

LESBIAN PARENTING: LIVING WITH PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Katherine Arnup, ed. Charlottetown,
PEI: gynergy books, 1995.

by *Lisa Freedman*

Before reading this book, I wondered what a collection of papers on lesbian mothering would cover. Do we parent any differently than others? Do we teach toilet training in a way unique to lesbian mothers? Is there a certain type of food that lesbian mothers feed their offspring? The value of *Lesbian Parenting: Living with Pride and Prejudice* is that it clearly focuses on those aspects of parenting, and being a parent, that are unique to lesbian mothers. It sets about examining these through a collection of essays written for the most part from a first-person perspective.

If you are thinking of becoming a lesbian mother, if you are a lesbian mother, if you are the child of a lesbian(s), or if you're one of those who are fighting for equal rights for gays and lesbians, there is a story in this book for you.

The styles of writing range from academic to conversational and for the most part I found them quite accessible. The writers come from a variety of backgrounds with diverse experiences and include the voices of parents, children, academics, and advocates. The book is divided into five areas, each canvassing a number of issues. These sections encompass choosing parenthood, defining family, raising children, reflections on identity, and the law.

The first section deals with choosing parenthood. I was impressed with the choice of language for this chapter. Lesbians for the most part do not find themselves pregnant or with a family by "accident." It is a choice in the real sense of the world, usually preceded by thorough discussion and soul-searching.

Most parenting books begin with a chapter on "conception" and "birth"

but this book quickly acknowledges that not all lesbians become mothers through conception and birth. The myriad of ways that lesbians become pregnant is canvassed. Adoption (including foreign adoption); entering into a relationship with a woman who already has children; and making the decision not to have children are also discussed. There is also discussion of different reproductive technologies, infertility, and other conception difficulties.

The second section deals with the definition of families and describes different circumstances in which women (and men) find themselves when forming new families. The journey to have and maintain some notion of a family unit is well-covered, with articles covering experiences, problems, and solutions that most people never encounter and could not even fathom.

The third section deals with the topic of raising children and here again, the unique problems that lesbian mothers face are well-canvassed. How to explain why your children do not have a daddy, how to raise boys, how to explain where babies come from, how to merge lesbian-feminist politics with the desire of children "not to be embarrassed," are just some of the questions that are addressed.

The fourth section deals with identity—identities of mothers coming out to adult children, children with lesbian mothers, disabled lesbian mothers, black lesbian mothers, and lesbian mothers in other cultures. This section could probably fill its own book as people's struggle with identity issues are as numerous as the individuals themselves.

The fifth section deals with the law, through the courts, legislatures, and bureaucracies. This chapter, more than the others, reflects the struggle that lesbian mothers have to go through to parent their children in a society that has formulated laws that work their damndest against recognizing lesbian families as a legal unit. Yet, the law is ever-changing and this book went to press before some important court victories in the area of

lesbian adoption were won; this chapter will most bear the burden of becoming out-dated.

Will the rest of the book stand the test of time? For the most part it will. Future editions will benefit from the existence of research being done on lesbian parents and the children of lesbians, and from advances in reproductive technology. Growing bodies of knowledge in these areas will enhance decision-making when choosing parenthood. This is a book that will hold a prominent place on my bookshelf. As I find with most parenting books, I tend to read those parts that relate to my parenting experiences or issues that I am about to address. At the current time I found those chapters on choosing parenting and the law the most interesting. As my children get older and more verbal, the chapters on defining family, raising children, and reflections on identity will become more relevant.

The stories recounted here are a mix of sadness, struggle, triumph, and accomplishment. What is missing, though, is humour. And there is humour in being a lesbian mother. When the three and four year-olds at our day care were discussing why the twins had two moms, using the logic that only kids possess, they surmised "two babies, two moms." They did have one final word on the subject: they thought that having two moms was "cool."



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