

Mimi with Sam

imagine being a straight woman having triplets and a husband. Even with the most wonderful man in the world, if there were just two parents of triplets—I'd go nuts. We've got such incredible support from people we don't even know. People who've heard about us show up on the doorstep with bags of clothes, diapers, or car seats—there's hardly a week goes by that we don't get some kind of support like that from somebody in the lesbian and gay community or someone who knows someone in the lesbian and gay community.

"Sheila's friend Buddy lives with us. Essentially these babies have three mommies. It's beyond words to try to talk about how significant that is for our family. Buddy quit her job to stay home to take care of these babies so that we don't have to put them in day care very much."

Buddy is 32. She worked as a professional chef for 12 years. Now she cooks outside the home on Fridays and Saturdays only. She contributes financially to the household, as well as being a primary caregiver for the babies. She prepares delicious family dinners during her five weekdays at home. She refers to herself as family, although not as 'the third mommy.'

"I'm their Buddy. I will be their Buddy forever and ever and ever. And then some," she states as she rocks Sam and soothes Risa to sleep.

I contrast this commitment to the experience of a heterosexual mother of triplets who mentioned that she received enormous societal support during her babies' first year, but found that it basically evaporated as they grew up.

I notice that Sheila's sister Julie is here today, as she was on my previous visit. Mimi continues, "We have great family support. Two of Sheila's sisters live here. We get lots of help from them. My 13-year-old niece lives in Portland. She helped me take care of the babies all summer long when I stayed home. Both of our mothers are very supportive even though they're far away. We're very lucky."

Sheila and Mimi complete each others' words in the intimate conversational style of longtime lovers. Sheila says, "I don't want to say that we couldn't do it without all this support—" and Mimi interjects, "I do!"

Sheila concurs, "We probably could, but it would be really difficult. It wouldn't be as enjoy-

able as it is. We're more rested. The babies get all different kinds of folks taking care of them. Our community really is helping us raise these babies, truly in every sense of the word."

Mimi continues, "You know the old African saying that it takes a community to raise a child—that couldn't be more true with triplets. We have a whole list of people who come on weekends to take a baby. Sometimes all three babies are gone for 5 or 6 hours on Saturday and we're alone! We could nap, though we never do, we can work on the house, I can work on my job—"

Sheila adds, "We can even talk to each other."

Mimi: "I can pull weeds out of my garden. It's a whole community. It's family, it's gay and lesbian people, it's straight people, it's old people, young people, all kinds of people, different colors of people—"

Sheila: "Single people, married people, short people, tall people—"

Mimi: "Childless people—and people love it. There's never a time where somebody takes a baby where they don't say, 'Thank you so much for letting me have the baby today.' Some of these people had never spent a day with a newborn baby in their whole life. They do it now because they can, because we ask them, because it feels OK."

I observe, "It sounds just about ideal."

Sheila confirms, "It's pretty close to an ideal situation for triplets." She adds, "We think it's important to have men involved because this is a house full of women. Even our animals are female. Plus, some of our dearest friends are men. Fred went to every prenatal appointment. He was in the delivery room and was the first person to hold Gabriella. She went from Mommy's tummy to Uncle Fred's arms. The babies have what we call soulwatchers. It's our word for what most people call godparents. There are quite a few men in that group of soulwatchers—gay men, straight men—"

I ask, "Is that a term you invented yourselves?"

Sheila: "Straight men? No," she laughs. "Soulwatchers—yeah, I did. I knew I didn't want it to be 'godparents.' We're not religious people, except as far as baby care goes—we do that religiously. Each baby has at least four soulwatchers—a male, a female, a blood-family

"These kids are very, very blessed. They're going to have a lot of fun."

—Mimi Luther

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first. I still haven't decided."

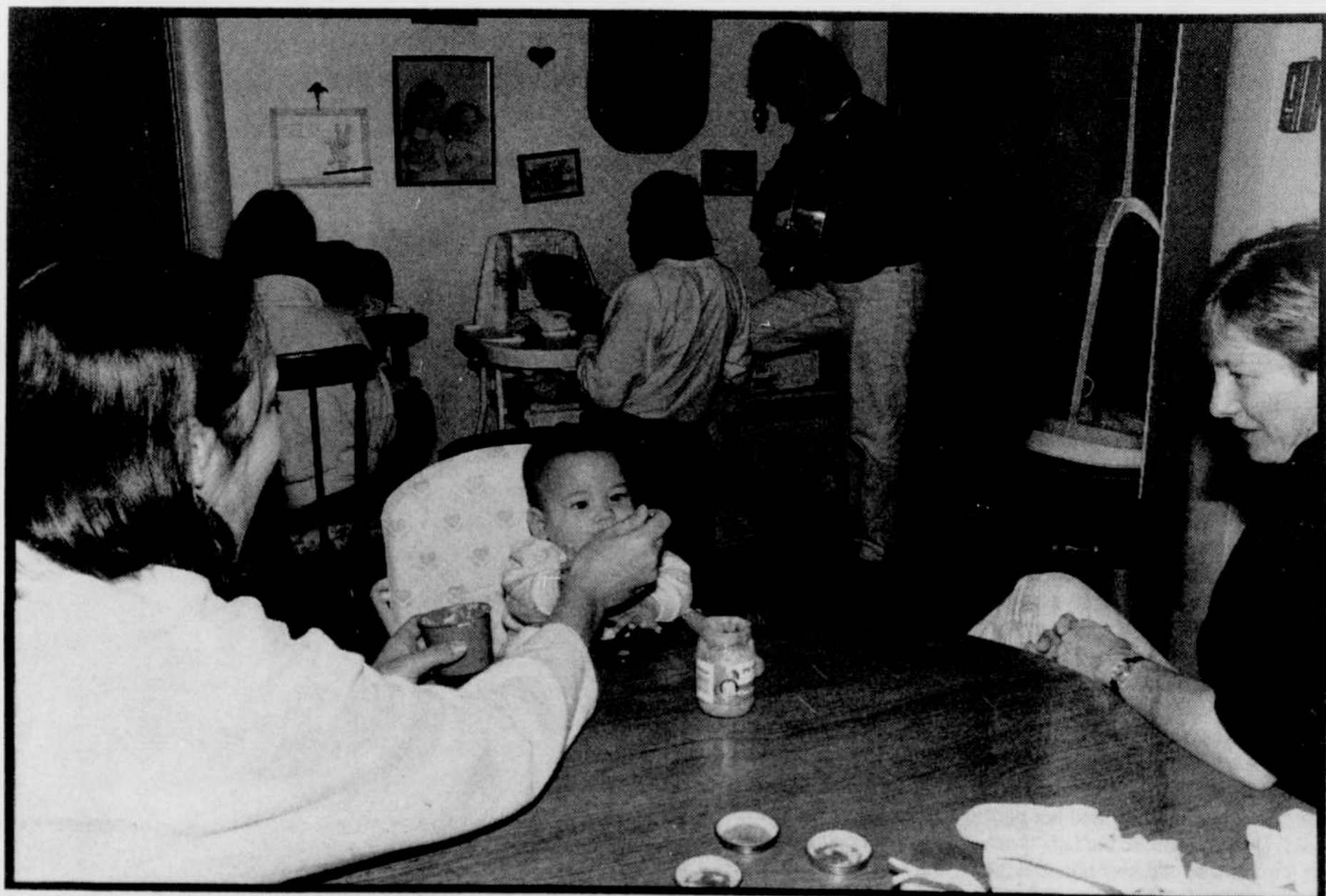
Mimi laughs. "I always knew that I wanted babies. I tried on and off to get pregnant for many years. An opportunity to adopt a baby presented itself. We went all the way up to the birth of the baby boy. We had him for five days, and the birth mom changed her mind and took him back. We were devastated. And so a year later, we decided to get pregnant. On the third try I was pregnant, somewhat to Sheila's dismay."

A baby gurgles as Sheila speaks: "This has been more of an evolution for me. In my early 20s I wanted children. As I got older it was less appealing and then I took care of my grandmother for several years. She had Alzheimer's disease. When she died I felt like I didn't have much more to give. I was pretty burned out. With the adoption of the boy last year [that didn't work out] I realized that I could love a baby. Once he was born and I saw him and held him and loved him, I knew I could do it. I'm not a natural like Mimi is, but...I love these children. I couldn't imagine being without them. I have to grow with it and deal with my frustrations around sleep issues and crying babies."

None of the babies are crying now. Risa is living up to her name, laughing and leaping in her Johnny Jump Up. Sheila changes Sam's diaper. He is watching us through the luscious lashes of his chocolate-colored eyes. Gabriella (Gabby) is off on an outing with an elder friend who has become her surrogate grandma.

Mimi explains: "The support factor is really significant. I can't

BABES IN DYKELAND!



Foreground: Mimi feeds Gabby while Jan looks on; back (left to right): Jackie with Risa, Buddy with Sam, and Sheila on guitar