

GAY FATHERS

**Some of their
stories, experience, and advice**

**30th Anniversary Edition
Reprint 2008**

Gay Fathers of Toronto

Looking Back Thirty Years Later

In 1978 a group of gay men who were also fathers banded together to establish a peer support group for themselves and other gay fathers. These men had created families the only way then possible, in a relationship with the mother of their children. Nevertheless, facing an unwelcoming world they wanted to reconcile their conflicted desires and emotions. Later in 1981 a few men associated with the then 3-year-old **Gay Fathers of Toronto** organization published a collection of their experiences related to "coming out", of their desires and dreams, of their fears and disappointments, and of their ongoing relationships with their children, [ex-]wives, and partners. Their book, *Gay Fathers*, seems to have been the first of its type ever published.

Since then legal and social changes have profoundly altered gay men's lives and opportunities in 21st-century Canada. Single, coupled, and married [GBQ] men can start families by adoption. Co-parenting with a woman – often a lesbian – or with a lesbian couple is another option, and a growing number of men start their own families through surrogacy arrangements. Government-supported queer parenting programs are now an integral part of the programs at **The 519 Community Centre** and the **Sherbourne Health Centre**. The course **Daddies & Papas 2B** - observing its 5th anniversary - helps GBQ would-be fathers determine the parenting approach best suited to their personal situation. And many gay men still become fathers in traditional marriages.

In bygone years, some men might never have fulfilled their desires; others led secret, dual lives. Without doubt it is much less stressful today to live wholesome satisfying lives as out gay men. Indeed that possibility entices more married men to come out, and GFT still supports them as each man finds the path that best fits him and his family's situation. Yes, 2008 is very different from 1978, in part due to those men who contributed to *Gay Fathers* in 1981. Yet, notwithstanding the better social environment of 21st-century Canada, during the man's period of transition his emotions -- anticipation and fear, dreams and stress, hopes and despair -- are frequently nearly identical to those described in 1981.

We are grateful that they shared their experience during a more perilous time. Their courage and their insights and their willingness to share that experience continues to inform and help men.

Paul Carr
father of 3 (out in 1996)

FIRST EDITION

Cover Derek Rainer
Design Margaret McCabe
Layout Sandy Hellard
Typesetting PinkType
Printer Ryerson Copy Shop

Published with support from the Gay Community Appeal of Toronto.

ISBN 0-969-0947-0-1

© 1981

Gay Fathers of Toronto, Box F, 730 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Canada M5S 2R4

SECOND EDITION

Cover Derek Rainer
Design Margaret McCabe
Layout Sandy Hellard
Typesetting Mars Media Communications Inc.
Printer Ryerson Copy Shop

Published with support from the Gay Community Appeal of Toronto.

Gay Fathers of Toronto

© 1981

Second Printing, December 1983

Third Printing, June 1987

GFT

P.O. Box 187, Station F, Toronto, Canada M4Y 2L5

(416) 364-4164 or 967-0430

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data Main entry under title:

Gay fathers: some of their stories, experience and advice

Bibliography: p.

ISBN 0-9690947-0-1

1. Homosexuals, Male — Family relationships.

2. Fathers. 3. Father and child. I. Gay Fathers of Toronto.

HQ76.2.C3G29

306.8'742

C82-4911-5

THIRD EDITION

Project Oversight Chris Veldhoven (The 519) & Paul Carr (GFT)
Scan and typesetting Mark Knauf

Third Printing, June 2008

Reproduced with permission from

Gay Fathers of Toronto

Box 43, Station "F"

Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4Y 2L4

Tel: 416-925-9872 Ext. 2124

info@gayfathers-toronto.com

<http://www.gayfathers-toronto.com/>

and with support from

Queer Parenting Programs

The 519 Community Centre

519 Church Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4Y 2C9

Tel: 416-355-6780

Fax: 416-392-0519

queerparenting@the519.org

<http://www.the519.org/QueerParenting/>

Part of the **LGBTQ Parenting Connection**

<http://www.lgbtqparentingconnection.ca>



**For gay fathers
to tell them they are not alone.**

Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes.

— Oscar Wilde
Lady Windermere's Fan

Yet each man kills the things he loves,
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!

— Oscar Wilde
The Ballad of Reading Gaol

"The love that dare not speak its name" is such a great affection as there was between David and Jonathan, such as Plato made the very basis of his philosophy, and such as you find in the sonnets of Michelangelo and Shakespeare. It is that deep, spiritual affection that is as pure as it is perfect. It dictates and pervades great works of art. It is in this century misunderstood, so much misunderstood that it may be described as the "Love that dare not speak its name," and on account of it I am placed where I am now. It is beautiful, it is fine, it is the noblest form of affection. There is nothing unnatural about it. That it is so, the world does not understand. The world mocks at it and sometimes puts one in the pillory for it."

— Excerpted from Oscar Wilde's reply to the Solicitor General in the second of Wilde's three trials. The crown prosecutor had asked him to explain a phrase he had used in a letter to Lord Alfred Douglas.

All trials are trials for one's life, just as all sentences are sentences of death.

— Oscar Wilde
De Profundis



Detail from Blake's *The Good and Evil Angels*. 1795. London, Tate Gallery

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

I INTRODUCTION

When Two Worlds Collide, or Telling My Wife About It: David's Story

II COMING OUT

A Gay Father Comes Out: Terry's Story

Coming Out to Yourself

Coming Out to Your Wife

New Play Tells Familiar Story: Howard's Tale

More Problems and Another Play

Coming Out to Your Children: Eric's Story

One Woman Tells Her Story: Joan's Story

III RE-ESTABLISHING YOUR LIFE

Are You in Danger if You Come Out?

It's Time You Found a Nice Man and Settled Down: Joel's Story

A Gay Father Readjusts: Derek's Story

IV GAY PARENTING

Shared Parenting

Terry's Story Continues

Sole Custody: A Gay Father, His Lover, and Their Daughter

Aspects of Gay Parenting Within Marriage

In the Closet

Out to Your Wife

Out to Your Children

Out to Everyone

Gay Parents and the Law

V THE FUTURE

AFTERWORD

APPENDIX A: GAY FATHERS' GROUPS

Gay Fathers of Toronto

Gay Fathers Coalition

APPENDIX B: A SAMPLE OF ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL HATE LITERATURE

APPENDIX C: WHAT DO I DO NOW?

SELECTED READINGS

PREFACE

This book has been written and published by men who know the special joys and special fears of being gay and being fathers. It is written for our children and their mothers in the hope that they may read it some day and understand more fully and deeply what was going on. But it is written chiefly for other gay fathers, those who are unknown to us. We write for them so that they may better understand what is happening to them now. As far as we know, the book is the first of its kind — the first attempt by a group of gay fathers to talk about themselves and their lives in their own voices.

In making our statement, we have chosen to remain anonymous. We do so partly because the book is a collective effort. But we do so also because we are thinking not of ourselves, but of our children and our families. Society still inflicts painful wounds on those it calls "homosexuals." Indeed, it often uses other words for them, words that are as sharp and destructive as fang and claw. Most homosexuals, however, who feel at all good use another word. They call themselves gay, but society regards their use of that word as theft and for the most part will not use it. But society, of course, makes no protest about its theft of the words that give pain — "queer," "faggot," and "gearbox" among many others.

When it speaks its poisoned names for us, society is also calling us dirty, sick, sinful, criminal, and perverted. Faced with this indiscriminate barrage, those who stand by and support homosexuals — their parents, friends, wives, children — also become targets for the anger and injury that is directed at homosexuals. Many now stand and face the worst society can do to us, but we want to spare others — especially our children — from the most bitter and punitive reactions that this book may trigger.

We welcome your comments on what is written here. There is much we have not said about ourselves that should be said. We will no doubt be accused of giving a one-sided view here, a view biased by the interests of male homosexuals who are fathers. We did not set out to say everything that could be or ought to be said on this topic. We claim only that what we are saying is true to our experience. What we have said needs to be said. We do not deny there is more to say.

The book is the work of many people. All of the two hundred or so men who over the last three years have had fleeting or extended contact with Gay Fathers of Toronto are in the book. Some of them are there as little more than echoes, while others are in it vividly like characters in a play. All of them are real and true, although truth, as Oscar Wilde said, is rarely pure and never simple. The people around us are in the book too — women, children, friends, and family — although the book is not about them in the same way it is about us.

The writing of the text was the work of many hands. We will identify them as L, R, M, R, and H, E, T, and H. For those who need a name, therefore, the author is LoRMaR HEaTH. So Lormar Heath did it all, but he (or she) will never make public appearances or sign autographs for devoted readers.

Our thanks to the Gay Community Appeal of Toronto for their generous support of the project and to our other benefactors in GFT itself. Some of them gave until it hurt so they we see this book in print. We are indebted, too, to Derek Rainer who designed the cover. Margaret McCabe typed and re-typed the manuscript several times and with cut-and-paste and valuable advice made the final product look good. We thank PinkType and the Ryerson Copy Shop who set the text in type and printed it.

Gay Fathers of Toronto

I. INTRODUCTION

Homosexuals live their lives in many ways. The images we have of them often come to us as stereotypes that range from the outrageous, flamboyant gays to the clones with jeans, sneakers, checked shirts, and carefully trimmed moustaches; from the "radicals" waving banners in the street, to the suburban gays living in houses behind white picket fences. The reality of their lives is, however, always more complex, human, and interesting than these stereotypes. One partial reality, however, is the homosexual who lives behind the facade of the straight life with a wife and children.

Is this your situation? Perhaps the pressures of family expectations and society at large were too great for you to avoid marriage. ("When are you going to get married and settle down?" was the persistent question, delivered with knowing looks.) Perhaps you believed counsellors, friends, or psychiatrists who told you it was just a phase you were going through. Perhaps you desperately wished your deepest fears were not true. And how better to disprove them than by getting married? Perhaps no one before had ever asked you to get married, and you took this as a sign that you were "normal" after all.

For whatever reasons, many men who are homosexuals do marry or establish continuing relationships with women and do father children. The lives of these men often appear to work for some time. Then the strains begin, and what started as a dream becomes a nightmare. What started with promise and hope begins to appear as a terrible mistake that cannot be rectified without doing unthinkable damage, both to the father and to those he loves dearly. His life is often fraught with the fears and anxiety that come from leading a double life — the increasingly persistent fantasies and perhaps the increasingly common but furtive excursions into homosexual activity. He lives with the recurring promises he makes to himself to reform, and with the sense of defeat and desperation that comes when the promises are always broken again. He lives with the terrible delusion that he is the only person in the world who is married, a father — and gay.

This book is for those men — and there are many of them — who are asking what it means when father is gay. It is directed to those men who may now be ready to accept the fact that they are fathers and also gay. It is directed to those who wish now to deal with this fact directly and honestly. We, the writers, are a group of men who began from a position in which each of us was living in a family setting when the realization finally dawned as to who we were and what we had done. This realization did not make us want to wish away the past. We accept the fact that we were, or still are, married, and we accept the fact that we are fathers. And we acknowledge the love that made these circumstances. We accept what is. We do not want to turn back the clock to start again without the women and children who are now part of our lives; but we also acknowledge that we are homosexual and that we must face this fact and somehow deal with it.

We are gay fathers, and you may be one too. If you are, we are writing this book now for you. We know the lonely road you are on. We know because we have traveled that way before you, and we remember the feelings you have now as our own at one time. We know the doubt that says "Why am I on this road at all?" and we know the need to talk to someone else about what lies ahead on the road. We know how important it was when we were beginning to have help from those who had traveled farther along the road than we. Now that more of us have made this journey, we believe it is time to talk about it and to make at least a rough map showing the valleys of despair it sometimes goes through, the peaks of joy it sometimes reaches, and the sense of relief, comradeship, and acceptance that comes to those who stick with it until the way becomes wide and comfortable. Some of us were

desperate before we found the road. A thought sometimes that to take flight or to destroy ourselves was the only answer to the problem. And we sometimes thought of taking others with us — everyone in the car, driving over the cliff. We know, and always knew, that these were not good answers, but we now know too, that there are indeed better ways of dealing with the problem. We hope that this book will help you to find those ways, as we have.

We assume, if you are now reading this introduction — whether in the public library, furtively in a bookstore, or tucked into your copy of *Health and Strength* — that you have reached stage of awareness, if not of acceptance. You are beginning to recognize a part of yourself the society still largely regards as taboo. Homosexuals are the modern-day lepers, as the opinion still prevails among people that we are sick, sinful, perverted, and misguided. You are experiencing the conflict between what society expects of you and what you are coming to realize is a deep and unalterable part of you. You may be aware only of a nagging discomfort that is becoming ever-more insistent. Perhaps you have not asked yourself questions about all of this, perhaps you are bursting with them.

"Can I face this? What should I do with my life? Should I try again to forget it, or go on with the lies? How do I tell my wife and what do I tell her? What about the kids? Should I tell them, my mother, the mailman? What will the guys at work say? How much do I tell? *What should I do?*"

There are no easy answers to these questions — at least none that we can give. We don't know you, your mother, your wife and kids, or your mailman. We *do* know what happened to us and what we are doing now. We can offer a glimpse of our lives to give you a sense of what may ahead; but everyone is different, and what happens to you will depend on you, the people around you, and the circumstances that bind you and others together.

Take heart. Don't be discouraged. At least read further in this book, and make up your own mind as to whether you have anything to learn from us. Knowing what has happened to others like you may reduce the guesswork in what you now do. We believe there are some generalizations that can be made about our experiences and we hope these may be helpful to others. We have stood where you stand and can look back now fairly calmly at events and feelings that were surely terrifying at the time.

Who are we? We are the Gays Fathers of Toronto. In 1981 our group had thirty-one members. Since the group began in early 1978, about two hundred other men have been in contact with the group. Some were never more than an unidentified voice on the phone. Others came for a while to our meetings and then, for various reasons, left. Some have continued with the group and worked to make it something that is very important and meaningful to us. We meet every two weeks and each meeting sees a dozen to fifteen people in attendance. We feel that we are making progress, both individually and collectively, in working out a variety of answers the problems involved in being a father and being gay.

Perhaps the following article from the February 1980 issue of the *Body Politic* says briefly and well who we are.

GAY FATHERS FIND A WARM WELCOME AT TORONTO'S GFT

The responsibilities and burdens of parenthood are well documented. They become even heavier to bear when the parent is also gay.

As gay fathers and mothers we must consider those we have brought into the world, and our partners who have shared in this, as a very important part of our lives. We have the need to express our

sexual identity but we do not want to jeopardize our relationship with our children or damage them in any way. We feel held back by the parental instinct to protect our children — what will breaking free, coming out, do to our children? With no one to turn to, with very little literature on the topic freely available, with the prevailing societal attitudes saying: "Broken marriages damage children, it is wrong, immoral, bad," the emerging gay father or mother often feels lost, condemned to a life he or she feels increasingly intolerable, and totally alone. Unless the gay person is unusually brave, the first attempts at gay contact are often clumsily anonymous or deliberately false, and to someone still so unsure of him — or herself, can result in a drawing back to the safety of familiar (i.e., family) situations, and a blocking of further healthy development as a gay person. If only there were someone to talk to who would understand!

Gay Fathers of Toronto addresses itself directly to this need. The different lesbian organizations have contacts for gay mothers, but very little exist for gay fathers. So GFT, in existence for two years, offers support, understanding and direct experience of the problems facing the gay man who is a parent.

Our basic message is *you are not alone*. We have all been there, or are still there. We know what it's like. Our members represent most facets of the gay father situation: some are divorced, some still married, some are separating, some have custody (full or shared) of their children, some are "out" to their wives, others are not. Some are not even fathers, though we all stand in a meaningful relationship to some child.

One of our strengths lies in our contradicting stereotypes. We share the concerns of all parents for our children's good, and we want to see the kind of sexual stereotyping that helped shape and distort our lives put out of society, and especially out of the education system.

We are more widespread than our name indicates. We trek regularly from Hamilton, Guelph, Peterborough and smaller centres in between, from the suburbs and the inner city. Our meetings are held, usually every two weeks, in various members' homes, and take the form of a discussion group followed by a pot luck supper, wine and relaxed socializing.

At the moment, we are engaged in putting together a book for gay fathers to reach out further than our own boundaries, again with the message: *you are not alone*.

To find out more about the Gay Fathers of Toronto, listen for information about our meetings on 923-GAYS, or call (416) 532-2333 or (416) 967-0430. Those gay fathers who live out of Toronto, or who cannot call, write to us c/o MCC, 730 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2R4. We welcome input from groups or individuals in other cities, so if you have something you think is relevant to us, or if you think we have something that could be relevant to you, please call or write.

We are still a small group, yet we know that the number of men who are gay and parents is large. Perhaps we will hear from you. *You are not alone*.

This book is not a guide for gay fathers. It does not set out to say: "Do *this* and *that* will result." It doesn't even say: "We know we're right." It does say: "We know; we understand."

From the personal stories that follow you may draw parallels to your own experience. You may even see things in them that you would wish to avoid. That's always a help!

The book contains four chapters. The introduction provides an overview and the three following chapters deal with a progression of themes and problems that are common to the experiences of gay fathers: coming out, re-establishing life as a gay father, living with children and others as a gay father, and gay parenting and the law. The book also has a chapter on the future — a chapter that is not a chapter because it has yet to be written. To help you with your own future, the book ends with three appendixes. One describes the organization and objectives of gay fathers' groups, another prepares you to deal with anti-homosexual hate literature, and the third discusses steps you may want to take after you have read the book. There is also a selected bibliography on homosexuality in general, and gay parenting in particular.

It can, of course, be read in any order you wish. It's your book. It's our book, too. It has our pain, our joys, and our experiences within its covers, and it contains one great truth that cannot be repeated too often: someone understands, someone cares. *YOU ARE NOT ALONE*.

Next is the story of a father who thought he was alone and who tried over many years to sort it all out by himself. Indeed, it is the aloneness that makes the gay father's life difficult. He sees no alternative but to face by himself the harshest verdict his family, friends, and colleagues can render. He likely believes he would condemn his own conduct just as strongly as they, if he were in their place. We draw no moral from David's story. We only say that no matter what you have done, or what you think you have done, someone has already been there before you — and survived. Some of the survivors are writing for you now.

WHEN TWO WORLDS COLLIDE, OR TELLING MY WIFE ABOUT IT: DAVID'S STORY

It was not my decision to tell my wife that I was a homosexual. I could not decide to tell her because I had hardly faced the fact myself. Instead, I lived in two worlds: one a secret world that I escaped to more and more frequently over the years; and the other the normal, everyday world in which I led an apparently happy married life. The everyday life was the more important one to me and I could not conceive of leaving it, as I would have to do if I told my wife about the secret me and the secret world I lived in. I came to tell her about that secret part of me, about the me I tried for so long to suppress, only when the two worlds finally collided. It was a collision she was totally unaware of, but I had watched it happen and — after first refusing to believe it had happened — I told her about it, too. And then my married life fell apart and I had to build, slowly and painfully, a new, honest, but basically better world around the homosexual me.

If I thought about it, I knew I was gay, but I chose not to think about it. I knew it from some of the earliest memories I could recall about myself. The strongest early memory I have of childhood is being put to bed and waiting in the dark for the images to appear in my mind. The forms I saw were masculine only, beautiful, the muscles hard, the bodies nude except for the small, tight cloths around the loins. I saw these forms floating upwards with outstretched arms through blue water to a bright light above them. Then I would see myself looking just like these other figures and following them.

All of this sense of self and sexuality I ignored when I came to consciousness as myself. I suppressed these images and my homosexuality more or less successfully for many years. My experiences

with sex after puberty were limited largely to fantasy and masturbation. One of my friends told me recently that he thought of me at that time as being asexual. In my late twenties, the strains began to appear. My friends married while I had almost no contact with women my own age except as wives of my friends. I began a career after university and settled into the role of eligible bachelor. With some money saved I went back to university for graduate training. Although I did well academically, the strains of the new life made me ask what I was doing it all for and why I was so much alone. I had spells of feeling that I was crazy, mad, perverted, sick. I thought I needed to see a psychiatrist, but I wasn't sure about what. I would stare at the list of psychiatrists in the phone book but lose my nerve before I could complete a call. What would I use as a reason for calling them? I used to hint to psychologists I knew in the university counselling service that I would like to talk to them professionally. Despite their encouragement, I never did so. I would stand in the stacks of the university library completely alone on a Saturday afternoon and tremble as I reached for a book on homosexuality, petrified that someone would see me take it from the shelf and know the truth that I could not accept about myself.

This drift towards self-destruction was halted abruptly when I was invited to a party that included both students and faculty members. It was not the kind of circle I usually moved in. It was fast and open in ideas and attitudes. It was stimulating on many levels. Afterwards I agonized over whether I could phone that girl I'd had the argument with and that I felt attracted to. Weren't we just arguing to have something to talk about? Although I waited until the wrong moment to call, I got a date and everything fell rapidly into place. She seduced me and we were engaged to be married. To the amazement of family and friends, we were married less than six weeks after we met.

My marriage solved my problems. I no longer thought I was falling apart; I no longer woke up in the morning and found I was too dizzy to stand up unless I lay without moving for an hour or so. I began to think of myself as a happily married heterosexual, and this state of affairs continued for more than two years. I'm not sure what happened in our marriage to change things, but there came a time when the old images started coming back. It was as though marriage had released a block that enabled me to be sexual in reality, not just in fantasy. And then I began asking myself what kinds of sexual experience I really desired. Marriage for me let the sexual genie out of the bottle and once he was out there was no way of putting him back in. And there was no doubt that this genie was male and that I wanted him. Although I struggled against these feelings, I rationalized that they could be justified on the grounds of experimentation. In any case, my wife was less interested in sex now than I was and I simply had to find additional expression for my drive. That's when I began to create the secret world where I could give expression to my fantasies.

Moving to Toronto in the middle 1960s gave a practical opportunity for the creation of this hidden and exquisitely desirable world. And that's when the double life, the lying and duplicity, began in earnest. Before my marriage the fantasies were my problem only. Now I knew that they involved others and that I was playing with fire. My job was a particularly good one, visible in some degree publicly, and one where the solid virtues of monogamous marriage and family were the expected public norm.

My slide into the secret world began with buying beefcake pictures in magazine stores on Yonge Street. These I bought and carefully concealed at home or in the office. For the practical reason that secure hiding places were small, the size of my library never grew much. I simply tossed out the old magazines as I bought new ones. Then the guys who sold the magazines became more interesting than the pictures in the magazines and I visualized doing mad things with them. But where could I do it? Then I thought of another image that had haunted my youth: the steam bath. I walked into the Romans on a Christmas Day when I had gone out of the house to buy some item that had been

forgotten for dinner. I simply had to see what was behind that door. Stairs were behind it and at the top of them a mirror in which a face appeared as soon as I entered the hall. I fled, terrified. But it was not too long thereafter that I returned and went up the stairs on what was to be the first of many, many visits.

The baths perfectly embodied my childhood fantasies: the men drifting around half-naked, the anonymity of the relationships, the muscles, the concealing and revealing steam, and above all that sense of sanctuary from society and its rules. And all of this was cleverly concealed from the other world and yet so easily accessible to it.

Beyond all these pleasures, there was also the blinding flash of orgasm with another male, the feeling of satisfaction and exhaustion too deep to express or even think about. And everything shut in this tiny, self-contained world. One could walk into it for two hours and out of it again into the other world with no fear that the two worlds could possibly collide. But keeping them apart became more and more difficult for me. First, the secret world began to take more and more time; and it required more and more elaborate lies to explain it away. Then came the shock of recognizing people in the baths. I thought I was the only person from the real world I lived in who would ever go to such places. Where the other people in this world came from in reality was something I didn't care to think about. But then I began to meet friends, colleagues from work, even neighbours. Besides these meetings there came also the anxiety of dealing with social diseases and groin bugs.

But I still could keep it all balanced, I told myself, as I sank deeper and deeper into the gay reality. At the same time, however, I was also strengthening the straight facade. If a child had not come into our married life, I might have faced the lie on my own. Earlier in our marriage, I had wanted children, but my wife did not, as a career was more important to her. When she had established herself in her career, she then decided we should have a child and I went along with the idea because it was part of the straight world to which I was so strongly attached. I told myself that a child would help me to give up the secret gay world that was causing me greater and greater anxiety and that I was coming to hate, although its allure was as strong as ever. When my wife could not conceive a child we began the steps leading to adoption and in a remarkably short time (since children for placement were in short supply) we had a baby in our house. Children's Aid had speeded our application because we were obviously the perfect couple who could give a child a home with all the advantages. All of this made me think of myself as being somehow a "normal" male with the potency of a father and all the hallmarks of the straight world. I felt I had now no reason why I should not devote myself exclusively to the straight world because I had demonstrated that I had all the sexual qualities and abilities that the straight world required. So I resolved at this time to give up the gay life completely. I told myself I now had no reason to want to continue in it and for several months I carried out the full role of the faithful husband and loving father. But it could not and did not last.

When I slid back into the secret gay world, it was via the baths again. The tension began to build strongly in my exclusively straight world. After a year or so, the child had changed our marriage completely. After initial indifference to the idea of being a father, I came to love our daughter deeply and, indeed, I was in many ways both mother and father to her. I felt I could respond to her more fully and completely than my wife could. My relationship with my wife began to change slowly, but with the inevitability of a glacier moving down a mountain. In the back of my mind, I began to realize that I now needed my daughter and I needed gay sex, but I didn't really need my wife.

Finally, the pressures became intolerable for me, although my wife claimed not to have noticed them during those months. We had agreed always to be open with one another and to talk about what we really felt. Yet I couldn't bring myself to talk about this deepest part of me because I

knew her knowledge of it would destroy our marriage, and this, I told myself, I did not want. At the same time, I could not see how I was going to go on. Secretly, I was moving further into the gay world. I wanted to meet people as people and wanted to get away from anonymous sex. A few months before the collision of the worlds, I decided to have myself circumcised. There were some medical reasons for doing this, but I knew that there were deeper reasons. The result was a symbolic cutting as well as a physical one and I knew I was moving in a direction I could not retreat from, although I knew too that I was moving towards a personal disaster.

The strain began to tell on me. I would wake up at night screaming and angry. The anger was directed, I knew, at my wife, but I was never able to tell her what was bothering me. Although she must have known that I was profoundly disturbed about something, she always accepted my explanations of the incidents and outbursts that began to trouble our relationship. More lies. She asked me if she were the cause of my disturbance. Another lie. Finally a kind of calm descended on our relationship. Everything was suspended. I was waiting for something to happen. But I could not decide to make it happen. Once I lay in my cubicle at the bath and listened to two guys in the next room talking about their wives' acceptance of their homosexuality. I couldn't believe it; they were matter-of-factly talking about how their wives had adapted to the fact that they were gay. One guy said something like, "She cried, but finally decided she wanted me even if I was gay." The other man was separated from his wife, but on good terms with her. Neither of them had children. I wanted to walk in on them and talk, but as usual I did nothing. I just lay on my bed afraid, hardly daring to breathe.

Then I went one afternoon to the bath and found it almost empty, as I knew it would be on a lovely August day. But there was that one man again in one of the farthest rooms from all the others. I had gone at such a time hoping that I wouldn't find anybody interesting. But I had been with him before and it was one of those tantalizing unions that asks for more to make it even closer to perfection. He was almost the perfect realization of my fantasy, although we said virtually nothing to each other and I never knew his name. What kind of pain he was acting out I never got to know, although it was obvious from his physical injury and the overdeveloped body that he was determined to win some of life's races even if he couldn't compete in the more usual ones. I wish I had talked to him. More recently I had been trying to combine talk with the sex and I had even had some spectacular successes, although they were always short term because I could never take such relationships outside the secret world. All of this seeking for communication other than sexual in my secret world was simply taking me further down that slope to the point where the next step would plunge me into the abyss.

With this man, talk wasn't really necessary. And in any case, I had gotten to the point where I didn't care whether the next step would bring calamity. However petrified I was by what I could see coming, I knew I would take even more steps in the same direction. I couldn't go back. I tried to think about telling my wife, but it was impossible. That was a step I knew I could not take. At least, I knew it was a step I could not *yet* take. I don't know if I ever would have told her voluntarily, before circumstances compelled me to do so. But in those days, I did at least think about it and I did wish I could face the lie and talk with her about it. But I didn't. Instead I went that afternoon to the bath and fucked the beautiful body — tall, slim, muscular — of the guy I did not know. He took the choice out of my hands; he threw the die I could not cast. As it was he had the clap and some days later I saw the symptoms in me. I phoned the bath and asked the voice that answered to tell body beautiful what I had gotten from him. He was easy to identify, as he was a regular at the bath and, indeed, seemed almost to live there. (Sometimes I thought I did too.) A week or so later I saw him in the same gay doctor's office where I had taken problems of this kind before. As I sat in the waiting room, he came out of the examination room and swept past giving me only that blink of the eyes that says, "I see

you."

The week had been hell for me. I knew what had happened, but I couldn't believe it. It had happened, but it wasn't true. The cameras would be rolled back to play the scene again. Chance, luck, something would spare me. But I knew, or rather feared — because I could not understand what was happening to me except as a spectator — that I had made the fatal slip. Had I really broken my rule: "No sex at home for at least three days after a contact at the bath?" Had it been two days, three days, five days? I didn't know. I just knew inside my numbing fear that I had had sexual contact with my wife sometime between the event at the bath and the appearance of the symptoms. I knew then that the worlds were rushing towards collision. I just waited for the impact to register and hoped that something would rescue me from the consequences. I focused on the rule and tried to sort out what had actually happened. "Did I break the rule?" "How long did I wait?" Or did I simply abandon the rule as a way of forcing my way out of the intolerable tensions that were gripping me? Then and since I have never been able to sort out what happened and what my intentions were in those events. The sequence of acts and feelings was blurred then and remains so now. Certainly I would never have deliberately set out to infect my wife. But I knew with a sense of growing desperation that I might have infected her and that I could have. I waited, hoping for a reprieve. I was anxious, terrified even, yet there was a strange calmness in my behaviour.

In this hiatus, my wife and I went to Stratford to take in a few plays at the Festival — Maggie Smith in *The Three Sisters* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. I stayed on alone especially to see *The Tempest*. I had always loved the play, but I sat transfixed at its end when Prospero seemed to be speaking directly to me and giving me reassurance:

Our revels are now ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on.

I awoke from the dream one day after dinner, about ten days after my contact in the bath. As we sat at the table over coffee, I watched my worlds collide and knew that my life as I was living it was utterly destroyed. My wife told me casually that she was being bothered by a vaginal discharge. There was an explosion in my mind, but as usual the outer shell gave no sign of it. I did not flinch, but inside I was stunned, rigid with shock. The next morning, after a night of private horror, I told her what the discharge likely was, that I had just been treated for gonorrhoea, and that the source of my disease had been a homosexual contact.

Only then, she said, did she know that I was a homosexual. As some kind of explanation, I added that I thought I had been one all my life. I wept in telling her all of this and said that my life was

in her hands. She could do with me as she pleased. She could have hit me, ordered me out of the house, or denounced me publicly. I would not have questioned anything she might have done then.

It took two more months for the separation to come. Medical and psychiatric help, hours of talk, communication that was more direct and meaningful than any we had ever had — these were the things that filled those sixty days. By now it was the golden days of fall and I remember the clarity, the intensity, the sudden utter honesty with which I saw things around me. And this same light pervaded our relationship.

We laid down the conditions for the way we would carry on together. My conditions were that I could no longer live a lie and that I would no longer promise to myself or anyone else that I could live without gay reality around me. My wife tried to live with me as a homosexual, but it did not work. If I was late, for whatever plausible reason, she would be near hysteria when I returned to the house. It was impossible. She said I would have to choose between her and being gay. I knew I could only choose her by returning to the double life, to the lies, to the self-hate, and to the whole way of living and thinking that I could no longer accept. We parted on the understanding that we would continue as friends. I was to leave on an experimental basis for a short time; I was to sort things out and come to my senses. My wife was confident that I would return on her conditions. She thought I could become heterosexual simply by resolving in isolation to change myself and she hoped the pressure of separation would speed this transformation. I knew if I left I would never return as her husband. I think these conditions allowed us both to get out of a relationship that neither of us wanted to shoulder the responsibility for shattering. And that was the end of our marriage in any human terms.

It was also the beginning of the end of our amicable relationship. Later the fighting and uncontrolled anger took over. It was searing pain from that point onwards, not least for our young daughter who simply could not understand why we were separating. She had never seen anything that suggested tension or anger between us. Her tears when we told her were among the hardest things I have had to bear in all of this history — in this progress towards the final recognition of myself. But they were by no means the only expression of deep sorrow to mark the three years that followed. Those tears, as they welled up and burst forth, expressed the feelings of all of us. But our daughter saw the situation more clearly than we did. We explained how I would remain nearby and how I might come back to live at home again. When she stopped crying, she said simply, "Daddy, you're never going to come back."

Now it is over and we are divorced after three years filled mostly with bitter wrangling. We've all come to accept what has happened in one way or another. Do I think it was all worth it? Oh yes. My only regret is that I did not have the courage to tell my wife earlier and to deal honestly with her about that secret and innermost essential part of me. Would she have understood me? I don't know, but that course — had I taken it — would have been far better than waiting as I did until I made that final slip on my precarious climb down into hell. It is always better to jump than to be pushed. It is always better to face up to what one is than to hide it from yourself and others with the hope that even you yourself will not be able to see the duplicity you are practising.

Postscript. When I first read this story to friends in the Gay Fathers of Toronto group they said, "But you can't stop there. Go on and say what happened." I never understood those comments, although perhaps I am beginning to now. Whenever I tried to say more it always seemed pointless to me, as I continued to feel that I had said all I could and even that I had said too much. It is not that my life stopped at the point this story does, but merely that things thereafter are not fixed in a perspective as are those from the earliest part of my life. Things now are still in flux.

And that, I suppose, is what my friends are urging me to say. That whatever the pain from

an earlier time, things do go on in the new life. There are new friends, new problems, new opportunities, new mistakes.

I did do a number of dumb things after I started to accept myself as homosexual. But I have managed to do a number of things right, too. First there are those new friends, the gay ones and our times together — tender and intense, like a homecoming. There are the deeply satisfying feelings of being with gay people and rejoicing in it. There is the relaxing, the final act of being oneself.

And there are the men I have known and know now as lovers. Some of them are part of the mistakes. But with them at last I have felt that full sharing of self that can come only with another man. He is with me, here, all the faculties engaged, although the presence may not last. Building a lasting relationship is not easy, and I cannot say too much about it because I have not yet tested that I can. Starting late with such things means that they are not easy. But in these relationships there is the full enjoyment of an intense sexual and personal bond that is splendidly egalitarian, no sham, no shame, no blame, just the essential stimulating and creative bond. Such relationships are real and satisfying, although they do not fit heterosexual fantasies about the idyllic bond between Snow White and Prince Charming.

There comes also a slow reconciliation with the woman who was once my wife and the return of respect and regard for each other. And there is the satisfaction of watching this reconciliation work its benefit on us all. And so we see our daughter once more bubbling with laughter, able to talk again about one parent to the other. Time does heal even the deepest personal wounds.

And finally I have come to the conclusion that the choice I made about my life was right. I wish only that I had made it sooner, before I had done so much damage to myself and others. I wish the world had let me make that choice much earlier or that I had had the courage to make it in spite of the world's ways. So part of my life is now filled by working for the rights of homosexuals, for the right of some of us to be ourselves and be gay.

The public transit system in Toronto promotes itself in this time of energy crisis as "The Better Way." I know an even better "Better Way" and those of us who sense and mark a mystery deep within us will know what that way is.

— May 1979 Postscript March 1981

II. COMING OUT

For most gay men, whether or not they are fathers, the experience we call "coming out" — that is, telling someone else that they are gay, inexorably casting the die — is the pivotal experience of their lives. Once "out" there is no going back; for few gay men will return willingly to the closet. The reason for this reluctance is that self-respect at whatever cost feels better than fear in the closet.

Common to all the coming-out stories is a sense of a long, difficult struggle within one's self, of much energy devoted to keeping the secret, of much energy wasted denying one's true self. This struggle may be going on within you now, as you read this. At whatever coming-out stage you are, the coming-out stories make strange but fascinating reading. However different the stories are we may think they all sing with John Lennon:

I am he
as you are he
as you are me
and we are all
together.

A GAY FATHER COMES OUT: Terry's Story

When I stop to contemplate what has happened to my life over the past few years, I can hardly believe all that has occurred. I was constantly hit with waves of depression and sadness then by waves of elation, excitement, and happiness. I suppose if I had not married Joan and had come out as a single gay person, I would have only felt the relief, joy, and excitement of self-discovery. When I look back over my life, I realize that there were many incidents where my homosexuality "seeped out." My earliest recollection was an erotic attraction to a cute boy in my grade two-class behind whom I made it my business to line up at recess time in order to enjoy being pushed up against him. I had not any concept of it being right or wrong, just enjoyable. This was the only guilt-free incident of the "gay" life that I can recall.

At the onset of puberty I had erotic feelings towards other boys but felt it was somehow wrong because no one else spoke about similar feelings. All my masturbatory fantasies were about men or boys at school or on television. Gradually, like so many other gay boys and girls, I picked up the signals from the rest of society, the family, friends, and schoolmates that there were people called "queers," "homos," and "fruits." I somehow felt that they were talking about me and I wasn't having any of that. I was not one of those queers. Like every child I wanted to be liked, loved, and accepted and queers weren't accepted. I was one of those gays who hid their real sexuality early and did a pretty good job of it. I think that the early hiding was partly responsible for my shyness. I was a loner and my interests were not those of my friends or family. But those interests and the internal growth helped to sustain me through most of my life until I was ready to come out, not only about my gayness, but about many other things that a Canadian male wasn't supposed to do or feel. I couldn't play the part of the Mountie who won't leave his horse but loves Rosemarie.

I hardly ever dated girls. There just wasn't the motivation, and yet in my twenties I thought I had better get a move on or I would end up lonely with no wife or children. Heterosexual singles were portrayed as unfortunate and desperate to get a man or woman like another Rosemarie —

the one on the Dick Van Dyke Show. After all, you couldn't live a full, useful, emotionally-balanced life being single, could you? Of course I considered myself heterosexual even though my sexual fantasies were always of males and despite the fact I had often during my teens tried to get my hands down the pants of boys on the street.

At nineteen I was working at the Steel Company of Canada in Hamilton and was interested in politics and economics. At one point I wrote my personal "manifesto" of how Canada should be run. One emphatic section stated that all homosexuals should be imprisoned, so strong was my self-denial. After all, if I could make such a statement, how could I be a homosexual? And so it went up to the time I met my wife, Joan.

I had dated one girl for six months, and I was temporarily shattered when she wanted to stop dating. I suppose I thought my one and only opportunity to affirm my straightness had slipped through my fingers. Six months later I met Joan, who had been a teacher with my former girlfriend. I fell in love with her, and we dated for three months, at which point we became engaged and planned to marry the following July. We had a great rapport and sense of belonging together that continued throughout our nine-year marriage. I had tried sex with a woman once before meeting Joan but it wasn't very successful, so I had some anxiety just before our wedding. I wondered if I would be able to perform sexually. I was turned on by Joan; we kissed and were sexually stimulated by each other, but we hadn't had sex together so I thought the years of denial would be exposed once we were married. However, my anxieties were for naught because we had, despite my preference for males, a good sex life. I did not have to fantasize about other males during intercourse, although in retrospect I was not able to make our sex life very imaginative, as I do freely with a man. Everything about my self-denial seemed to go well, but several forces acted against me as I fought to deny and hide my gayness.

In the first place, I am a reader. I consume books by the car-load and in particular on some specific subject that catches my attention. I bought, begged, and borrowed books on the environmental movement and became a part of it with my wife. As a result we became members of Zero Population Growth in our area, probably the most unpopular group of what was then an unpopular, non-establishment movement. Environmentalism taught us about vegetarianism, a dietary regime which we willingly and gladly adopted. Once again we added another seemingly strange facet to our lifestyle, one which we didn't feel needed defending, but which we had to defend on many occasions. As a result of these two changes in our lifestyle we moved to the country to have a large organic garden. We had an outhouse, a pump in the kitchen, we heated with wood, and took baths on the kitchen floor in a galvanized tub with water heated in a kettle. Once again we stepped outside the norm of the mid-nineteen seventies. Finally an interest in oriental art led to Buddhism and an interest in world religions and philosophy. Binding all this together was the anti-Viet Nam war movement, the Flower Children, Black Power and the Women's Movement. We had adopted non-establishment ways at a time when the establishment of the late sixties and early seventies was under attack.

I realized being different did not make one bad or hurt people, nor did the sky fall. I felt the freedom that comes from breaking old and restricting icons in every part of me but in my sexual orientation.

In 1973, after three years of marriage, Joan and I took a two-week trip to England and France. It was on a channel ferry that I had my first homosexual experience. Several times before this I had been in a position to have sex with another man but had panicked at the last minute because to go ahead would have meant I could no longer deny my homosexuality. I even phoned the desk at the YMCA where I was staying with my youngest brother to complain of a man making a pass at me,

even though I realize I was probably more the *agent provocateur* than he. Once I had had this ship-board experience, I could no longer deny it and began thinking more about human sexuality. I started to have quick sex in my hometown and had a six-month affair with another gay man who was married. I was more positive about my gayness by this time, though afraid to let heterosexual society know.

In the summer of 1977 I first became aware of the Anita Bryant campaign and had awakened enough to my own gayness so I was no longer afraid to follow stories about her in the newspapers. I soon realized that what she was saying was totally wrong. She was narrow-minded and said things about me that were not true. I was not a child molester; I was none of the things she incorrectly said gays were. I began to watch carefully for more articles about gays and began also to borrow library books. Newer, more positive books were appearing on the shelves such as *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* and *The Homosexual Matrix*. My self-awareness was growing. I was beginning to come out of the closet, at least to myself.

I might mention at this point that I am the oldest of five boys and at least three of us are gay. The middle brother is four years younger than I and has been out as a gay person since his teens. There was no gay-positive support in our area then. The fact that I had a gay brother did not help me to realize that I was really gay. In fact, it probably scared me further into the closet. He always seemed so upset emotionally and I didn't realize that most gays did not fit his manifestation of gayness.

In March 1975 our son and only child, Dean, was born and in the Spring of 1978 I noticed an article about a gay father in the *Globe and Mail*. This was the final catalyst. I began writing to him and had reply mail addressed to the post office where I work as a letter carrier. That April, 1978, a long-time friend of mine came out to me because I spoke so positively about gays. I came out to him about five minutes later. I was then introduced to gay friends of his, some of whom I had known as "straight" people from previous jobs. I realized that gay people were not freaks but were, for the most part, nice people. I began going to the one gay disco in Hamilton and for the first time danced with and touched other men with no fear or guilt, but as a free man.

The following June I told my wife I was bisexual. I was keeping one foot on dry land by saying that to see what her reaction was. Joan read nearly everything I did about homosexuality and thus I felt she was getting ready subconsciously for the day of my "coming out." She knew I had at least one brother who was gay and so suspected my new interest in things gay was because I was concerned about him. I then contacted all my older brothers — except the youngest because I wasn't sure how he would react — to tell them that I was gay. Just prior to this, I had begun to suspect other brothers may have been gay. The second-youngest reacted calmly and didn't reveal a thing about his gayness until months later. The middle brother, who has always been "out," said he always knew I was gay and suspected that the second-youngest was gay also.

The first two months after coming out to Joan weren't too bad. She was never anti-gay and had never really thought much about it. We talked often about human sexuality and homosexuality in particular. Joan began asking me questions about the way I viewed men and women and what being free from the hiding and fear would mean for our future. In most cases she had already anticipated my answers, but just wanted them verified by me. For Joan fear, jealousy, and depression set in as I began spending some time, at least once a week, with new gay friends. At times I got angry that I had not been able to come out before we were married and thus save both of us the pain that we were going through. On the one hand I was depressed and unhappy that an ideal nine-year marriage might very well be ending, and yet I was elated at having accepted the fact that I was gay. A great burden was lifted from my shoulders. However, my anger culminated one evening when Joan was crying and saying that what was happening hurt. I wanted to lash out at someone yet no one person was to blame. It was a homophobic society that scared me into hiding and denying my homosexuality until I believed I was

heterosexual. Thus I stumbled into a marriage. I went wild with anger that evening. I threw furniture all over the house and wanted to drive my car at break-neck speed — not caring whether I got killed. Joan calmed me down and from then on, although we were often upset, we began to face the reality of what was to happen to our marriage.

The previous October we had sold our house in the country because the isolation under the circumstances was intolerable. We bought a small bungalow in Hamilton and moved there with our son Dean who was nearly four years old. Joan began looking for a job; she needed the sense of security and independence it would give her if we had to live separately. In February of 1979 I came out to my family, Joan's family, and some friends. To say the least it was a shock and upsetting to everyone. There was no overt homophobia on the part of the parents, although they knew little or nothing about homosexuality. A few members of the family were secretly hostile and refused to learn or understand, but the two mothers listened and learned and are supportive of gays now. The really upsetting fact was our probable separation but we realized that it would be unavoidable. We began discussing how we would relate to each other. Fortunately we had reached the stage where we could deal with my gayness and with coming out to others, so planning the near future was manageable. We agreed, as we had before my coming out, that Dean would be raised in an open, non-sexist home. Joan began working at a local car-rental company and started the search for an apartment in late Spring of 1979. We agreed to separate and did so just at the beginning of July after I returned from the Seventh Annual Gay-Lesbian Conference in Ottawa.

Dean has adjusted quite well. He has two homes with his own room in each. Nursery school introduced him to new people and places, which helped him a lot. He never questions why we live separately but will some day. He knows the word "gay" and associates it with certain people, even though he doesn't know its meaning. Joan and I want him to grow up knowing his father and some uncles are gay and to understand them as people and not the shadowy freaks they have been falsely portrayed to be. Joan has come to understand what it means to be gay, the oppression, the fear, the myths, and the authenticity of gay feelings. She is now a strong supporter of gay rights.

My way was first to educate myself about human sexuality and especially about homosexuality. Then I was able to educate others too, if they were willing to learn. I am convinced that these are the major steps required to end the fears of gays among heterosexuals and to end the self-dread felt by closeted gays like the one I used to be. Thus we hope that fewer gays will marry out of fear of loneliness and rejection by others or simply because they never could believe they were really homosexual. I realize after much pain and years of hiding that gays and lesbians can live a full, happy life and that they can love and be loved by another person of the same sex. They can also be loved by heterosexuals who have been educated by the example of open gays and lesbians who clearly show the stereotypes about them are a lie.

I have no fear of my son being gay. The heterosexual dictatorship we live in has not stopped us from being gay. We cannot make a child gay, bisexual, or heterosexual. Whether my son is gay or heterosexual or somewhere in between I will not honestly care. I just want him to be happy as the person he is and to know he has the support of his family. He will face difficulties with other people because his father is gay, no doubt, but so do the children of Pakistani parents in an alien land, or of other parents who somehow are different from the mainstream of our society.

COMING OUT TO YOURSELF

The first step in emerging from the darkness into the light is the winning of the struggle within yourself. This step into self-awareness, the joyful acceptance of your homosexuality, we call "coming

out to yourself."

Coming out has been defined as "the act of identifying and accepting oneself as a homosexual."¹ But it is more of a process than an act, although the end of the process may be symbolized by a single, simple act that comes to take on great meaning for the individual. Many of us, for example, have had the experience of trembling before we walked into our first gay meeting. Some of us who finally called that gay counselling line hung up the phone after talking for half an hour and then wept uncontrollably. To some it is walking into a gay bar. For one of our members, it was seeing a man across the street and knowing that if he crossed it to be with him again his life would be changed unalterably. He crossed it.

Don Clark writes with sympathy and insight about gays generally and about gay fathers in particular. He views coming out as a process in which the individual tries and ultimately fails to conform to a social mould that does not fit:

The first massive effort to conform is motivated by the reluctance to admit to a deviant identity. It ends in failure. The second struggle to conform is motivated by hope that the deviant identity while true and privately accepted, can be changed. After this second long stage of trying to change has drained emotional and financial reserves, most of us are left with seriously lessened self-esteem and confronted with despair.²

It is, therefore, a conscious and sometimes painful process that brings homosexuals to identify themselves as homosexuals and to accept that fact. In some people this process of acceptance is relatively quick; in others it is accomplished only slowly and often with great anguish. The gay father is usually someone who strives to deny his homosexuality. Acceptance of his gayness comes slowly and during that time of struggle he lives in fear that others will discover his secret. His life carries all the hallmarks of the "normal" heterosexual: wife, responsibility, children. He therefore tries to hide a part of himself. The fear of discovery is usually so great that he denies his homosexual feelings and as he succeeds in hiding, his fear grows with the continuing denial. To overcome this fear, the gay father must first accept himself and his sexual preferences.

The first step towards acceptance requires the gay father to recognize his homosexual fantasies, desires, and actions for what they are. Only then can he end the horrible isolation to which he otherwise condemns himself. Only then can he begin to share meaningfully with others (possibly with his wife and children) a hidden part of self that is deep, powerful, intense and (yes) unalterable.

"Coming out" now means more than it once did when the words described the debutante's transition from child to woman. It now marks the dawn of self-recognition in the gay person. After gays come out in this way, the next step that many take is, of course, to come out to others — at least to *some* others. Indeed, more and more gay men and women are coming out to friends, family, and co-workers. In a few very special cases some of this coming out may be caught and broadcast far and wide by the media, for example in a sympathetic television show or newspaper article about gays. Then those who live with a painful secret realize that they are not alone. They see that others have done the impossible. They may now see that gay people are not the monsters some people say they are; they may even come to see that gay people have made contributions out of all proportion to their numbers.

¹ Peter Fisher, *The Gay Mystique* (New York: Stein & Day, 1972), p. 24.

² Don Clark, *Loving Someone Gay* (New York: Signet Books, 1977), p. 18.

COMING OUT TO YOUR WIFE

And now, what?

You've accepted your homosexuality and may for a time get by living the double life — straight by day, gay by night, or some such ulcerating arrangement. The urge will come, will grow, will insist that you tell your wife. This revelation is perhaps the major event in the coming out process for a married gay man. One gay man sets his story as a theatre-review of this dramatic movement in his life.

New Play Tells Familiar Story: Howard's Tale

Coming Out, the new offering at the Empire-Majestic, is pretty much a standard bill of fare. An autobiographical drama in two acts by Howard Uno (a pseudonym, if not a misnomer), it charts the development and ultimate de-closeting of a homosexual member of the lower middle classes. The story it tells is by now familiar to theatre-goers everywhere; yet it retains a certain power which arises not so much from the play itself but from the basic subject matter with which it deals: facing up to the ultimate truth of one's existence. It is a subject which never fails to fascinate, whether one is in the closet, out of it, or just a disinterested onlooker.

The play opens with the central character, rather blatantly named Howard, and played by the author himself, experiencing sexual activity for the first time, at a very early age. We see him cavorting in harmless, innocent grope-play with a slightly older boy, but as the two quickly age the playing becomes not so innocent, until by puberty the two are engaged in furtive but overt homosexual activity.

There is no explanation given for the central character's predilection for same-sex behaviour. His family is paraded before us, devoid of the classic stereotypes. His mother is a warm, loving (and fun-loving) woman who, for her time (the late 1940s to early 1950s) is no more afraid of sex than most other women of her socio-economic class. The father is seen more briefly, but when he is on stage he is a real, three-dimensional character, overworked and somewhat overwhelmed but a generous and loving father to his two boys.

There is a younger brother who is rather spoiled, being the second surviving child out of four pregnancies, and the one traditionally to turn out "different." he reappears throughout the play, becoming more of a drifter and a crop-out all the time until, in a parallel to his brother's life, he is shown at the end of the play getting his life in order. The family scenes are warm, friendly, but not clichés. There are the usual quarrels, rivalries, marital spats, but the sense given, in a relatively few scenes, is of a functioning family, normal in every way.

But then it is not the author's intention to find a cause. His, and his character's, problem is dealing with the fact. Young Howard practices self-denial and self-abuse, learns to lie about himself without a flicker of betrayal in his eyes, learns to mimic perfectly his heterosexual friends (even to some grope-play with the opposite sex) in order to live in their world, without fully understanding what he is doing or why. He is alone, he is something dirty, and it is all his fault.

Everyone is against him and, so it seems, rightly so. He reels from the confessional, staggering under the viciousness of his confessor's screamed abuse. He reads of child molesters, delinquent scout masters fondling their troops, and sees that the world considers them monsters. He begins to think: "Am I one of *those!*" He prays for deliverance and pays for his crime.

We see him fall in love with his friends, none of whom, thanks to his powers of mimicry, suspect a thing. And then we see him fall in love with a woman, truly in love. They marry, he is

saved. Act One ends on this note, but it is forced, too good to be true — it portends bad things to come.

In Act Two we see what he has been saved for. As the marriage grows and deepens, along much the same lines as his own parents', the hidden feelings force themselves closer to the surface. He begins sneaking about, discovering the thrills and degradation of cruising the parks and washrooms, building a shell around his feelings and satisfying only his physical urges, all the while building a real marriage which eventually includes a child. He proves to be a good father, the marriage is a visibly happy one, while invisibly his "secret life" eats away at its foundations.

Everything you expect to happen does. But here the author plays it smart, or honest, and saves the drama from melo-ing. His wife is called out of town for an extended time and Howard seizes the moment to "come out," but in a way which minimizes later conflicts. Instead of hitting the bars and discos and going home with three different fellows each night, he talks to people — the MCC, a Gay Fathers group, a gay sociologist — and finds what he is really seeking: people of his own nature who are intelligent, open, and *normal*. He is accepted by his own kind and becomes so positive about himself that he is slowly able to bring himself to the realization that he can be open with his wife without driving her away.

In the play's climax he comes out to his wife, and we see that, although he has prepared himself for the event, it is not as he has foreseen it. He is not calm and controlled, warm and reassuring. The emotion that the audience knows he has suppressed suddenly pours forth. The shock wave of his wail of declaration echoes and dies — "*I'M GAY!*" he cries from the depth of his being — and he is seen to be truly alone at the turning point of his life; too late to go back, not willing to look forward. But he is not alone. His wife, from the shadows, moves forward in a slow movement worthy of ballet and enfolds him in an embrace of acceptance and love.

There is, of course, much weeping on both sides, much talking, but he strives very hard, with a few emotional lapses, to avoid self-pity and to convince her because he loves her and can lie to her no more. She reacts with amazing selflessness and understanding. As long as he doesn't want to leave her, she resolves to try and accept his revelations and to live with them.

It is on this note of real hope that the play ends, but with the understanding that life goes on and that the path they have chosen is not exactly strewn with roses. But because of the hope expressed in the final moments, a hope sincerely felt by the author, the playgoer is left with the feeling that somehow they will make it.

It is a play typical of its genre, differing in degree in its circumstances and characters but telling the same basic truth: that living a life in which one's inner self is constantly denied is impossible, that life will go on as *it* wants, or it won't go on at all.

More Problems and Another Play

Circumstances may vary, everyone's story is different; yet somehow all the stories are the same — different details, characters, settings, but see if this is not your story: you are gay, you are married, you are unhappy, and you have (or soon will have) reached a point where your situation has become intolerable.

It becomes increasingly necessary to have homosexual contact, both sexual and social, yet locked into a heterosexual marriage you cannot explain the absences from home, not over the long run. And since so much gay activity takes place at night — late at night, do they ever sleep? — how can you ever get away from home then?

Oh, sure, there are ways; but as we learn from the popular press, the stress of leading a double life, whether, gay, straight, moonlighting in car insurance, or selling atomic secrets to the Ruritians, can lead to ulcers, high blood pressure, heart attacks, nervous breakdowns, suicide, and probably dandruff and the heartbreak of psoriasis. And guilt. Lots of guilt.

It's the guilt that does us in. Yet what have we to be guilty about? Gay is Good, Gay is Proud, Gay is Beautiful. So they say, but you're not convinced; it's not so hot for you, not as things stand. You're not proud of the way you have to lurk about public washrooms, prowl through park bushes or slink into gay baths and bars. And if it's so beautiful why does it all seem so impersonal, so inhuman, and so ... well, dirty?

Guilt strikes again; and Fear, its Faithful Companion. Fear of being found out, fear of losing everything, fear of the Unknown. But often the fear of what will happen is worse than what actually happens, unless you have a fear of being gang-raped by sex-crazed nomadic tribesmen, which fear is definitely not as bad as the event itself. (Never mind how I know that.)

We are, however, talking of personal relationships, and in the majority of cases the human species proves to be very adaptable, surprisingly so. In essence, what will happen on Disclosure Day may be worse than anything you have experienced but it may also be very much better.

"It's all very well for you to say that coming out is good," you are probably thinking, "but you don't know my wife. I couldn't do it to her, it would break her heart."

Possibly; probably; but a broken heart need not be fatal, and the heart may be stronger for the mending. But it *is* one of the considerations you must take into account with the question inevitably arises: "How do I tell my wife?" "How" isn't as difficult, as we shall see, as the real question: "*Should I tell my wife?*"

What are your choices? Well, you could say nothing, stay married, and keep your grubby little secret to yourself. You may, of course, grow to hate yourself for being gay (if you don't already) and hate your wife for keeping you in an intolerable situation. Next stop: nervous breakdown.

Or, you may get arrested in one of the popular Police-Raids-On-Gay-Baths, or for winking-and-wanking in the subway washroom. And then everyone will know. Or you may get VD and pass it on to her, and then she would know.

Or you may balance your gay and straight lives, successfully maintain two circles of friends, fool your family, confound your employers, and go to your grave secure in the knowledge that you put one over on them all. Clever you. You could also grow wings and fly.

The second, and most popular (or at least most common) is to come out to your wife and — gently if possible — dissolve the marriage. This will set you free to pursue your own needs, to develop your full potential as a human being and a gay man. You may also discover that you are an absentee father, with few or no visiting rights; there may be a messy, highly-public divorce resulting in changes to your life you didn't foresee.

The third, and decidedly least popular, option is to come out but stay married. Many people try this, but few succeed, because of the incredible tensions set up by being openly gay in a formerly straight marriage.

If a man chooses this path, he is expecting his wife, who was (usually) totally unsuspecting, to be tolerant while he goes out and has gay sex on a regular basis. She may be sensible, sophisticated, and liberated enough to agree to this on an intellectual basis: It isn't his fault, he has to do what his nature demands, and other rationalizations. But deep down where the emotions dwell it's a different story.

Each of us harbours a little alien in our soul called Jealousy, and it bursts forth when we least expect it, to consume us savagely and totally. Your wife, undoubtedly one of the finest people you know (you married her, didn't you?) has this vicious little beast within her, too, and despite the

genuine love you feel for her, and the wish to protect her from hurt, she *will* be hurt having to share your affections and your physical expressions of love with another, or a series of others.

It's just sex to you, though, isn't it? Still nameless, blameless encounters in bar and bath where, if you're not raided, the worst that can happen is that you will pick up a few *spirochetes* or *bacilli gonocci*, collect a few crabs, or contract non-specific urethritis (it may be non-specific to them but you know *exactly* where it hurts). You take these home, slip between the covers next to her, she feels so nice and warm, sleepy-soft, and familiar and before you know it you've Spread the Word. She won't thank you for at. She will be hurt.

She may be very hurt. She may turn on you, throw you out, forbid you to see your children under court order; she may tell your friends, your boss. Jesus! The shit has really hit the fan now! If your boss is the school board, it's good-bye tenure, good-bye senior boy's volleyball, good-bye locker room privileges. If your boss is, say, the Racing Commission, it's good-bye job.

So what do you do? It seems you're damned if you do and doomed if you don't. If you protect her from a nervous breakdown you'll make her suffer, and then you merely trade one form of guilt for another. And what about the kids? You love them, they love you, they trust you implicitly, you wouldn't leave them, would you, Daddy?

Your little girl, fresh from her sex-role-stereotyping class, how could she possibly understand that you're not living with them any more because you prefer to have sex with men. "What's sex, Daddy?" Yes, well. Explain to her in detail and she'll be very silent and serious and then she'll say: "Can I have green barettes tomorrow? Loretta has green barettes and we're both going to wear them to school tomorrow."

Kids are marvellous organisms. They absorb only as much as they can handle, they adapt quickly to new situations, while screaming resistance all the way. Grown-ups are not so marvellous. They become set in their ways, and a wife who believes she has a happy, normal marriage may resist any move to change it. On the other hand, she may prove to be more resilient, more adaptable and understanding than you imagine.

For every wife who turns "nasty" there are those who demonstrate understanding, sympathy, and love. After all, if the love between you is genuine and based on respect, affection, and an appreciation of each other as people, it will survive. You will still be the same decent, honest person you always were (or told everyone you were), and she will come to realize this if she is likewise decent, honest, and loving.

All may not be lost. In all probability, unless you try really hard, the nature of the relationship will change, and there will be tears, hurting, and anger on both sides. But you can remain close friends — you've shared so many good experiences, including the making and raising of your children, you can't expect to want to turn your back on all of this. If you both want to keep the thing going, it will keep going; and when one or the other of you cries "stop," it will stop, and your lives will go into a new phase.

If you decide to tell her, if you think you will benefit from the disclosure, if the things-as-they-are quite intolerable, if you think you can handle all the problems that will arise without knowing in advance what they will be; in other words, if you're at that point we all reach (and if you think you're not there, you're not — you'll know when you are) then how do you do it: how do you tell your wife you're gay?

You only come out once, so make it good. (Actually you'll spend the rest of your life coming out to someone or other, but this is the Big One — do it right!) How it eventually happens will be partly due to your initiative and a great part due to circumstance, coincidence, and both your personalities.

A couple of approaches not recommended:

The off-hand approach.

"Darling! Great news! I've just been made vice-president with a big raise in pay, and we can afford that Lamborghini you've had your eye on, and the villa in Marbella, and I'm gay, and we can move into one of those condominiums on the waterfront, and I've bought champagne to celebrate, and isn't it great?"

This approach has a success rate of 0.1 of 1% and it will cost you a Lamborghini, a villa in Spain, and a bottle of champagne at today's prices!

(The germ of truth in this absurd example is that you must be prepared and, if possible, prepare her. Slow and steady wins the race, or so the losers say; but once you've made the decision to come out, wheels are set in motion that will not slow down. Impatience usually wins out, but you may find afterwards that you've been setting her up unwittingly, that all the groundwork has been done.)

Another approach: soften her up. A good Beaujolais will usually do the trick, but use Adolph's if you have to, and when she is sufficiently tenderized, begin. And what the hell do you say?

Start with "I love you" but don't say it if you don't mean it; it's Truth and Consequences all the way, now. A sample dialogue.

You: The last thing I want to do is hurt you.
She: But you're going to anyway.
You: There's something about me you don't know.
She: You're the Hillside Strangler?
You: I've been keeping it a secret all these years and I can't keep it a secret any longer.
She: Adolph Hitler was your father, right? The moustache gave you away.
You: It's been eating away inside me for so long.
She: You drink Drano?
You: I want to tell you now *because* I love you.
She: Oh-oh.
You: Not because I want to leave you.
She: But who would get the stereo? Or the dog?
You: I don't want to leave you.
She: You take the dog.
You: Unless I have to.
She: No, I'll keep the dog, you take the kids.
You: But whatever happens, I'll be glad I loved you, and married you.
She: Boy, is this ever strong wine!
You: You see, I . . .
She: What is it? Are you sick?
You: Uh . . . I, ah . . . I'm . . .
She: Is it cancer? Oh no! That's terrible! Where is it?
You: I'm . . . gay!
She: Is it the lung? My uncle had that, it was . . .
You: It's true
She: What did you say?
You: It's nothing I can help, it's how I am.

She: What kind of talk is this? Who's gay?
You: Ever since I can remember . . .
She: You? You, gay? Don't be silly, you're not gay!
You: I guess you can't believe it, eh?
She: I know gay. My brother Irwin is gay. You're not gay.
You: Had you fooled good, eh?
She: Look, have some more wine. You're not gay; it's just a mid-life crisis. Get over it and sail into your fifties, a fully-rounded, mature adult. I read about it.
You: I'll do whatever you want to do. I don't want to ruin your life any more.
She: I'll probably regret this in the morning, but let's open another bottle of wine.
You: Remember this: I really do love you very much.
She: That's nice, dear; but pour this wine, will you? And oh, can you cut some more cheese?

This example demonstrates, if nothing else, that nothing goes according to plan, something you will learn — probably the hard way. In the ideal world you would tell her calmly, gently, and reassuringly, and she would cry a little, but decorously, and into her natural-toned, lace-edged, damask handkerchief, \$59.99 the set of four. You would discuss things as mature adults and come to an agreement on how your lives would change, ultimately for the better.

This is not the ideal world. In the truly ideal world you wouldn't be in this predicament and coffee would still be fifty cents a pound. Well, it isn't, and you are. Do what we have all done and bumble through.

Say the wrong things, break down, cry, become flustered, confused, angry. Apologize (you're not supposed to apologize but jeez, you've been lugging all this guilt around for twenty years and this is the first chance you've had to say you're sorry; and so you are, even if you haven't really done anything wrong). But tell her the truth. Not all of it, at first, she won't want to know too many details. Later she will, and you can tell her whatever she wants to know, although it may make you feel uncomfortable. It's very much like explaining sex to children: "We, ah . . . you know, he puts his . . . um . . . I . . . you see, diff-, ah . . . different people do different . . . it's hard to explain, but it works!

Encourage her to read as much as she can absorb. Remember, her horizons are expanding rapidly now, too. She needs to learn an awful lot awfully fast.

Fortunately, unless you live in Climax, Saskatchewan, help is at hand, and even if you do live there, the case is not hopeless. There are other gay people for you to talk to, even, in some centres, sympathetic — even gay — counselling. Get support; don't try to do it alone; and remember, it's better that *you* tell her than that someone else — police, doctor, or neighbour — does. She will be much more hurt, and much less likely to be sympathetic, if you get caught, or beaten up, and it all spills out over the yellow pages of the press or the bitter leaves of the grapevine.

And remember also, if *you* don't come out, *it* will. You cannot live a lie forever and be happy, sane, and healthy. Any kind of compromise, any kind of ultimate confrontation, is better than suffering in silence, alone. Anything is better than the guilt, the self-hate, and the bitterness.

No matter how reluctant you are, the moment will come. We are writing to you now in the hope that when the moment does come, you will know it, use it to your advantage, and not let it work against you. You are unique, but you are not alone. You have to make your own decisions based on your own circumstances. And it's your life.

But you are not alone.

COMING OUT TO YOUR CHILDREN

Experiences, personalities, and circumstances differ. Some gay fathers break up with their wives without their gayness becoming an issue in the split. Others use it as an excuse to end an already soured relationship. Some have to watch as a good relationship crumbles and descends into bitterness, with no one really at fault, while others see their relationship with their wives falter, change, and develop strongly in a new direction.

And what about the children?

We'll deal with this question in greater detail in a later section, but if you've come out to yourself and to your wife, you can't live a gay life and not have your kids notice.

Eric's Story

"Daddy, I always thought you were gay, because I never meet any of your girlfriends, only your boyfriends."

That's what my then eleven-year-old son said one Sunday when I finally came out to him. The topic of homosexuality had come up rather naturally during the weekly visits prior to that Sunday morning, originally, I suppose, because I had tried to deal with the stereotypic impressions of "faggots," "queers," and "gays" he had picked up at school. David had, of course, met gays before. Not only his father, but many of his father's and mother's friends. Two men loving each other is, I think, quite within David's range of experience, even though at first it was a bit different for him to accept about his own father.

David meets the people I love when he is with me during weekends or longer holiday periods. I make it clear to my friends also that I have a son who has a prior claim on my time and affection. So far this approach has presented no problem, for David and my friends get along quite well with each other.

Coming out to David, surprisingly, was much easier and simpler than I had thought it would be. He is, however, a rather sophisticated and verbal child, and these qualities, no doubt, made my task simpler. But basically it was easy largely because I did not drop the news about my being gay out of the blue. Rather, I made very careful and deliberate preparations, and my statement about being gay was made in the context of the total relationship between him and me.

I have been separated for six years and am now divorced. David often spends every weekend and half of his holidays with me. Often we have lunch together and sometimes I visit his mother's home. His mother and I do not want me to be a weekend father only; I very much want him to be an important part of my life, just as I want to be an important part of his life. That means that I must let him share my life as fully as possible, my friends, my politics, and any other interest I have. He has never been excluded from any aspect of my life, except, for many years, from my gayness. I excluded him from this even while I was living with a lover after my separation. On weekends, Alan and I would not sleep together or show affection for each other. In that sense I kept Alan hidden from my son. But David was often at our apartment where he met other gay men and women, saw gay men dancing with each other and being affectionate.

Several factors need to be considered in coming out to one's children. The first is that as gay men we have a need to feel secure about, and comfortable with, our own sexuality. Doubts, guilt or shame may be communicated to our children. As we become more secure in our sexuality we can achieve the kind of open and easy communication we want. Certainly we have nothing to be ashamed of and nothing to hide, realizing that we can only tell our children as much as they are capable of understanding at any one time.

Secondly, we need to learn to share our gay selves with our children. Is there an obvious or compelling reason for hiding the person who, like our children, is dear and close to us? It is natural to feel a bit dicey about introducing our gay friends especially a lover, but this too can be handled easily and smoothly, for children do accept such people as a normal part of the household if we do.

It is very important, of course, that we are free enough to show affection for our friends and lovers in front of our children, just as we want to be affectionate with the kids themselves. We all need affection; we need to be held, or hugged for comfort, for affirmation, for warmth and happiness.

Thirdly, as parents we need to recognize and respect that our children are sexual beings just as we are. Children are constantly in the process of discovering their sexuality and of appropriate means for acting it out. They, too, are often perplexed, plagued by feelings of guilt, shame, and doubt — such feelings are common in a culture such as ours. As people who have gone through much the same struggle, intensified no doubt because we are gay, we can be of immense help to our children.

It is important to help our children to put human sexuality into perspective. At age twelve, few things are of greater importance to David than dealing with his emerging interest in sex. Hence sex will often come up in our conversations, most often in the form of jokes he has heard at school.

Given the cultural environment in which we grow up, it causes problems for a father to come out too suddenly or unexpectedly. There is little point in upsetting or hurting people needlessly. As gay fathers, however, we have an opportunity to be role models to our children of persons who are whole, who feel good about themselves, who are free of social or cultural stereotypes, and who are comfortable in their sexuality.

ONE WOMAN TELLS HER STORY

So perhaps there is hope for some kind of a decent life, once the fallout from the Nuclear Family Meltdown settles. But if you've read this far and are starting to picture yourself in these roles, the question you now want most to ask is: "What of my wife? How will she take it; what will she do?" The following is one wife's story.

Joan's Story

I am the wife of a gay man. Now separated, we were married for nine years. My husband, Terry, came out to me a year before we separated. When he first told me, he said that he was bisexual. I, of course, was shocked. Our relationship had been very good. We shared a lot of common interests and we were very good friends. Our sex life was very satisfying to me.

After the initial coming out I was faced with coping with Terry's sexuality and its effects on our relationship. Homosexuality generally, was no problem for me. I had long ago accepted and understood it to be as natural as heterosexuality. Terry and I had read and discussed a lot about homosexuality. For Terry's part this was a way of feeling me out in preparation for his "coming out."

After the first shock, we both felt our lives would go on pretty much the same with some alterations. As time went by, Terry admitted to being homosexual. We were unaware of the implications involved. As Terry was finding that he needed more time to be with gay people, I found I was posing questions which seemed to be a step ahead of where Terry was at the time. I began to resent his time away and his growing psychological distance from me. We were both torn apart inside. Terry was feeling a sense of joy and rebirth because he was now beginning to live as the person he truly was. On the other hand, he was feeling guilt and sadness because he knew I was hurting and he didn't want to lose the love we had. I felt resentful and at the same time

wanted him to at last be free to live as his sexuality dictated.

We spent many evenings reading and discussing the lives of other gay people and in particular those in a heterosexual marriage. We thought perhaps an open marriage could work. As I had no desire to pursue any other relationship, I didn't exercise my option. I didn't become blasé about Terry's sexual involvement but my main concern was the possibility of an emotional involvement. I had to do a lot of self-analysis to see what I wanted for myself in life and what would be fair to both of us. Although it took both of us a long time to speak our thoughts, we knew we must separate. Terry could no longer compromise his life and live with dignity. I could not be involved in a relationship in which my needs could not be met completely. The emotional tension was getting unbearable. The thought of separating when there was so much love seemed almost impossible to deal with. At different times we both reached such a state of depression that we felt suicidal. For me it was the thought of our son that made me realize I couldn't take the easy way out. We reached a point where we were emotionally drained and our thoughts had to turn to the future and to a changed relationship. I got a job and made preparations for moving. It was my choice to move out, as I had neither the time nor the energy to maintain a house.

During the year that passed, our families and friends were totally unaware of what we were going-through. We had to cope ourselves, without interference. We knew it would be very difficult telling those we loved. Our families, when told, were very shocked and concerned, but over time came to a degree of understanding and were very supportive. Our friends reacted in much the same way. The comforting aspect was that they knew Terry was the same person he had always been and now they knew him completely. There was definitely more of an effort on the part of the women than the men to understand and learn.

The period of time right after the separation wasn't as traumatic as I thought it would be. I was busy with practical matters and didn't mind living alone. We shared the parenting and Dean's time with each of us was based on our work schedules. Dean was going to nursery school. We tried to present a positive situation for Dean with regard to his living arrangement. He had times, and still does, when he is upset and confused. We are very much aware that he is making comparisons with other families. He seems secure in his parents' love for him and each other. My hope is that society will begin to accommodate children like Dean and recognize that the concept of "family" is based on the positive, loving feelings among its members and not solely determined by the fact that mother, father, child live under the same roof. Dean has adjusted very very well.

After I settled into my apartment I began to experience times when I felt I was regressing emotionally. My love for Terry had not changed. I felt frustrated because I needed more from him than loving affection. I had to redirect those feelings but found I was turned off by the straight men I had met. My feminist attitudes and the friendships I enjoyed with gay men contributed to my reaction to straight men. It wasn't until I met another wife whose husband was gay that I began to make progress emotionally. I began to gain strength because this woman, whose husband had just come out to her, needed me — if only to listen and know I understood completely.

I am now beginning to experience inner happiness. The relationship I have with Terry is loving and without anxiety. I will always be supportive of Terry and gay people. My experience has so affected my life that I know I will have to deal with anti-gay attitudes as best I can, while finding happiness as a single straight woman.

I have a moral obligation to share my experience and what I have learned in hopes that others can avoid a situation which causes a lot of emotional pain. There is always a tendency to place blame somewhere for an unhappy situation. I feel societal attitudes have forced gay people to

suppress their sexuality and develop emotional relationships with the opposite sex than can never be fully satisfying.

My son will grow up knowing that his father is gay and knowing gay people. He will have to deal with his peers, but he will not be confused by all the misconceptions. His sexuality is now established. If he is straight, hopefully because of his exposure to gay people he will accept sexual variation as healthy and good. If he is gay, he will not feel alone and self-loathing. He will have a role model which society denied his father.

— June 1980



III. RE-ESTABLISHING YOUR LIFE

Once a married gay man has come out to himself and accepts his homosexuality, some very basic questions have to be answered. Will the marriage continue, especially after a gay man has come out to his wife? The answer to this and other related questions depends on several factors.

First, a gay father may decide not to come out to his wife at all, but having accepted his homosexuality will continue having anonymous tearoom sex or perhaps may frequent gay bars or baths without his wife ever suspecting anything. He may even know another gay married man with whom he has a sexual relationship. Most gay men in this situation eventually find they cannot tolerate this narrow, restricted way of expressing their homosexuality and wish to be honest with their wife. Thus, as is often the case today, many gay men are coming out to their wives and experiencing that great sense of relief at no longer having to hide their secret.

With the lifting of this burden a sense of euphoria may set in and a concomitant desire to expand one's contacts in the gay world on a more social level. It should be noted at this point that many gay men knowing they are gay, still get married for various reasons, such as a cover for their homosexuality, or the desire to have children, and have a secret gay social as well as sexual life all through their marriage. The gay man who accepts his homosexuality only after getting married begins to take more and more time out of his marriage to be with other gay people. The sense of being with one's own people makes the heterosexual relationship seem more and more distant.

It is at this point that some of the terrible pain may begin. The more the gay man and his wife love each other and their children, the more difficult the decisions become. Can the gay husband restrict his gay involvement to a night or two out with gay friends, even if his wife is understanding and willing to let him? It is most likely, as experience has shown, that the wife will begin showing resentment and jealousy when her husband is out on his allotted "gay nights." Even a wife who has learned much about gay people and who truly understands is not going to be any more free from jealousy than one who remains totally ignorant of homosexuality.

Both partners may want to try to make accommodations and may want to stay together. If they love each other, what could be more natural than wanting to carry on with the relationship? A few nights per week may seem sufficient time to be with other gay people, but this only helps the gay person realize where he truly belongs and the two nights per week will begin to seem like a restriction.

What is happening to the gay man in this and similar situations is a restructuring of his life. It can take several paths and go at varying speeds, but a new person and lifestyle is forming. Many men, of course, may not be given a prolonged period of time to make these changes gradually. A wife may be very hostile and want immediate separation in which case the separated husband will be making many adjustments all at the same time. He may move out and live alone, or his wife may leave with the kids. Essentially he is now living as a bachelor, but with the financial and emotional responsibilities of a father.

Another factor which may hasten the separation is the one where the gay husband meets a lover. The wife, more often than not, will begin to notice a withdrawal of attention. She may ask her husband if he is depressed about something. The pressure of trying to share affection with two people may bring a man to come out to his wife and a decision on his part to let his life take a new direction.

It is rare that an openly gay man and his wife stay together. It does happen on occasion; Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester are a case in point, although their marriage was still

fraught with some emotional difficulties. Each of us has a different personality and each gay husband and his wife, within their own perception of the future, will determine where the gay person's life is going.

Staying in a marriage is always going to make both partners live with compromises. If those compromises restrict neither the continued success of the marriage nor the healthy development of the gay spouse as an openly gay person, then perhaps the marriage may work. However, whether the marriage continues or the husband and wife go their separate ways, the gay man may find his circle of friends and acquaintances expanding substantially and an increased feeling of confidence and Tightness about his sexuality.

These changes in a person — the new confidence, the increased amount of psychic energy now available for things other than pretending to be heterosexual — will provide the tools for creating that new life as an openly gay man, even if being open is restricted to family and gay friends. The degree that the gay man is going to be open about his homosexuality will determine how he is going to restructure his life. If one's family is told, their reaction will decide how the family relationship will proceed. If most reject their gay relative then a severe break in the previously established pattern of family interaction will occur. Again the reaction of straight friends will determine whether the old social patterns will remain or not. Simply stated, the number of straight people who accept the gay man and the degree to which they accept him will determine to what degree the old life will be a part of the new.

An important and sometimes difficult matter in separation and divorce is the question of money. In Ontario, the Family Law Reform Act requires that "family assets" be divided equally between husband and wife and that child custody and visiting rights be established "in the best interests of the child." Most other provinces and states have similar legislation. The principles of these laws set helpful and fair guidelines, but they do not resolve all questions. In law, children are a responsibility of both parents and this principle too should be seen in decisions that fix who is to pay what to whom. How much should you share with your wife in support payments? No firm rule exists to determine a figure, but it should be recalled that women's earning power is often less than men's. Usually a woman will find employment after a separation if she does not already have a paying job and this may help to increase her sense of independence and self-esteem. The father's job too serves as an anchor for him in a period of disorientation, particularly if he can find a colleague he can confide in and to whom he can explain the symptoms of distress that may now be spilling over into his work.

In one example from our group, the separated parents decided to share time with their child during equal periods each month. Neither parent pays child support to the other. Instead, they live on their own incomes, but share the child's medical expenses and such costs as clothing and nursery school equally between them.

There are as many ways to restructure your life as there are gay fathers, and each father will have a variety of options open as well as roadblocks that need to be, and can be, overcome. It is important to read about gay people. The number of books and newspapers available by and about gay men and women is now growing fast — so read! You may also find it helpful to become involved with a local gay group — either one that is working for gay rights, or one that is predominantly social in nature. It is one way of meeting other gay people and one that is free of harassment by non-gays and will allow you to come out at your own speed. If a gay fathers' or gay married men's group is within reach then it would be a good idea to contact them so that you will have someone with similar experiences to talk to. They will let you socialize with gay people while remaining as anonymous as you feel you want to be.

It is a different but not uncommon circumstance where the gay father finds himself in a marriage that has deteriorated, not because the husband and father is gay, but simply because the marriage is not working. The personalities and goals of the partners are, or become, too divergent. Most often this gay man is not out to his wife but acknowledges his gay identity and lives as a gay person after the separation or divorce. If a reasonable settlement is achieved at separation, i.e., child custody, division of family equity, child support payments, the gay man is often afraid that acknowledgement of his gayness by his former wife may jeopardize what child custody he has. Children can be used as a weapon and no one comes out the winner. The gay father who comes out after the fact of separation must weigh the benefits and losses of coming out to his wife. His wife's feelings and knowledge about homosexuality and the degree that the gay man wishes to be out and involved in the gay community will be important factors. In the final analysis, the individual must decide what he feels is the best step to take.

ARE YOU IN DANGER IF YOU COME OUT?

Over recent years, an increasing number of people have come to recognize that many minorities and disadvantaged groups live under conditions of injustice and inequity. This awareness has also grown among those who suffer discrimination and disadvantage. So it is that women, native peoples, linguistic and ethnic minorities, the disabled, and, of course, gays have come to ask for their rights as human beings; they ask to be allowed to exist without oppression and self-hatred. In Canada many provincial governments have now moved to guarantee the liberty and dignity of individuals by enacting human rights codes and by creating commissions to enforce them. The federal government has established a similar code and commission and proposes as well to enact a Charter of Rights when it patriates and revises the Canadian constitution. With the single exception of Quebec, neither the provinces nor the federal government give protection to gays in their human rights legislation. This lack of recognition serves to continue society's misunderstanding and persecution of gays. People fired from their jobs or denied housing because they are gay have no recourse through law. And so the growing flow of hate literature against gays can continue unchecked, although this literature would be illegal if it were directed against any of the other groups protected by human rights legislation.

The federal government has revised the Criminal Code to limit its provisions that make homosexual acts illegal. In 1967, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the present Prime Minister of Canada, was Minister of Justice. In a phrase that expressed the spirit of the times and gained widespread recognition and acceptance, he declared that "the State has no place in the bedrooms of the nation." And then he introduced legislation to make homosexual acts legal *in some circumstances*. It is important to note what these circumstances are. The government did not repeal the section of the Criminal Code that makes homosexual acts illegal; it simply added other sections to say that homosexual acts would be no longer be illegal if they were performed between consenting adults in private. It is now becoming clear that this way of making homosexuality legal means that the State still has a place in rooms other than the bedroom, and maybe even there too if homo- rather than heterosexual acts are occurring in them.

Recent events have made it clear that the 1967 revision of the Criminal Code did not make gay sex legal; it simply said that sometimes it was not illegal. The difference is important, as more than

300 men know who were arrested during the raids on four Toronto bathhouses on February 5, 1981.³ These raids were launched under provisions of the Criminal Code that define *any place* as a common bawdy house if prostitution or "acts of indecency" are committed there. Are homosexual acts indecent? The courts are now considering that question and they have before them a long history of precedents to say they are, although these precedents are balanced by a few modern decisions to the contrary. The courts may also be influenced by the current virulent attacks against homosexuals, aimed especially at the gay liberation movement, that come from frightened or opportunistic politicians, from the police, and from the self-proclaimed moral majority that, in the style of the Ministry of Truth, calls itself in Canada the "moderate majority."

If homosexual acts are themselves indecent, then even the bedrooms of the nation become common bawdy houses if gay sex goes on in them. It is this "Catch 22" that gives the police the grounds to raid the baths — and for that matter to charge people in their own homes — for no matter how private the setting, nor what the age of the consenting partners, their acts may be regarded as "indecent" (i.e., homosexual) and subject to penalty under the Criminal Code.

So even today, gays can find good reason to remain hidden and to do little to help themselves. Unlike individuals in cultural or racial minorities, the gay person experiences a large part of life as an isolated human being. He or she cannot readily see anyone among family or friends to turn to for comfort and support. If others call you "nigger," "wop," or "paki," you at least know someone else close and dear to you who bears the same label. We do not underestimate the pain these labels give those they are pinned on, nor do we condone the action of those who do the pinning. Some of us bear these labels too and know a double alienation. But what do you do if they call you "queer" or "faggot"? And worse, what do you do if you call yourself that? Unlike other targets of discrimination, gays can go unnoticed. They can pass for straight and so they themselves become a potent force in their own oppression. If you are gay, you can hide in full view of everyone, even yourself. You may even show a little homophobia (or a lot of it) to hide your gayness from others and from yourself.

Some gays were always able to accept their homosexuality even before the current gay liberation movement helped masses of others to come out of the closet. Some people may hide their gayness from everyone except a small circle of friends, but at least they are out to themselves.

In this book, however, we address those men who may not *want* to accept their homosexuality. We speak also to those men who do not yet recognize what their fears, fantasies, and compelling urges mean. And We speak also to those men who know what is different about their sexuality, but who are unsure how to cope with the problems it brings within the family. Such men are gays who denied their sexuality long enough to get married and father children. If this has happened to you and you are now awakening to who you are and what you have done, we want to talk to you and say many things.

The first is: *You are not alone*. Others have been in your shoes, faced the crisis, and lived through it to become happier and better people — people who are more honest with themselves and with others. They recognize that there are no easy or pat answers to the problems they face, but they are convinced that it is possible to face them, live through them, and build a better way of living for themselves and for those they love.

Coming out to yourself is a struggle each person goes through alone. Perhaps a positive newspaper article about gays or an interview on television with a gay person who seems to have life by the tail is the spark that starts the fire. The implanting of this first healthy gay image is, of course,

³ The sixty men arrested recently in a police raid on an Edmonton bath have the same painful knowledge. It is said the Edmonton police consulted with Toronto police, so they could do an even better raid than the big city cops. And they did — one that was even more humiliating, arbitrary, and destructive to those trapped in it.

unplanned by you, since you could never bring yourself to think of homosexuality and yourself in positive terms. Yet that first active, healthy gay role model may have forced you to think and perhaps now you want to know more about it. You may cautiously approach the public library and read a few chapters in some of the increasingly numerous and helpful books about homosexuality. Some of them may even be written by gays for gays. You may not yet be ready to go through the ordeal of taking a book to a librarian and checking it out, but at least you are now more aware that there are other gay people who are fully human and who are probably not much different from you.

Secondly, we want to say that you may be ready now to start learning and changing. Perhaps one of the sympathetic portrayals of gays in novels, plays, or the popular media penetrates your consciousness and you begin to understand and accept what is being said. You are then beginning to come out and you know you can't help it, although the path ahead looks impossible, but you desperately want to avoid hurting those you love, those to whom you gave commitments. So you worry. But once you begin to come out to yourself, how can you go back? You can't believe you would see in yourself what you now see. You can't believe you could ever find yourself in this position, but there you are. The worry doesn't help, but it won't go away and you may find yourself feeling desperate and deeply depressed. How often have you contemplated suicide or drunk too much and too often? These are attempts to escape what you know is true and to avoid problems that appear insoluble.

Whose fault is all of this? In the midst of loved ones, you are lonely and unhappy, and you begin to see that the source of this stress is not your gayness but society's attitudes to it. Many gays who go through this internal struggle become angry about the wasted years, the deceit and the hiding. This anger can be healthy, so use it positively. You may cry a lot, but a sense of relief comes as you experience the real self, the self without the pretence and the oppression. Go ahead and cry. You owe it to yourself, and you are no less of a man or a human being for letting out feelings that have been too long pent up. There is a rage that builds against the long years of oppression and it will out, it will be expressed. Go ahead and cry and then do something about the oppression that you have for so long accepted. Make plans to do something different. Do one thing at a time, but do something. Or, are you happy to leave things as they are? If so, you should probably put this book down, although you may want to take it up again. Looking at your present state of affairs honestly and fully may give you the incentive and the courage to go on, to take at least one small step to change your situation and make it better.

If you do nothing else, you can at least continue reading. The suggested readings at the end of the book will help you to know more about yourself and other gay people. It is important to come out to yourself and to understand your gayness before you can successfully come out to other people, particularly to your wife and children. If you are married and have children, a new and frightening dilemma poses itself. Do you come out to your wife and children, and if so, what does the future hold for you?

Through it all remember that homosexuality is natural. The homosexual lifestyle can be a loving and rewarding experience if we make it so. The problem is how to combine it with our roles as husbands and fathers. There is no easy answer to this problem. Those of us who write this book can only say we have found a variety of answers to it. Sometimes these answers are found within the intact structure of the family. More often they are found outside of it. Whatever the answers we have found and however painful they were to reach, we believe our circumstances to be better than those in which we carried on as though nothing were wrong and in which we solved the problem by denying that it existed. In all the answers we seek, we know that it is not just our own happiness we must consider. When all those involved are able to understand and accept what

has happened, the possibility of working out new and more satisfying family structures is greatly increased. The making of the new structure sometimes comes only with bitterness and recrimination, with struggles over children and financial resources. Other times it comes with sadness and regret, but with continuing love, respect and support. It is this latter kind of rebuilding that we should aim for, but some new structures must come, even through pain. Once the father begins to come out, he finds it difficult if not impossible to go back. He may hesitate, he may stop; but then he realizes he is not alone and he goes forward again.

The following stories by a gay father and his lover illustrate some of the stress and release that go with the transition to the new life.

It's Time You Found a Nice Man and Settled Down: Joel's Story

It is difficult to say when I came out. Was it my first sexual encounter at sixteen in the YMCA, or was it the time many years later when a straight friend blurted out "It's time you found a nice man and settled down." To me it was the latter occasion because I realized that she knew me better than I knew myself.

For many years I had silently experimented, had liaisons — short-lived with several men and one long-lasting, successful relationship with a woman. The relationship with the woman left me feeling more fulfilled than the short-lived liaisons with the men. To this day my oldest and most loyal friends are female.

I thought I had successfully separated my social life from my business life and my sexual existence from the other two. In many ways I felt that I was going in three different directions. This hidden searching, this fear of revealing myself completely, has not fully left me.

Although I had several lovers, I was still very much in the closet. As much as possible, without attracting attention, I looked for books and materials dealing with homosexuality. I even smuggled back "skin" books from New York — books I had never even seen in Toronto.

My life was becoming very isolated, and any company I kept was within a very small group of people, most of whom came from a refugee or Israeli background. At this point in time I was virtually celibate.

When told "It's time you found a nice man and settled down," my instant reaction was denial. But what was there to deny? It was true. I accepted the challenge of what I was, of what I am now, and of what I always will be. This acceptance made me want to come out to some people from whom I had previously hidden the person I was.

Up until that point I had never gone to a gay bar or dance hall or to the baths. I had heard about such places, and had even heard rumours as to where they were. Now for the first time I went to some of the bars and dances, but not to the baths — that would have been going too far. Even going to the places I did was a startling experience. This was a new game and I didn't know the rules. The places and the experiences were interesting, but not satisfying. Was this gay? My comfort was in the support of a couple of friends whose strong belief in themselves and others helped me to find my own identity. It was at this point that I heard of George Hislop and CHAT. I hoped I would discover more — much more.

I made an appointment with George and subsequently became heavily involved with committee work and other activities. To my great delight I discovered some interesting and fun people who had a broader outlook on life than is found in the bars and baths.

It was now the time to "come out." I told the people who were closest to me that I was gay — those to whom I felt I had a commitment, a commitment based on friendship. Most continued to accept me, a few withdrew. Most had already suspected that I was gay and were pleased that I could talk to them

about it. All the same I felt that I should be discreet and never really expose them to a homosexual situation. Several years went by during which time I had some brief encounters, and some not so brief. I consequently gained some sense of self as well as the idea that I might go through life in much the same manner as the partners with whom I was having affairs. I decided I had to go along with what others did as couples. I travelled, socialized, went out to dinner, and even became a property owner. Even so, there were still some pretty low times.

At the time I met the person who has now been my lover for seven years, I was feeling down, and at first I didn't want to get involved. Well, it took a week for me to decide this was the man I wanted and needed. I felt so confident that I introduced him to my friends. Most of them have since disappeared into the woodwork, including the person who gave me the challenge in the first place. I was acceptable only as a token gay in their straight society, but adding one to make us a couple was unacceptable. Several of our friends did accept us; they congratulated us and have remained as friends, supportive and loving.

The circle of our friends is still small, but growing. The opportunity today to be oneself and to express affection, as a whole person, is worth the trials, pain, and isolation experienced in getting there.

A Gay Father Readjusts: Derek's Story

I do not remember when I actually knew I was a confirmed homosexual, but I'm sure that I was reasonably young (ten to twelve years of age). The male physique had always excited me for as far back as I can recall. I was able to get an erection just from looking at a reasonably well-built man who was shirtless or in tight shorts or, of course, naked. Whereas well-developed women were always beautiful to behold, they never aroused me. Since I was quite young, I'm sure that the realization that I was gay was not yet at the conscious level. I was too naive and innocent. I didn't know, for example, what people with these kinds of feelings were called. I just instinctively knew that I was different and that my difference was somehow not socially acceptable (my maternal grandmother periodically made derogatory comments about my behaviour that reinforced my awareness that I was atypical). I desperately wanted to express these feelings — to tell someone what I was feeling — but there was no one with whom I could talk, nor had I reached the point where I could have articulated very clearly the nature of the feelings which were running wildly through my head. Frustration was pervasive. It loomed over me like a dark, ominous, and certainly very oppressive cloud. Loneliness was all I knew.

My interpersonal relationships were few and primarily unsuccessful. I retreated and became a loner. I tried to exercise what few heterosexual feelings I had. I made a feeble attempt at dating and during my adolescent years I tried to prove to myself that I, too, was capable of such socially-acceptable behaviour. I failed. My self-concept, never being very good to begin with because of lack of parental empathy and support during my formative years, deteriorated even further. I began to compensate for this by becoming the buffoon, the class clown, as well as acquiring a certain degree of bravado. My peers were experiencing life, whereas my life was a charade. I began to read extensively as a means of escaping my situation. I used to watch television and would become completely absorbed in whatever happened to be on. The situations being depicted appeared to offer another means of escape. I periodically fell in love with an actor who was particularly attractive. I fantasized.

Eventually at age seventeen I left, for good, the small, inconspicuous town in northern California where I was born and raised and moved to San Francisco to pursue a college degree. San Francisco became my Mecca. I acted like a wild animal released from captivity. I blossomed. I had more homosexual encounters, although not as many as I wanted to have or as I might have had if I had been more self-confident and assertive. Nevertheless I sensed that my horizons were expanding at last and indeed they were.

I never actually came out to my wife prior to our separating and subsequently divorcing. Our marital breakup was primarily due to other, unrelated factors. Like many homosexuals, I think I could have masked my sexual persuasion and when circumstances permitted, had the occasional liaison. However unsatisfactory this arrangement might have been, I'm sure I would have tried to make it work since that was the way I had been programmed: heterosexuality was good; homosexuality was bad.

The Fates, however, didn't give me an opportunity to decide which course of action to take. Once my wife embarked on her own career, our child and I were alone. Never deliberately seeking to be alone, I immediately began to pursue the sexual drives that had been more or less lying dormant. The more homosexual contact I had (and I didn't have that many), the more convinced I became that I could never deny who or what I was. There was no turning back. I decided that my life was not going to be a charade any longer.

When circumstances permitted, I told all of my friends — all of whom were straight. Their reaction was, "So what?" Since then many of these so-called friends have ceased to play an active part in my life. The heterosexual social world gradually began to assume less and less importance, while the previously restricted homosexual social world began to assume an increasingly greater role. I was finally able to express my total being in an environment that was supportive, sympathetic, and understanding, although I must acknowledge that there was (and still are) aspects of the gay world which I have found unacceptable, if not totally reprehensible. My move away from the heterosexual social world was done with some regret. I had enjoyed many good times with these people, even though a significant part of me was being denied expression. (I had successfully learned to sublimate.)

I'm still not out of the closet at work, at least not explicitly. I doubt if I ever will be. The organization for which I work is too conservative to accommodate such unconventionally. Being partially free (in my social life), however, is certainly better than not being free at all. Maybe in time I'll have the courage to go all the way. Who knows? In the meantime, there is a duality about my persona that only the perceptive apparently see. An unwritten rule prevails, however; I don't tell and they don't ask. We simply continue to coexist.

— September 1979

IV. GAY PARENTING

And now, the children.

We are, after all, fathers — and damned good fathers too; proud of our kids, protective of their well being, loving. We willingly give of ourselves for them. We invest our time and money, our emotions and intellects in their welfare; we have our dreams, hopes, and ambitions for them. We want them to do well, to be healthy and happy.

We *don't* want them to go through what we had to endure: the unnecessary guilt, the self-doubt, and the recrimination. We want, simply, a better future for them. Just like fathers and mothers everywhere.

Fortunately, our children are like children in loving families anywhere. Many of them are aware of the Gay Fact in their lives — at least as far as their age and maturity allows this understanding — and they accept it. The attitudes of others to the Fact do trouble them from time to time and this reaction in them causes us distress, but it does not make us deny the Fact or regret it. Instead we talk to them, as we have before. So their understanding grows, they come to feel better again and they go on with their lives as before. They can do so because they accept and love us and because children are never frightened by love even when they see it between men and men or between women and women. It is hate and fear that are destructive to children. So the Gay Fact need not affect our children adversely, if we ourselves accept the Fact. It cannot hurt them if we neither hide nor ignore it, nor give it undue emphasis and importance.

In society's eyes, we already have one, or maybe two, strikes against us as parents. We are expected to be like Caesar's wife — beyond reproach. We are, in fact, as conscientious and concerned about our children as any good parents — perhaps more so. Indeed we are deeply concerned for our children's welfare. That's why we've written this book. A similar concern may explain why you're reading it.

A concerned parent will want close contact with his or her children. This may not always be possible, especially when access has been limited by a hard-line court decision. Some judges who still act out of a hypocritical Victorian morality may award the homosexual father, or (worse) the one who is openly gay, only the briefest and most difficult access. In such cases the father can end up with only two hours a week on Saturday night or on specially-arranged occasions, perhaps once every three or four months, when some other "responsible adult" can be present in "neutral surroundings," that is, not in the father's home. While such decisions are less common than previously, they are by no means rare. And there is no doubt that the homosexual parent who goes into court does so under a disadvantage that does not apply to heterosexual parents. They are under special obligation to show that their homosexuality will not adversely affect the children. This difficulty can best be avoided if the parents can agree on custody and visiting rights and, indeed, upon all other circumstances of the separation. In many cases where separation has occurred, parents can agree on suitable access. In a small but growing number of cases the gay father may be given full custody.

We present here three modes of gay parenting, beginning with shared parenting, which is the most common form of parenting after the gay father has come out. The other modes we discuss are sole custody and gay parenting within marriage.



SHARED PARENTING

When a marriage or relationship ends in separation or divorce, the children of the union may still be raised by sharing responsibility for them between the mother and father. Indeed, when heterosexual unions end, the courts recognize the continuing interests and rights of the natural parents with respect to their children even though the separated parents may now establish new relationships with other people. This principle is coming to be recognized also in cases where one of the parents is homosexual. Such parents too have continuing interests in their children and, even though they are homosexual, they also have continuing rights and obligations with respect to their children. What most separated parents who are homosexual ask is simply the chance to exercise their rights and discharge their obligations with respect to their children. Indeed, no matter what causes the union between the parents to dissolve, the children may still be raised by sharing the mother's and father's responsibility for them. The responsibility for a child may indeed be shared equally

between the parents even though the child spends different amounts of time with each parent.

If children are to adjust to a separation of the parents they should not be used as weapons in a war between them. Although the parents may be hostile or indifferent to one another after the separation, they have common interests in their children and should recognize the advantages to all of cooperation in raising the children. Of course, hostility between the parents makes cooperation difficult. Although there are many possible ways of co-parenting, it may be helpful to look at one example of how the arrangement works, while keeping in mind that it is only one of several arrangements that could be made to suit circumstances where one of the parents is gay.

Terry's Story Continues

When my wife and I decided that separation was inevitable, we had to decide how the separation would affect us as parents of our son, Dean. It was fortunate that my wife is supportive of gay people and there is no hostility in our present relationship. My wife read about the many cases of judicial prejudice toward a gay parent in custody cases and said that I would not lose any part of my role as Dean's father.

Before we separated I was often in tears over what I thought would be a serious rupture in my relationship with my son. I was upset that I would not be able to give him his bath *every* night, or read him his bedtime story *every* night as I was accustomed to doing. How would he handle living in two different homes? My fears did not last after the separation. Dean is adjusting quite well. Knowing other gay fathers and their children will be a big help to Dean over the growing years. He will be aware that many children have gay parents and that other children have two homes also. We incorrectly assume that because the nuclear family has been the norm for some time, children cannot be raised to be healthy adults in other nurturant settings.

Dean's mother and I both share any major costs related to our son. Any medical costs above the provincial health coverage and pharmaceuticals are split equally. The expense of winter clothing — raincoat and other items that he only needs one of — is shared. Although we do not have a legal separation at this time we have both agreed to live on our own earnings and there is no child-support money exchanged. Therefore, an equal sharing of costs was deemed fair, especially since Dean spends an equal amount of time with each of us.

We both discussed what nursery school Dean should attend, and we share the monthly cost equally. Similarly, we decided to send Dean to a French-immersion school near his nursery since I have spoken French to our son since birth, and we both wanted him to continue in a bilingual environment if possible.

There are a variety of ways we cooperate since we are fortunate enough to hold no malice toward one another. One point where we are definitely in accord is Dean's knowing that his father is gay. Dean has several other openly gay relatives and cannot help but be in their company. Dean's mother now knows many gay people and has read to obtain a wide knowledge of homosexuality. I would not ever consider keeping my gayness from him now, and fortunately Dean's mother also wants him to be brought up in a gay as well as a heterosexual milieu. Thus if he is gay he will have parents who are understanding and supportive of him and he will see as well many healthy gay people who provide fine models that he may wish to emulate. Similarly if he is heterosexual he will have plenty of examples of decent gay people to buffer him against the traditional bigotry and myths about gay people, as well as heterosexual family members and friends of both sexes for him to identify with who will help reinforce that heterosexual self-identity.

Dean's mother and I live relatively close to one another which makes this equal sharing, especially the half-month he spends with each of us, possible. In the future if either of us changes

careers or moves to another city, then there will be problems with equal sharing. Hopefully Dean's mother and I will be able to adjust to these changes through the cooperation we have been able to maintain up until now.

SOLE CUSTODY

A Gay Father, His Lover, and Their Daughter: Derek, Joel, and Zoe's Story

Those of us who have sole custody of our children are truly fortunate, considering the painful experiences of those who have even been denied access to their children because of their sexual orientation.

In my particular case my sexual orientation was not an issue in my divorce, but the fact that I have raised my daughter since she was approximately thirteen months old puts me in an enviable and unique situation, namely, a homosexual solely performing the parenting function. (Actually, that should read "homosexuals" since my lover and I share the responsibility.)

Our child has known of our sexuality since she was seven years old. A situation presented itself which prompted the revelation. I had a mobile hanging in my study; it consisted of small cards with a sexually-oriented word printed on each. Seeing this mobile for the first time, she asked me what the words meant. I proceeded to tell her. When the word "homosexual" arose, I told her what it meant. In her perceptiveness she asked me if that was what Joel and I were. I answered in the affirmative. And that was all I said. I felt that no more needed to be said at that time. We have added to the original story as circumstances have warranted.

In addition to the mobile, Joel and I were sharing the same bedroom, one that was adjacent to hers. This physical proximity certainly must have been a contributing factor prompting the question and the subsequent realization that her parents were homosexual.

Joel and I consider, to greater and lesser degrees, my daughter to be "our" child. In order to remain a family unit there was no other alternative, and besides, I really wanted it that way. Zoe has done many of the things her peer group has done, including such things as climbing into bed with us because of fear during thunderstorms, sharing Sunday morning breakfast in bed, and sitting on the bed while telling a story about some particular event that might have occurred at school or elsewhere. She has had girlfriends to stay overnight and has had the typical pajama parties, birthday parties, and so forth. The fact that her parents have been two gay men has not caused us to deprive her of these kinds of memorable childhood experiences. As idyllic as all of this may sound, there have been difficult and unpleasant moments, but, then, our heterosexual counterparts have these kinds of moments, too.

A decided advantage that Joel and I have had is that Zoe is an extraordinarily capable person in practically every respect. Without exaggeration, she has yet to cause or create major problems. She has tremendous forbearance, insight, and sensitivity, particularly for those who are less fortunate. In short, she's an incredible child and as her father I'm thankful every day for this beautiful gift.

It is not possible for me to speak for her. She is certainly capable of doing that herself. I have, therefore, asked her to respond to a few questions.

Briefly, what has it been like being raised by a gay father?

Being raised by a gay father has probably been different, but how different I cannot say as I have not experienced any other kind of lifestyle and thus can only go by what I've seen. I've grown up faster than most of my peers and I've seen and done a lot more, but I'm not sure if this is the

result of my father's homosexuality or if it's just the way my father would have raised me anyway.

What kinds of problems has it created for you?

It would not have created many problems had my father and I lived by ourselves, unless, of course, he had had "friends" for short periods of time which would have created some difficulties. In this regard his having a live-in lover has made things a little easier.

What are some of the disadvantages and some of the advantages?

Some of the disadvantages in having gay parents are trying to keep my mouth shut when some prejudiced person mouths off about homosexuals or, if they suspect there is a homosexual relationship at home, they crack a joke to see what kind of effect it has on me. Another problem is trying not to give "it" away, because if I did it could put us all through some torture. So one has to stay in the closet.

If you had the power to do anything, what aspect of your life to date would you change?

If I had the power to change any aspect I would alter the public's opinion. It is extremely hard to stay in the closet about homosexuality, whether it is one's parents, oneself, or one's friends.

Having a gay father is one thing, but having a gay stepfather is another. How has this gay coupling affected you? Specifically, what kinds of problems has it created for you?

It has affected me to the extent that I've had to share my father with someone other than my mother. Specifically, one of the problems that has arisen between us is that invariably one of us, at sometime or another, feels left out, particularly the lover who often feels that he does not belong or that we shun him for one reason or another.

Whether it is heterosexual or homosexual, step-parenting is never easy. The child is fighting to maintain her natural territory, the territory she previously never had to share, and the lover is seeking to establish his position in the family, while still maintaining his own identity. Invariably, while jockeying for position, the players collide. Most of the arguments which have erupted from time to time and which have almost been instrumental in the dissolution of our relationship were because of my protectiveness towards Zoe. During these moments of conflict, doubt would creep in to the picture and I would wonder whether Joel was, in fact, the right person to be sharing these critical years with us. This doubt does not surface as much these days, but in retrospect I marvel at our tenacity and perseverance. Many people would surely have said to hell with the situation and walked away. That neither one of us did (although it was a constantly-articulated threat) shows a level of commitment that few seem to be able to summon. I know why, too. It's damned hard work.

As for Zoe", I must let Joel describe his interpretation of the situation. Here are the answers to some questions that I asked him to consider.

How has the role of step-father affected you?

My immediate response is that the experience of being a parent, something I never expected would be an integral part of my life, is more challenging and fraught with anxiety and frustration than I thought it would be.

Previous to meeting Derek I had lived alone for thirteen years. The habits I acquired and the style of life to which I had grown accustomed were very different from sharing one's day-to-day existence with someone else. Add to that the fact that the man I decided to share my life with had a daughter and you have another change I was not prepared for. I'm sure that this situation is common to all those who marry someone with a ready-made family. Being gay seems easy compared to the problem of bringing two people into your life whom you don't know fully yet — with all their needs, their fears, and their expectations. These have to be accommodated within one's own experience. In many ways I have great difficulty putting aside my own personal needs when, in fact, the needs of the

two people in my life should take priority. Sometimes this builds up to an uncontrollable level of frustration and resentment. The result is a noisy conflict.

Shortly after having become a family unit, Zoe was told that her parents were gay. It was due to an answer to her question, the natural curiosity of a child, that gave us the opportunity to tell her at the beginning of the relationship. I'm sure that this helped to establish a confidence and trust in her parents. The result of this honesty and straightforward approach has led to a very strong supportive attitude towards us. A recent event is a perfect example.

I volunteered not to attend her grade-eight graduation ceremony and reception afterwards so that she would not be put into a difficult situation with her peer group. She insisted that both of us be there. After the ceremony, she brought a friend over and we started the dancing. We each danced with her before we went home to let her enjoy the party without the inhibiting influence of parental eyes.

Specifically, what kinds of problems has your role as a step-father caused you?

Specific problems (frustrations) sounds so very clinical. As a step-parent I'm sure they are the same ones common to most people in a step-parenting role. First and foremost is the question of acceptance. I think we have solved that problem reasonably successfully, although admittedly there is still room for improvement. We have a deep and caring love for each other that binds us through all the arguments and disappointments. If that wasn't there we wouldn't be together today. In the situation between child and step-parent there is no natural tie. Therefore I often feel that any frustration or rejection of the natural parent is actually aimed at the step-parent — me. This hurts; it places me in a position that is secondary in our own home.

How can the role of a step-father be made easier?

I don't know if the role of step-parent can be made easier. To follow all advice about how to be an acceptable parent leaves me repressing so much of what I feel and need that I withdraw. I feel that conquering guilt and the complications about being gay would make it easier for everyone. This burden no matter how small, builds walls between the people involved.

Generally speaking, the step-parenting role has been very satisfying. I know our daughter does not feel the need to make the same commitment to me as to her natural father, but there is an honesty about this that makes it relatively easy to understand, although I often feel hurt and disappointed when it does occur.

The thrill and love that I feel for her and about her accomplishments and successes all make my life so much more complete. I am living a life that is full of experiences that I never, ever expected; it is a life in which I get to share love, laughter, and yes, sadness. We are a family.

The preceding description of our situation makes it very clear that our life today is not one smooth, effortless, euphoric experience. Periodically, there are still tense, unpleasant moments; but I suggest that any relationship has these kinds of moments. Trying to cope with another's idiosyncrasies, whether they be those of your own child or those of your lover, is not always easy. Familiarity tends to breed contempt. We see each other's best features and qualities, and, of course, we see the worst. The mystique, like a thin veneer, begins to wear. If it wears through in too many places, the relationship, in all likelihood, is doomed; if, on the other hand, those recurring holes can be patched and kept to a minimum, then there's hope for the relationship. It all comes down to a basic, rather fundamental component in the fragile fabric of interpersonal relationships — work! If the relationship is important to you, you exhaust all avenues before leaving the ship. Our ship, thankfully, is still afloat; we've not abandoned it and we don't intend to — the Fates so willing.

— 1980, 1981

ASPECTS OF GAY PARENTING WITHIN MARRIAGE

As the courts are slowly recognizing by awarding child custody to openly gay men and women, many homosexuals make excellent parents.

As a glance at the Children's Aid Society statistics will show, many straight people make very bad parents. Sexuality is not a criterion for quality in parenting. Any person, man or woman, straight or gay, who sincerely desires children and who welcomes them and is positive towards them will likely be a good parent.

This person may not be within a marriage. It is only grudgingly recognized by society — if it is recognized at all — that single parenting is an acceptable alternative to the nuclear family.

But what of gay people who are married and who want to stay married? While they may see marriage as something positive, as something worth retaining, the Gay Fact will continue to cause stress for the father, stress that he often transmits throughout the family.

There are four states of gay parenting for anyone trying to remain in a marriage, each one depending on the "outness" of the gay person. They are:

- in the closet (out only to yourself)
- out to your wife
- out to your children
- out to everyone

Each of these stages is a progression, one usually follows the others. It is possible to change the order, but if you are out beyond the family it won't be long before your wife and kids learn of it from other sources, at serious consequences to you.

Each state comes with its own set of problems, all of which are familiar, all of which are dealt with elsewhere in separate sections of this book, yet all of which must be faced by a gay person trying to stay in a marriage where there are children. Some of these problems have no obvious solution.

In the Closet

The closet is still the most common state for married gays. The consequences and costs of coming out are greatly magnified within a marriage and the attending stresses are correspondingly greater. For the gay father the prospect of coming out within a marriage is often terrifying. Only the pressure to be himself and to have others recognize this reality makes him do it. Some never make the step and remain within unhappy, emotionally-crippling relationships. Only through feelings does awareness come to the gay parent. The condemnations of himself that he feels from society are that much more painful because they are accepted by the victim. He accepts the message that he is deprived, unnatural, sick. Tensions build within the father, leading to depression, possible breakdowns, psychiatrists, and drugs. How can he ever find release? How could he come out? How would that affect the children?

The gay person becomes self-absorbed; his problem occupies more and more of his thoughts; his marriage and his children become millstones dragging him down, keeping him from the gay life — he hates them. Guilt follows. It's not the others' fault, after all, it's his own. Guilt grows like a cancer. Then one day his wife says, innocently, "How come you never smile at the kids any more?" and he goes off the rails: "She looked at me sideways, so I stabbed her." Twenty times. Or the leap from the twelfth floor ends his fear of flying. The mental straight jacket he's been wearing all these years becomes a physical reality.

Whatever happens, this anguish is not conducive to the happy home he wanted so badly —

how can the children feel secure in such a den of misery?

The only way to stop the cancer from growing, to stop these destructive fantasies from becoming a reality is to move onward — to come out a little further.

Out To Your Wife

Presumably the gay father wants to keep the family intact. Otherwise at this point he come; out and leaves the family entirely and does so in short order. Such precipitate action creates a completely different set of problems for all concerned.

Both parents want to keep the marriage going, but they don't want the kids to know. So now the gay parent has someone else to share the burden, someone to help deal with all the problems that the wife who had been kept in the dark was trying with little success to adjust to. Now she knows something of what was going on, but now she has to try also to understand and accept her husband's homosexuality. None of these are minor problems. So what the gay father ha; really done in coming out to his wife is to get someone else to share his closet.

Tensions build within the marriage — the gay man now expects some freedom to follow a gay life, at least from time to time. The way is now open for anger, hurting, arguments (which seem to be about trivial matters but are really about one thing). Possibly, although *not* inevitably separation and divorce follow. The children become unhappy, bewildered, resentful, rebellious: they start acting out in response to feelings they can't explain in self-destructive ways.

If only they could understand . . .

Out To Your Children

Children usually take the news better than the unsuspecting wife (or husband). It explains a lot about what has been going on in the family; they can accept the idea, at least in many cases, and more so with younger children. But new problems arise as they become involved. Things may ease inside the family but now we have three, or four, or more people in the same closet. The children get conflicting ideas about gay from the media, from their friends and their friends' parents, from their teachers, and from the Church. They know their father is a good, loving person, yet everyone else portrays him as a monster or a criminal, or at least as a weirdo.

The child now has to cope with a secret - dad is still a neat guy and mom loves him but we can't let anybody know he's gay (even though it's okay to be gay) because it could ruin his reputation in the community and even lose him his job. *Why?* How does a child even (or especially) a teenager, deal with anti-gay sentiment among friends and the world in general? It's hard enough for an adult; it's quite a trip to lay on a kid.

The next step, while logical, is not inevitable and is not usually taken-

Out To Everyone

Very few married gays are in the position to be openly gay, given the prejudice against them. Friends drop them like septic bandages, their wives suffer by becoming neighbourhood oddities, and the entire family becomes tainted. The thinking, if that is what it can be called, goes like this: "How can she possibly put up with him; she must be queer as well; how can we possibly talk to her if she's like that; those people should be run from the neighbourhood."

Very soon the family does depart, defeated. The children suffer, the same line of thinking being present with their friends: "Like father, like son; you must be a fag, too. Hey, fag! Watch out for Jerry, boys; don't get too close!" The laughter takes on a cruel edge, and it becomes, to them, true. For a boy or girl trying to get a hold on their own developing sexuality, whatever it is, this can have a damaging and very retrograde effect. Children might then turn on their parent,

resentful of the position they have been put into, and could easily turn anti-gay.

It is clearly too much to ask of our children that they bear the burdens of anti-gay prejudice which are too much for many gay adults to handle.

The problem is that all of these states of coming out have a bearing on the children of the marriage. Children are always caught in the fall-out from a nuclear family melt-down, whether they know the causes or not. They are easily confused as they go about trying to sort order from the chaos all around them, and they are very susceptible to peer group pressure and approval. To prevent harm being done to your children requires a great effort on your part, and your wife's, if you are in the first two states. You will have to be visibly a good parent while coping with the tremendous stresses of leading the double life.

Being out to your children, while it loads them with problems they don't want or need, can be more readily handled, and can result in better parenting.

With the current hostile social climate towards homosexuality, it is almost imperative that children who are told of their parent's homosexuality be warned that it is strictly a family matter and nobody else's business. Any questions have to be dealt with honestly and without alarming the child: "Other people don't understand, don't approve; it isn't wrong but some people will say it is; they are misguided, but we know better."

How well this will be accepted depends on how well the child has been brought up to respect the rights of others and not to have prejudices, on the relationship that exists between parent and child, and on the open and loving relationship between husband and wife.

As a gay parent you can help set a counter-example to the socially available one; you can answer questions that the child might have with a greater insight than most parents; (Parents not out to their children can do this too, of course.) The child could meet your gay friends to see that they, too, are okay people, not monsters, could meet other children of gay parents so that they might see that they are not alone, one of the greatest fears and misconceptions in the whole gay world.

This does not mean that because you are gay you will be a good parent, but it does mean that the two can go together. If you sincerely love your child and wish to live in a family situation without locking yourself entirely in the closet, then the family must be a part of your whole *lift* gay though it may be. Remember, love is a very positive force.

All gay parents, in whatever marital status, must be conscious of the need for positive examples of gay people, and gay parents in particular, of the need for reform in education on every level, from kindergarten to the National Research Council. As long as society is anti-gay, these problems will exist. But if we can bring up our own children to be free of these prejudices, we will have helped gay parents, and gay people, everywhere.

GAY PARENTS AND THE LAW

If a separation and divorce result after a gay parent comes out to the non-gay spouse, the ugly spectre of court battles over child custody or visitation rights looms over the horizon. If the two parents can come to a mutually agreed upon custody arrangement, so much the better. It will be better for the parents and better, of course, for the children. However, if a custody fight appears; to be likely then the following ideas, culled from gay and gay-supportive lawyers and from case law concerning gay parents and child custody, may be enlightening. *Do not use this legally-oriented section as an absolute guide or substitute for sound legal advice.* When a gay parent is in a custody battle with a

heterosexual parent, that gay parent has already one strike against him or her in the view of the courts. The gay parent must seem to be an even better parent than a non-gay parent. There are several factors that will be looked at before awarding custody to a gay parent.

1. How much involvement did the parent have with the children before the separation?
2. What is the parent's relationship with the children? (A judge is probably going to want to hear this answered by a psychiatrist or other expert.)
3. Stability. Did the gay parent provide a good home over a long period? Does he/she have a good job and good job record? If the answers are in the negative, the fact that it may be due to circumstances beyond the parent's control may not carry much weight.
4. Who have the children been with after the initial separation?

Of the five or six reported cases in Canada of child custody being awarded to a gay parent, only one gay parent was a man. Gay parents are often afraid of the legal process and do not assert their claim because of the distress the court case may cause him/her and the children.

In these reported cases and in those not reported, repeatedly judges awarded custody to a gay parent because the gay parent:

1. was "discreet," did not "flaunt" his sexuality, was not militant nor in any activist group, and did not frequent gay bars (all of this really means: the more closeted the better);
2. had a "balanced attitude" toward sexuality, i.e., "I want my child to be straight even though I am gay;" even if you feel good about being gay, show a preference for your child being heterosexual, is what the court is saying.
3. had many friends of the opposite sex;
4. would provide the child frequent contact with members of the opposite sex; this would be stressed, it seems, more than in awarding custody to a heterosexual parent.

If we look at the aspect of the gay parent providing stability, judges more often than not will begin by assuming that the gay parent is less stable because of their own biases. In almost all Canadian and American cases, judges asked whether the children would more likely be gay living with a gay parent. Most judges make the error of thinking they will be. How will the children feel having a gay parent? Will they be ostracized by schoolmates? Are not gay parents less adequate as parents and role models than heterosexuals? Often experts are necessary to remove the court's doubts on these questions. Judges ask these questions because they, along with many others, often hold the mistaken belief that homosexuality is a disease and a sign of emotional instability. Studies disproving these beliefs need to be presented and such evidence will influence the court more strongly if it can be presented through the voice of a psychiatrist or psychologist (See the studies listed in the "Selected Readings" section, located at the end of this book) Be prepared before the case to spend time and money to keep your children.

Here are some dos and don'ts for gay parents who feel they are the better parent and want custody following the separation or divorce.

1. If your spouse will not agree to your wish for shared custody or you cannot accept unreasonably restrictive access arrangements, take the children with you if you are going to leave. Strangely, such an action may be seen as evidence that you really care for the chil-

dren and want them with you.

2. If you are going to leave with the children, set up the most stable home you can under the circumstances. Get a place that is large enough, near the children's school, and a babysitter.
3. If you are not an activist already, do not be a militant during or just prior to the case. This may seem politically unacceptable, but such behaviour can go in your favour to get custody.
4. If you are going to live with someone, the judge's view of the lover as a parenting figure may be as decisive as his view of the natural parents' skills.
5. Judges may be uncomfortable about gay people being affectionate in front of children.
6. If your former spouse knows you are gay and you know that she will bring it up in court, then you should admit it and try to move the case to other issues.

Again let us repeat that the above advice is very general and must be adapted to the specifics of the circumstances of the gay and non-gay parent. How the advice is used will also depend, of course, on how the gay parent feels about his or her own sexuality.

This advice may have to be revised as time goes on and as family laws change and will vary in usefulness with each individual. If at all possible, Gay Fathers of Toronto would welcome gay parents writing to us and describing the outcome of their case to us. Details that you might feel would identify you need not be reported, i.e., names of persons, locations, professions, etc. Our address appears on the opening pages of the book.

Finally, seek expert legal advice. Your nearest gay organization may be able to suggest gay or gay-positive lawyers to help you. Ask your local gay organization to suggest books and studies that deal with gays as parents to assist you and your lawyer in being as articulate as possible in court.



V. THE FUTURE

A cartoon from *Christopher Street* shows a smiling woman seated in her living room and shouting into the phone: "Hello, Benny. It's your mother. I only have a minute. Get married and have children. Goodbye." Many of us will remember a little sadly scenes like this from our past. They are funny, but only in retrospect.

Will such scenes be repeated in the future as they have been so many times in the past? Will Benny do what his mother, family and society at large want him to do? Answers to these questions lie in the future. Many people will be required to give them.

This book is not finished, but it will end here nevertheless. But our lives will go on and so will our stories. In writing the book, we have come to see ourselves more clearly. We hope it has also given those who read it a better view of themselves and of their lives. What will they do now? It is time perhaps for them to assess their lives and decide again how they are going to live. It is for them, therefore — or rather it is for them and us to finish the book in reality, not just in words. When all of us have collected enough new reality, then perhaps we will write another book and a better on



AFTERWORD

Some people have read this book and asked: "Why have you made it so much of a downer?" If it is depressing, we can only say that we did not set out to make it so. Instead we worked from the assumption that the best release from pain and guilt comes from working directly at what causes them. The next book — whenever it is written — will no doubt have more to say about the joys of being gay and being fathers. It will dwell less on the pains and more on the joys. Although life is not just a cabaret, my friend, we are as prepared to laugh at it as the next person. If you have not seen the smiles behind some of the scenes we wrote about, we would like to assure you that they are there peeking out like cupid from behind a dark cloud. If you missed the smiles perhaps you should go back and read some of the scenes again. We have avoided the error of saying that everything in the gay father's world is rosy, but it is not all dark either, if you have a taste for irony.

Take the following conversation as an example. Achilles and the Tortoise are sometime lovers and members of Gay Fathers of Toronto. Their conversation proceeds by indirection and progress is made in between the lines.

Achilles: Can you let me have two valium?
Tortoise: Sure. Don't you have any?
Achilles: No.
Tortoise: Why not?
Achilles: I don't want them around. I've given them up.
Tortoise: You should keep some on hand in case of an emergency.
Achilles: My life is an emergency. And so it goes.

This conversation — and indeed, our whole book — can be read either as tragic or comic. We prefer to read it as neither tragic nor comic, but as the hyphen in tragi-comic. So we say, "What the hell, let's get on with it. Somebody has to try keeping the world together and we are prepared to do our bit." This book is just a tiny bit of the world. If you think of it as too heavy sometimes and too frivolous at others, just think about the hyphen.

So here we are at the end, thinking of all the things that we *didn't* say. We haven't said what to do if you feel lonely, although you will find some suggestions written in the following appendixes. We haven't said what to do either if you would like to have more sex than you are getting. Whether you decide to give it up or to spend your life looking at it, there are undoubtedly better manuals around to help you with such matters than anything we could write. And you have probably found them already in any case. If you have just separated, you are surely aware of the silence that has suddenly surged softly around you and into you. You will either get used to it or find someone else to fill it. In either case, there is not much we can do about it.

Every now and then a voice on the phone asks: "Yes, but what do you *do* at your meetings?" Most of these calls we assume come from the police playing their usual entrapment games, but to all of them we say: "Well, we talk and eat, and talk, and drink a little, and talk some more." What more is there to say or do?

There is little reason why books should begin at the beginning and end at the end, if in fact they are talking about things with no real beginning and no visible end. They are like explanations concocted after the fact to justify things that have already happened and that are still happening. That is the case with our book.

In writing it we are looking back. We have been writing it in bits and pieces, starts and stops,

for over two years. Although it is not done, we are going to publish it anyway. Because we can see the past more clearly than the future, it says more about the past than it does about the present or the future.

There are some of us who worry about the book. Should it be made better before we publish it? Is it too negative, too full of pain? Will it serve to depress and discourage the gay father who stands at a turning point in his life simply because it can give no firm and clear sense of what lie; ahead?

Perhaps. It all depends on how willing that father is to look at himself and to change — ever if that change is totally inward and apparent only to himself.

We have already said that the book is our work; it contains our lives as far as we have lived them, our experience. Despite the obvious differences in their outward circumstances, everyone fashions their own lives. This book is a testament to how we remade ours. Don't let anyone tell you it is easy to remake a life, but it can be done and ultimately the joy of doing so outweighs the pain.

This is our only answer to those who read the manuscript and asked why it dwells so much on personal difficulties and stress. These facets of the gay father's life do exist and, looking back on them now, we simply do not wish to deny them. The joy was there too, but it lies closer to us in time. It lies in the here-and-now and we believe it will continue to grow in the future. So this work is as it is because it is more about the past than it is about the here-and-now or the yet-to-be.

If you have flipped over pages from the front of the book to see how it all comes out, we don't blame you. Or if you have read through most of it, we will say for the last of many times *you are not alone*. In the end, the story comes out well if you want it to. The future is good if you want to make it so. It is up to you. Write the future as you will.

APPENDIX A: GAY FATHERS' GROUPS

Gay Fathers of Toronto is one of a growing number of gay fathers' groups developing across the United States and Canada. The fact of having children draws gay fathers together, for social support and because of concerns for their children in what is still to a great extent a homophobic world.

The following is the statement of objectives for Gay Fathers of Toronto, and could serve as a philosophical base for setting up such a group. Certainly the majority of homosexual fathers are either still in the closet or unaware that others such as themselves exist. Even knowing two or three other men in the same situation can be a help. No one else fully understands.

While a couple can split up, each going his or her own way (although not, certainly, without heartache and emotional stress) to make a new life for themselves, the man who has children unless he deliberately cuts himself off, has ties to the family that non-parent gays and non-gays cannot, or do not want to, understand.

We would like to think that groups such as ours will make themselves unnecessary or redundant by advancing their goals and the cause of liberation for all gays. That is the long-term goal — alongside, perhaps, the establishment of the Gay Fathers' Softball League and the writing of the "Gay Fathers' Cookbook and Guide to Organized Anarchy and Parliamentary Procedure." Until the day comes, however, that sees these long-term goals accomplished, and while young homosexual men continue to embrace both straight life and straight wife, and while they continue to have children, groups like ours must continue to exist because they fulfill a real need and perform a service that no other agency in society offers.

GAY FATHERS OF TORONTO

Basic Objectives:

Gay Fathers of Toronto has four basic objectives:

- Support
- Education
- Social Relations and Friendship
- Political Action

Support

The main function of the GFT at this time is to support all Gay Fathers, those already out, those in the process of coming out, and those still in the closet.

- Those already out, whether embroiled in litigation, still suffering the trauma of separation, or even well-established in the gay community, need to know that others sympathize and can help.
- Those in the process of coming out need a group to depend on for stability and encouragement, a way to reaffirm their gay identity in a positive way, and the knowledge that where they are going others have successfully gone.
- Those still in the closet need to be aware of the existence of a group such as GFT; aware that discreet, positive support is available, and that there is someone willing to listen, as we all have our story to tell that needs to be told.

Education

Self-education. Apart from the more subtle educative process involved in joining any group, i.e., learning what being gay is all about and what other gay people are like, GFT can offer more practical education for its members — in topics such as legal rights, child custody, and child raising (e.g., how and when to disclose your gayness to your children, or how to counteract anti-gay propaganda repeated parrot-fashion by your children).

Public education. We all agree that the general public, while sometimes sympathetic to the problems of gay people, need to be made aware of the value of gay people in society, and specifically that being gay and being a parent are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, GFT, by its existence, can be a way of bringing this to the public. However, we must be aware of the implications of going public, and must only do so in accordance with the needs of the members of the group, and in relation to its other objectives.

Social Relations and Friendship

As a means of meeting others in the same circumstances, GFT fills a definite need socially, especially for those members still in family situations.

Political Action

GFT exists as a group within the larger gay community and as such can have some political weight. We are all engaged, whether voluntarily or not, in the struggle for gay rights, by the very fact of being gay. Thus we cannot deny the existence of political action. This is not the prime objective of GFT, nor should it be, but our interaction with other facets of the gay community can have a beneficial effect on gay society. What political weight we have comes not from radical pronouncements or angry manifestos, but from our being a stable, serious, and responsible group of people dedicated to both the open gay existence and to our children.

Long-Term Objectives

These can be as varied as the group members themselves. The ultimate goal for all gay people is a life free from repression and discrimination and as gay fathers we have an extra interest in forming a tolerant society, so that our children, in whatever form their individuality takes, can be sure in that individuality. We should, therefore, look beyond our immediate concerns to those of other discriminated groups — lesbian mothers, gays in general, women, racial minorities, the disabled — everyone whom society has disallowed their rightful place.

GAY FATHERS COALITION

Gay Fathers of Toronto is a member of the Gay Fathers Coalition, centered in Washington, D.C. and whose statement of purpose follows. (For the addresses of this group, see Appendix C).

Statement of Purpose

We are a group of fathers who are gay. Our experiences have been varied and we are united in our determination to integrate these two aspects of our lives. In the past our roles as fathers and gay men have been viewed as incompatible, both by society at large and, all too often, by ourselves as well. We believe, on the contrary, that gay men can love and nourish children and provide a safe environment

in which girls and boys can mature into loving and productive men and women.

We have founded this organization to help ourselves and others in similar situations to continue to grow and develop in ways which draw upon the rich experiences of both aspects of our lives. We intend to do this by forming mutually supportive groups for building a positive self-image and for creative problem solving, by locating other gay men who are fathers or are contemplating fatherhood and may be struggling alone, and by educating professionals and the general public both to our special strengths and our special concerns.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

1. Membership and Community of Interest

Our affiliates include gay fathers' groups, gay and lesbian parents' groups and individuals acting as local contacts in areas where there are no such groups currently in existence.

At the present time we believe that we can adequately represent only gay males in parenting situations. However, we have an active interest in the concerns of lesbian mothers and we want to assist and to cooperate fully with lesbian mothers who share our parenting concerns.

We support and welcome as members gay fathers, lovers of gay fathers, and gay men who are committed to adopting children or providing foster care. Delegates to the Gay Fathers Coalition are presently limited to these categories. We recognize that local groups will continue to observe their own requirements for membership.

2. Support for Children

We support lesbian and gay parents in helping their children to deal with the effects of homophobic attitudes and myths.

We are committed to bringing about changes in the attitudes of society that cause confusion in our children about our worthiness as parents and our ability to love and nurture them or that cause them to be anxious about their own sexual development.

We affirm without qualification that we can and do serve as positive role models for our own children, as well as for all children, whatever their sexual orientations.

We are strongly committed to a non-sexist upbringing of our children.

We affirm that all children have the right to develop their natural sexuality free from stereotypes, fear, or coercion.

3. Support for Local Groups

In order to provide support for existing groups and to act as a catalyst to form new groups, we will:

- Prepare a support packet for gay fathers groups that will provide encouragement, assistance, and information to existing, new and potential groups. This packet will later be expanded to meet the needs of other groups relative to gay parents, such as mental health workers, judges, attorneys and legislators, children, social action agencies, etc.
- Act as a clearinghouse for the collection and dissemination of information on gay parenting.
- Establish a national network of local representatives to assist individuals ⁱⁿ forming new groups or to assist them on a one-to-one basis if group formation is not feasible.

4. Support for Individuals in Parenting Roles

In order to provide support for individual gay fathers or those who otherwise find themselves in a child-nurturing situation, we will:

- Provide information on parenting, such as the previously-mentioned support packet.
- Put them in contact with other gay parents in their area.
- Act as a reference source for legal problems.
- Provide information, counselling, and support to fathers estranged from their children because of court orders, geographic distance, homophobic attitudes in themselves or in others, or any other reasons.

5. Educational Outreach

We plan to educate the general public as well as the gay community about the fact that there are substantial numbers of gay fathers and lesbian mothers and that we are fully effective parents.

To work toward educating professionals and the general public we will:

- Encourage valid research on gay parenting and disseminate the results of this research.
- Provide and support speakers for gay and non-gay groups.
- Engage in outreach to the gay and non-gay media.

6. Legislation

We support the passage of legislation designed to eliminate the effects of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

We are particularly committed to support laws and rulings that forbid the consideration of sex or sexual orientation in matters of divorce, separation, alimony, child support, childcare, foster care, visitation, and custody.

APPENDIX B: A SAMPLE OF ANTI-HOMOSEXUAL HATE LITERATURE

The League Against Homosexuals and several other groups in Toronto were aroused during recent election campaigns into virulent and persistent attacks on gays. The preferred method of attack by these groups is to push fliers through citizens' mailboxes. This literature relies on the time-tested techniques perfected by Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda chief: if you repeat a lie often enough, some people, and sometimes many people, will accept it as truth.

The homophobic people who produce and tirelessly distribute this literature are undoubtedly motivated by the growing openness and success of the gay liberation movement. Although they are small in number, these people who hate and fear more than they love can significantly influence political events in a society that is vaguely hostile to, prejudiced towards, or simply ignorant of homosexuality. In some sense, then, such groups speak for society — at least for those parts of society that will not grant human rights to homosexuals. If the materials produced by such groups as the League Against Homosexuals were directed against other targets, such as women, Jews, Blacks, or other minorities and disadvantaged groups, the force of the law could be used to prevent distribution of the material. But no such protection is offered to homosexuals and so the League and other groups can continue to vilify and defame them with impunity.

In the fall of 1980, the homosexual community in Toronto tried to establish a special liaison with the Toronto Board of Education, as the Board had done with several other community groups. The public response to the Board's initial interest and support of the proposal was swift and abusive. The Board promptly withdrew its support from the proposal to establish the liaison committee.

Gay Fathers of Toronto was among the groups that approached the Board of Education to establish the liaison because we felt and still feel that education has a responsibility to our children and to all children to make the facts of homosexuality known to them. But the League Against Homosexuals thinks otherwise. They and similar groups want to know nothing of the facts. They prefer to live the fantasy that sees homosexuals as child seducers who reproduce by infecting children with the same sin and sickness that they revel in for themselves.

The outcome of the November 1980 election in Toronto was that Mayor John Sewell, who had supported the notion of human rights for homosexuals, was defeated by the narrow margin of 2,000 votes across the entire city, and George Hislop, a gay activist, running for alderman with the endorsement of a progressive community organization in the downtown ward that includes Toronto's Gay Ghetto was defeated by a similar margin. Although neither Sewell nor Hislop had been involved in the proposal to establish the liaison between the Board of Education and the gay community, they were held responsible for the growing presence of open homosexuals in society and therefore for the increased risk to children. The hate literature was a response to the simple idea that homosexuals are citizens like other citizens and are worthy, therefore, of all the civil rights that other citizens enjoy.

Read the following tract carefully and remember that it was at one time available to anyone who wished to pick it up from the general information desk of the largest police station in downtown Toronto. Ask why some people write such tracts, why some distribute them, and why others accept them as true.



LEAGUE AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS

(L.A.H.)



QUEERS DO NOT PRODUCE: THEY SEDUCE!

QUESTIONS FOR TODAY'S PARENTS AND FUTURE PARENTS:

- DO YOU WANT YOUR CHILDREN TAUGHT BY QUEERS?
- DO YOU WISH TO HAVE YOUR CHILD TURN INTO A QUEER?
- DO YOU WISH TO HAVE YOUR CHILD MARRY THE SAME SEX?
- DO YOU WISH TO KILL OUR FUTURE?

OUR CHILDREN ARE TOMORROW'S MOTHERS AND FATHERS.

IF OUR SCHOOLS ALLOW QUEERS TO TEACH OUR CHILDREN, OUR CHILDREN WILL BE ENCOURAGED TO TURN QUEER AND QUEERS DO NOT PRODUCE: THEY SEDUCE:

REMEMBER WELL LITTLE EMANUEL JACQUES; YOUR CHILD COULD BE NEXT

QUESTIONS FOR ALL NON QUEERS TO CONSIDER:

1. DOES OUR SOCIETY NEED QUEERS?
2. WHO SUPPORTS QUEERS?
3. WHO WANTS OUR CHILDREN TAUGHT BY QUEERS?
4. WHO WANTS OUR CHILDREN TO TURN INTO QUEERS?
5. WHO WANTS QUEERS TO SEDUCE OUR CHILDREN?
6. WHO NEEDS THE SUPPORT OF QUEERS?

HERE ARE THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS:

Any sane, rational, healthy society does not need queers for anything. The remaining questions can all be answered by the following list, who in one fashion or another are pro-queer and therefore are a threat to you and your family. These pro-queers for whatever perverted motives are: queers themselves, and; John Sewell, dis-honourable mayor of Toronto; who promotes queers at every opportunity; "Georgie" Hislop, queer from Ward 6 currently seeking election on the platform of being a "super queer"; many left-wing Liberals; the so-called "Human Rights Commission", who would consider it a violation of a queer's "civil rights" if it wasn't allowed to seduce your child; all communists, and other rabble and mis-fits; the Toronto City Council, who by their cowardice in taking a public stand against queers, are advocating queers by their silence, in direct opposition to the vast amount of voters in the Toronto area; the Toronto Star, who seem to favour the forced inclusion of queers and other perverts in our society as essential; Mr. Roy McMurtry, who refuses to publicly outlaw queers from joining our Toronto Police and who has just helped to drop height and weight restrictions from our police recruiting criteria; and Pierre Trudeau, who, it will not be forgotten, as Justice Minister in 1967 legalized homosexual acts between "consenting," one of the many objectionable parts of his "Omnibus Bill." Trudeau, a father of 3 children, was the main architect of this pro-queer legislation. One wonders whether he encourages "consenting acts" in his family; after all, one should practice what he preaches. The same goes for John Sewell.

SOME FACTS ABOUT QUEERS:

- QUEERS ARE AGAINST GOD AND THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE.
- QUEERS ARE AGAINST HUMANITY.
- QUEERS ARE AGAINST EVERY RACE AND RELIGION.

DOES OUR SOCIETY NEED QUEERS?

NO!

WHO IS AGAINST QUEERS?

- ALL DECENT CITIZENS.
- ALL NORMAL, HEALTHY HETEROSEXUAL FAMILIES.
- ALL COUPLES THAT PRODUCE CHILDREN.
- ALL RIGHT-WING POLITICAL PARTIES.
- ALL THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN CHRIST AND HIS TEACHINGS.

DO YOU WISH TO SEE QUEERS ON OUR TORONTO POLICE FORCE?

Right now plans are underway, to be sure, as the question is being raised in public to possibly condition the people of Toronto to accept as a foregone conclusion, that blatant queers will be allowed on our police force. If this proceeds, are we then to see police officers *sashaying down the streets hand-in-hand on their beats*? Will queers in blue give you and your family confidence in the police force, or on the city streets???

Today, the once great police force of San Francisco is rapidly becoming a queers "boys in blue" circus. Just recently, a notorious lesbian was given the task of "helping oversee" the San Francisco Police Force by that city's pro-queer mayor, who in fact had a "bizzare ceremony" of marriage performed in her garden between this new "director" and her own press secretary. Now these two lesbians help "oversee" that city's police!

With the inclusion of queers on the Frisco police and queers helping "oversee" if queers have flocked to that modern day "Sodom and Gomorrah." The queer population there now is estimated to be at 60%! Is this what we want Toronto to become? We say NO! HELL NO!

REASONS FOR LEAGUE AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS, (L.A.H.)

If you are revolted and sickened by the very subject of queers and their perversions, if the thought of having your child or any child kidnapped, tortured, raped repeatedly and finally murdered by sexually depraved deviates that now prowl our schools, theatres, shopping malls, public parks, steambaths, public washrooms, and taverns, then you will support L.A.H.

If you feel yourself isolated or restricted in your movements, because as a concerned parent you worry about where your child goes, or because of fear from being assaulted by queers yourself, then hopefully you too will join and support the League Against Homosexuals.

The League Against Homosexuals calls upon every normal, healthy heterosexual Canadian, regardless of Race or Colour to join and support our effort and our common fight to establish and maintain a free society free of queers and their perverted anti-human morals.

Queers exist to seduce and pervert our children. Queers are sexually depraved vampires.

If queers are allowed to have "equal rights", then they MUST be allowed to seduce your child. Do you want a queer calling at your home to see if your little boy "can come out to play"? If you had to give up your child for adoption, for whatever reason, would you like it if a queer had an equal right to adopt it...? If you look for a baby sitter and a queer responds, asking for the job, would you feel safe having your child in the hands of a queer...? If not, why not; queers are after all "equal". They will remain so unless L.A.H. and you join to stop the queer from any and all social influence whatsoever. Its time they be put back into their closets and have them nailed shut by having their "equal rights" to practice their perversions revoked. It may also be a good idea to have queers and their perversions declared a crime against nature, with stiff mandatory prison terms.

REMEMBER, THE GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT WANT THE LEGAL RIGHT TO SEDUCE OUR CHILDREN!

What are you going to do about it... will you help us, even if you yourself do not have children, think of us that do, and please, above all, think of the poor young children. Would you want them to be the "blood" of sexually depraved vampires...??

It's bad enough already with child molesters, our society doesn't need either. Society may be going to the dogs, but let's not let our children go to the queers!!

STAND UP AND FIGHT FOR CHILDREN: THEY ARE OUR FUTURE!

JOIN AND/OR SUPPORT THE LEAGUE AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS

698

905-2886
P.O. BOX 275,
STATION D
TORONTO, ONT.
M6P 3J9



KARL VON GOETZ-CHAIRMAN
CARROLL VON GOETZ - SECRETARY
MIKE KELLER - VICE CHAIRMAN
NORMAN SMITH - PUBLICITY

* The League Against Homosexuals is a registered non-profit organization seeking co-operation and/or amalgamation of any and all individuals and organizations concerned with the welfare of all children.

Any donations toward defraying the costs of printing supplies, public media ads etc., will be gratefully acknowledged.

APPENDIX C: WHAT DO I DO NOW?

In general there are three things you can do if you have read this book and wish to take some steps on your own. First, you may look for peer support and advice; second, you may seek out trained, professional help that some doctors, lawyers, and psychiatrists can give; third you may want to form a gay fathers' group in your own community. Here are some ways of doing these things.

SUPPORT AND CONTACT WITH PEERS

Look up listings beginning with "gay," "lesbian," and "homosexual" in the telephone book. Calling the groups so listed may put you in contact with individuals and groups who can help, advise, and give support. Look up a listing for the Metropolitan Community Church, as this group ministers largely to the gay community and offers counselling and help without pressing its own religious views upon those it tries to help.

Agencies of these kinds will be found most frequently in larger cities. If you happen to live where there is no such groups or agencies, go to a library and look up the listing in phone books for nearby larger cities. Or when you are travelling through such centres, give a call and make contact.

Community resources are also listed in publications of the gay press. In Canada, the largest publication is *The Body Politic* and it lists agencies and groups across the country. *TBP* is available in gay book stores, in many baths, and in some "straight" bookstores that are brave enough and are strongly enough devoted to free speech to carry it. *TBP* may also be purchased (\$1.25 a copy) from Box 7289, Station A, Toronto, Canada M5W 1X9.

In Britain, *Gay News* carries similar information. The United States has many gay publications with the *Advocate* being the "leading gay newsmagazine," but it does not feature the community resources pages that are carried by *TBP* and *Gay News*. Many smaller publications in the US do carry such information, but they are too numerous to list here. Specifically, you may want to contact the following groups:

Gay Fathers of Toronto
730 Bathurst Street
Toronto, Canada
M5S 2R4
(416) 532-2333 or (416) 967-0430

Gay Fathers Coalition
P.O. Box 50360
Washington, D.C. 20004
USA
(301) 984-9449

(This group will advise you where the gay fathers' group nearest to you is located.)

Organizations trying to help the spouses of gay fathers and lesbian mothers are now beginning to develop also. Two of these are:

Spouses of Gays
c/o Caryn Miller
260 Carlton Street
Toronto, Canada

M5A 2L3
(416) 967-0597
Straight Partners
P.O. Box 1603
Hyattsville, Md. 20788
USA

PROFESSIONAL HELP

The stress of the transition to a gay identity from the former apparently straight reality can be very great, as some of our stories have shown. Peer counselling and support is of great importance in helping the individual to cope with this stress, but it alone may not be sufficient. Professional help is often needed too. But be careful where you get it. Many straight professionals do not understand the facts of homosexuality, let alone the subtleties of the gay life style. (Many of us have indeed struggled through situations that were made worse by the "help" given to us by ill-informed or biased professionals.) In the guise of therapy or good advice, such persons simply inflict further unnecessary pain.

But fortunately, there are professionals who are well intentioned, sympathetic, and in command of the facts. Some, but by no means all, of such professionals are gay themselves. Gays often feel most comfortable in dealing with other gays about professional problems, but many straights in these professions also offer sound advice and effective help.

Find these professionals in the same way you look for peer support and contact. The same sources that have information about gay groups and individuals can give referrals to competent and sympathetic professionals. Individuals in peer groups may also be able to give such referrals out of their own experience.

FORM YOUR OWN GROUP FOR GAY FATHERS

If there is no group near you, form your own. The following advice on how to form your own group is based on the experience of the people who helped to found the Gay Fathers Coalition. The Coalition links together a dozen or more groups in the United States and two in Canada. This is what they say are the essentials of getting a group off the ground.

First, you need a place to meet regularly. It can be a community center, church hall, or someone's living room. Actually, a more personal situation such as someone's home seems to work out best. Meeting places can rotate among various members' homes.

Second, there has to be one person (or a small group) who will send out meeting notices and act as a contact for people to call. Ideally, he should be out enough so that his name, address and phone number can be disseminated. Another possibility would be to use the local gay hotline or MCC number, especially in any publications. But talk to them about it first!

Some groups have begun by placing ads in the personal columns of the local newspapers, although persuading the managers of advertising departments to accept such ads can sometimes be a problem. And handling the abusive calls that follow from the publication of a telephone number in the public press is another problem. Note, however, that both of these problems can be avoided by placing notices in gay publications, although these media may not be read by the people you want to get your message. Placing notices in gay steam baths is another good way of reaching gay fathers. A notice in gay bars is likely to reach fewer of them. If you can persuade a local newspaper or radio station to do a story, you will certainly get responses, but this method has obvious drawbacks — the

response can be too great and, of course, somebody has to appear in print or before the microphones and cameras.

The third essential is patience and persistence. Your group will start out small and stay small for a while. Then, just when you're sick of the same faces, half-a-dozen new people will show up out of nowhere, with half-a-dozen new stories to tell, and you're on your way!

That's it: start small, keep with it, and stay open to developing possibilities. It also helps to visit another gay fathers' group and to see how they have managed. It's good, too, if someone with experience in another group can come to a few of your early meetings and guide you along. And the Gay Fathers Coalition, of course, is always available for consultation and guidance. Just drop them a line or give them a call.

Here are some questions often asked in gay fathers' groups and here too are some thoughts in answer to them.

Should we introduce our children to the group? Picnics or other outings with the kids are great fun, and very liberating for you. It feels good to be with your gay friends when you have your kids for the weekend. We're nice people. You may want to set limits on greetings and expressions of affection among members in order to allay anxieties. Best not to be doctrinaire, one way or the other.

What about coming out to the children? Same principle. Do what feels most natural. So much depends on geography, politics, and just plain individual differences. Many of us have done it, and the results have been excellent. Gay fathers groups should not try, however, to enforce a group standard of behaviour on this or other critical points about the way their members lead their lives. These are very personal decisions. We can learn from each other, but no one should try to tell someone else what to do. Differences of approach and tolerance for others' opinions, situations, and sense of what they can do are essential ingredients of gay fathers' groups.

Do you have to publicize the group? Some publicity right at the start is probably essential. You must do something to get the word out. We've talked about some of these ways already. These include posting a flyer in local bars and baths, putting a notice in the local gay paper (or straight paper, if it's not run by Neanderthals), an announcement by the local MCC or other gay organization. But it's not necessary to go to a lot of expense. The word will get out.

What can we talk about when the group meets? Anything and everything. A good place to start is simply to let those who want to talk tell their stories. When you've exhausted these you might want to turn to specific topics such as custody, visitation, legal proceedings, cruising, VD, pot, adolescent rebellion, diapers, gay politics, personal problems, emotions, ex-wives, wives, lovers, loneliness, recipes, school boards . . . Just be sure everybody gets a chance to talk who wants to, and beware of conversation monopolizers. It is often helpful to appoint a coordinator or discussion leader who keeps a gentle order and ensures that everyone who wants to gets a chance to contribute. Change the coordinator or leader for different meetings, even a you change the topics of discussion.

What about men who are still married? They often feel left out and/or pressured to get a divorce. They are in a very special situation and you should go out of your way to make them comfortable with you. Similarly, be sensitive to the problems of fathers with full-time custody. They may need help with babysitting, for example, and special consideration in scheduling meetings and parties. Also, be sensitive to the situation of fathers who don't see their children often, for whatever reason. They have special needs and a special outlook. Be sure, for example, to make them welcome on outings with children.

Should the meeting times be consistent? Yes. The same week night every other week has worked out best for a number of our groups.

What about meeting size? Groups of seven to fifteen seem best, but larger groups can be accommodated, as they do in San Francisco, by dividing into sub-groups for discussion around different topics. Whatever the size of the group it makes a pleasant evening to combine the discussion with a pot-luck supper and perhaps a little wine or beer. Guest speakers from time to time are also good to give variety and new perspectives.

Should we get involved in gay politics? Our advice is to stay out of high-profile gay politics, at least until you're a solid group. New members are often turned off by what they see as "radical" politics. But *do* take stands on what is important to you. Sometimes part of the group will want to act while others do not. Compromise is necessary. Individual action is often the answer. And as members get greater confidence in themselves, they will be surprised to find themselves doing things they would have condemned in others but a short time ago. You should also consider marching on Gay Pride Day, if you're anywhere near a big city, and can take the chance. Make a banner. You'll be applauded like crazy — especially by women — and you'll be high on it for days.

Should we join the Gay Fathers Coalition? Definitely! And send a delegation to the next regional or national meeting. If it's a long way, you can help defray the delegates' expenses by taking up a collection, or maybe having a bake sale. Or how about a Gay Fathers' Car Wash?

How can we share our experiences with others? Write articles; send speakers to local gay groups, perhaps even to sympathetic community organizations that are predominantly straight. In New York City, for example, members have spoken at meetings of Dignity, Integrity, the Gay Synagogue, and other groups, with uniformly good receptions.

So, to sum all this up, if you feel the need for a support group — start one! Take a chance. That's how most of us got started.

You'll love it!

SELECTED READINGS

Sources Containing Materials About Gay Fathers

Babuscio, Jack. *We Speak for Ourselves: Experiences in Homosexual Counselling*. SPCK 1976. See especially Chapter 4 "The Halo of Marriage," which addresses the subject of why gays marry.

Cameron, Stevie. "When Someone in Your Family is Gay." *Chatelaine*, July 1981, pp. 35, 98-110.

An article that looks closely and sympathetically at what happens when a husband, wife, parent, or child announces that he or she is gay. It finds that such an announcement is likely to send family members into "shock and bitter alienation" unless lines of communication among them are kept open. The article also lists Canadian groups that offer support for the special needs of various family members. The editors here follow the common practices of the popular press that illustrates homosexuals only in shades of grey, lavender, or purple.

Clark, Don. *Loving Someone Gay*. New York: Signet Books, 1977.

Don Clark is a gay psychologist who was married and has three children. He writes with insight and compassion and uniquely reveals the struggles of gay people as children and adults.

Clark, Don. *Living Gay*. Celestial Arts, 1979.

Another fine account of the problems and joys of living as a gay person.

"The Daddy Issue." *Christopher Street* 7(10) (April 1977).

"Gay Fathers Struggle for Acceptance." *Hamilton Spectator*. 15 July 1980, p. 49.

Godley, Elizabeth. "Lesbian Mothers: Living a Lie — or Living in Fear." *Vancouver Sun* 26 May 1981, Sec. B. p. 3

"A Homosexual Father: Many Consider Him Unfit But 'I Love My Son.'" *Toronto Globe and Mail*. 30 March 1978.

Jay, Karla and Young, Alien, eds. *After You're Out: Personal Experiences of Gay Men and Lesbian Women*. New York: Pyramid Books, 1975.

A collection of writings that evoke the direct experiences and reflections of those who struggle with a straight world from within the gay reality. The range of lifestyles and experiences is wide indeed and includes separate statements by "a lesbian mother" and "a faggot father."

Jones, Clinton R. *Understanding Gay Relatives and Friends*. The Seabury Press, 1978.

Clinton Jones is a canon of the Episcopal Church. He discusses relationships in families where one of their members is gay — son, daughter, father, or husband.

Latham, Jack Purdom. "Tender Mornings: Progress of a Faggot Father." *Gay Sunshine* (San Francisco), Summer/Fall 1979, pp. 10-12.

An excerpt from a book-length manuscript in which Latham writes about his experiences as a gay father. It deals with practical realities, but in a style that is imaginative, vivid, and deeply felt. He discusses the time his son slipped into his bedroom and watched silently while he and his lover had sex. He talks about facing his son's decision to leave him and return to his mother. "Without him I would be 'just another faggot' with nothing to distinguish me, purposeless and wasted. I saw myself in Buena Vista Park, where all the men had beautiful pedigreed dogs on leashes, and I no longer had John, the Ultimate Pet, the Final Credential."

Lynch, Michael. "Forgotten Fathers." *The Body Politic*. April 1978, p. 1.

Miller, Brian. "Unpromised Paternity: Life Styles of Gay Fathers." In *Gay Men: The Sociology of Male Homosexuality*, pp. 239-252. Edited by Martin Levine. New York: Harper and Row, 1979. Sometimes sociology forgets its obsession with big words and vague ideas that explain the obvious. Miller's article makes a bow in the direction of "clinical objectivity" that makes it a little painful to read, but there is no doubt he has gotten to the heart of the matter here. His descriptions of what gay fathers do — the tearoom trade, their struggles with fear and anxiety, and finally the greater openness and acceptance — all have the ring of truth about them and suggest hope for the future as well. Other articles in the collection have value as well, especially Michael Riordan's "Capital Punishment: Notes of a Willing Victim" describing the use of electric aversion therapy to "cure" homosexuality.

Riddle, Dorothy. "Relating to Children: Gays as Role Models." *Journal of Social Issues* 34 (3) (1978).

Scrivener, Leslie, "The Anguish of Marriage to a Homosexual." *Toronto Star*, 2 July 1981, sec. D, p. 1. When a mass circulation paper talks about "the trauma of discovering your partner's hidden proclivities," it is unlikely to do more than exploit sensational stereotypes, but at least this article gets the clear message across that there are homosexuals who marry and have children.

"Wives of Gay Men Struggle to be Happy." *Hamilton Spectator*. 15 July 1980, p. 49.
Materials of Interest to Gay People

Fisher, Peter. *The Gay Mystique*. Day Books, 1972.
A classic book by a gay man about gay life. A readable panorama of gay male life.

Galper, Miriam. *Co-parenting: A Source for the Separated or Divorced Family*. Running Press, 1978. Although this book is not directed to gay parents, it is very helpful to the separated or divorced gay parent and his or her former spouse. For the gay parent it provides a variety of options in child-rearing after a separation or divorce. For gays and non-gays alike.

Goldstein, Joseph; Freud, Anna; and Solnit, Albert J. *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child*. New York: The Free Press, 1973.

_____. *Before the Best Interest of the Child*. New York: The Free Press, 1979. The Free Press, 1979.

These two books recognise that "the state is too crude an instrument to become an adequate substitute for 'flesh and blood parents.'" Yet they argue that the state must intervene in certain instances to decide matters that parents themselves cannot agree upon or to safeguard children whose well-being is threatened by their parents. The books give insight into the ways courts and childcare experts think about these issues. While the authors argue that the child's interests are best served within "the intact family," they

recognise also that the needs of children can be met in any situation where the child has a "feeling of being wanted and therefore valued." They declare that the essential elements for satisfactory child development are found in a continuing relationship of "reciprocal affection between the child and ... at least one caretaking adult." They recognize too that these caretaking adults can be other than the biological parents of the child. The books unfortunately make no reference to circumstances in which one or both of the caretaking adults are homosexual.

Hodges, Andrew and Hutter, David. *With Downcast Gays: Aspects of Homosexual Self-Oppression*. Toronto: Pink Triangle Press, 1977.

McNeil, John J. *The Church and the Homosexual*. New York: Pocket Books, 1976.

A Jesuit theologian examines homosexuality in the light of ancient teaching and modern thought. He reviews the long-standing anti-homosexual bias of society and finds that it has suppressed information and corrupted the very channels of enlightenment that might lead to understanding of the topic. He examines the grounds on which the Church has condemned homosexuality and denies the validity of each: that homosexuality is against the will of God, that homosexuals are a menace to the community, and that the union of homosexuals is a sinful love. A clear, strong statement and one of great support to gays who seek a place of love and respect in the Church.

Nahas, Rebecca and Turley, Myra. *The New Couple: Women and Gay Men*. New York: Seaview, 1979.

An exploration of friendship, sex, and love between women and gay men. Based on a large number of personal interviews, the book describes various couple relationships — some married, some lovers or roommates, others platonic friends. Though sex is often part of these relationships, emotional commitment is said not to be an essential part of them. Though the book examines at length what it calls "traditional" married couples, there is no suggestion that any of them have children. So the book deals not with gay fathers, but with male homosexuals who marry or otherwise form relationships with women. This makes clear that commitment and children define the essence of the gay fathers' relationship to women.

Rosenfels, Paul. *Homosexuality: The Psychology of the Creative Process*. Roslyn Heights, N.Y.: Libra Publishers, 1971.

Rosenfels finds that traditional concepts of human nature stifle creativity and that homosexuality is a key to the process that fashions vividly new values, fashions, and meanings. He argues that the dynamic of this creativity lies in "the fact that the making and dissolving of human attachments is the basic instruments of self-development."

Tripp, C.A. *The Homosexual Matrix*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.

An in-depth study of male homosexuality from religious, anthropological, political, and biological viewpoints. Tripp also examines the question of psychotherapy to cure homosexuality and shows why therapy has never been able to cure anyone of homosexuality. Since homosexuality is not a disease, homosexuals are not sick, so there is nothing to cure them of.

Vanggaard, Thorkil. *Phalld: A Symbol and Its History in the Male World*. New York: International Universities Press, 1972.

The erect penis as symbol is the Phallus and its history is long and deep in human consciousness. Only in recent centuries has veneration of it been obliterated from public ceremony with its suppression being led first by the Church and then by secular authority. The power of the symbol can serve either aggression or love. It is associated with a homosexual radical that was once recognized to exist in some degree in all men and that was therefore widely accepted. When his beloved Antinoiis drowned in the Nile at the age

of twenty, Hadrian proclaimed his grief in monuments throughout the realm and poets wrote verses to console their emperor. Vaggaard points out that people, even as late as the Elizabethan Age, could accept the idea

of naked men sleeping with each other. So Iago's betrayal of Othello and Cassio hinges on suppressed homosexuality and his words are those of a frightened and envious closet case:

I lay with Cassio lately,
And being troubled with a raging tooth,
I could not sleep.
There are a kind of man so loose of soul,
That in their sleeps will mutter their affairs,
One of this kind is Cassio:
In sleep I heard him say "Sweet Desdemona,
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves:"
And then, sir, would be gripe and wring my hand,
Cry out, "O sweet creature!" and then kiss me hard,
As if he pluck'd up kisses by the roots,
That grew upon my lips, then laid his leg
Over my thigh, and sigh'd, and kiss'd, and then
Cried "Cursed fate, that gave thee to the Moor!"

It still happens today, but now the betrayer besides poisoning personal relationships may also go to the police.

Weinburg, George. *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1973.

BACK COVER

The man who is both homosexual and a father often stands alone. Behind a well-managed facade, he lives a secret life that turns on a painful combination of desire and denial. If the straight world recognizes him at all, he is regarded with an attitude that hovers between derision and contempt. For the publicly gay father, the politest reaction that greets him is usually silence with the face turned away. The most wounding responses regard him as a social and biological impossibility. The fact of the matter, however, is that a large number of men who are homosexual do establish continuing relations with women — usually within marriage — and do father children. Many of these men seek out such relationships as proof that their darkest fears about themselves are untrue. Their unions often appear to work for a time, but ultimately the dream turns to a nightmare. Escape seems impossible, for now in addition to the enormous social pressures that made the union in the first place, there is also the bond to a woman and above all there are the children.

This book is written by men who know the special joys and fears of being gay and being fathers. They have at last faced a fact that they for so long denied. They speak here in their own voices about their experiences. In doing so, they do not try to wish away the past; they acknowledge the love they offered and the children that sprang from it. They seek only to understand better what happened in their lives and to share that understanding with others — with their families and with their children. Here they speak chiefly to those many fathers who are homosexual and who still try to deal with their torment alone. They have something to say to such men. *You are not alone. Others have gone this way before and found release in self-acceptance and greater honesty with others.*

ISBN 0-969-0947-0-1