloodline, my granddaughter is not. In many heterosexual marriages these days this is the case.

Who the sperm donor is, is much less important than who the father is. How good a parent he is. Gay couples and lesbian couples are very good parents indeed. Some of them will go on to be grandparents, as I have, because their children will be parents in whatever arrangements they chose.

I do not usually think of myself as a lesbian grandmother, or even as a mother. My children are surviving, or surviving very well, without any help from me.

I think of myself as an artist, a photographer, a writer, a sometime-activist, and in an undermining sort of way, a poet. You know me through art exhibitions, as a radio producer, a poet reading at the Open Mike at the Jambalya. You know me as a writer of computer and opinion columns in the *SRNews*. As a reviewer of mostly lesbian books for the L-Word, a publicist in GALA and as curator for the new gallery at the Center at 4th and D. Some of you know me as a volunteer at the Ink People, or as a board member at the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgendered Center.

Some of you know me as a perennial student at Humboldt State University, in the Over-60s program. Others as a teacher of basic computing for Northcoast Internet.

Some of you know me as the co-publisher and editor of the magazine *WomanSpirit* that my lesbian partner and I were part of for ten years, or the *Blatant Image*, a photography annual we published for three years, or as half-owner of “Rootworks,” lesbian land in Oregon. Some of you even know some of my lovers

since I've lived in Arcata. There is life and love after 60 and even 70.

We are living in a time of transition when lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people are being accepted despite the Far Right's attempting to close the door. We are living in a time when I can stand here and say: Yes, I am a lesbian grandmother.

This was a talk given at Gay Pride Day, June 1997, at the Arcata Plaza in Arcata, California.

To bring this up to 2005: my grandson, now eighteen is in his first year of college and my granddaughter is eleven. I earned my first masters in Art in Photography in 1990 and my second in 2002 in Theatre Production. The Center at 4th and D disbanded but some effort is being made to create another one. I no longer teach computing or write a column on computers. Nor do I run the darkroom at the Ink People which I ran for twelve years. Now that I've stepped down the Ink People are calling it the Ruth Mountaingrove Darkroom. I no longer own half of "Rootworks." It is now in trust in perpetuity for women. The Jambalya has gone upscale so we no longer read poetry there. I am eighty-two.

Suzanne Maheu

Letting Go

Year two is underway. I wonder when I'll stop choking up when I least expect it. It's not like someone died. He just grew up.

I call our son The Boy even though he now more closely resembles A Man. As his mom, it's my prerogative. Greg is a college sophomore. This year returning him to campus was frenzied. We pulled onto campus and the race began. On your mark! Unload the car. Get set! Greet his friends. Go! Grab a hug and be gone. Bit by bit, our son is further removed. It's rather like ripping off a bandaid. Repeatedly. Each time from a different angle.

His freshman year, we were there for two days, one of which was a day of orientation. I was excited and highly interested in being oriented, yet the only part I clearly remember now is The Reading of the Letters. Oh? There were letters involved? Why yes there was! The student advisor assigned to our group read to us. Individually while in a group. The Reading of the Letters. Parents, consider yourselves extraordinarily fortunate if, when you attend your child's college orientation, you, too, are regaled with The Reading of the Letters.

A portion of the orientation activity was conducted with parents separated from students. They went one way as we were led the other way. Our last activity before the groups reunited had the parents gathered in a classroom, sitting at desks all facing front. The Advisor entered and began a very thoughtful lecture on the process of Letting Your Children Go.

We nervously punctuated his lecture with laughs in appropriate places. We guiltily looked down at our hands when he hit on something we knew we had done even though we knew when we were doing it we shouldn't be doing it at all. I wasn't the only one sweating over the enormity of this occasion. Over what could happen if we hadn't done it right. The business of raising a child is fraught with peril. I really wanted to reach over and hold Wendy's hand, but couldn't bring myself to do it.

It was a typical group of parents, various ages and not particularly racially diverse. The abundance of white faces did not

surprise me, but I briefly wondered if Greg would miss the multicultural flavor of his high school. Aside from Wendy and me, other parents, who were paired, were heterosexual. As a lesbian couple in a heterosexual world, sometimes it is just better not to draw attention to ourselves by holding hands in public. Some days I'm brave enough to grab my own bit of freedom and embrace it, but on that particular day at that particular time, I wasn't. The day was hard enough already.

The Advisor waved a stack of papers. Our students, he said, had each written us a letter. These letters contained their advice. Advice on how to let them go. The twist was that the Advisor was going to read them aloud, without saying who wrote them. We were supposed to figure out which letter was written by our son.

He began reading. And what I thought had been an emotional day so far became even more so. The touching tribute written by a daughter to the father who had raised her alone. The humorous list of all the things one fellow was sure his family was going to miss about having him around. Another with specific, *very* specific, instructions on how to care for the family pet. The obvious amount of love these parents had given their children spoke clearly through those letters.

Mistakes were made in identification. Parents would think a particular letter came from their student. A sentence or two more would reveal it to be from some other. Exclamations of "That one is mine! Definitely mine!" were heard when a positive identification was made.

The one that began "Dear Old Folks" garnered mild gasps of dismay. Wendy and I didn't gasp and we weren't dismayed, because we knew that was the one from The Boy. That's when I did grab Wendy's hand. It was involuntary and just had to be. So it was.

By the time all the letters were read and claimed, there was not a dry eye in the house. We all got to keep them. Those letters. That advice. I cling to those small bits of The Boy, however overly sentimental that may be. This process of letting go is a lengthy one. Meanwhile, I revel when a quick cell phone conversation wraps up with him saying "Love you, Mom!"

I love you too, sweetheart. Talk soon.

Merry Gangemi

Foreboding

Leaving your father was something I never regretted.
But the custody battle was like crossing a river in a battered rowboat,
oars too short, no life preserver, no compass.

Caught between the footfalls of my choices
Confused by how mercilessly friends and family turned
I could barely shield you from all that fury
or bottle the kindness of the babysitter,
who let me visit you once a week.
I was slow to forgive myself for living the life I dared to live.

But memories can be blatant or sly
oblivious to ideal or motive, they drive the difference
between intent and innocence.

And now, you are twenty-five,
my age when you were born.
You live and work in New York.
Walk past buildings I worked in,
coffee shops where I grabbed a cup of coffee,
a bagel, or a cold bran muffin.

I follow you like a ghost, amazed at your confidence
Fascinated by your independence
and the stunning green flecks in your eyes.

But your pace changes when you reach Church Street.
You perceive some shadows and a faint keening
in the wind off the Hudson.
You remember what you saw, over and over again.

The split visage of memory, when I took you up there
and we saw the world stretched out below us
the startling blue river, the simple green of Ellis Island,
the ghosts of September 11
and the scars of those who ran fast enough to escape
are etched in your memory forever.

Run, I want to shout at you...
Run away and swim that river.
Follow it to the sea.
Surf the waves just like I taught you.
Read the books I gave you.
Tell the truth.
So if they come for you
one day or any day,
you will understand you have lived
the life you dared to live.



(L to R) Elizabeth, Merry and granddaughter Phoebe. By Leah Simpson.

Merry Gangemi

Baker's Dozen

When I was fifteen, I wanted twelve children.
But I remember the day I changed my mind.
It was summer, blue-hot sky and the beach
littered with green and yellow plastic pails,
pink and turquoise shovels, and pinwheels
whirling crazy in the wind.

I saw an enormously pregnant woman
standing next to a pastel-striped umbrella.
One hand on the north pole of her belly,
the other shading her eyes.
She was scanning the horizon like a castaway.
Five children were neatly arranged on a blanket,
eating jelly sandwiches and drinking orange Kool-aid
from clear plastic cups.
The kids kept asking: *Where's daddy? Where's daddy?*

The waves that day were enormous and clean,
endless breakers garnished with the boiling froth of heaven.
The woman's eyes locked on someone riding those breakers
like a rough-edged teenager,
his shoulders and triceps bulged with muscle and raw joy.
He rode his wave right onto the beach.
He emerged like a gladiator after a kill,
his grin demonic.

When I was fifteen, I thought I wanted twelve children,
but I knew I could wind up with thirteen.

Maggie Harrison

3 Families

Joe and Jono's daughter, Andrea, was engaged. Her dads had already met her fiancé, and had said to one another "They are marvelous together!" But still, on the first visit after the announcement, the fathers were astonished—she would wear red high tops, of course; that was no rattle. They matched her tattooed shoulders and nose bone. But why had she selected this strapless satin number? Andrea wanted a white wedding to a wife.

Dot and Tina's son, Jasper, pulled his foreskin back for the first time at age three and a half. He was excited and amazed. Approaching proud and petrified. They had read that it would happen like this—that one day he would be playing with his penis, probably in the bathtub, and he would discover the magical thing his body could do. They were happy for him. He continued to play but soon felt the water brush against the tender tip of his penis and worried aloud that it would never return to its former state. Of course it would, his ignorant mothers assured him.

Duffy's son, Quinn, sucked her breasts for a solid fourteen hours after he was born. Ten months had plodded by since his conception, and reticent intensity was his way of being in the world, she would later discover. But now, they sat together, he in her lap, she in his mouth. Here, in this bleary bliss, he amazed her with his pestilent salubrity.

Maggie Harrison

Vox Matrimonia

Parents are supposed to learn something from their first child, but then they go and have another. We would have learned our lesson—I swear we would have—after the second, but we never got a chance. Five minutes later, we had number three.

The kids are finally asleep—though two of them are nursing—and it’s the first chance we’ve had to talk in forty-eight hours. My would-be wife doesn’t look at me. She flips through pictures in a year-old *Life Magazine* spread on space travel. Earlier tonight when she was pushing the babies down the sidewalk in the double stroller, she found a stack of old magazines on the sidewalk and selected this one. It’s moldy—I can smell it, can almost see the spores hovering about the planets she peruses—but she doesn’t seem to mind. She squeezes her furry upper lip to her teeth with her knuckle. Thea worked in a fluorescently-lit cubicle all day, and then came home, walked the kids, and sanded sheetrock mud for an hour and a half. Her hair and eyelashes are still flecked with white.

Thea repositions her knuckle, a smidge in the direction of her ear, and persists at her project to gnaw ragged the inside of her cheek. Cheek chewing is her one pleasure, I give her that. Her eyes dart back and forth across the pages, taking in moonlit space clouds and magnified pock marks. “The Columbia is lost!” her untimely headline screams.

My hands are on the twins’ heads, cradling their knobby skulls. They are sucking on my tits, their limp chubby bodies draping off the “My Breast Friend” nursing pillow. “I need you to take one,” I prepare her, “if and when one stops.” I reach over them to unlatch the small marble case on the coffee table, and as I do, Harlee falls off. It’s never a surprise when she falls off the breast first. I tuck my slimy nipple back into my bra and she sucks her own tongue and relaxes more. They sell nursing bras with panels you flip up or down, and I got one when I first had Elihu, but four years later it’s all stretched out like the rest of my faded black bras, and who can afford a thirty-five dollar bra that will feel silly to wear in a few months? “The,” I grunt, just loud enough to not wake the girls.

Thea sighs at Jupiter's gossamer rings before she scoops up Harlee. This is Thea's favorite time with the kids, when they are asleep and not nursing, and she treats the unconscious Harlee to a swaying dance before she kicks aside the visquine to get to the crib. My nine perfectly rolled joints have been protected from sheetrock dust by the marble case. When Elihu was born, we rarely smoked pot, afraid it could stunt his neonatal development. Now with the twins we have changed our minds about the risks involved. It's not like we blow the smoke into their ears—my brother used to blow pot smoke into the ears of our family cats. In fact, I often cover the twins' ears when I exhale. I tap a joint on "My Breast Friend" and ask Thea to grab me a light on her way back through the construction zone.

Now that we are parents of three kids, and sleep poorly, and speak to one another less frequently, Thea decided to redesign our kitchen. She imagined our home anew for so long; she finally said "Now! We must do it now! We must not be deterred by these two little things that are determined to wreak havoc in our lives!" Actually, Elihu wreaks true, unadulterated havoc, but that was expected. We barely wanted a second child, but what would a life without a sibling be? The single child Harlee and Madison were meant to be would take pressure off the parent-child relationship, we thought. We had them for him.

Of course we wanted a girl; every lesbian wants a girl-child to nurture, to offer the full range of human experience that we do to our penised child. Oh yes, a girl, but the revolution will be brought about by male children of lesbians, if we can get enough of them out there. Here we are, proudly watching him totter across the balance beam of gender expectations, just the other night proclaiming, "Woe, the pressures of boyhood!" So this is what our feminism has come to.

But the pressures of boyhood compare not to the pressures of interest rates, finance charges, and returned check fees. Thea has borrowed an extra thirty-five thousand dollars for the renovation, I contribute nothing to the household coffers, and frankly, I probably won't for another five years. I couldn't earn enough to cover multi-child care costs, and the bank says we have eight hundred dollars less than we think we have. Correction—that was last week, today on the phone with the bank it was fourteen hundred dollars less. But I can't figure out why

because they won't give me electronic access because even though it is a joint account, I am not the primary. I'll try to figure it out when the statement finally comes next month—addressed to her—and says we are in the red for—I can see it now—twenty-two thousand dollars! I'll owe them an entire work year.

Thea selected this year to remodel the kitchen. We laughed and said, "This could be the end of the marriage!" But she's not getting any younger, and the twins don't eat much right now: mainly breast milk, which is free. It's now or never. Who needs a kitchen sink at home all day with three small children? The bathtub is full of dirty dishes, the garbage can is full of oily Styrofoam from take-out, and the Dy-dee Wash container reeks with the lurching sweetness of human waste, deodorant, and two hundred and three poop and pee-soaked diapers. No one can take a shower without standing in pots. On the upside, we have plenty of clean clothes to change into, sorted into piles next to the couch: infant, child, and adult. As I dropped the folded clothes in the piles earlier this evening, they sent up little puffs of white dust.

Madison sucks in vicious little spurts. How can she sleep through such bouts of seeming desperation? Thea slides back through the plastic sheeting and postures victoriously—two down and one to go! Until what?

Oh yes, the clock is ticking; we need joint decisiveness. Our neighbors have been getting married by the boatload and the courts could nix our opportunity any day. When the dike broke on Valentine's Day, we sat in front of two greying gay men in the audience of a play called "Okra." Thea asked me to marry her just as the lights went out. "Marriage?" I said. "Do we not speak of death and manhood?" The play began.

We put it to rest that night, but the possibility nags. We could make history.

Thea lights the marijuana cigarette that's between my teeth. "Okay, marry me, The. Let's get hitched." She takes the joint and sits down with her moldy *Life*. I continue, "Promise me as soon as they welcome our ceremony in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Rome, Georgia, you'll make me an honest woman."

"Right," she says, and we're safe. We've been married long enough to know better.

Victoria Ferrara-Loris

This Is My Code

I have this Polaroid picture of my five-year-old son, Nick, the day they took him, at four-months-old, from his birth mother and brought him to my home. It shows him lying face up on a small, thin, patchwork quilt on the floor of his birth mother's boyfriend's apartment, eyes wide, looking still and pale. He had on a too-large, dark olive green, one-piece fleece with buttons open from his neck to his abdomen. No undershirt. It was March; still cold. He was waiting to be picked up into a stranger's arms, to be taken away from a frail, red-headed, sad, heroin addict.

The day he arrived, I wasn't thinking about this child's day, or what he was going through, or how he would be when they took him. I wasn't thinking about the police with their badges, sticks, and guns. I could not picture his frightened, blue, blood-shot eyes or his bald, unwashed head. I couldn't hear his raspy breathing. I didn't know he would smell of cigarettes and infant sweat, or that the clothes in his green plaid, plastic diaper bag would not fit him. I didn't know that he would not cry in the night but instead would make scratching sounds with his fingers, or that one day I would change his diaper, and he would pee into the air, urine splashing in his eyes and face. He would look at me stoically and perplexed, and I would be the one to cry, telling him: *It's okay to cry.*

"What should I do?" I asked my friend after I learned the social workers were on their way with this baby.

"I think you should set up the Porta-Crib," she said with some stability.

"Right. The Porta-Crib." I ran to the upstairs closet, pulled it out, hot pink and purple, and set it up in the bedroom I shared with my lover, Michelle.

The social workers were supposed to bring the baby at two o'clock in the afternoon, but shortly before two, one of them called and said they would be late because they could not find the mother or the baby. I wondered if she skipped town, if the child would really be coming. I had not yet learned of his experiences during

the four months since his birth. I had not yet heard that his mother took him out all hours of the day and night, that she had been picked up shoplifting, that he had been born with opiates in his system, that his biological mother's mother was on methadone, and that the one time he would go and visit his mother and grandmother, he would come back to me smelling of cigarettes and perfume.

Nick finally arrived at four-thirty in the afternoon. As the social workers, two young women, walked in, the house seemed to fill with a haze. They handed the sobbing baby to me and then wandered around, staring into space, commenting about the house.

I nervously held Nick, not knowing what to do to calm him down. He sucked down two bottles of formula in record time and still cried. I walked with him and then put him down on a black beanbag chair. The thin and soft skin around his eyes was bruised blue and purple; I hovered over him, and loosened his hot, sweaty clothes. When I changed his diaper and saw the terrible, raw, red rash, I got the Balmex and I smeared the fishy-smelling stuff all over his rash.

It struck me, as I was trying to soothe Nick that at least for the moment, he was mine. The social workers were going to leave, and, although my friend was helping me (she ran out to get formula), comforting this small child was up to me. He sobbed and could not catch his breath; walking him didn't help so I took him up to my room to rock him. My other son, Sal, four-years-old, followed me into the room.

"Mommy," he said, "I think we need Mama."

I didn't want to admit my fear and the emphatic sense of inadequacy that scraped at my inner being. "I think you're right," I said. I did not know what to do.

The only thing I could think of was to hold him as tightly as possible while he cried. I turned out the lights, sat in the rocker, sang *Both Sides Now*, and prayed. After a long, dark while, he fell asleep. During the night, Michelle and I listened to him and worried if we should bring him to the emergency room. It was not until the very early hours of the morning that he let out a long, slow sigh, and his sobs subsided.

I remember when I first spoke to Michelle about the possi-

bility of foster parenting. It was as if I were in a dream; I didn't know anything about it. I felt detached, in no way thinking of any potential problems, nothing about special needs, illnesses, drug-addiction, children coming home to our house and then moving out. I thought nothing about the immediate possessiveness I would feel, the need to intrude on the court process too early, the consequences. But isn't that how things move along? Do any of us ever give birth or adopt a child thinking about all that it will bring, entail, change, disturb, move? Does anyone think about the state of worry that you enter and never exit for all of the years you and this child are on earth together?

"Just go with me on this," I had said to Michelle during the summer before the open house at the state agency.

"Okay," she told me. And although I am sure we talked more about it, this is all I can recall. I don't even remember the reason, except that we wanted another child. International adoption seemed like a step into the faraway unknown, and the meds needed to get pregnant were too much. I was done with them. One difficult pregnancy in my life was enough.

This whole thing went from talk to action at the state agency open house. The billboard ads for foster parenting, placed along the highway, read *1-800 Be a Hero*, although I was not thinking about heroics, just another child, a boy, a sibling for Sal; two small children to make our hearts swell with joy.

I went alone to the open house. Toward the end of the session, Kasha, the agency leader, said, "If you want, meet with me at the end of the session. We'll have a private meeting about going ahead with foster parenting classes if you would like to do that."

Kasha was very funny and had sharp, bright brown eyes and a heavy Polish accent. I had the feeling I was in another country, getting instructions on how to adjust to life in a new land.

"Who are the members of your household?" she asked me.

"I live with Michelle; we are a couple. We have a four-year old son, Sal."

"So then you and your partner will both be the foster parents," she asserted confidently, and some of my fears receded.

Now that I have him, I can't remember too well the time before I knew he would be the one they would drop off to our

newly-licensed foster family. I don't recall thinking who would come, or even if someone would come. I couldn't see this baby's face turn toward me the morning after his arrival, the connection already forming, Michelle saying, *Look, he knows you already. He's looking for you. His eyes are following you around the room.* I couldn't picture his focused, bright eyes and round face bobbing out of the bouncy chair, or imagine that I would say as Michelle left for work the morning after he was with us for just three days. *Say goodbye to him, he might not be here later.* I couldn't imagine the sadness.

Lately I've been reading a self-help book that describes how parents often look to their children to get their needs met. The author says that, as a therapist, she is suspect of any parent who says, *I love being a parent.* This, it appears, is evidence that such a parent may be getting his or her needs met by the child. A parent is not supposed to get needs met from a child or children. Parenting, the book says, is total self-sacrifice. It means totally meeting the child's needs, complete selflessness.

I don't love being a parent. I often don't accept the necessary immersion in selflessness required to care for my two boys. Therefore, I say I am not suspect. But I cannot deny that this child, five-years-old, meets needs in me I never recognized. It doesn't take much, maybe just standing at the front door in the early morning as he skips to get the newspaper. It's the skipping that grabs me in a moment when nothing else would. Or maybe it's how he tells me my hair looks beautiful when I've just come out of the shower, or how he always knows when I'm wearing something new. Maybe it's the joy of life in him that sparks my own joy, something I was not sure existed in my world.

And now he's sitting next to me and telling me he likes my typing and wants to get in my lap and try it. So I stop my writing as he climbs up, and I watch his small, smooth, white hands glide over the keypad, typing gibberish like a pro. A look of confidence lights his face. His off-red lips are pressed together, eyes scanning all the letters. He says, *This is my code.*

This morning, I was listening to Joni Mitchell. Her songs transport me back to a time before this child came into my life, to a time when I was more than a bit like my son's biological mother, doing drugs and drinking, falling asleep on curbs in

the dead of winter, isolated, removed from society, far away in my own desert winter. I was desperate but hopeful. I saw nothing ahead of me but kept moving on.

Still, I never stop wondering, with gratitude, why I am here now, why I was given this time, this chosen family, this child, now our son, born into my heart, sure-footed and confident, knowing his code, while I am still searching for mine.

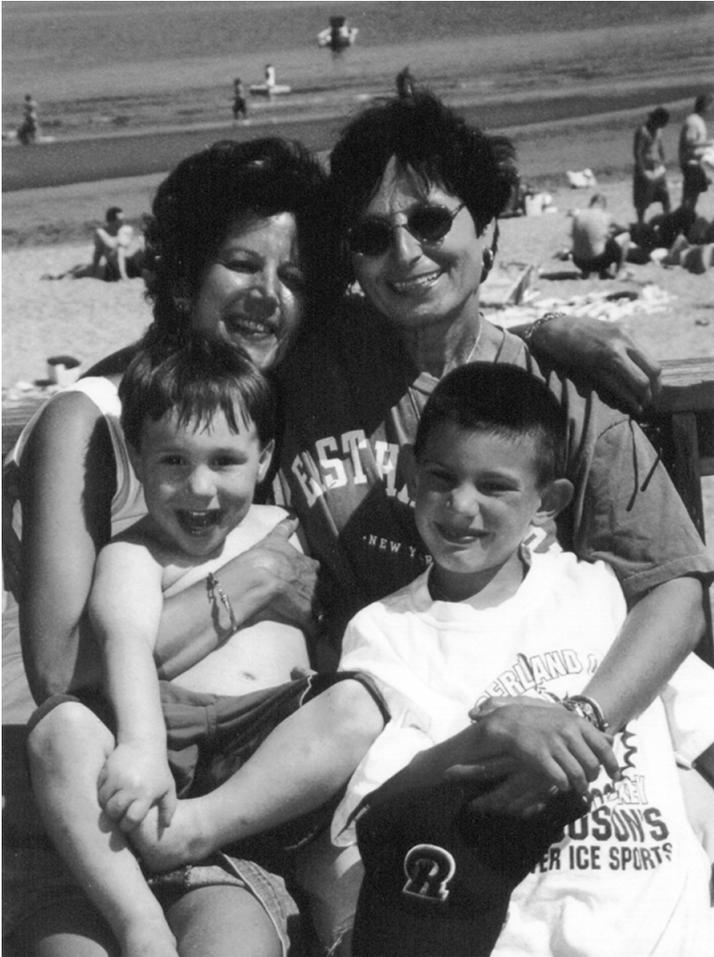


Photo of Michelle, Vicki, Nick, and Sal Ferrara-Loris taken by Sarah Farrell.

Mary Spicer

Lesbian Mom

I came out to my family in 1997. At the time, my girls were ages 9 and 14 and had been dealing with the fact that their parents were getting a divorce. My oldest daughter had already figured it out.

The girls were brought up in (what I can now be embarrassed to acknowledge) a very conservative home. Both their father and I were brought up Catholic, so the girls went through the same indoctrination, brainwashing, whatever you wish to call it. Not that I was all that religious. (I believed in the right of woman to make decisions about her own body and I found the hypocrisy in the Catholic church annoying.) It was just that I was continuing what my family considered was the “right thing to do,” even into my married life.

The idea of having time to myself and with the girls without their father’s influence was refreshing. However, the struggle for the girls was that a lot of what I believed and what my ex believed was a collision course. Oh, we believed in the basic be nice to your neighbor and all that, but when it came to beliefs of the Church and what individuals should believe in, we were total opposites. My thought is a person has opinions and beliefs and they have the right to have those beliefs. My ex believed that everyone should have his morals, with no deviation. You can see now how much the girls must have been struggling with these conflicting beliefs and opinions.

The arrangement I had with my ex was that the girls would alternate weeks at each of our homes. It was not an ideal situation for the girls and was an obvious struggle for them. Although they each had a dresser for their clothes, it was a very long time before they actually unpacked their bags for the week with me. Imagine living out of your suitcase all the time.

As soon as I had the final divorce decree in hand, I was on my way to purchasing my new home. It was also at this time that I had entered into a serious relationship with a woman. At the time, I did not feel that the girls, nor I, was ready to have

my partner involved on a 24-hour basis. I felt that I needed that “independent” time and that it would do me some good. I had gone right from my mom’s house, to college, and directly to married life without any real independence, and this was my opportunity to experience that independence.

Also, I did not want to force their father’s replacement on them. I wanted them to get to know my partner and find out all the wonderful things about her. How willing she is to do for others without question; how intelligent she is; how much she appreciates intelligent conversations; her love for reading. Most of all, her ability to be silly and have fun in life. There were many things that my girls could find in common with my partner if they just got to know her.

Of course, my idea of how to do things clashed with how my partner saw things. She was brought up in a strict environment that I could not relate to. But there were things that contradicted her conservative upbringing. She said teenagers should be on their own without parental supervision for great lengths of time, or be able to go on trips without a parent. Totally out of my realm.

At first, my oldest daughter had the more difficult time. My partner was quite demanding and vocal on what I should and shouldn’t do in regards to the girls. Being caught in the middle was very frustrating for me. The ingrained method of trying to please everyone was just not working and proved very hard for me.

My youngest daughter was young enough that things just seemed to flow for her. However, as she grew into the early teens, she started to do the guilt thing with me. Especially if she asked a question and my partner answered first. Then, I would get that glare of saying, “Well, mom, are you going to let her tell me what to do?”

The clashes continued. I was caught in the middle of my partner’s ideas of what I should do and what my ex was saying I should do. No matter what I decided upon, it was not going to be the right decision. To top it all off, my mother was listening to my ex and believing him when he told her that my partner was going to steal me away from my girls! So many times I would make a decision on a matter and either my partner or my ex

would tell me it was wrong for one reason or another. To this day, I still have times when I doubt a decision and don't trust my instinct.

Recently, we were awakened by the police, who told us that my youngest daughter was being transported to the hospital. She had been at party and had drank so much that she was unconscious and unresponsive. A parent's nightmare. And my partner's nightmare too.

She was as reactive to this situation as any parent would be. She was experiencing the same horrors of the situation.

My girls have gone through a lot over these past years, yet they have blossomed into intelligent, beautiful, and open-minded individuals. My oldest has been there to listen to recent problems my youngest has been through. My youngest has finally discovered her voice and has broken out of that reserved shell. They have their own opinions and have learned they can express those opinions... and do!

We have all had some tough lessons over the last few years, but we have come through it all with flying colors. The girls have come to know my partner very well and can joke and tease her just as they would me. My oldest has recently apologized to my partner for giving her such a hard time in those first years. My youngest daughter recently made a comment about possible grandchildren and grammas Mary and Amy. We are a family and we are going to be just fine.

Amy Gamble

Little League Father

When I was in college, my friends and I would sit drinking our fifty-cent Bud drafts and imagine our futures. We were all pretty clear on one thing...we couldn't begin to imagine ourselves pregnant. I declared at the time that I wanted to be a Little League father—the parent my dad sometimes managed to be. A loving coach and mentor, showing up for games and recitals and bringing home the bacon. As a corollary to this image, I declared that the only way I'd ever have kids was if I fell in love with someone who already had them.

Several years later, it happened. I saw her first on the basketball court during a pickup game, and later in the office where I had an interview. She was married, with two daughters, and I tried to keep my fascination in check. For two years we worked at keeping a professional distance. Then came her divorce, and the conference at which we shared a hotel room. Suddenly I had to decide, was Little League fatherhood really what I wanted? Could I imagine my future with kids?

Mary and I transitioned from dating to partnership in the fall. We still had separate houses, and I magnanimously figured that we'd let the girls finish up the school year before seriously combining households, giving them a semester plus some to absorb the idea that their parents were divorced, that they weren't getting back together, that their mother was queer, and oh yes, I am your new step...something or other. The girls spent every other week with their mom, and during those weeks I'd have dinner with them a couple evenings. During our "kid free" weeks we were inseparable, but Mary kept her distance when the kids were around. "Give them time," she said.

I tried. I remember the pang of rejection, at the waterpark when I wrapped Gabi's blue lipped body in a towel and held her close to warm her, and she'd squirmed away. The awful tension when I suggested we take public transportation and walk places and eat somewhere other than the Hard Rock cafe when Mary and I took them to San Diego.

It wasn't easy. I guess it never is, but I grew up on the "Brady Bunch" and "Eight is Enough," with step-parents who work together to form a new family unit, and anguishes that resolve themselves neatly in the span of an episode. What I hadn't expected was that my partner and I would have different ideas of what my role ought to be, that we might be working at cross purposes. I imagined that the kids would have a hard time, but that their mother would stand up for me and help them to adjust to the new family.

It just never occurred to me that Mary wouldn't see me in a parental role at all: I was not her partner in all things and the kids were hers, her responsibility; her family; hers alone. Part of it was pride—she didn't need my help, financially or otherwise. A huge part of it was fear—that if she pushed too hard for them to accept me, they'd leave her altogether to stay with their father.

I tried parenting where I could. Gabi was nine, too short to reach the drinking glasses without climbing on the counter, which she wasn't allowed to do. I spent a Saturday together with her building a step stool. Other nights I sat with her at the table and untangled math word problems, helping her find the area and volume of a soup can. We struggled together through the endless steps of making croissants from scratch for a school project. I learned the names of her basketball teammates and yelled encouragement with all the other parents. Jes was five years older, and at 14 wanted little to do with adults of any stripe. I cheered at her Tae Kwon Do tournaments and mostly stayed out of the way. I did what any desperate step-parent would do; got them a puppy.

I struggled, past that first semester, and into the next school year, and the next. We still maintained separate houses, and lived double lives. Jes had, despite Mary's efforts to keep the effects of my presence to a minimum, chosen to live full-time with her father. With that choice, my fantasy of teaching her to drive and giving her my aging car evaporated. I couldn't figure out how to make the connection.

With Gabi, I still might have a chance. Finally, I saw my opening. Mary had a conference to attend in Oregon. I volunteered to go along and chaperone Gabi. I planned things a middle

school student might enjoy—a trip to an amusement park, a discovery museum, a zoo, a shopping mall. We got along ok. Except when Mary was with us. Then we competed for Mary's attention.

It all came to a head on my birthday. We went to the restaurant of my choice, and then to a rodeo at the county fair I'd read about. When we got back to the hotel, I wanted to go downstairs for a drink with Mary at the bar, a little private celebration. She refused to leave her daughter alone in the hotel room. I was incredulous—when I was Gabi's age, my brothers and I had traveled without my parents in Europe. What was Mary thinking would happen with us in the same building? A mostly unspoken battle ensued, and eventually, Mary and Gabi went to the mall, leaving me to stew.

I wrote a letter then. Gazing off the 17th floor balcony I cried out, "Marry me! Marry me or let me go!" I considered jumping. I considered leaving. I considered going to the bar and drinking alone. In the end, I just finished the letter, folded it into my jacket pocket, and watched TV while I waited for them to return. Then we went to bed as if nothing had happened.

When we got home, I insisted we go to couples counseling. The refrain "marry me or let me go" rang in my ears. I couldn't take the split life anymore. I moved out of Mary's condo—that is, I took my drawer full of clothes and the handful of books I'd accumulated. I established myself back at my house, where I'd been a stranger to my housemate. I'd tried it Mary's way, for what seemed like forever. I needed my life back.

We talked, with the counselor's help. I finally got to tell Mary that I wanted to be her partner, in all things. She finally got to tell me that I'd never be a parent to her children, but that there was a place for me in their lives.

Jes moved back with us full time. We bought a bigger house where the girls could have their own rooms, a place that was ours, together. We tied the knot at our civil union, with the girls in attendance.

I went to dance recitals, chorales, and plays. I chatted with their friends in the kitchen as they waited to go out. We hosted backyard parties full of laughing teens, grilling veggie burgers

and hotdogs and taking our turns at badminton. I gave Gabi nervous instructions the first time she backed my car out of our narrow garage and drove me to her school. Jes interviewed me for a college paper she was writing on “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.”

Jes is finishing college this spring. Gabi is graduating from high school. It really hit me this year, that it’s too late. I never will get to be a Little League dad for them. I’ve been grieving for what never was. There’s so much I wanted to give them.

Recently, we were awakened in the middle of the night by a state trooper pounding on our door. I stumbled downstairs in my robe, and with Mary at my shoulder I hardly breathed as he explained that Gabi was on her way to the hospital in an ambulance, that she had passed out at a party. We dressed quickly. I gathered a change of clothes for her and insisted on driving so Mary’s fear wouldn’t send us hurtling up the hill uncontrollably. Her baby girl was in trouble, a teenager fraught with the same desires to be cool, the same desires to rebel, the same confusing turmoil we can all remember. It was too soon to be angry, to be disappointed. At that moment we were just thankful a frightened friend had called her mother, who in turn had called 911.

I rubbed Gabi’s back gently, whispering what I hoped were comforting words, “You’re going to be alright. You’re going to get through this. It sucks right now, but it’s going to get better.” She was laying on a stretcher in the emergency room, an IV and heart monitor snaking wires and tubes. A nurse came and fit an oxygen mask over her pale face, to help ease the hyperventilation. She shook uncontrollably. Mary had gone to call Gabi’s father. She’d asked me to give him space, to leave the room when he arrived, gently but unobtrusively reminding me that I am not a parent. But for the moment, I was there, alone with Gabi and my thoughts. I hope that some part of her remembers that whatever my role is called, I was there and I do care.

We were sitting around the kitchen table a few nights ago, the girls bantering about how it will be when they have kids of their own. Gabi exclaimed, “When they get to be too much, they’ll be getting on the plane and going to stay with Gramma Amy and Gramma Mary!”

Can anyone say, “Little League Gramma?”

Lynn Martin

Living Together as Family

The minute my son's baby, at six months of age sat in my lap, I was hopelessly in love and hooked for life. No matter we were not related by blood or religion. It is only by accident that we are related by race. All of it didn't matter. This child is my first grandchild and my connection to the future. She is an adopted child.

Forty some years ago, in the 60s I had adopted my first child. He was Filipino-American and he came into my life at six months of age. Eight months later I gave birth to my second son, who is a mixture of English, Irish, Welsh, and Scottish. Nine years later I adopted my daughter, who is Afro-American. Both my oldest son and my daughter were adopted when strict secrecy around the birth parents was ensured by locked court documents.

This grand-daughter's adoption in the year 2003 is very different. Her birth mother and her adopted parents agreed to an open adoption. Thus her adoptive parents were present at her birth and took her home from the hospital. The birth mother chose my son and his wife to raise her child. In the six months of her life, the baby has met with her birth mother twice. Time will tell how this method works, though the lack of secrecy has to be an improvement. When my children began to ask questions like, Who do I look like? Do I have to worry about inheriting any chronic diseases like diabetes, there were no answers. My son's baby will grow up knowing who her birth mother is, who her father is, and what her history is both biologically and medically.

When I was 20 years old, someone gave me a copy of *The Family of Man*, an exhibit of photographs by Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art. I remember being absolutely stunned by the diversity of the families depicted, and also, by the commonality. I was completely awed by the photographs and the definition of family they invoked. I didn't realize I was going to unconsciously try to duplicate this in my own life. Today, as I look through a very beat up library copy of the same book, I am still left breathless by its beauty.

In the sixties, when I first adopted, it wasn't the thing to do. Adoption itself was suspect, never mind adopting children with a different heritage than one's own. Today, this is much more common, at least it is here in Vermont. My children are now 42, 41, and 35. In a way, they are my own world family. What the Pueblo Indians say is true: "We shall be one person." But at the same time, we are also completely individual. Today, as adults, my older son is a dedicated kayaker, my middle son works in our National parks, and my daughter is about to specialize in counseling biracial, adopted children in schools. *The Family of Man* did not deceive me. What my 20-year-old eyes recognized is what the Sioux Indians say, "With all beings and all things we shall be as relatives." These three children were part of a traditional family. I was married then, but this grandchild has a lesbian grandmother. That is a story too, but it is longer and yet to be told.

Today, I think family is any group of loving people who choose to live together. Whether it is a same-sex partnership, heterosexual partnership, surrogate motherhood, artificial insemination, family by adoption, or family by choice, the bottom line is love. Today, with all the blood being shed in the world over nationalism and religion, I think we need to find more ways to love. We need to widen our ways of seeing ourselves in the world, and stop trying to say only my way is way. That's never been true, and it isn't true today. Go to the library and look at that collection of pictures, called *The Family of Man*. The photographs tell the truth; within our diversity is our commonality.



“Coatlicue” by Sudie Rakusin

Coatlicue is the mother of the Aztec deities and was identified with the Aztec's ancestral homeland, Aztlan. She was worshipped both as Earth Mother and Life and Dark Mother. Coatlicue wore a skirt of flowing, swinging snakes and lived high atop a mountain. She became pregnant when she held white, plumed feathers to her breast.

Lisa Figueroa

The Doll

Elena could not escape the heat of late morning. It seeped through crevices, obliterating coolness as it invaded the still air of her bedroom. She gathered up her long, dark hair, twisting it away from the nape of her neck; its heaviness and length more irritating than ever. She'd wanted to cut it short for the summer wishing for the ease of Carmen's trim military cut, but when she mentioned it, Carmen had a fit and made her promise not to touch a single strand of it. As usual, Elena gave in.

She turned on her side and studied her lover, who was stretched out on her stomach and seemed uncharacteristically defenseless. Elena's gaze traveled down her firm brown backside, she examined the tattoo above her hip, "Elena" etched in stylized letters in the center of a rose. A surprise first anniversary present. Her fingers lingered on it then continued down sleek skin unable to stop the sensuous movement of her hand as she reached the full curve of buttocks.

She stretched onto her back again and froze as her toes brushed against the small form of Graciela sleeping like a curled up cat between her feet and the end of the bed. Elena covered Carmen's nakedness then tapped her foot against her daughter's back, prodding gently. "Get up, Graciela."

Graciela woke up, yawning with a grumpy frown. She gazed up at her mother, pleading to stay, but Elena jabbed a finger toward the door shaking her head until her daughter finally climbed out. As soon as Graciela left, Elena turned on her side again and found herself face to face with Carmen who was propped up on one elbow watching her.

"Has she been here all night?" Carmen asked.

"Don't think so. She must have just come in." Elena yawned and closed her eyes as if overwhelmed by sleepiness.

"This is our bed. I told you before, she doesn't belong here."

Elena kept her eyes closed. "I thought she'd be gone before you woke up."

"You say that every time." Carmen reached out and grasped Elena's arm, squeezing her fingers hard around the thin delicate wrist as she pulled her close.

Elena blinked as Carmen's breath chafed her face like small bursts of flame.

"I share enough of you, but not here. Not in our bed."

She struggled to pry her arm free. "You don't have to use that tone."

Carmen laughed, but her eyes shined with displeasure as she pressed against Elena, catching her other wrist easily. She forced her onto her back then slid on top of her.

"Déjame. Get off of me."

Carmen ignored her. She buried her face in the soft groove between Elena's neck and shoulder. Their hips moved instinctively against each other as Elena moaned. She grasped the back of Carmen's head, curled her fingers in Carmen's short black hair, but Carmen abruptly released her and shifted to her side of the bed.

"I have to get some sleep," she said. "Don't forget, I'm working tonight."

Elena lay motionless. She hated how Carmen punished her whenever she felt jealous of the children. When Carmen's soft snoring resumed, she left the bed and went to her children's room. She stood surrounded by books, dolls, crayons, and clothes but it felt so empty. She moved on through the living room and kitchen, already knowing Graciela and Alex were gone.

Graciela leaned against the fence, impatiently picking at the wood with sharp tugs. She'd just turned nine but still wasn't tall enough to see over the fence unless she stood on her toes. With her whole body stretched up, twisting her neck uncomfortably, she scanned the yard in search of it. Yes. There it was. The small doll was on the back porch steps where some child had abandoned it. Other toys were scattered about, but all she noticed was the doll. She glanced down at her brother, Alex, who waited squatting in the dirt, drawing circles with a short stick.

“She’s still there.”

He grunted in acknowledgment as he tossed the stick away and peered easily over the fence. Though a year younger than his sister, he already stood a foot taller. The latch at the top gave way as he pushed the gate open and looked around cautiously. “Wait here and get ready to run,” he said, then disappeared inside.

Graciela didn't have to wait long. Alex was back in an instant, almost knocking her over as he burst through the gate. “Run!” he yelled.

They ran hard, back down the hill away from the large houses and fancy cars until they reached an empty field located next to abandoned railroad tracks. Alex led the way, not slowing down until they were hidden in the tall familiar wet grass. They collapsed into the coolness laughing and gasping for breath. Alex handed Graciela the doll.

She took the doll reverently as if afraid she might somehow damage it. It was more beautiful than she had realized. She turned it over in her hands, examining the shiny silkiness of the long, black hair. The eyes were the same ebony color with downy eyelashes on eyelids that closed whenever the head tilted back. Her dress was a rich, vibrant blue. The hem, sleeves, and collar were all edged in crisp white lace that emphasized the doll's delicateness.

“Mom's not going to let you keep it,” Alex said.

Graciela hugged the doll. “I won't give her back. I won't.”

“Okay. Forget it.” He rose to his feet, fluttering his hands along the tops of the blades of grass. A light breeze made them tickle his palms. “We should go back. Maybe she won't be there.”

Graciela nodded without enthusiasm as she followed her brother out from among the dancing waves of grass.

The children saw Carmen the moment they reached the top of the porch steps. She came outside, blocking entry to the house.

“What have you two been doing?” she asked.

"Just playing," Alex said.

"Stealing's more like it," Carmen said, yanking the doll from Graciela's arms. Caught by surprise, Graciela stumbled off balance.

Alex rushed forward and grabbed the doll, tearing it free with a firm tug. He backed away in his sister's direction.

Graciela took a deep breath and said angrily, "It's mine."

Carmen advanced toward Alex and once again seized the doll. He flinched but held on tight, refusing to let go. "Give it to me," she said.

Graciela helped Alex pull as together they fought with Carmen for possession, each unwilling to relinquish their end. Finally, Carmen gave a wrenching jerk and the doll broke apart. Stunned, Graciela looked down at the doll in her hands, intact except for a missing arm that Carmen held triumphantly.

"You hurt her!" Graciela screamed.

"What are you doing?" Elena called out to Carmen from behind the screen door. She opened it, coming onto the porch to demand again as she moved between her lover and children, "What are you doing?"

Carmen shrugged. "Why don't you ask them what they've been doing?"

"You're fighting over a doll. Una muñeca."

"It's not about the doll don't you realize that?" She reached out, gathering some of Elena's long black hair studying it briefly before letting the silky strands slip through her fingers. "Same lovely hair. Here, I'm late for work," she said as she thrust the doll's arm at her.

Elena drew in a shaky breath as Carmen left. She sat down on the porch swing and studied the doll's arm in her hands. It had detached cleanly from the shoulder socket along the inseam and wouldn't be hard to sew back on. She wished everything could be so easily repaired. Graciela and Alex sat on either side of her in the swing as they rocked together in the still afternoon while her daughter cradled the doll and fingered the spot where the arm had been.

"Don't worry, honey, we'll fix it. But I don't understand, you have plenty of dolls. Why did you take this one?"

“We didn't take it,” Alex said. “We rescued it.”

“It was so sad, mommy. She needed our help. She was lying there all alone with no one to take care of her,” Graciela said.

“She's very lucky to have you two,” Elena said, drawing her children close as a pang of guilt settled in the middle of her stomach. She felt like the doll, inanimate, helpless, and breakable. “I have an idea. Come with me.”

Elena took scissors from a drawer and they all went into the bathroom. She stood in front of the sink and looked at herself in the mirror as if she no longer recognized herself, brushing fingers through tresses that were well past her shoulders. She grasped a palm full of strands and began to slowly snip her way through them. Once released, she waved the long strip of hair, shiny and dark, in front of her then dropped it into the sink and smiled. It was already feeling wonderful. She continued to cut her way through the generous amount of hair, a segment at a time as the children watched mesmerized. The pile in the sink grew. When she had severed the last piece, Elena, now free of her hair's combersom weight, shook her head with abandon. She decided to keep going and trimmed away randomly, getting closer to the scalp until her hair was reduced to a haphazard one inch cut. Some patches were almost bald.

Alex reached up and ran his hand over the patchy hair. “It looks a little uneven.”

“Yeah, Mom,” Graciela agreed.

“We'll see about that.” Elena took a disposable shaver from the medicine cabinet and after applying shaving lotion, shaved the last remnants of hair in several measured swipes. When done, she wiped her head with a towel and surveyed herself from side to side. The children touched her smooth scalp as if stroking a new family pet, giggling with delight.

“It looks cool,” Alex said.

“What will Carmen say?” Graciela asked.

Elena shrugged her shoulders, but inside she knew exactly how Carmen would react. All that mattered was that she be strong and not back down this time.

Elena heard Carmen's truck pulling up the driveway, the dull thump of the driver's side door closing, then light footsteps on the front porch. She touched her bare head as if to bolster her determination and braced herself for Carmen's reaction.

Carmen swooped in with a bouquet of roses which she presented with a magician's flourish. In the same instant, her mouth dropped open and her eyes widened as she took in Elena's appearance. "My God. What have you done?"

Elena touched her head as if she'd forgotten. "I've been wanting to cut my hair for a long time," she said.

"Cut? Your beautiful hair's completely gone." Carmen raised a hand to touch Elena's scalp, but couldn't seem to complete the action and brought her hand back down.

"I like it."

"How could you do it?"

"It took me all afternoon but I finally managed to remove every bit of it."

"You did it to punish me, didn't you?"

"It's not that simple, amor."

"Where are the kids?" Carmen looked around the room as if they might be hiding somewhere.

"They're at my mother's house. I wanted to talk to you alone. Things are going to change. My hair's just the beginning."

"I know I could have handled the situation with the kids better, okay? But they stole that doll, Elena. You let them do whatever they want because you feel guilty not being there for them all the time. But, I need you too, don't you know that?"

"I'm doing the best I can," Elena said. Her tears were tiny shimmerings of disappointment that she rubbed away until her cheeks were pink. "You have to accept the fact that my children come first. In return, I will accept the fact that there have to be boundaries. I promise not to let them in the bedroom anymore."

Carmen pressed her lips together thoughtfully as she sat down on the living room couch, the roses resting on her lap. "I can't help it, *mujer*. I want you all to myself. Come here," she said softly.

"No."

Carmen's back stiffened and for a moment, Elena thought she might get up, but she settled back into her seat and simply stared at the flowers. "You're really punishing me, baby. What do you want?" Her eyes moistened with tears she quickly blinked away.

Elena stared, wondering if was imaging it, realizing she'd never seen Carmen cry before. She was always so strong, so invincible. Carmen's tears touched her, but not enough to make her give up her resolve. Being rid of all that hair made her impatient to eliminate whatever else from her life that held her back.

"You. Me. Our relationship has to change."

"What if I don't want things to change?"

"It's not up to you anymore."

"I've been so angry at you, Elena. Sometimes I've wished there was some way for you to split yourself in two. Your children come first. I know that, I've always known that. More than anything, I just want us to be a real family. I'll try. All I can promise is that I'll try. Please, baby. Please come here."

Elena hesitated, then sat beside Carmen, making sure they didn't touch. It reminded her of their first date when they'd been too nervous to make much more than eye contact. She remembered how respectful Carmen had been, so acquiescent to her every wish. Somehow, that had been lost along with a lot of things. She felt Carmen's hand on the back of her head, softly trailing down her neck, the gentleness in her fingers making her quiver. She took Carmen's face between her hands and kissed her tenderly, lingering on her full, soft lips as Carmen pulled her onto her lap. Their kissing deepened; their hands began to explore.

Elena drew back, determined to keep setting boundaries no matter how difficult. "Wait. We have to pick up the kids."

Carmen nodded, but continued holding her as she cautiously ran a palm over Elena's head. There was a brief look of sadness in her eyes.

"It will grow back you know."

"I love you, with or without hair." Carmen kissed her once more. "Let's go. We can talk more over dinner." She went to the

door and was about to go through, but she stepped back and held it open.

Elena smiled, acknowledging the gesture. "I forgot something," she said. She came back with the doll. "Look, I fixed it."

They both inspected the doll, turning it over in their hands. Its missing arm had been neatly stitched back on, but the doll was not perfect. Its shoulder was crooked and the thread didn't match, but Elena's work would hold it together, perhaps for good.

Lilith Lynn Rodgers

Soft Cheeks

I came home
and kissed the children
in their beds.
They each rolled over,
snuggled deeper
in their sleep.
“You don’t kiss us
when you come in, I know it,”
four-year-old Noah had accused me
this morning at breakfast.
“Sure I do, of course I do,”
I replied.
But...I lied. He was right...
I hadn’t been.
It had seemed too silly
to be kissing sleeping kids.
Certainly I checked them...
pulled up covers, turned down lights...
but kissing them...
well, not late at night.
How did he KNOW though,
how did HE know?
So tonight
I did kiss them as I bent over their beds.
“Sweet dreams, beautiful child of mine,”
I murmured to each in turn
as I brushed my lips
over those dear, soft cheeks.
When each frowned, sighed,
rolled over in deeper sleep...
I knew how he knew.

Lilith Lynn Rogers

On Raising Tomatoes

I CAN NOT raise tomatoes like they tell me to here.
All tied up, pinched back, allowed only SO much water
and SO much growth.

At first. I tried.

I DID plant them in neat rows, bind each to its stake.
I EVEN pinched out the unruly side growth—
for the first week or so.

But then—I neglected that chore.

Large, luscious branches of fragrant deep green
began to pop out .

I COULD NOT bear to snip them out.

I went and looked at the other,
PROPER gardener's PROPER patch.

Oh yes—his were SO much taller than mine.

And yes—they did have MUCH more fruit.

But they looked so stripped,
so tame and tortured on their stakes.

I went back to my patch, my verdant grove
determined now to SHAPE UP those bushes!

But it was hopeless.

How could I KNOW
which branch should stay, which branch should go?

I suppose I am fated to raise tomatoes
like I raise kids—glad-appearing, half-wild, unkempt,
TOUGH.

Disciplined from within, not without
creating their own shapes, guiding their own growth.

And if the fruits of either prove not so large
as those of the more properly grown kind—
well, I have to believe they'll be that much more
TASTY!

Mary Merium

The Twisted Cage

My mother's love for us is twisted by
the lies she loves to live. She isn't straight,
pretends to be, and now it's far too late
to melt the twisted iron cage of my
gay mother's life. She snarls and scratches us
as if we're prey, instead of family.
She keeps us separate, and I can't see
my sister or my father, or she'll fuss
herself into a rage and hurt us more.
Escape and run was all that I could do.
I almost died; I barely made it through
from longing for them all, and feeling sure
the twisted cage would kill me if I couldn't
unbend the bars and go where mother wouldn't.

Kerry McCabe

Finding California

Excerpt from a memoir in progress:

Curt was 22 years old when I met him, a handsome, imposing young man with a cutting sense of humor. He would fill up a room when he walked into it, throwing his power around the way some men unconsciously do. If I hadn't been in love with his mother Rebecca, I wouldn't have given Curt the time of day. He represented everything I abhorred in men, and he was loud, obnoxious, and egotistical.

His mother wasn't sure how Curt turned out this way. Rebecca was the exact opposite, quiet, introspective, and polite. And Curt had been raised around a lot of feminists. He grew up surrounded by people who had little tolerance for male arrogance.

One such person was Kelly, Rebecca's ex-partner and Curt's main co-parent. She was a strong, outspoken butch who didn't take crap from anyone, much less a young male. Even though Curt was close to Kelly, they had been through some battles together. She had fought hard to make him aware of his behavior and she had tried to teach him some manners and sensitivity. But judging by the way Curt turned out, Kelly hadn't been too successful. He was still a piece of work.

I had no desire to take on Curt, but inevitably I had to. When I moved in with Rebecca, Curt was part of the deal. I became a member of a family that included Rebecca, Curt and in time, Curt's son, Mario. After I moved in, Curt's girlfriend gave birth to a baby boy and I became a quasi grandmother.

As it turned out, I adored Mario. I hate to brag the way some grandmothers do, but Mario is the most precious being who ever landed on earth. We formed a strong bond; mostly because I was Mario's designated babysitter. Rebecca watched him too but the time that she spent with Mario was limited. Rebecca was often tied-up with her political activism and most recently her work evolved around the anti-war movement.

So I spent a lot of time our neighborhood park. I'd hang out there with the other *abuelas*, pushing Mario on the swings and watching him climb and run. I'd read to him, play games with him, and we shared the most delightful conversations. I marveled at the relationship I had with this little boy. I'd compare it to the connection I had with my own grandparents; stiff, white Midwesterners who I visited on occasional Sundays. I'd sit on my grandparent's couch, listening to the clock tick while the adults around me conversed. I'd sit there quietly on those eternally long afternoons. Once in a while my grandparents would acknowledge my presence with some benign comment. "How is school?" or "My, aren't you growing." They'd send cards and money for my birthdays, but there was no real connection. While I was growing up, my own grandparents lived in another county. They didn't seem to need me and I learned not to need them. With Mario it was all so different. It was love born of mutual need, time, and proximity. He loved Rebecca and me desperately and we loved him.

Like so many other young adults in our neighborhood, Curt never strayed far from his mother's kitchen. He needed us for many reasons, but mostly he needed us for childcare. So Curt was in my life whether I liked it or not and I struggled with our relationship. I was an older feminist lesbian and Curt was young, macho, and male. We were oil and water trying to mix.

Rebecca and I were having another argument about Curt. It had started over one of those rare occasions when I let him borrow my car. He had gotten another parking ticket and had failed to either take care of it or tell me about it. This happened only two months after he totaled Rebecca's Toyota. We were certain that he was speeding and tailgating, things that we warned him so many times not to do.

"My girlfriend said she was going to pay it," Curt explained when I confronted him about the ticket.

I didn't blame his girlfriend for not paying it. I blamed her more for offering to take care of a responsibility that clearly belonged to Curt. And I marveled at why so many young women seemed to take care of this guy. I realized it was his

good looks or a curse that might very well prevent him from growing up.

I also blamed Rebecca. "You need to talk to that kid," I told her. "You need to make him wake up and start being responsible."

"I'll talk to him," she said, but I knew talking to Curt wouldn't rank high on her priority list. It would register somewhere between calling City Hall about a protest permit and driving to Berkeley for a radio interview. Inevitably, she might never get around to it.

I never felt that it was my place to talk to Curt. It was awkward telling a 25-year-old man what to do and besides, young adults don't like being told what to do. Not only do they resent advice, but they also have this irritating habit of telling you what to do. Curt was especially good at assuming that, because I was over 50, I was born yesterday and didn't have a clue as to how to live. Being an older woman automatically put me in the category of being feeble-minded. Curt also had this image of me as a hick who was so out of touch with Urban America, especially the youth culture which was his turf. He'd hurt himself laughing when I botched street slang, saying things like "bling blang" instead of "bling bling" or "Fer Sher!" instead of "Fo Sho!"

What irritated me most about his know-it-all attitude was when he slipped into those time worn gender roles I thought I had escaped when I declared myself a lesbian. He loved to tell me what to do in a manner frustratingly unique to men. If I was cooking (food that I purchased and that he was about to eat), he would generously offer his advice on how I might better prepare it. If I was watching Mario (for free), Curt was quick to volunteer advice on how to discipline or take care of children.

What pissed me off most was when Curt would give me pointers on how to stay in shape. We worked out at the same gym and Curt always thought he was doing me a favor when he'd saunter over and try to be my personal trainer. He'd insinuate what parts of my anatomy could use conditioning and this was where I drew the line. "No woman wants some man telling her how to improve her body!" I told him point blank.

Curt stared back at me as if he had no clue that he was being insulting. He was only trying to help.

"He should have been taught this stuff a long time ago," I nagged at Rebecca. I launched into another versions of my "why didn't you teach him any manners" lecture.

Rebecca didn't want to hear it. She had other things on her mind and this wasn't a good time to talk.

"It's never a good time," I said in exasperation.

The phone rang. "Hello? Yes, the meeting is set up for 2:30." Rebecca cupped her hand over the receiver and looked up at me. "I'm in a crunch," she whispered.

I put on my jacket, slammed the door, and walked out onto the street murmuring, "That's always the way it always is." Whatever I needed from Rebecca, she always had something more important going on. And how could my needs compete? How could my needs compete with the horror that was happening in Iraq? And why did I even care about Curt? Why didn't I just keep him at a safe distance so he wouldn't bug me? Why did I do things like loan him my car to begin with?

It was my attempt, I suppose, to feel part of a family. I wanted a family, but there were times when I felt like I really needed to just bale. I loved Rebecca, but there were times this just didn't seem to be working. Sometimes I just felt like giving up on the relationship.

I wanted to give up on Curt at times too. After all, he was a grown man. He didn't need to keep coming around and relying on me and Rebecca and assorted girlfriends. Whatever happened to the generation gap? When I was young, none of us trusted anyone over 30. We wouldn't be caught dead hanging around our parents. We left home as fast and as far as we could. Why didn't Curt just split? Take off and test his wings? I remember telling him about a book I read by Ted Conover, *Rolling Nowhere; Riding the Rails with America's Hobos*. It was the story of a young man who hopped freights across the western United States.

"You've always wanted to travel," I said to Curt. "Wouldn't that be an adventure?"

"Are you out of your mind?" He asked me. "Why would I want to do that?"

Young people like Curt seemed to be different. They needed their parents, and not only economically. The universities were cutting off a whole class of young people now. Only the rich could afford an education. And the youth that did work, especially in San Francisco, were dropping the bulk of their paychecks on rent. Buying a car was out of the question. And if these kids had children themselves, things could get pretty tight.

Curt also needed us emotionally. He loved his mother. He respected her and when it was offered, he sometimes even listened to her advice. He also cared about Kelly, Kelly's girlfriend Jan and their son, Thomas. This was an extended family that talked to one another, shared personal information, and showed each other affection.

I had trouble figuring out what my role was in this scene. I definitely had trouble relating to Curt. I never felt like his parent, more like dueling siblings at times. We were both stuck in a situation where we had to relate to one another, but we often didn't know how.

Once, we were talking about my lesbian hiking group. Hiking was one thing Curt and I had in common, and I was trying to make conversation.

"You' all ought to call yourselves the Twatlicker's Club," he said, referring to the lesbian group.

I stared at him. It took a while before I could compose myself enough to reply. When I did, I let him have it. Did he have any idea what he just said? Didn't he realize how sexist and homophobic he sounded?

He didn't have a clue. He was just joking.

I told him that this kind of joke reeked of hostility and sarcasm and was homophobic and sexist.

"When people joke like that," I said, "it often makes me wonder what's behind it. Are you carrying around some anger?" For instance, I suggested, was he angry that his mother was gay?

"Hell no," he replied. "My Dad is a dick-head." He went on to explain that all of the lesbians that raised him "had his

back” more than his biological father ever did. And he reminded me that most of his friends were gay.

Thus evolved our ongoing struggle to understand one another. I would get angry with Curt, and then he would turn around and surprise me.

Curt did have many redeeming qualities. He had a good heart and even when we had difficulty communicating, he was motivated to change. He was an extremely loving father and although irresponsible at times, he did go to work every day and he supported his son.

In spite of his behavior, Curt became very fond of me. He had an odd way of showing it, but in time he grew to care for me. He told me that I made his mother very happy. He respected me. And he said he really liked the way I connected with Mario. Curt and I shared a love of the outdoors and ended up camping and hiking together.

Another thing that helped me relate to Curt, was remembering how I had treated my mother. I've heard many parents say that they learn a lot about their parents when they have their own children. In a way, that's what happened to me. In dealing with Curt, I faced a flood of memories of my adolescence and young adulthood. I had given my mother hell. She had had her character defects, but after Curt entered my life, I became acutely aware of my part in our mother-daughter difficulties. With Curt, I came face to face with these memories in blazing Technicolor. And I forgave Curt because I somehow had to forgive myself. In time I would tell my own mother what I had learned from Curt.

That family life is never what we expect it to be. It doesn't fit into some neat little package. So when things don't work out the way we want, or we don't see eye to eye with relatives, it isn't always reason to cut and run, like I did from my own parents.

Thirty years earlier I had left for California, hoping that distance would fix what was wrong between us. It didn't. And what went on between us was more complicated than any of us would ever be able to figure out. The only thing we ever really knew was that we cared about each other. In time, I would decide, that was all we needed to know.

There was so much in life I couldn't understand, much less control or predict. I couldn't predict the future. I had no idea whether Rebecca and I would stay together, although sometimes it seemed we would. Even when things were difficult, I couldn't imagine life without her. And so I stayed. The days and months and years passed and neither of us seemed to be going anywhere.

Sometimes I'd worry about what would happen when we got old. Neither of us had a hell of a lot of money and I didn't have any of my own children. Who would take care of me, I wondered, if I got old, poor, and disabled?

"Curt will take care of you," Rebecca offered. "He loves you."

And then I'd think about Curt taking over my household and my bank account; maybe even driving my car. "God help us if that ever happens," I'd say.

So the years kept moving. Every morning I would get up and look out the window. I'd see a new day but the same old neighborhood, the same barrio with its mothers, children, and homeless people. Every day in that neighborhood seemed the same, but I knew very well that time kept moving.

Patricia MacAodha

Shopping for a Baby Shower

My daughter-in-law will soon give birth (It's a girl!). My daughter warned me that my presence would be required at a baby shower this spring. I've never been into the "girl party" scene, even when I thought myself het, but it's one of those experiences you know is down the road, when you have grown, heterosexual children. The other members of my lesbian household begged off, but my Virgo housemate, formerly a lover, and very much part of my son's life, offered to help me (the Aries) shop for baby shower gifts, and therein hangs the tale.

The mother-to-be was "registered," including an emphasis on "Classic Pooh," at one of those modern, warehouse-style stores with cavernous interiors and confusing layouts, not familiar to our over-fifty dyke generation. We are accustomed to the multi-layer, elegant department store of the past, with each floor featuring a specific ambience for seventy years, well-marked and easy to find. Perhaps our generational slip is showing, but navigating the required store was a challenge.

The first problem was that we hadn't a lot of time. I was to get to my daughter's house and wrap the presents we were buying, and the Virgo had to be at a meeting across town. The first task inside the store was finding the kiosk, that mechanical computerized site where one pushes buttons recording the "registerees" name and home branch.

We looked so hard, we missed it because it was located just inside the main door. I did the required button pushing, and the computer gurgled, churned, and spit out pages and pages of possible merchandise for the baby-to-be, all neatly organized, bearing each item's name, merchandise number, price, description, and on what shelf it should be found. When the list reached ten pages (10!), we just looked at each other and shook our heads. How could this metallic, one-storey barn *have* all these items, as well as everything else the store sold?

The kiosk, of course, didn't provide a location map for the different departments, but we found out Baby Wear and Baby Care are not the same place, and our shrinking time limit, about

45 minutes, was making both of us anxious. The Virgo will never ask where something is. It's a matter of butchly pride, I guess. After wandering aimlessly and dodging various crowds of teen-aged shoppers, who gave us strange looks, I queried a friendly-looking Jewelry clerk. She pointed us in the right direction.

As I reached the baby department, I dropped the list, and all ten pages spread out on the floor. I scooped them up before the Virgo noticed, and tried to get them in order while she scanned the scene. On the way to the store, I had mentioned some items my daughter suggested, one being a bottle carrier. The Virgo turned onto the aisle that had baby carriers, searched quickly, and said, "There are a lot of carriers here."

"No," I said, "not BABY carriers, BOTTLE carriers. I think they'll be where bottles are."

Having reorganized most of the pages, I found bottles on the list, and noted the aisle number. The Virgo, better at directions than I, found it easily. There were a lot of bottles in various types of packaging, but no bottle carriers. We thought we had it once, but the item was a breast pump. In fact there were a lot of breast pumps, but we didn't see any listed, so we picked up a package of bottles. We decided the mother-to-be couldn't have too many bottles, and we weren't sure of the propriety of two dyke-in-laws presenting a breast pump to the daughter-in-law.

The Virgo read over my shoulder: "Crib sheets." We looked at each other. We're academics. A crib sheet is what you create to cram for exams, (Well, it's been twenty-eight years since *my* last baby.) Then I remembered "A crib sheet is what goes on the crib mattress," I said. "I'll find one." The Virgo hadn't given up on the bottle carrier, so I went down the aisle to 'Crib Bedding.' The brand was on the list, but I couldn't find the requested stripes or dots.

Abandoning her search, the Virgo joined me. We reluctantly selected a pablum yellow sheet, I found the shade boring. Looking below the shelves of sheets, the Virgo found a crib pad, white with little lambies on it. I looked quickly, shuffling some pages. It was on the list, so I snapped it up.

"Didn't you say they want Classic Pooh," the Virgo asked.

"I don't see Pooh," I answered; "Anyway, it will be under the sheet, so no one will notice." The Virgo looked at her watch and didn't argue further. Turning around, I noticed the very Pooh

section we'd been hunting. It was on the other side of the aisle. I leafed through the list, and found Pooh items—none of which appeared on the list. I did see a crib sheet. Aha! If I couldn't find a Pooh mattress cover, at least *it* could be covered by a Pooh crib sheet. Another few minutes of discussion followed, because the sheet wasn't listed; but I held my ground, and Pooh prevailed.

I also noticed a package of those little felt pads one plops between the baby's bottom and the lap Baby is sitting on. They've saved many a skirt or pair of pants from getting soaked, and I knew the Virgo would approve. We now had four items, which seemed enough.

The Virgo noticed page one of the list was not on top. "Why is this list messed up?" she inquired. "It just is," was my testy response. She grabbed the list and put it in numerical order—now that we were done shopping.

I went to get in line, sending the Virgo off to get wrapping accessories. She came back with a large gift bag that cost more than the lap pads, some pink tissue paper and a roll of red foil with gold stars. It's a baby shower, not the Fourth of July, I thought, but said nothing.

We paid for the items, and rushed out of the store to daughter's house, where the Virgo left an exhausted Aries and all the purchases, and then dashed off to her meeting. My eldest granddaughter, giving an eye-roll to the red and gold star foil, found boxes and a piece of green pastel paper. She got everything nicely stashed in the gift sack, fluffed up the pink tissue paper and put the card we'd signed inside. It looked very professional. Grateful, I slipped her a dollar.

After the baby shower, I brought the roll of wrapping paper back with me on the bus; it will work for my teenaged grandson's birthday later this month. Next time I have to go to a shower, I'll print the list down on my own computer *days* before I go shopping, and maybe I'll cajole the Taurus to come with, and give the Virgo a break.

Postscript:

Trinity Ann Melani Truett-Chang was born on May 14th. And all the grandmothers and aunties are so proud. The Virgo was at the hospital that evening for the first introduction of our newest little girl.



"Isis" by Sudie Rakusin

She is known as Isis Panthea; the All-Goddess; the Universal Goddess; the Lady of Ten Thousand Names. From her, all becoming arose. Winged Isis is the moon who gave birth to the sun. To her devotees, she is all things everlasting; she promises deep blessings and protection in their life on earth. When it is time to die, they will see her shining presence, know her ubiquitous divinity, and realize that she could and would allay death. Only Isis can say: I will overcome fate.

Isis has a twin sister, Nephthys. Together they are the innate duality inherent in all goddesses: Creator/Destroyer; Rebirth/Sunset; Mother of Life/Tomb Dwelling Crone of Death. The *mu'at* is the sign of Isis.

Contributors' Notes

Kendra Brooks lives on the East Side in Providence, Rhode Island, with her partner and two daughters. She is a visual artist and adult education teacher. "The Other Mother" was written while pursuing a master's degree in creative writing. Kendra is currently working on a children's book about lesbian families. Her writing has also appeared in *Outsider Ink*.

Tee A. Corinne: An artist and writer, Tee A. Corinne grew up in the South, moved North for graduate school (MFA, Pratt, 1968), and then West in 1972. Her still-in-print *Cunt Coloring Book* was published in 1975. *Intimacies: Photos* by Tee A. Corinne was a Lambda Literary Award finalist. A collection of her essays, *Lesbian Art Issues: Variations on Queerly Appealing Themes* is forthcoming from Haworth Press (Alice Street Editions).

Victoria Ferrara-Loris lives in Fairfield, Connecticut with her partner, Michelle Ferrara-Loris, and their two sons, Salvatore and Nicholas. She is now beginning to publish her work and has presented her short fiction at the Twentieth Century Literature Conference 2000 in Louisville, Kentucky, and at the New England Modern Language Association's 2000 Conference. Victoria has been practicing law since 1984 and has her own law firm in Fairfield, Connecticut.

Lisa Figueroa is a Chicana writer from the Los Angeles area. She has an MA in English/Creative Writing and has been published in *The Lesbian News* and *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly*. Besides writing, she loves spending quality time with her beautiful, amazing partner of five years and their three adorable cats.

Amy Gamble lives in Montpelier, VT, with her partner, in their soon-to-be-empty nest. She is a traffic engineer who plays broomball in winter and softball in the summer. On really nice days, Amy rides a motorcycle.

Merry Gangemi is a writer, activist, and dilettante. She lives in Woodbury, VT with her partner, Elizabeth Hansen. Merry

has an MA in comparative literature (SFSU). Her work has been published in the *Journal of NJ Poets*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly*, *Visibilities*, and *Lavender Express*. She was the 1999 recipient of the Audre Lorde Creative Writing Award (SFSU) for poetry. Contact at: mgangemi@sover.net or <http://www.merrygangemi.org>.

Maggie Harrison is an expatriate Southerner currently reading, writing, and teaching in San Francisco. Her fiction is forthcoming in *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly*. She is pursuing an MFA in creative writing and teaches basic writing to new undergraduates at SFSU.

Cherie James grew up in a small mountain town listening to opera and baking cookies with her grandmother. At 18, she moved to San Francisco, where she has lived for many years. She has two daughters and one granddaughter, and takes writing classes whenever she can. Cherie has been an out lesbian for 20+ years. She spent almost 20 years writing and performing for Mothertongue Feminist Theater. Cherie has taken writing classes with Ida Red and Martha Courtot.

Lori L. Lake is and a freelance reviewer for *Midwest Book Review*, *The Crown* (Golden Crown Literary Society), *The Independent Gay Writer*, and *Just About Writing*. She also writes lesbian fiction.

Marie LaPre'Grabon is a visual artist, teacher, mother, and grandmother. She lives in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont with her partner Linda.

Patricia MacAodha is a freelance writer and a regular contributor to *Just Out*, Portland Oregon's local GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered) monthly newspaper. She is the mother of two grown children, and has five grandchildren (including Babyshower star, Trinity Ann Melani Truett-Chang)!

Suzanne Mahue lives an idyllic suburban life in Alexandria, Virginia, residing with her partner Wendy and their pack of

spoiled dogs. She earns her living as a bookkeeper while working on her version of the Great American Novel at night. More of her writing can be found on her blog, www.suburbanlesbian.com.

Jane Mara's stories are from a book she is writing to her son, Michael, from her treasured memories of his childhood. Michael is now 32, and a Zen Buddhist monk. He recently married a Zen Buddhist nun. They live at a Zen Buddhist monastery in Oregon, where Jane sometimes also lives.

Linda Markin makes her living as a financial executive for a manufacturing company. She makes her life with partner Marie in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. She feeds her soul with community, political work, and by taking full advantage of the riches of northern Vermont.

Lynn Martin's work has been published in *Calliope*, *River City Review*, *South Florida Review*, *The Garden State*, *Green Mountain Review*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *5 a.m.*, *Connecticut Review*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Ancient Mariners*, *Out in the Mountains*, *Bloodstone*, *Sweet Annie Press*, *The Centennial Review*, and *Friend's Journal*. Her work is included in the anthologies, *Heartbeat of New England*, and *My Lover Is a Woman*. "Martha Grimes' Children," a nonfiction piece, was published in the *Mystery Review*. Lynn recently completed a residency at the Vermont Studio, in Johnson, VT, an experience she recommends to all. Lynn Martin lives in Brattleboro, VT.

Mary Meriam is a poet-activist with an MFA in poetry from Columbia University. She credits the LOVE Diet, and an exercise program of vigorous stair-climbing, for getting her in touch with her iambic pentameter. Her poems and essays have been published in *Bay Windows*, *The Write Dyke*, *So To Speak*, *Lode-star Quarterly*, *Queer Ramblings*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *Harrington Lesbian Fiction Quarterly*.

Kerry McCabe is a native Midwesterner, a writer, and a nurse, who lives in San Francisco, CA. She has written non-

fiction for *Out Now* and *Entre Nous* and poetry for the Wilde Oaks Review. She has also published a chapbook entitled *Short Poems from California*.

Janell Moon teaches writing at the College of Marin and San Francisco City College. She is the author of four books of poetry, including: *The Mouth of Home* (Arctos Press 1999), and four books of nonfiction. Janell has won many poetry contests including the Salt Hill Prize, The Randall Jarrett Prize, and the Stonewall Prize for her chapbook, *Snakeskin Boots*. She is a practicing counselor and hypnotherapist in San Francisco, CA.

Ruth Mountaingrove has taught high school science, and was a research technician in applied organic chemistry. She was married for 20 years and has 3 living children. Ruth came out through the women's movement at 48. She moved from Philadelphia to live with her first lesbian lover, Jean Mountaingrove, in a commune in Oregon called Mountain Grove, outside of Grants Pass. Ruth has been a photographer, poet, artist, and folk musician. She has two books of poetry: *Rhythms of Spring*, and *For Those Who Cannot Sleep*, and a songbook: *The Turned on Woman's Songbook*. The last two published by New Woman Press.

Lesléa Newman is the author of 50 books, including *Heather Has Two Mommies*, *A Letter to Harvey Milk*, *Writing from the Heart*, *In Every Laugh, a Tear*, *The Femme Mystique*, *Still Life with Buddy*, *Fat Chance*, and *Out of the Closet and Nothing to Wear*. She has received many literary awards, including poetry fellowships from the Massachusetts Arts Fellowship Foundation and the National Endowments for the Arts, the Highlights for Children Writing Award, The James Baldwin Award for Cultural Achievement, and two Pushcart Prize Nominations. Nine of her books have been Lambda Literary Award finalists. *Heather Has Two Mommies* was the first children's book to portray lesbians in a positive way. Newman has written several more children's books on lesbian and gay families: *Gloria Goes to Gay Pride*, *Belinda's Bouquet*, *Too Far Away to Touch*, and *Saturday Is Pattyday*. Her website is: <http://www.lesleanewman.com>.

Marjorie Norris is a writer from western New York State. She has published a collection of poems called *Chautauqua Breathing*. She was Just Buffalo Poet-in Residence in 1999, and has taught creative writing at State University of Buffalo Women's Studies Department, and at the Chautauqua Institute. Her work has appeared in *Arizona Mandala Quarterly*, and other national publications.

Minnie Bruce Pratt has published five books of poetry: *The Sound of One Fork*; *We Say We Love Each Other*; *Crime Against Nature*; *Walking Back Up Depot Street*; and *The Dirt She Ate: Selected and New Poems*. Pratt has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. *Crime Against Nature* was the Lamont Poetry Selection by the Academy of American Poets; a New York Times Notable Book of the Year; and was also given the American Library Association Gay and Lesbian Book Award for Literature. Minnie Bruce was chosen, along with Chrystos and Audre Lorde, to receive a Lillian Hellman-Dashiell Hammett award given by the Fund for Free Expression to writers victimized by political persecution. Her book of prose stories about gender boundary crossing, *S/HE*, was a finalist for both the 1995 American Library Association Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Book Award and the Firecracker Award. *The Dirt She Ate*, received the 2003 Lambda Literary Award for Poetry. Minnie Bruce's work was published in *SW* when it was still in Charlotte, North Carolina under Harriet Ellenberger & Catherine Nicholson 1976–1981. She lives with her partner, transgender activist and writer Leslie Feinberg, in Jersey City, New Jersey. Her website is www.mbpratt.org

Alison Prine is a poet living in Burlington, VT.

Sudie Rakusin's art is well-known and widely published in newspapers, magazines, and calendars. Her work has also been published in *The Once and Future Goddess* (Elinor Gadon); *Seasons of the Witch*, (Patricia Monaghan); and Mary Daly's *Wickedary*, *Outercourse*, and *Quintessence*. Sudie lives in North Carolina, on the edge of a meadow, with her Great Danes. View her work at <http://www.sudierakusin.com>

Lilith Lynn Rodgers is a longtime writer, gardener, and lover of women...especially the latter. She has recently published a CD-Rom paper-free book of her poems and photographs, *Per-simmons and Other Lesbian Erotica*. She is currently performing a one-woman show about Rachel Carson. Her book can be ordered at: <http://www.lilithrogers.com>.

Mary Spicer was born and raised in Vermont. She is the mother of two daughters, Jessica and Gabrielle. She is an engineering technician at the Vermont Agency of Transportation. Out since 1997, Mary lives with her civil union partner, Amy Gamble in their soon-to-be-empty nest.

Judith K. Witherow is a poet, essayist, and storyteller. A mixed-blood Native American raised in rural Appalachian poverty, she writes about her life experiences with disability, and about gender, sexual orientation, race, and class from a perspective influenced by her early heritage. Her website is: www.jkwitherow.com.

Sinister Wisdom News

Thanks to jody jewdyke, Issue #62 “Lesbian Writers on Writing and Reading” is now available on tape. Compatible with APH or Talking Book 15/16 i.p.s. speed players. Recorded on four-track, approximately 5 hours. We hope to have Issue #63 “Lesbians and Nature” available on tape soon. Email fran@sonic.net for more information.

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We mourn the passing of Carla Volpe who died on Saturday, June 25, 2005 at her home in Cheektawaga, New York. She served on the board and generously donated her considerable electronic talents to Sinister Wisdom during the last four years. Carla was born on May 11, 1955 in Buffalo, New York. For many years, she was the lead singer of the first lesbian band in Buffalo. Later, she worked in an organization that helped low income women learn to work in the trades, making it possible for them to earn a living wage. She was of Italian descent, and her first job was throwing pizza dough in her uncle’s pizzeria.

She was a loving friend and the life of any party. She is survived by two sisters, one brother, her cat, Betty and numerous friends. She will be sorely missed by many.

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Our website now has a new look thanks to the creativity and hard work of Sue Lenaerts. Go to www.sinisterwisdom.org to see the changes.

Please help spread the word about Sinister Wisdom. We also need volunteers to help with fundraising, outreach and grantwriting. Email fran@sonic.net if you are willing to distribute fliers. Thanks to everyone who has helped out in some way.

Books Reviewed by Lori Lake

The Lives of Lesbian Elders: Looking Back, Looking Forward by D. Merilee Clunis, PhD. Haworth Press (December 1, 2004), ISBN 0789023342

Book Description:

The untold history of lesbian life from those who have lived it! *Lives of Lesbian Elders: Looking Back, Looking Forward* illuminates the hopes, fears, issues, and concerns of gay women as they grow older. Based on interviews with 62 lesbians ranging in age from 55 to 95, this very special book provides a historical account of the shared experiences of the lesbian community that is so often invisible or ignored in contemporary society. The book gives voice to their thoughts and feelings on a wide range of issues, including coming out, identity and the meaning of life, the role of family and personal relationships, work and retirement, adversity, and individual sources of strength and resilience. Cast off and overlooked at best or victims of scorn and prejudice at worst, lesbians in the twentieth century lived dual lives, their full voices unheard until now. *Lives of Lesbian Elders* chronicles the life choices they made and their reasons for making them, set against the contexts of culture, politics, and the social mores of the eras in which they lived. Their stories of courage, resilience, resourcefulness, pride, and independence help restore lesbian history that has been forgotten, distorted, or disregarded and provide the information necessary to meet the future needs of aging lesbians.

For Lesbian Parents: Your Guide to Helping Your Family Grow Up Happy, Healthy, and Proud by Suzanne M. Johnson and Elizabeth O'Connor

The Guilford Press (March 23, 2001), ISBN 1572306637

Book Description:

Raising a child is overwhelming, thrilling, exhausting, terrifying, and joyous—and all at the same time. In addition to the adjustments that any new parents must make, lesbian mothers face numerous special questions and concerns. From com-

ing out to your child to coping with the pressures of trying to be a lesbian supermom, this wise and reassuring book offers information and support for women forging a new path in what it means to be a family. The authors are uniquely qualified for the task as expert developmental psychologists who are also co-parenting two young daughters. With clarity and wit, they offer helpful advice on what kids need to know, and at what age; how to help them respond to questions and teasing from peers; ways to foster sensitivity in relatives, teachers, and others; how to talk to teens about their own developing sexuality; how parenting affects couple relationships; and much more. Chapters are packed with the insights and experiences of lesbians who have come to be parents in a variety of ways. Also included are listings of useful web sites, publications, and other resources.

The Family of Woman: Lesbian Mothers, Their Children, and the Undoing of Gender by Maureen Sullivan. University of California Press (August 1, 2004), ISBN 0520239636

Book Description:

Amidst the shrill and discordant notes struck in debates over the make-up or breakdown of the American family, the family keeps evolving. This book offers a close, clear-eyed look into a form this change has taken most recently, the lesbian co-parent family. Based on intensive interviews and extensive firsthand observation, *The Family of Woman* chronicles the experience of 34 families headed by lesbian mothers whose children were conceived by means of donor insemination. With its intimate perspective on the interior dynamics of these families and its penetrating view of their public lives, the book provides rare insight into the workings of emerging family forms and their significance for our understanding of family and our culture itself.

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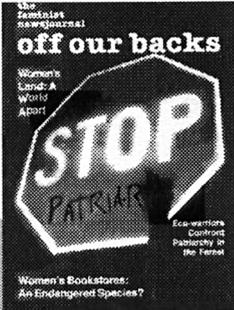
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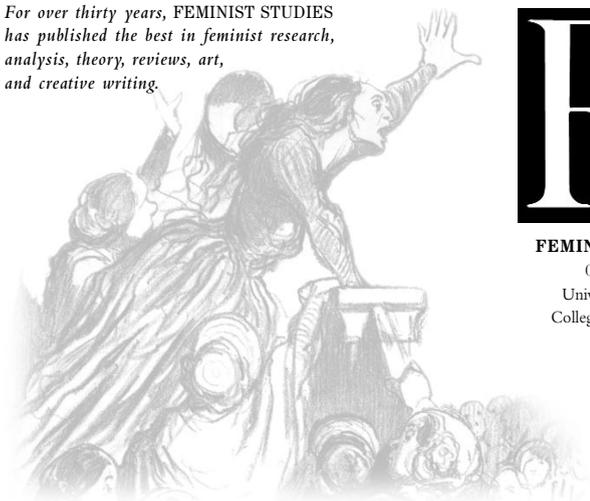
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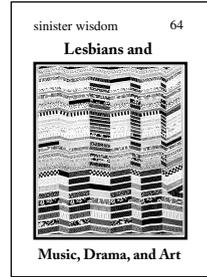
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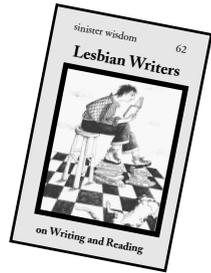
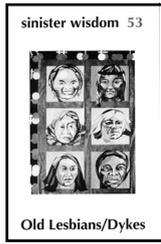
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