



A lesbian mother of Mexico (left, name unknown) and lesbian grandmother Bonnie Tinker of Portland in Beijing

# A LESBIAN PRESENCE

*The U.N. Conference in Beijing resounded with women's voices, and lesbian voices were strong among them.*

*Regional representatives were there to bring the story home to Oregon*

BY INGA SORENSEN

PHOTOS BY BONNIE TINKER

In an apartment in India, two women commit suicide rather than allow their relationship with one another to be broken up by their families.

In a house in Zimbabwe, a woman is raped repeatedly with the consent of her family in their hopes that she will become pregnant, get married and cease having relationships with women.

In a psychiatric institution in the United States, a teenager is subjected to coercive "treatment" to "cure" her lesbianism.

In a courtroom in Germany, a woman loses custody of her child because the court finds that her lesbianism disqualifies her as a fit parent.

In a prison in Uruguay, a woman is isolated in a cell because her captors know that she is a lesbian.

For women-loving women, human rights violations almost seem par for the course, no matter where they live. While lesbian and bisexual women often understand the risks they are taking simply by being true to themselves, others remain ignorant about the persecution—government-sanctioned or otherwise—these women may be forced to endure.

Decreasing that ignorance—and hopefully altering this harsh reality—was one of the primary reasons lesbian and bisexual women from across the globe—including several from Oregon—gathered with tens of thousands of women and men in China for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women and the accompanying Non-Governmental Organizations Forum on Women.

"I went because I felt it was critical there be a voice representing lesbian families," says 47-year-old Bonnie Tinker, executive director of the Portland-based Love Makes a Family Inc. The group

promotes visibility of lesbian and gay families. "When I heard that [the anti-gay] Focus on the Family was planning to send six of their own representatives, I knew I had to be there, too."

Despite persistent rumors that Chinese officials might search luggage, confiscate materials, or ultimately deny entry into the country to women who were clearly affiliated with lesbian causes, Tinker brought with her a stack of Love Makes a Family newsletters, leaflets, buttons and business

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cards to distribute to activists during the conference.

"I had heard those rumors and it did make me a little nervous, but I'm happy to report that I was never searched," says Tinker, a lesbian mother and grandmother who attended both the non-governmental organizations forum, held Aug. 30 to Sept. 8 in Huairou, and the official U.N. conference, held Sept. 4 to 15 several miles away in Beijing.

The forum attempts to influence the conference and its Platform for Action. While the platform is nonbinding on the 189 nations that are party to it, the United Nations hopes that the document will become the blueprint for women's advancement in the coming decade.

Continued on page 17