

## BABES IN DYKELAND

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not consider letting me deliver vaginally."

Sheila interjects, "They probably would have considered it, but we would have had to push really, really hard." This time she seems to miss the obvious humor.

The conversation turns to trying to recollect when, if ever, each parent was alone with the triplets. Both Mimi and Sheila are hard pressed to recall even one instance of being alone with all three babies at once. A typical day includes at least two loving adults at almost every moment, and ends with gourmet dinners—it seems that these parents have a much easier time with three babies than most parents have with one.

It's not perfect. There are occasional ear infections, intestinal distress, high fevers—but the concerns are shared. The lonely stress of parenting as a solitary pursuit, that plagues so many mothers and fathers, is missing from this family. There is an easy, interrelated flow of neighbors, family and friends.

The caregivers range in age from 12 to sixtysomething. It reminds me of the successful extended family structure that is traditional to many cultures and virtually nonexistent in the post-nuclear family fallout of modern dysfunctional society.

Mimi comments, "I don't believe in a child having to rely on only one or even two adults to get their needs met. It does not create as healthy children as when kids have lots of adults that they're close to, that they trust, that they love, that they know from the day they're born, that they can go to for their whole life. I was committed to creating that kind of environment for the child that I was carrying. Because I had triplets, I didn't have to do very much work around creating that—it was happening for me."

The talk turns to the future. Mimi is primarily Caucasian with a small amount of Native American ancestry. Sheila's ancestors are from Finland. The donor for the triplets is Latino. "Are you concerned with



(Left to right) Sheila's sister Julie Robinson, Risa, Mimi, Sheila and Sam

the racism and heterosexism that these mixed-race children of color, and of lesbian parents, may have to deal with when they are older?" I ask. I think of the toll racism takes, and of the OCA and other attempts to rob us of the right to reproduce and raise children.

Mimi answers, "I know these kids will face some kinds of trials and tribulations and would have regardless of what our choices around this had been. We just had to make a commitment that we were going to do our best to equip these kids with the skills they need to work through stuff like that."

A windup toy plays the slow soothing melody of "Lullaby, and goodnight, you're my very own baby..." as Mimi adds, "All kids have some kind of internal, very personal questions. I feel it's my job as a parent to try to anticipate what those are. This one I know. There will be some I don't have a clue about. That's where other adults come in. As a young teenage woman there were things that happened to me that I couldn't talk to my mom about. I know the reason I survived is because of my aunt. I had someone that I could go to and talk with and these kids will have that."

The lullaby toy chimes on. Sheila says, "If it's

not one thing it's another with kids. They'll be teased no matter what. Most kids are. Kids can be very cruel. They'll definitely have the skills to deal with things that come up and hopefully they'll be able to ask for help. That's why we have a lot of people involved—because somebody will be able to help them."

I don't know if it's the lullaby or their words, but, as this afternoon draws to a close, a peaceful sense of the harmony of many hearts and hands promises to salve, if not protect these children from, the pains and hurts of years to come.

An early gust of winter ushers in the surrogate grandma and Gabby. This tiniest of the babies is all rosy-cheeked from her outing and pink and white in her pretty dress. I take her in my arms.

"What do you see in the future?" I ask.

"Diapers," Mimi answers. "Lots of diapers. We go through almost 200 diapers a week. That's an incredible amount."

"I think these kids are gonna be the luckiest kids in the world. I think about what kind of parent Sheila is, and what kind of a parent she's going to be as they get older, and I'm so envious of these babies. These babies are gonna get to play basketball with their mommy, and Sheila plays the guitar and she sings and she plays sports and she's a carpenter and she's smart and thoughtful and playful and that's just *one* of their parents."

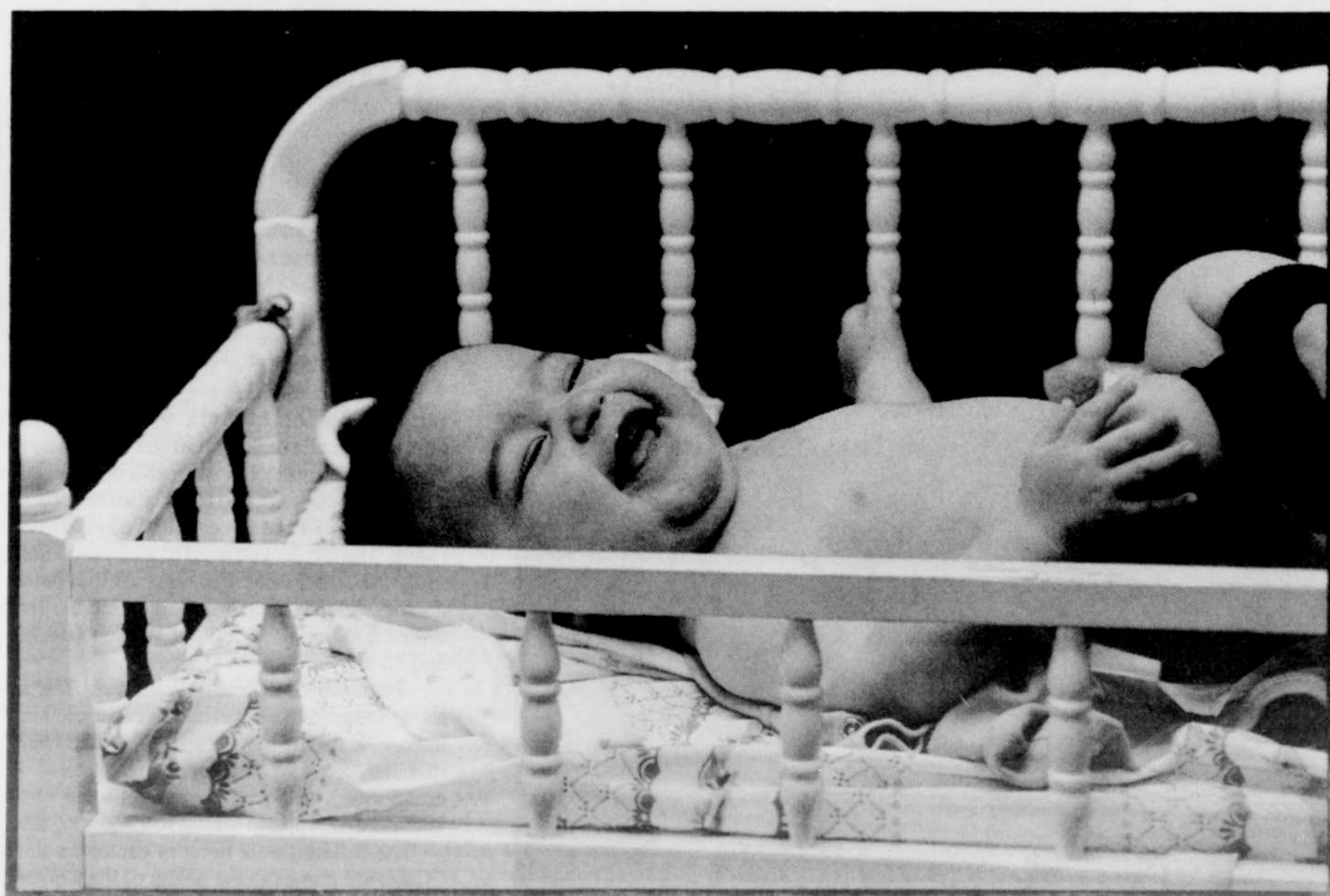
"These kids are very, very blessed. They're going to have a lot of fun. These kids are not going to want for anything. They don't have any grandpas, that's sad, but that might be the only thing these kids want for. They're gonna have lots of wonderful people in their lives—men and women and kids, and they're gonna learn the values of family and love and home cooking and gardening and artwork and pizza and submarine sandwiches to go, and Sheila's gonna build them a tree fort—"

"Well," says Sheila, "we might have to do it without the tree, but we're going to have the fort."

Mimi continues, "And with me they get soft mommy stuff—they'll get cuddling and storybooks and gardening, and with Buddy they'll get adventures and cooking and patience." And from everywhere, love.

Mimi says, "They're going to start first grade in the year 2000."

I'm thinking that somewhere between now and then they may even get grandpas. In any case, this is the kind of child raising we can take pride and take part in. Our lesbian and gay family and friends are fostering a future that may be a model to transform the millennium.



Sam in a state of delight