

Matiah Rudy Shaman is a well-loved child, to say the least.

"I have lots of things and people in my family. I have two lizards, four tadpoles, and I also have some fish. And I have two finches who make lots of babies," laughs the 5-year-old kindergartner from Seattle, Wash. "[And there's] my mom and my dad, and Bob...and an aunt, and I also have one grandpa and two grandmas."

It's probably a pretty safe bet to say that finding a baby sitter for Matiah is not much of a problem given the stretch of relatives, blood-related and otherwise, which comprise his family, including a gay dad and lesbian mother, and their partners, parents and siblings—a compilation that quite honestly takes the uninitiated a few minutes to piece together.

Though the configuration may be Pat Robertson's worst nightmare (and his hottest meal ticket), it is an inspiration to the millions of us who work every day to create firm and loving familial foundations that too often are described as "non-traditional."

We know we're out there, it's just a matter of seeing the pictures and hearing the stories. A new book, *Making Love Visible: In Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Families* (The Crossing Press, \$18.95), does just that.

Interviewer Jean Swallow and photographer Geoff Manasse journeyed from Philadelphia to San Francisco, from Brooklyn, N.Y., to Portland, Ore., chronicling the myriad ways in which gay and lesbian people create family.

Included in the 176-page book are interviews and photos of the Shamans and 23 other gay and lesbian families, among them Victor Gaitan and Roberto Garcia's family in Alameda, Calif.

"A big reason I came to America was because I am gay. I had hope for a better life," the 27-year-old Gaitan, an AIDS counselor for Latino clients, tells the authors. "I crossed the border because I didn't have papers. It was scary and difficult...my brother bought my freedom. I came with a coyote; we crossed at night. I ran from 9 pm to 6 am through the desert...."

The reader also peeks into a third-floor walk-up studio in Brooklyn where Irena Klepfisz and her long-time partner, Judy Waterman, live.

In 1943, Klepfisz's father smuggled her and her mother out of the Warsaw ghetto, but he remained and died during the Uprising. Almost all of Irena Klepfisz's extended family, we learn, perished in the Holocaust, and just using the term "family" is disturbing to her: "There's a way in which I hate it," she says, "because I lost so much family in the Holocaust. The word 'family' itself feels painful. I never had my family."

For many of the families profiled in the book, being gay or lesbian has provided opportunities. "The non-nuclearness of our family is one of the strengths that we get from being a gay family," says Matiah Shaman's mother, Donna. "There is also an expansiveness, and a tremendous amount and breadth of love and attention by various people with their gifts and strengths...."



Above: (from left) Letha Bruce, Tasha Birtha and Becky Birtha of Philadelphia; Below left: (from left) Keith Ocheltree and Charles-Gene McDaniel of Chicago; Below right: the Goldstein-Perdue family of Worcester, Vt., (back row, from left) Karen Henderson, Holly Perdue, Kevin Perdue, Cheri Goldstein, Bonnie Barrows, (front row, from left) Leo Perdue, Rici Perdue, Robert Perdue and dog, Gisele

Matiah gets lots of different experiences and an openness to the world. I think he sees a much bigger picture than most."

The authors, who have done an admirable job of capturing a geographic and cultural cross section of the gay and lesbian community, write: "In real life, people make families in every way they can, just as they always have. Married people. Unmarried people. Families with kids. Families without kids. Families with older folks in them. Families of a single generation. Blended families,

step-families, my dad's other family, my kid's other house. Some of these families think of themselves as gay families, but all families have gay people in them, acknowledged or not."

Look past the structure, urge the authors and their subjects: "It is love and commitment that make a family. No more. And no less."

My advice to you? For a taste of queer family life, skip *Home for the Holidays* and pick up a copy of *Making Love Visible: In Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Families*.