



Bundles of Joy

Newborn twins, a curious 8-year-old, a rebellious teen, an adult child visiting on the weekends with a baby of her own—being a parent changes everything

BY JONATHAN KIPP

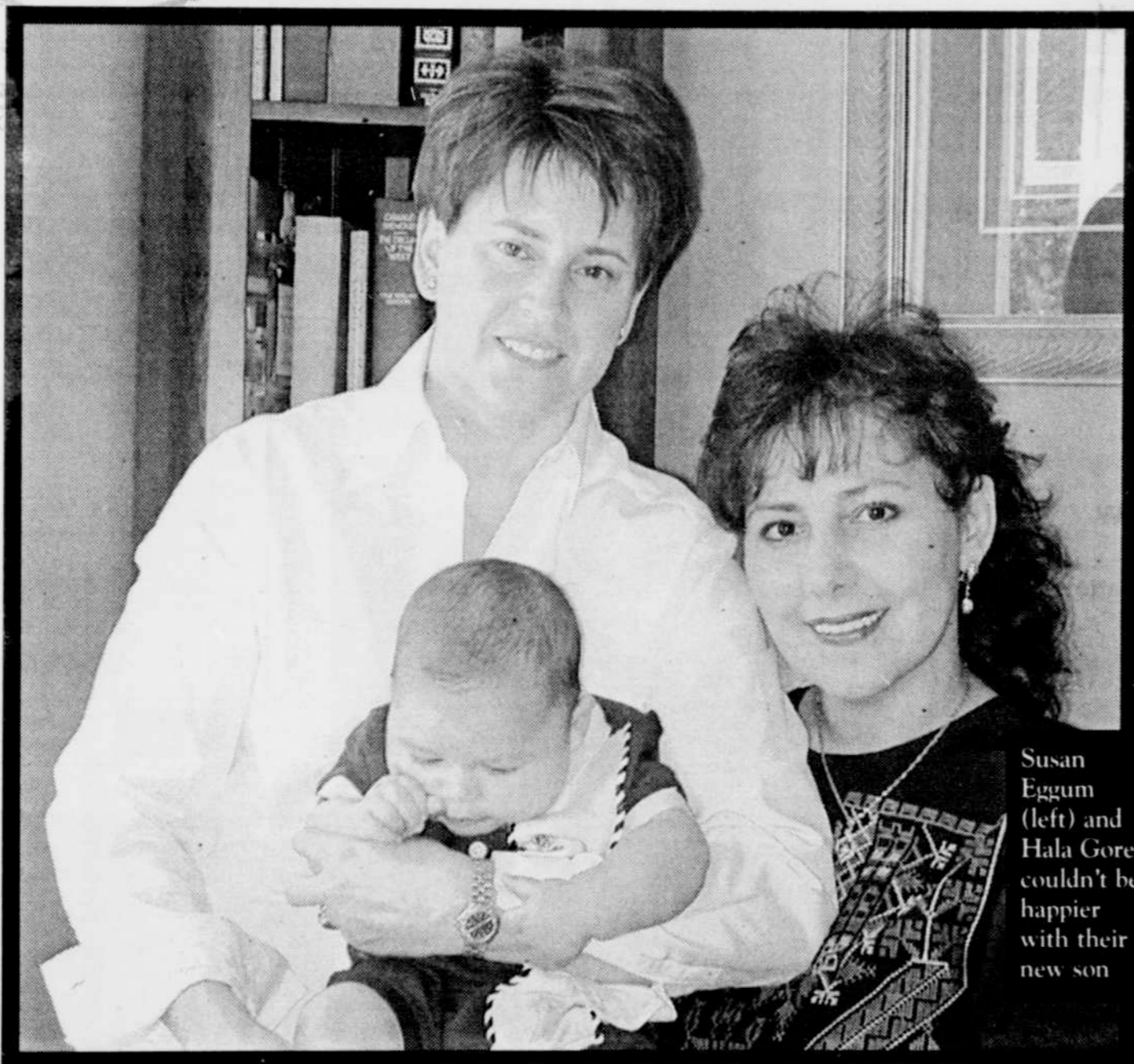


PHOTO BY FRANCO CAPRIOTTI

Susan Eggum (left) and Hala Gores couldn't be happier with their new son

Apparently the secret is out. Sharon Stone is discussing it with Larry King. Melissa Etheridge passes along the news to Charlie Rose. Madonna purrs to Matt Lauer. And Will and Grace aren't keeping quiet either. Rosie O'Donnell even featured it on her afternoon talk show, for goodness' sake. Sexual minorities are having children. Some are adopting, some are using modern technological advances and others are providing foster care to satisfy the urge to parent. Some are choosing to do it the old fashioned way—both before and after they come out of the closet.

Regardless of public opinion, gay or straight, alternative families are popping up everywhere. It is estimated that 6 million to 14 million children live with at least one gay parent, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

The face of the family is changing in the general population as well. According to *The Oregonian*, half of pregnant women and mothers aged 15 to 29 conceived or gave birth to their first child outside marriage. The trend is said to cross all social and ethnic groups, but the increase in single motherhood is most evident among white women.

The Big Decision

Being a parent isn't for everyone. "Being around kids is like nails on the chalkboard," one middle-aged lesbian says. Not having to have children is one of the perks of being a lesbian, she explains, noting that it's becoming more difficult to meet women who don't have or want children. Others don't see full-time parenting as a goal, but they value having children in their lives, whether it's a regular baby-sitting gig with neighborhood children, serving as a Big Brother or Big Sister, or being the stereotypical favorite aunt or uncle. But a growing number of those in the sexual minorities community want more. These men and women want their own kids. Many begin the process by answering important questions before taking any action toward making a family. Will I make a good parent even though I'm not straight? Can I afford this? How am I going to get a child? For many of those who proceed with their quest to become new parents, the issue of money can't be ignored. While the actual cost of becoming a foster

or adoptive parent can be nearly free (if working with a state agency), costs can rise to \$30,000 or more for private, international or agency adoptions—though the average cost is around \$15,000. Using the technology of in vitro fertilization and surrogacy can be the most expensive alternative, costing parents \$35,000 to \$65,000. Women doing artificial insemination, utilizing known sperm donors or anonymous sperm banks, will spend the least, often under \$1,000. Add a crib, thousands of diapers, a bottle or two, a bib and a few stuffed animals and it becomes apparent that it can take a small fortune to create a family. In addition, experts calculate that the average cost of raising a child from birth to age 18 will be \$150,000 to \$250,000.

Lesbians Choosing Pregnancy

Being female can definitely make having a baby less complicated and more affordable. While a large percentage of the children being raised by lesbians were conceived in heterosexual relationships, a growing number of

children are now born via artificial insemination. Alternatively, some female couples will harvest eggs from one partner, have the egg fertilized in vitro and implant the embryo in the other partner. Although Hala Gores and Susan Eggum, both downtown Portland attorneys, discussed having children early in their relationship, they postponed parenthood until they had been together almost six years. The couple couldn't find the time to get pregnant. Eventually they concluded there wouldn't be a perfectly auspicious moment and that they had to make starting their family a priority. "We wish we would have made the decision six years ago," Gores says. "It is so great!" The two women purchased sperm from an exclusive southern California sperm bank known for high-IQ donors. Although their physician warned them it could take months to get pregnant, Gores conceived on the first try via artificial insemination—now referred to as "alternative insemination" by a growing number of lesbians choosing this route to motherhood. The women spent less than \$1,000 to achieve pregnancy. Their baby, Jake, is now almost four months old.

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