

Support for Children of Gays and Lesbians By Mona Greenbaum and Nicole Paquette

Sylvie and her son Ben live in a suburb of Montreal. Sylvie has been openly lesbian for her whole adult life and before her son went to high school this was never a problem. During elementary school Ben would bring friends home, he spoke candidly about his mother and her girlfriend and was very comfortable in his shoes. But when Ben began high school everything changed. In his new school, suddenly homosexuality became an issue. His new friends regularly used homophobic slurs to deride and tease each other. Accusations of acting like a "fag" were regularly heard in the schoolyard, in the cafeteria or in the gym locker-room. Suddenly Ben felt like a target. Even though he had a girlfriend, he himself felt attacked because of his mother's sexual orientation. He was embarrassed about his family situation, about his mom and her girlfriend and thought that if the others knew they would draw conclusions that he too was gay. He lived in constant fear of being found out and never brought friends home. The situation became so uncomfortable that he would not leave the house with his mom and her friend. And even in the privacy of his own home the relationship between Ben and his mom's girlfriend began to be very much strained. After two years of this, Ben was so resentful of his mom's partner that he was in constant conflict with her. As the situation became increasingly unlivable for everyone, Sylvie decided that the only way to save her son's sanity, as well as her own relationship, was for her and Ben to move out. Sylvie and her partner will wait till Ben is an adult to begin living together again. The names have been changed, but this is a true story.

Although already present at the elementary level, the atmosphere of homophobia is much greater in secondary schools (some claim it is pervasive). Adolescents are at an age when the pressure to conform is extremely high and when comments from peers are particularly painful. Add to this the fact that teenagers are often themselves questioning and uneasy about their own sexual orientation. And also, as is well known, teenagers are commonly in rebellion against their own parents. So when parents are part of a derided, minority sexual group, the situation can become very tense. The adolescents of our group are particularly hard to reach out to. Parents phone us and tell us that they are having a lot of difficulties, but we lack the resources to help them.

What can be done? Teenagers that have attended our meetings tell us that by the time kids are in high school their ideas are already quite engrained. They say kids need to be told about homosexuality and educated not to be homophobic from the time they enter primary school. Teachers can of course do this on their own initiative, the Ministry of Education state in their elementary curriculum that school "...favours the children's personal growth by encouraging them to adopt useful and meaningful attitudes and behaviours, and providing them with a healthy, safe environment that fosters their sexual

development. It also enables them to develop their personal identity, based on self-confidence and awareness of the value of their sex, their age, and their culture.” Although this sounds like an open invitation, without specific directives teachers are at a loss for what to do.

Beginning in primary school, teachers can touch upon ideas about different types of relationships and different kinds of families. Diversity can be shown to be valuable. This is pertinent to everyone. There are kids in alternative families, but there are also kids who themselves will become gay or lesbian when they grow up. It is a well-known fact that the suicide rate is much higher in students who are questioning their own sexual orientation. And this is probably about 10% of the student population. Furthermore, almost everyone has someone in their families who is gay or lesbian and if not, in their lives they will certainly encounter gays and lesbians, at their work, their neighbors, and their friends. It is thus essential to create a school environment that is open to gays and lesbians.

Teachers can talk about well-known gays and lesbians in popular culture. Ideas about stereotypes and prejudices can be connected with homophobia, as part of a larger discussion about racism, sexism and other isms. The discussion can progress over the years as children mature. Homosexuality can be addressed without necessarily teaching about sex. A specific curriculum is needed for this, as well as a government that supports and protects its teachers.

Teachers can begin to address homophobic language and behaviour that they hear and see amongst students. They should not tolerate homophobia, just as racism is not tolerated. Sensitization training is needed for this, for teachers, administrators as well as other staff that work within the school environment. Name calling, bullying and even physical violence are far too common.

In the high schools an adult can be designated as a contact person for anyone who is having problems with issues regarding sexual orientation, whether it is someone to speak to about one's own problems or to report bullying and teasing to, or just someone who can respond to questions. This person must of course be trained so that he / she can understand how sensitive these situations can be. Many gays and lesbians say that they are alive today because one teacher stood up for them or took an interest in them.

Books must be added to the classroom and school library that speak about issues on sexuality, sexual identity and sexual health. Books about family diversity are increasingly available as well. There are less and less students who come from traditional nuclear families, whether it is single parent families, extended families, blended families or families with gay or lesbian parents.

Also, education must be provided about sexuality and health care that include information about sexual orientation and diversity. Pamphlets and resource materials must be available to students on subjects such as STDs and AIDS, suicide, substance

abuse and other risky behaviours. These materials must be placed in areas where students can discretely access them without labeling themselves.

Workshops and presentations where gay and lesbian concerns and facts are discussed and demystified, given by groups such as GRIS, Project 10 and H-Muet, must be organized and brought to schools. The current lack of access of these groups into many Quebec schools is unacceptable.

What else? Gay /Straight alliances can be encouraged. What are these? Following the example of many American schools, these are clubs where students who either themselves are gay or lesbian or who support gays and lesbians can get together and support each other. These groups are particularly appealing for those who are questioning, as it is not necessary to define oneself, and students can socialize in a non-judgmental environment.

Outside of the school, family counselors are needed who know about our families and are tuned to our issues and the pressures that society puts upon us and our children. Even if all the above measures were implemented tomorrow, it will only be the next generation of teenagers who will feel the positive effects. In the meantime, our families need sensitive, sophisticated interventionists who can deal with our realities and who are not ignorant of our problems.

It is estimated that between 1 and 4 out of every ten students is either gay or lesbian or has a gay or lesbian immediate family member. If society really cares about ALL of its children than it is necessary that teachers, administrators, support staff and counselors work to make the school a safer and more inclusive environment for children. Public schools also have a responsibility to support and enhance family relationships in all families, including those with gay or lesbian parents. Schools are the most logical place to provide accurate information and replace the myths, ignorance and stereotypes that hurt all children and their families.

We would like to hear from you! Interested in writing for our newsletter?

Send your articles at any time to monicole@citenet.net or by post to AML, 2401 Coursol, Montreal, Quebec, H3J 1C8

News Briefs May-August 2001

Montreal

May 27 - **Roger Thibault and Théo Wouters**, are a gay couple that have been together for 28 years and own a home in **Pointe Claire**. In 1996 a homophobic man moved in next door who has, since then, continuously harassed them (insults, verbal abuse, vandalizing their garden, etc). Finally, after putting up with it for too long, the couple complained. They pressed charges and also filed a report with the Human Rights Commission. The gay and lesbian community mobilized and on Sunday May 27 a few thousand of us (no one knows for sure but estimates range between 1500- 4000) showed up for a very peaceful and dignified **protest march** through the neighbourhood: An incredible show of solidarity. The couple is currently in court.

Gay Écoute, a gay help-line, receives about **2000 calls about homophobic violence** each year so the Roger and Théo story is not an isolated incident. The cases range from name-calling to murder.

June 15 -Speaking of **Gay Écoute**: they recently won a prize called the **Prix Réjean-Marier** from the **Quebec Suicide Association**. The prize was given to Laurent McHutcheon, general director of gay écoute. The help-line was recognized for their exceptional role in preventing suicide in Quebec, not only in terms of the listening services provided by the help-line, but also for their research on suicide.

News items in the village:

L'Androgyne bookstore, after 28 years on rue St. Laurent has moved to the village. It opened on July 1st at it's **new and larger location** at **1436**

Amherst (corner Ste. Catherine). Go and check it out. France Desilets (an LMA member and mom to be with her partner Claudine Dugas) is the manager. Their phone number is still 514-842-4765 and their e-mail is info@androgynne.ca

Another exciting event is slated to happen in the village. Although it is not certain when, a recent article in the Journal de Montreal (June 19) spoke about a **5 million dollar mega-complex** that would be a dream come true for the G and L community. Possibly in the heart of the village between Amherst and Wolfe, a **G and L community centre** will be built in the upcoming years. Montreal, as well as provincial and federal governments will each contribute 1.2 million towards this center. The Mario-Racine foundation in collaboration with the CCGLM will raise the last million from private funds.

While waiting for this all to happen you can go check out a **new pub for dykes**, called **Magnolia**, that opened **in the village** at the end of July. It's at 1329 rue Ste. Catherine east. The new owner Manon L'Écuyer wants to create a friendly atmosphere full of activities dedicated to the lesbian community. It'll be open from Wednesday to Sunday and will offer happy hours, brunches and theme nights.

Provincial news

The Quebec Youth Protection and Human Rights Commissions are under attack. The Quebec government wants to severely **limit the jurisdiction** of where and how the commissions can act. The government feels that the commission is there to make recommendations, not to defend people in court. What they want to eliminate, for example, are cases like those where individuals claim that Quebec law discriminates against gays and lesbians. The human rights commission is the only way that individuals, who can't afford to hire lawyers to fight lengthy legal battles, can challenge the government.

News from the elsewhere in Canada

Nova Scotia made big strides recently in terms of G and L rights. Currently in Canada it is the most progressive province. At the beginning of June four same-sex couples made Canadian gay history when they **legally registered their relationships** in Nova Scotia on Monday. What **Bill 75** didn't give gay men and lesbians was the right to marry or the right to adopt each other's children..

And from the Égale list serve:

On June 28, 2001, Gay and lesbian couples in **Nova Scotia** were praising a landmark court ruling that gives them the **right to adopt** children and makes the province one of few that legally recognizes homosexual parents. A provincial **Supreme Court** judge handed down a decision that states the law preventing same-sex couples from adopting was unconstitutional. The case was launched by a lesbian couple who already have children, but who argued that they were being discriminated against because the province prevented both from being recognized as parents. Justice Deborah Gass said families are an essential part of the democratic society and can't be restricted based on sexual orientation. "Prohibiting a joint adoption where all the evidence indicates these adults are providing optimum care and loving . . . defeats the very purpose of the legislation," Gass wrote. "The evolution of the concept of family and the importance of family to children . . . support the contention that this exclusion is unjustified."

Stay tuned for developments here in **Quebec**. An **adoption case** is scheduled for September.

On July 6, 2001, omnibus **Saskatchewan legislation** to extend marital rights and responsibilities to **same-sex couples** received Royal Assent. The Miscellaneous Statutes (Domestic Relations) Amendment Acts amended the definition of "spouse" in some 24 provincial statutes to treat same-sex couples equally with opposite-sex married couples, in areas including **adoption**, spousal support, inheritance rights, pensions, survivor benefits, and matrimonial property.

Also on July 6, 2001, omnibus **Manitoba legislation** received Royal Assent. This legislation amends 10 other provincial statutes to extend rights and responsibilities to **same-sex couples** in areas such as superannuation, dependants' relief, family maintenance, survivor's benefits, pension benefits, and workers' compensation - although the Manitoba government made a deliberate decision to exclude adoption rights.

Although for many of us, for personal or aesthetic reasons **marriage** may not seem like the holy grail, in terms of our rights it is the one institution that would afford us complete legal equality. That is why it has become the HOTTEST issue for G and L rights here in Canada and elsewhere in the world. In May, a gay couple and a lesbian couple were "married" at **Toronto's** predominantly gay **Metropolitan Community Church** through the use of a marital law loophole called "banns." Whether or not the Ontario government will officially recognize the unions remains to be seen, but if it doesn't, prepare for a huge battle.

(Speaking of Marriage, **Sinead O'Connor** is getting married, but no ladies, sorry, to a man. This, after coming out to Curve magazine as a lesbian (not bisexual) last year. Fickle fickle fickle.)

On July 23, 2001, the **Supreme Court of British Columbia** began a two-week hearing of a landmark challenge to **Canada's marriage laws**. The new BC Liberal Government has recently announced that it will be withdrawing its legal action in support

of same-sex marriage. Additional **cases** are also proceeding in Ontario and Quebec.

All these legal changes in Canada point to one thing: public opinion on gays and lesbians is changing. An **opinion poll** released in June by Leger Marketing suggests that the vast majority of Canadians — nearly 76 per cent — believe homosexuals deserve the same rights as everyone else, while 53.1 percent — believe same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt children.

"There's a definite laissez-faire attitude of Canadians toward homosexuality," said Christian Bourque, vice-president of Leger Marketing. "If we had done the poll 15 years ago — my God, how different the results would have been".

That a majority of the 1,507 people polled are in favor of adoption of children by same-sex families shows just how dramatically our society has changed. That apparently a quarter of all people still think gays should not have equal rights shows just how far we have yet to go. The large gap between those who accept gay equality but who wouldn't let gays adopt children shows a dichotomy in opinions on this issue.

Pride events around the world

Gay Pride parades and parties drew millions of people to the streets in cities throughout the world this summer, as leather-clad men and women joined with drag queens in stilettos and suburban gay couples in shorts and sneakers to celebrate the GLBT community.

In **San Francisco**, Pride event organizers estimated that more than 1 million people turned out for the pride party, and pumped nearly \$150 million into the Bay Area economy, the San Francisco Chronicle reported. San Francisco's parade, led by the 500-strong Women's Motorcycle Contingent — a.k.a. Dykes on Bikes — featured 182 floats and contingents, the largest number of parade participants to date. SF Mayor Willie Brown was out of town, so openly-gay Supervisor Mark Leno was "mayor for the day."

In **Paris** police estimated that 500,000 people participated in the Pride celebration — the largest turnout ever. Bertrand Delanoë, the city's recently elected gay mayor, was the first Paris mayor to participate in the Pride event.

With the rainbow flag flying from **Berlin's** city hall for the first time, a crowd estimated at 1 million by event organizers turned out for their parade. Openly gay Klaus Wowereit, installed as interim mayor of Berlin (following the ousting of the previous mayor in a no-confidence vote), told a cheering crowd that he would lead the city in the fight against intolerance.

At **New York City's** 32nd annual Pride parade, 36 gay and lesbian couples held a mass commitment ceremony to kick off the parade. One of the couples, Sheneen Ellis and Alona Hartnett, were joined in the ceremony by their five children, according to the Times. One of the couple's children carried a sign that read, "Two mothers are better than having only one. I love mommy and mommy."

Toronto drew 800,000 spectators. On the down-side, police raided women's night at a bath-house, although similar entertainment for men usually goes unmolested. Lesbians reacted with outrage.

Joe Clark lead **Calgary's** gay pride. It's the first time that an ex prime minister participated in a Pride event.

Sadly many countries are still not open enough to celebrate diversity. **Moscow's** mayor refused a pride parade in July, stating that "such demonstrations outrage the majority of the capital's population...and force upon society unacceptable norms of behaviour".

The repercussions of homophobic policies abroad are felt even here in **Montreal**. Many immigrants from countries where homosexuality is still considered a crime decided this year not to participate in the celebrations because of the fact that the parade has become a televised event. Remember the courage of that group of Iranians in last year's parade (to give just one example). They fear that they might create problems for their families at home if their participation is noted.

Despite these absences, **Montreal's** own Pride event had over 80 groups participating in the community day and 750,000 spectators for the parade itself. Michael Hendricks and René Leboeuf publicly expressed their love in a commitment ceremony on the lawn of the CCA, just before the parade began. The couple will be going before the Quebec courts in the fall to ask for the right to marry. During the parade our families were especially well received...with the day's heat we certainly needed that encouragement. Pride celebrations brought about 40 million tourist dollars to Montreal.

International News

June 23 Reuters - **Belgium's** government has approved a bill allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry, a move that would make it the second country in the world to legalize homosexual weddings after the Netherlands.

June 27 Agence France-Presse- The minister of justice announced that a law allowing homosexuals to marry as well as to adopt children is currently being studied in **Taiwan**.

From **Amnesty International-** (June 22) Tortured, ill-treated, sexually assaulted, forcibly subjected to medical or psychiatric treatment, forced to flee their home countries in terror -- the world over, lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people

are at particular risk of human rights violations because of their sexual identity, Amnesty International said.

In a new report the organization describes the plight of the thousands of people who are tortured and ill-treated because their real or perceived sexuality is seen as threatening social order. The report includes documented examples from some 30 countries, but the full extent of the problem is undoubtedly much larger. In over 70 countries same-sex relations are considered a crime, and in some instances they incur the death penalty.

Amnesty also welcomed the recent initiative by the special mechanisms of **the United Nations Commission on Human Rights** -- including the Special Report on Torture -- to encourage the submission of information on human rights abuses related to sexual identity. "However, UN human rights bodies should give more attention to LGBT issues," Amnesty International said.

Relevant concern, as on July 19th a report went out that **52 Egyptian** men were on trial, accused of "homosexual practices." Although homosexuality is not explicitly a part of Egyptian law, many laws do relate to immoral acts and religious offenses. All pleaded not guilty.

Sports

The **gay games** will take place in **Sydney** next year and **Montreal** is one of the candidates for **2006** (check out the bid website: www.montreal2006.org) bidding against Chicago, Los Angeles and Atlanta. The Site Selection Committee was in Montreal from August 1 to 4 to evaluate the sports and cultural venues. A final decision will be made in October 25.

In Montreal there is a group called the **Comité de Non 2006** (a coalition of right-wing religious groups) who are publicly opposed to the idea of Montreal winning the bid for the games. They claim that it is a promotion of an undesirable lifestyle and besides it will spread AIDS. The group tried to open a bank account at The **Royal Bank** and were refused. The Royal Bank's PR person, Raymond Chouinard, said, "we cannot support, even indirectly, a group that has discriminatory goals." The Non committee plans to take the Royal Bank to court.

Research News

April 2001- **Journal of Fertility and Sterility**-Fenway community health center in Boston conducted a randomized study of approximately 60 fertile women doing donor insemination over the course of 189 cycles; half the cycles were **ICI** (vaginal) and half **IUI** (intrauterine). Overall probable conception rate per cycle was 9% for ICI and 15% for IUI. In many of these attempts the recipients inseminated twice per cycle. When the researchers analyzed cycles with only one insemination, the probable

conception rate per cycle was 5% for ICI and 14% for IUI. They also found that , regardless of the type of insemination (ICI or IUI), pregnancy was about 70% more likely to occur when recipients inseminated twice per cycle. Overall, however, the researchers concluded that IUI with frozen sperm is more effective than ICI. Despite these findings many recipients prefer to do vaginal inseminations at home, and many conceive this way. IUI is a more expensive and costly procedure and requires a medical professional to insert the catheter through the woman's cervical opening.

News from the Lesbian Mothers Association

UPCOMING MEETINGS:

For the kids: Sunday September 16 at 10:30 a.m.: visit to the Canadian Railway Museum. 122-A Rue St-Pierre in St. Constant. Cost: adults \$6 and kids \$3. By car: take the Champlain Bridge to Candiac and follow route 132 West. In Ste. Catherine, turn left (south) onto St. Pierre Street. After about 2 minutes, look for the museum on the left (east side of the street). About 30 minutes from downtown. By public transit call CIT Roussillon (450-638-2031) for information.

For adults only: Saturday September 22 at 8 pm: General Meeting to plan what we'd like to do as a group in the upcoming year. 2401 Coursol (metro Lionel Groulx).

For moms with teenagers: a new discussion group about issues specific to teenagers. A meeting will be held on **Saturday September 15**. For more information please contact coordinator Sacha Martin at home: 514-935-6725 or on her cell phone: 514-570-0068.

For adults only: Saturday October 13 at 8 pm: Discussion group. Topic : **Non-biological moms** (experiences, roles, problems, differences...). Biological mothers are also invited! 2401 Coursol (metro Lionel Groulx).

For everyone: Last week-end of October: Halloween Party. Time and place to be determined (we'll let you know by the end of September).

Bulletin Board

Births:

To Sylvia Edgerton and Sylvie Gascon a baby boy, **Carl** born April 2001. Brother to the exuberant Julien.

In April as well: To Pheleshia Hudson and Diane Jameson a baby boy **Graham**. Little brother to the very artistic and creative Melissa.

Congratulations:

To Heather Mullin on completing her Masters Degree In Social Work at McGill University.

And to Catherine Derry, as well, who completed her Masters in Education at Concordia University.

Congratulations and good luck to Lauren Beauchamp, a single mom with 3 kids who was just accepted into the Recreational Sciences program at Concordia, beginning this fall.

Well done to our coordinator Nicole Paquette, recently elected to the administrative counsels of both the Table de concertation des gais et lesbiennes du Quebec and the Centre communautaire des gais et lesbiennes de Montréal. A busy year ahead.

Happy Birthday:

To our sweet son Léo Paquette-Greenbaum, 3 years old or as he would poetically say “free years ode.”

Moved:

Beth Foster and Lesley Fellows, moms to the adorable Caleb, moved last July to Philidelphia. Both are doing fellowships and plan to eventually (we hope!), come back to Canada to practice. They can be reached by e-mail at: fosterbeth@hotmail.com

Thank-you:

Mona and Nicole would like to thank everyone who helped out with Pride this year: Amy Barratt, Lauren Beauchamp, Sylvia Edgerton, Sylvie Gascon, Pheleshia Hudson, Diane Jameson, Diane Labelle, Mary Lamey, Elyse Lavigne, Monica Perrazzo, Jacki Pinkston, Gabriel Pinkstone, Brigitte Masella and the tons of kids who made it all happen!!!

xox

The bulletin board is a free forum for members to communicate amongst each other. If you want to post an announcement in the next issue please send it to us at any time to

monicole@citenet.net or by post to AML, 2401 Coursol, Montreal, Quebec, H3J 1C8.

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