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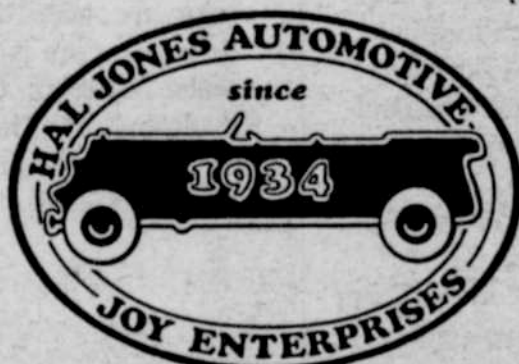
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P/FLAG president advocates for children's sake

*"We're working to put ourselves
out of business"*

BY ANDEE HOCHMAN

The woman waiting in the lobby of the Portland Inn peers kindly from behind her glasses. A cap of soft gray curls frames her face; she wears stockings with her practical sandals. Her voice, slightly accented, wraps around you like a summer quilt. Maybe she reminds you of your best friend's mother.

Then you notice the button, pinned conspicuously on the pink sweater vest: "We love our gay and lesbian children." Maybe you'd like her to give your own parents some pointers.

That is precisely what Paulette Goodman does. Not for a living, because she is not paid for her work as president of the Federation of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Goodman's job is more of a mission — one that began nine years ago when she learned her daughter was a lesbian and which urges her forward with the hope of dissolving homophobia in her lifetime.

"We feel we can be our children's best advocates," she said during a visit to Portland last month for the P/FLAG Pacific Northwest regional conference. "We, together with our children, are a powerful force. [Homophobia] shouldn't be an issue. We're working towards getting ourselves out of business."

Goodman's first hint that her daughter might be a lesbian came from an ex-boyfriend, a man her daughter had dated for five-and-a-half years. "He wrote me that she had a 'special friend' at college and he thought it was more than a friendship," Goodman recalled. "It took me nine months to even broach the subject with my husband. His reaction was, 'So what?'"

Goodman attended a support group for parents of gay and lesbian children; during a visit with her daughter in New York she heard about P/FLAG. In 1983, she and several other parents formed their own chapter in

Washington, DC, a group that now boasts more than 300 members.

And Goodman, who had never wanted to be president of anything, found herself in the role of a passionate and visible spokesperson, quoted in the Washington Post, appearing on the local news, negotiating with the bus company to post 50 signs with the P/FLAG phone number, testifying on Capitol Hill for the repeal of sodomy laws.

Her mild manner and appearance belie a fervor that drives Goodman to put in ten-hour days, conduct endless speaking engagements and envision a national advertising campaign to change public myths about lesbians and gay men.

"I would like to see P/FLAG become a household word, like the Red Cross," she said. "We're not going to get equal rights for our children if we don't create a movement."

While the struggle against homophobia may require legislation, national ads and a mass popular movement, Goodman knows that critical steps toward that goal also take place in the minds and the living rooms of parents all over the country.

"It's very difficult to come [to a P/FLAG meeting] the first time. I know, because I struggled with it," she recalled. "But it's important for new parents to hear the stories so they can hear the parallels with themselves, realize that it's not the end of the world, that they're not the only ones."

As long as some parents have yet to realize that, Goodman is committed to attending groups and conferences, speaking out again and again, correcting the myths of people like the local woman who called a Portland radio station wondering if a head injury in infancy could cause homosexuality.

"It's a matter of desensitizing the public, educating the public," she said. "It's important to put a human face on homosexuality."



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