

wars of liberation

that summer
we wandered the islands
along the Dalmatian coast

I with my sketchbooks
he with his troubles
compressed in the bulk of his shoulders

the sea carried rumours of war
the waves shuddered in from Africa
a long slow telegraph

we talked in cafés
or on wharves
embraced by the murmuring sea
his eyes would dart like bright fish
through my questions

I struggled to capture him
the sun on his skin
or his hair catching fire with the wind

in the mornings I swam
trailing my arms through the transient waves
lured by the fish
flashing like missiles of light at my feet

I drifted away from the familiar moorings

while the sunlight
crackled the surface
like gunfire

Robin Metcalfe

Gay and Lesbian Supplement



Shooting Stars

for Clyde
with apologies that I took so
long to answer your letter

Yes, I do remember
the night we counted shooting stars
We left the others drinking on the beach
and making out in pickup trucks.
The smoke from burning tires
stained the stars above Baie Ste-Marie.

We walked into the August night
to read the golden riddle of the stars,
while all the village slept,
not dreaming that the sky was raining light,
until, upon the tide of dawn,
we drifted home to sleep.

We who kept the vigil saw the sign,
but did not understand it.
Although we saw his flaming arrows
falling through the sky,
we did not see the god of love arrive
on other wings than we expected.

I was not with you when he showed himself to you.
You stepped into light on St. Valentine's Day,
alone in the dark side of the year.
Did you shine for a moment
as you fell through the headlights
bright in the act of destruction?

Ten years too late I cannot warn you
that the god of love comes armed.

I always watch for shooting stars.
They fall from heaven like the tears of St. Sebastian,
as the sky, pierced by stars,
bleeds light.

Robin Metcalfe



Gay parents' first line of support is each other

by **Beth Ryan**

National Features Writer
Canadian University Press

When a pre-school teacher asked four-year-old Mark to draw a picture of his family, she expected a standard depiction of the nuclear family: a woman and a man and their children. So when he illustrated his family as two women and a collection of family friends and relatives, he is told he's done the exercise "wrong".

There are many alternatives to what North Americans traditionally refer to as the nuclear family, the most common being the single-parent family headed by a woman. But the newest variation is the nuclear family based on a same-sex couple.

Some gay couples are parenting the children they had in previous marriages, while others are trying to start a family through reproductive technology or adoption. But all of them are asserting their right to be parents and are having to prove they are capable, sensitive parents regardless of their sexual preference.

"Lesbian moms and families offer an alternative to the traditional family model," says Karen, a lesbian mother who lives with her partner and both of their children.

"It's an alternative lifestyle that is growthful for kids because it teaches them about differences and how to accept them. It teaches them about loving people for who they are, whatever they are."

Hans Mohr, a social worker and former president of the Vanier Institute of the Family, says that the family is simply a group of people who care for each other. He has studied our concepts of the family and says we have been trapped by our own structures.

"In reality, the family has always been defined by caretaking. Who gives care for whom? That is the family," he says.

People must redefine family support and move away from the idea that the family is a structure that cannot change," says Mohr.

Mohr says humans need to live in a group of interdependent individuals. The family should be what people want it to be and he says the law should be reformed to reflect family values.

Support groups for lesbian mothers and gay fathers are growing in several Canadian cities and even in some small towns. The parents are brought together by the painful experiences they've endured in their struggle to legitimize their alternative family unit.

While lesbian mothers face the same resistance from a heterosexual society as gay fathers do, their circumstances and concerns are often very different.

When Donna separated from her husband, she got full custody of their young son. But when she later took her ex-husband to court to get the support payments, he refused to pay and sued for joint custody.

"His lawyer tried to use my lesbianism against me in court but

the judge didn't accept that argument. He eventually got more decision-making power about our son and I got my support money," says Donna.

"But in order to get the child support, I lost a lot of dignity. He tried to muddy my name in the court."

"It's becoming less and less unusual for a gay father to get custody of children after the marriage breaks up because the mother doesn't automatically get custody any more. Under the new family law, custody is joint unless there's a problem with one of the parents. Precedent has been established by cases in Québec," says Stephen, who also works with Gay Fathers of Ottawa.

Unlike Donna, Karen has never faced resistance from her son's father.

"I never had any problems with custody because I was never married. I left my common-law partner when my son was four and it was fairly amicable," she says.

Karen's son sees his father regularly and she still maintains a friendly relationship with him, but she says her son misses his father and sometimes wishes he could live with him "in a more socially acceptable family" instead of his all-female family.

Gay and lesbian parents say while they get little negative feedback from their children about their sexuality, their ex-spouses and institutions like the school system refuse to accept their alternative lifestyle.

"The children take it better if the parents are positive. If one

parent uses the child as ammunition against their spouse, it will damage the child," says Stephen.

"I've raised my son from infancy in a gay household," says Tony of his seventeen-year-old son. "The subject of my sexuality seldom comes up."

"Once, when he was 12, he asked if I'd ever remarry. And I said, 'No, you know that won't happen. Do you want me to?' And he said he didn't care who it was, but he just didn't want me to be lonely."

"Our son is surrounded by people who love and care for him.

His grandparents are not homophobic and they respect my relationship. They don't bad-mouth me to my son," says Donna.

"My son was 4 when I left his father and realised I was a lesbian. He was young enough that it was natural for him to see me with a woman. It's only been in the last year that he realized it was different for other families," says Karen.

But as the gay parents work to foster a positive environment for their children, almost everyone else is setting up barriers.

Continued on page 10

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