

## Foster care and shelter homes needed by lesbian and gay teens

by Bruce K. Mason, MSW  
Clinical Social Worker

Within a week of the time 15 year-old Janet came out to her parents, she was gang-raped by a cousin and several of his friends. The rape occurred with the tacit approval of Janet's father, who ignored her cries. He thought the experience would 'straighten her out.' Janet's assailants included most of her classmates at her small rural school. Janet soon began to skip school. Finally her truancies came to the attention of the Juvenile Court, which referred the case for investigation by the local child welfare agency. When the facts of the rape came to light, Janet was placed in foster care in her own community. In the foster home Janet was required to shower each time she came in. She was given virtually no freedom to come and go. Janet ran away from the foster home several times; however, each time she ran away she was returned to the same foster home. A year and a half after the rape Janet again ran away and hitchhiked several hundred miles to Eugene where she sought refuge with an

aunt and uncle who lived there. The aunt and uncle were sympathetic and understanding. After several court hearings and some intense family conflict between the aunt and the natural parents, the Juvenile Court awarded temporary custody of Janet to her aunt and uncle. She completed high school there with honors and went on to earn top marks in college.

Brad was almost 17 when he came out to his parents. The following day he came home from school and found all of his possessions on the steps. When he tried to talk with his parents his mother would not respond at all. His father said only, "My son Brad is dead. I no longer have a son." Brad's father was the Minister of the fundamentalist Christian church in the small Idaho community. As a result of his father's influence, Brad found that the town's doors were closed to him. He found his way to Boise. He lived on the streets there for awhile before moving on to Spokane, Seattle, and finally to Portland. In Portland Brad became involved with both prostitution and drug traffic, and became addicted to heroin. Brad was arrested on drug charges two days after his 18th birthday. He eventually served three months in the county jail. Fortunately, after his jail term Brad got into a rehabilitation program. He is now working and completing high school at night.

Lesbian and Gay adolescents are usually living with their families at the time they begin

to deal with sexuality, sexual identity, and coming out. There is a great range of difference in family response. The experiences of Brad and Janet are probably at the more severe end of the scale. Lesbian and Gay adolescents do report physical abuse from parents in fits of rage. They also report restriction from contact with friends, invasion of their mail, interrogation of callers and total lack of privacy as well as coercion into treatment and/or religious counseling. Kids who run from their homes, or for other reasons become involved in the 'Juvenile System' are often so insecure in their sexual identity and tainted with homophobia themselves that they don't raise sexuality as an issue. Kids who are secure and self-affirming still may not be able to live with their families, depending on the family's ability to accept homosexuality as a normal sexual orientation.

The current emphasis of the Oregon Children's Services Division (CSD) is to provide intensive services (family therapy) to families in their own homes, with the aim of maintaining children in their own homes. If services cannot be provided or are not effective, children will be put in some kind of out-of-home placement. In my own experience as a CSD worker I never encountered an openly Lesbian or Gay foster care provider. There are several foster homes which treat gay kids fairly and decently, however what is needed is some good, gay, foster home

providers.

In the summer of 1983, CSD workers were advised by the Salem Central Office that they could not deny Foster Care Provider applicants based on sexual orientation alone. Alternative life-style applicants are to be studied as would any other applicants be studied.

Regrettably, I have not heard of any Lesbian or Gay applicants. The requirements are not stringent. Most gay homes with children are probably certifiable. Single-person and couple homes are probably certifiable as well; major qualifications are adequacy of space, fire protection, etc.

Both the National Association of Social Workers and the Juvenile Court support the development of gay foster homes; there is a need for shelter homes; homes which can accept a child on an emergency basis for a day or two or as long as a month, and for regular foster homes; where placement can be made on a relatively permanent basis for several months or longer.

I would be glad to talk with anyone who might be interested in becoming a foster parent and I would both explain and help them through the certification process. The state does make a contribution toward room and board and the child's expenses, as well as providing medical coverage. The primary reward is the satisfaction of having helped. Please call me, Bruce Mason, MSW, at the NASW office: 232-5003.

## TRAVEL

### The wonderful world of travel

by David R. Brewer

It's time I scribe one of these articles about what is up and coming (so to speak) in the wonderful world of travel.

First of all, we just returned from Winter

Park, Colorado yesterday. It was a beautiful, sunny day, the ski slopes were dusted with four inches of fresh powder snow, and most of all, no people, no lift lines and no broken legs! All in all, Winter Park is a great buy. You get all the amenities of a large resort (Vail, Aspen, etc.) without the expense or hassle of large crowds. It is a very laid back community, just a few bars, moderate restaurants (except the Swiss Village, awful, awful, awful no matter how you spell it!) and people from all

over the USA. Lift tickets run \$18.00 per day, a condo for 2-4 should cost about \$85.00 per day, and they have a ski train out of Denver right to the lifts. There were seven of us who went and each one of us thought it was the best value for the money.

#### Upcoming Tours:

**Olympics/Art Festival: July 28-August 12:**

It's not too late to get tickets to the Olympic sporting events plus arrange private Gay

housing/parties/guides. All is still available.

#### Birthplace of Women's Rights Tour:

May 4-6 Seneca Falls, NY. Visit the National Women's Hall of Fame and have Sunday brunch, lecture and slide show by Sandra Pollack. The overnight trips from New York start at \$110.00.

Well, that's all the space my editor will let me have. But, alas, more to come in every other issue.

## Just Advice

Dear Advisor:

I just received a letter from my parents. It seems that they want to visit me from out of town next month. I have just moved into a lovely two-bedroom apartment with my lover. We use one bedroom as a bedroom and the other as a combination study/library. It is obvious that only one bedroom is used as such.

I am in a quandary. Should we rent a bed for the library and pretend that one of us sleeps there, or should we come clean and tell them everything.

— Petrified in Portland

Dear Petrified,

Wait a minute. Stop tearing at your hair. Sit down and take a deep breath.

Now exactly what did you mean when you wrote, "perhaps you should tell your parents everything?"

We, who share your affectional preference, do not want to "know everything." You did not mean, for example, exactly describing the acts performed with a combination of chocolate sauce and your lover's toes to an embarrassed pair of parents.

We know and appreciate your desire to share your happiness with those to whom you feel close. "Coming Out" is affirming yourself as an adult to society, to your parents, and most importantly to yourself.

What we can not know is whether this visit is the best time for you to organize a "Coming Out" encounter.

Ideally, important decisions are made in an atmosphere of freedom and readiness rather than an atmosphere of acute anxiety.

After all, when you greet the folks you will want to radiate health and happiness not the panic and alarm your signautre name, "petrified," implies.

Also, you will want to feel in control when you decide whether "to tell" or "not to tell"

your parents. This decision will be easier when you realize that your parents are coming to your apartment as visitors and not as examiners. There is no need for your "confession." You are choosing whether or not you will now be inviting them to share this part of your life.

Now we will offer two basic strategies. The first called "NOT to tell" followed by, the second, called "TO tell". With these in mind the choice will be yours based on your knowing and understanding your parents. And of course, your courage.

Very well, now here is the nitty gritty.

#### NOT TO TELL

Reserve them sleeping accommodations elsewhere. Hosts need not always house their visitors. Motel rooms are very comfortable.

And when the folks visit your apartment, simply close the bedroom doors. They may want to ignore such clues of sexual taste as miscellaneous copies of Lesbian Nation or Pink Triangle Buttons.

There are, however, limits to what visitors can politely be expected to ignore. A polite

visitor cannot ignore the sight of you and your lover in the middle of a heated chocolate sauce and toe session, for example.

For all but the most insatiably curious parent the idea of two people of the same sex "rooming together" is charming.

#### TO TELL

Many before you have happily chosen this option when finding themselves in similar straights [sic]. A well-orchestrated "Coming Out" can be exhilarating for you and, at the very least, bearable and interesting for your parents.

PLEASE — talk with them privately. No matter how much your parents may come to love and treasure your lover, this is one time s/he will not be welcome. This is time between just you and your parents.

After greeting your folks, all health and smiles now, and after they are settled and are unpacked, is the time to broach the subject. Your opening line can be simply, "I would like to talk with you about something important to me and I'd like for us to set some time aside."