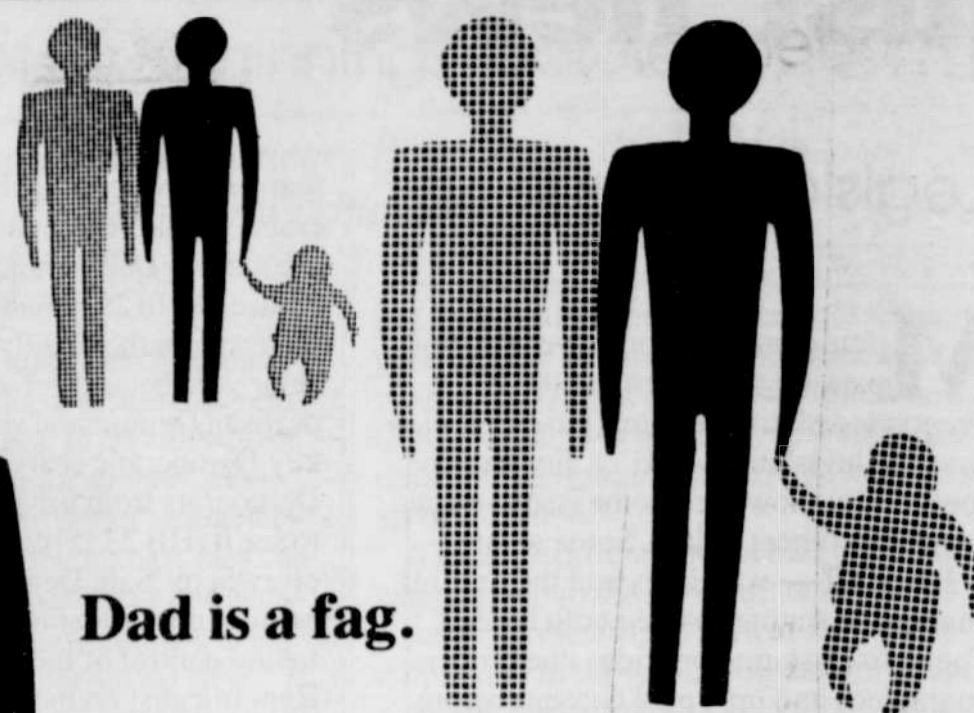
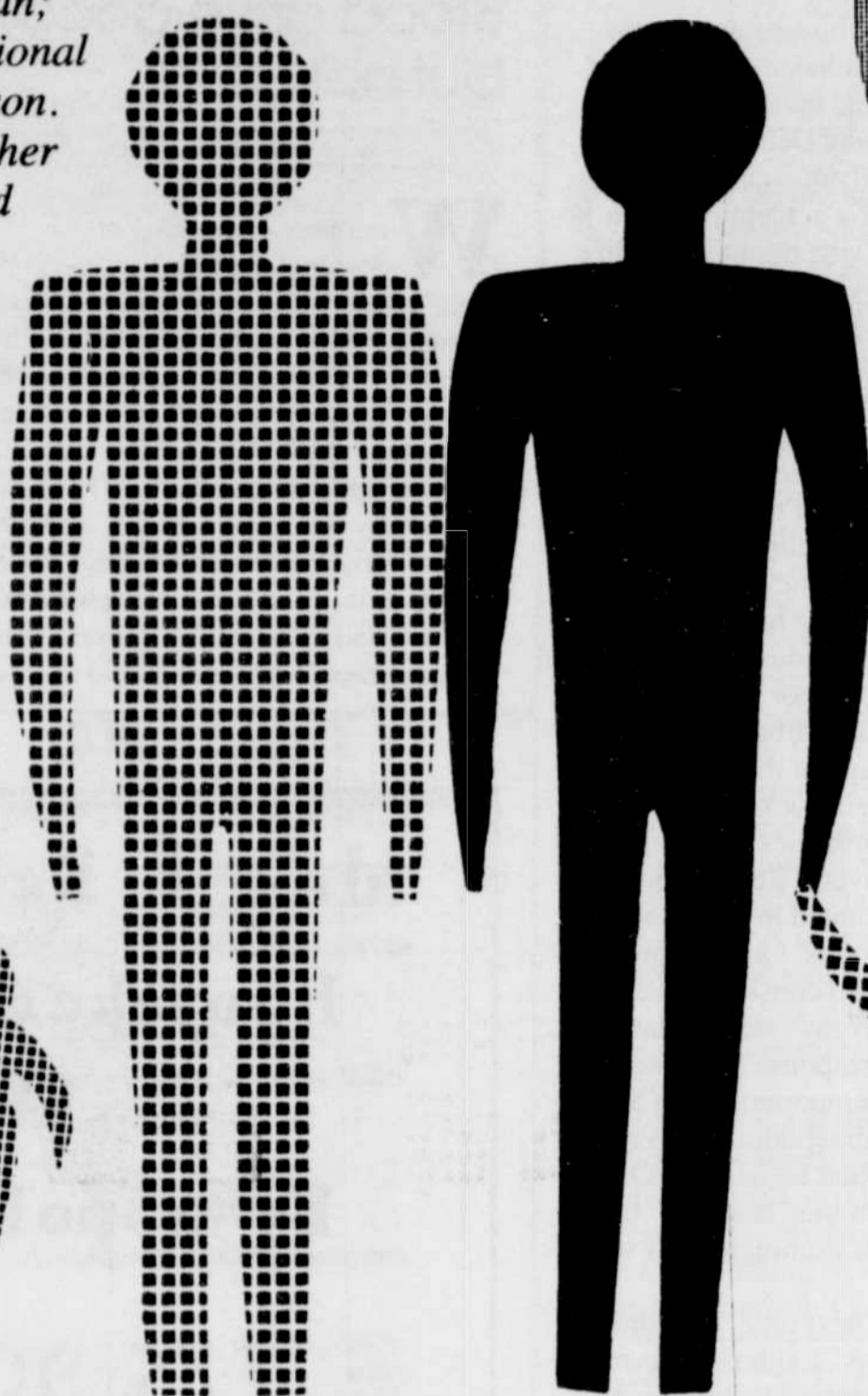
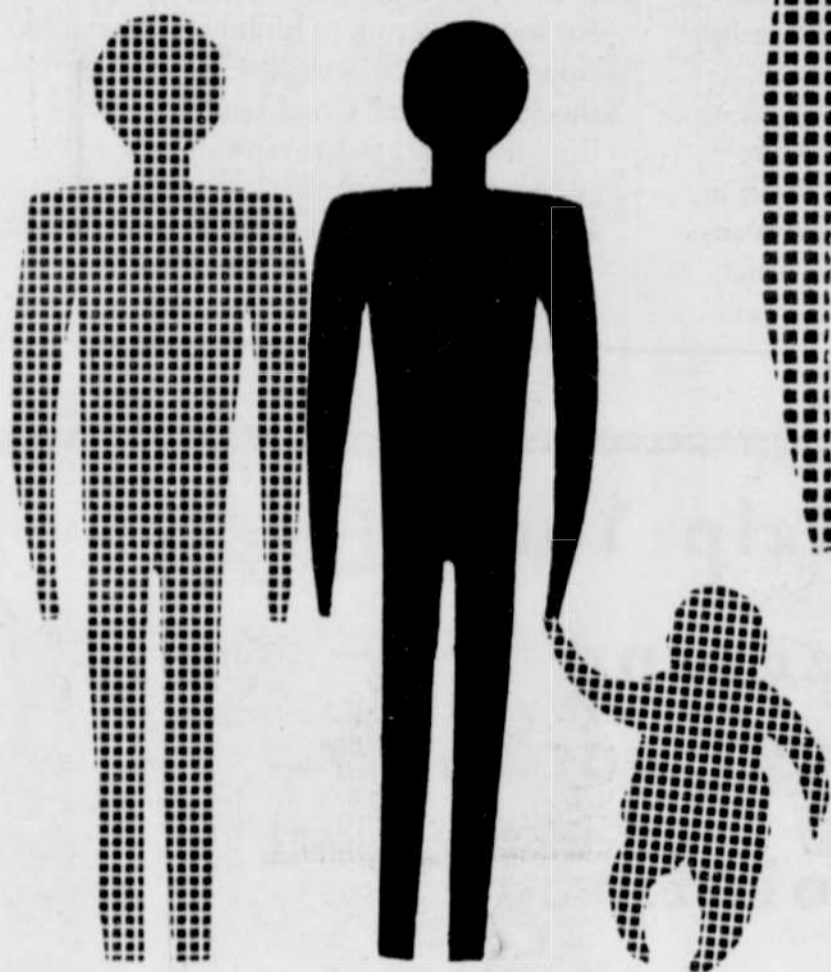


## Lesbian mother, Gay father.

Betty is a lesbian; Larry is a gay man; each is raising a child in a non-traditional family. Larry shares custody of his son. Betty and her six-year-old live with her lover and another roommate. And openness is making a difference.

BY DELL RICHARDS



Dad is a fag.

### Gay father: Honesty is the best policy

The summer Larry Bane, 40, came out, the movie "That Certain Summer" was a TV hit. It centered on an adolescent boy who runs away from home when he finds out his father is gay. The boy's childhood love for his father couldn't withstand the suddenness of the revelation.

Although Larry's son was only two years old, he saw the movie as an omen, a warning of what could happen if he tried to hide his lifestyle. That evening, he realized he never wanted to treat his son like that.

"I didn't want to risk letting him get to adolescence to find out," Larry said.

A computer systems analyst, Larry had told his wife and family but like many gay fathers, had not confided in his son. "That Certain Summer" wiped out any qualms he had. From then on, he didn't hide anything from Brandon, either. He made sure Brandon knew his father was gay. Doors weren't locked; lovers weren't hustled out at 4 a.m.; photographs and cards weren't hidden away in drawers.

The openness made a difference.

"Brandon lived with me when I first left my wife," Larry said. "And he had to go through my bedroom to get to the bathroom. Brandon would often crawl into bed with me in the early morning but if someone was staying over, he would go back to his own bed. From a very early age, he knew what was going on."

Brandon was 10 before he actually asked Larry about being gay. He had heard the word on the Phil Donahue TV talk show.

"I asked him if he knew what the term meant," Larry said. "He said 'yes' and

then I told him never ask a question if he didn't want to know the answer because I would always tell him the truth."

Naturally, Larry said 'yes.'

Like most children, it took Brandon time to digest the information. Two years went by before he brought up the subject again. By then, Brandon was living with his mother because Larry's work required extensive travel. Both parents felt it would be better for Brandon's education to stay in one place.

"I was living with someone by then," Larry said. "Brandon asked if I had always known I was gay, if I had known when I married his mom."

"At the time, it was the farthest thing from my mind," Larry said. "I loved my wife more than anyone I'd ever met but looking back, you always know."

Because Brandon felt comfortable enough to ask questions and talk about it openly, Larry knew that Brandon had accepted his being gay. By then, a lover was as much a part of Larry's life as a spouse would have been.

"Brandon was jealous of my lover at first but he came to love and accept him. When we broke up — and I told Brandon I'd asked him to leave — Brandon's comment was, 'Gee, Dad, how mean!'"

Though Larry has joint legal and physical custody, his wife began to have second thoughts when the spectre of AIDS first appeared. She was worried that Brandon could get AIDS from dishes or drinking glasses in the house.

Larry was as forthright then as he had been in the past.

"I explained to her how you get AIDS,"

Larry said. "And since I'm not going to sleep with my son, I told her he couldn't possibly get AIDS from me."

Despite the initial hysteria, Brandon continued to spend Christmas and summers with Larry. But Brandon — who is now 16 and is as informed about AIDS as anyone, according to Larry — was worried, too. Last summer, he confronted Larry, fearing that his father was in danger as a member of a high-risk group. Given the way things are today, he was concerned because Larry was gay.

This time, Larry was not as truthful as he'd always hoped to be.

"I wanted to reassure him," Larry said. "So I told him I wasn't doing anything to get the bug, that I wasn't doing anything to risk it — which is true."

In private, however, Larry harbors inner fears about the disease — and whether he's carrying a virus that will eventually mean a death sentence. But he didn't want his son to know that.

"I didn't want him to worry any more than necessary," he said. "With all teenagers have to deal with, adolescence is the roughest time in their life."

Larry didn't want his own angst to spill onto his son. Instead of telling the absolute truth like he always had, he fudged a little by accenting the positive changes he'd made in his lifestyle — the fact that he no longer smokes, drinks or takes drugs and doesn't intend to do anything to put himself at risk. As he looks robust and healthy, it's easy to believe he has eluded the illness.

But that doesn't make Larry feel any better about shading the truth.

"It does bother me not to be able to be

completely honest," Larry said. "But it wouldn't be beneficial for him to worry. Even if I came down with it, I probably wouldn't tell him until I had a full-blown case since there is nothing you can do about it."

"But that's all theory," he continued. "Until you get there and put the shoes on, you won't know which way you'll walk."

Honesty is a political act as well as a personal policy for Larry. He works on the Gay Fathers Hot Line in Sacramento and uses an M.A. in Psychology to counsel adolescents who think they may be gay.

"Many of my friends are in the closet," Larry said. "It is safe and secure for them but they aren't creating role models for the youngsters coming up. For the kid who's wondering if he's gay, there is no validation that 'normal' looking and acting people can be gay, that we don't all have to be swish."

"Most of my friends don't live a 'fast lane' life," Larry said with a smile. "Most of them are just looking for the right man to love, to marry and share their life with."

Born in Oklahoma, Larry came from a close-knit home that prized family life.

"The day my son was born was the happiest day of my life," he said. "He is and has always been the light of my life."

Having a teenage son, is there any advice he would give to parents with children still growing up?

"Listen to them," he said. "Listen to what they're telling you and what they're not telling you. From the time they're born, you have to talk with them, not to them to keep the channels of communication open."



Larry Bane