

Motherhood special for lesbian

By RICHARD SEVEN
Of the Emerald

For Laurie McClain, a Eugene gay business woman, Mother's Day was something special. After weathering a divorce, she feels fortunate to still have at least half-custody of her son.

Laurie and her husband Dick were divorced two years ago when it became obvious they were moving in different directions. Dick wanted to move to the country; Laurie wanted to pursue her career and feminism.

Now they share custody of their six-year-old son Quinn on a year-to-year basis.

"Lesbian mothers not only face the same problems as other single parents, but they also have to face the constant fear that if the wrong person finds out they're gay they can lose not only their job and house, but the custody of their child as well," she says.

Those wrong people include the father, the parents or "an uninformed welfare worker."

McClain says she didn't realize she was gay until after she was divorced, so she was able to at least retain partial control of her child. However, the fear of losing Quinn remains.

"I am afraid that one of these days Dick and I will get into an argument and he will call me an unfit mother and try to take sole custody of our child," she says.

According to the Lesbian Mother National Defense Fund (LMNDF), the only organization in the nation that specializes in lesbian mothers' custody cases, only about 20 percent of the cases they handle are won by the mothers.

The problem, according to Pam Keeley of LMNDF, is that the custody case is inevitably decided by a male



Photo by Erich Boekelheide

Laurie McClain shares a moment with her son, Quinn. She says she and her ex-husband share custody on a year to year basis but she's afraid someday she'll lose custody.

judge who feels being gay is "a sin." Because the decisions are left up to the judge, no victory can serve as a precedent.

The average cost of defending lesbian mothers usually runs in the neighborhood of \$10,000, according to Keeley.

Keeley cites an example of a case in Washington about five years ago when a lesbian mother lost custody of her five children.

"The judge told the mother if she ever wanted to visit her children, she should tell them she is very very sick," Keeley

says. "He also told her never to kiss them on the mouth because, 'everyone knows what terrible venereal diseases homosexuals carry.'" McClain calls this "homophobia."

Judges usually rule against lesbian mothers because they feel the child will grow up to be homosexual or the child will be embarrassed by peer evaluation, says Keeley.

McClain points out there is no evidence the children of homosexuals will necessarily grow up to also be gay.

"However, all gays have come from

heterosexual families — people tend to forget about that."

Keeley says the man frequently fights for custody of the child because the thinks the gay mother will ruin the child.

"Most of all, the man has a terrible ego loss from losing his wife to another woman," Keeley says.

McClain says she is not raising her child to be gay or straight.

"I just want him to feel good about himself and not oppress women. I have tried to explain to Quinn that lesbians are women who love other women; we don't hate men.

"The first time I told my son I was gay, I was really scared how he would react," McClain says. "I knew I had to prepare him for the prejudice he might face with his friends. When I told him I was gay he said 'oh.'"

"A while later, when Quinn was playing with his friends, he came into the kitchen where I was and said, 'Mommy, you're a lesbian, right?' I said, 'Yes dear, I am.' He then said 'Well, I'm a Virgo.'"

McClain says she feels more fortunate because her husband "is trying to understand" and she has a network of friends she can discuss her problems with.

She also feels that since her child is currently 400 miles away, she is able to be more outspoken on the gay rights issue. Although she hasn't personally been subjected to any prejudice, she says "Yes, housing and job discrimination happens right here in Eugene."

"It is hard enough being the sole supporter of a child and facing the possibility of losing your child," she says. "But, hopefully society will learn how to accept gays."

Officials urge early registration

By ANN TRENEMAN
Of the Emerald

More people have registered to vote in Lane County for the upcoming May 23 election than ever before, according to Don Penfold, county director of general services.

People can continue to register to vote until and on May 23; however, after next Wednesday, people must apply in person at the Lane County Elections office at 175 W. 8th St.

"After Wednesday, people must come in and register and pick up their certificate, which they will take with them to their polling place," Penfold says.

"I urge each and every person to register immediately," Penfold emphasizes, adding that during past election days the line of people registering to vote has stretched around the block.

The certificates include precinct numbers and must be presented at the polls. Precinct locations can be obtained from the Oregon Voters Pamphlet and the sample ballots. An example of the sample ballot will appear in the Eugene Register-Guard Thursday. Sample ballots are available today at locations around the county, including the EMU.

Penfold urges people to fill out registration cards completely and accurately, saying one out of 10 cards must be returned because of inaccurate or incomplete information.

To be eligible to vote in Oregon, a person must have been a resident of the state for 20 days. Penfold notes that registration cards which say 30 days are incorrect, since the state legislature passed new rules last session.

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Penfold says of the 145,898 people registered to vote as of May 1, 1,304 of them registered during the month of April. He says 57.29 percent are Democrat; 31.28 percent Republican; 2.21 percent independent and 9.22 non-partisan.

Registered Democrats and Republicans will vote for their respective party candidates, ballot measures and non-partisan

measures. Registered independents and non-partisan voters will vote for non-partisan races and ballot measures.

In the Lane County Commissioners' election, only persons living in the East Lane District will vote for that race. West Lane and Springfield districts will vote on their respective commissioners' race.

**gretchen
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