

9 ON THE LINE

As the dead-heat race nears the finish line, worried families speak out

Stories by Jonathan Kipp
Photos by Marty Davis

As Election Day fast approaches, gay and lesbian parents are holding their breath, wondering whether Measure 9 will pass Nov. 7 and literally change their children's lives.

Their kids already have to deal with judgment, harassment and ridicule—even violence. They worry that their children's challenges will grow even greater should Measure 9 pass.

Polls indicate a dead-heat race. Although voters rejected two previous anti-gay ballot measures during the past eight years, this year's effort to codify homosexuality in public schools has at least an even chance of winning.

Some privately fret this might be the year the Oregon Citizens Alliance finally gets a stronghold on the state's lawbooks after years of failed attempts. Few boast of an imminent defeat.

The measure would prohibit public schools from encouraging, promoting or sanctioning homosexuality; state funding would be withheld as a consequence for violators. Its vague wording leaves many voters wondering what the outcome would be if it is enacted into law.

Some parents are worrying in private, paralyzed by what they consider an attack on their family; others are mad and have decided to speak out. And while fiercely protective of their children, they are not attempting to keep them in the dark about Measure 9.

On some level, the kids understand certain people think their families aren't as acceptable as others. Even young children—whose typical worries are about family pets, pending art projects, spelling tests and upcoming piano recitals—fear what might come with the passage of Measure 9.

"If Measure 9 passes, I will be uncomfortable going to school because my family will be discriminated against."
— Briana

Certainly, lesbian mothers are speaking out against the initiative. They will do whatever it takes to protect their children.

They say school is at the center of their kids' lives, and they want them to feel supported and protected there. They flare at the thought of the OCA making life more difficult for their children, who already have enormous struggles outside the warmth and safety of their homes.

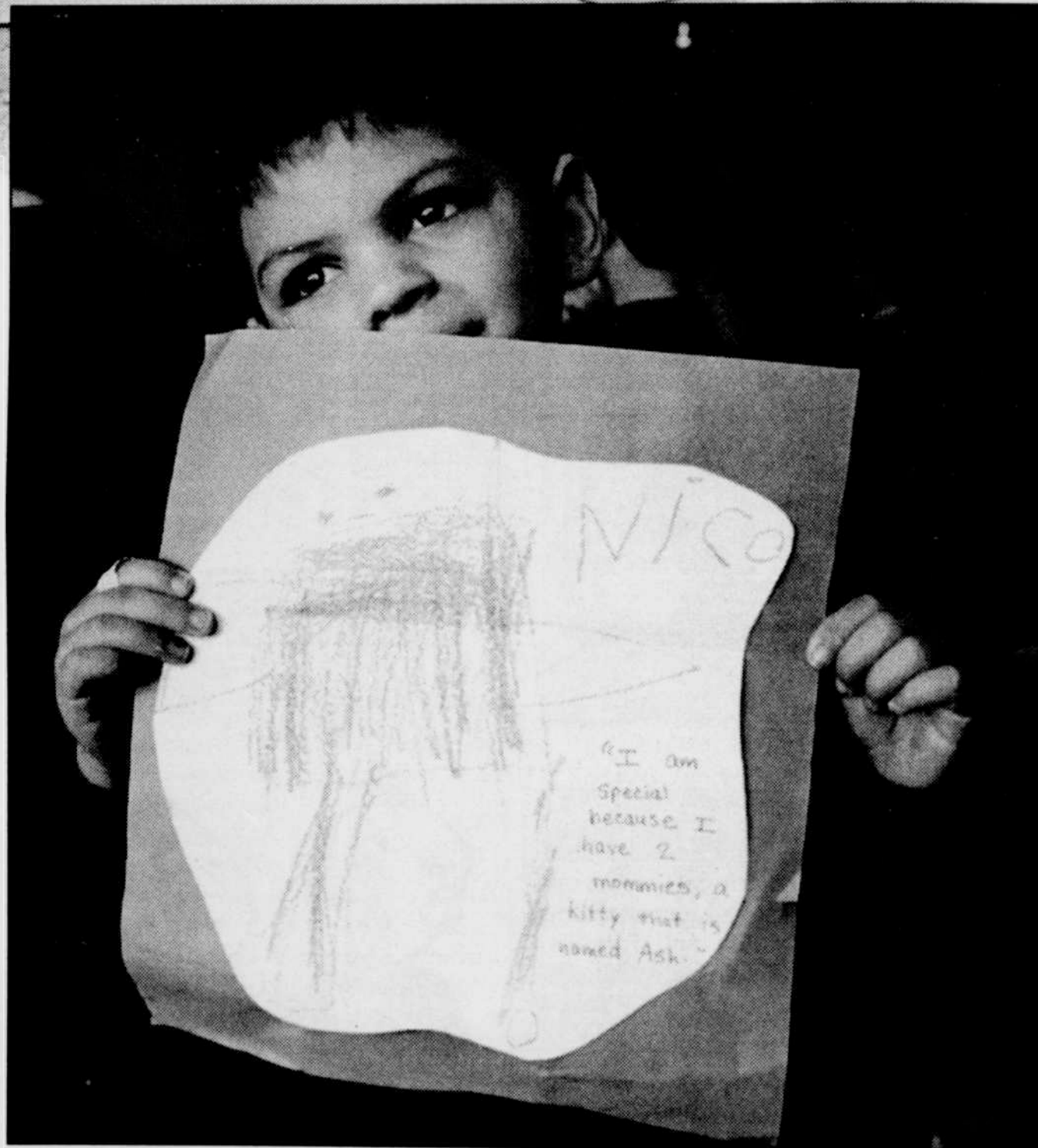
But the kids—who aren't just programmed to say what their parents want—are speaking out, too. Even elementary-age children understand what Measure 9 could mean, in real terms, to their lives.

Love Makes a Family, an international organization providing a public voice for sexual minority families, gave parents and kids an opportunity to address Oregon voters during a press conference Oct. 23 at the World Trade Center. The children's words were most compelling.

Briana, a fourth-grader at Portland's Buckman Elementary, said she was teased when a boy saw her and a female friend walking arm in arm through the school's playground. He asked them if they were lesbians.

Briana fears such comments wouldn't be discouraged should the initiative pass. "If Measure 9 passes, I will be uncomfortable going to

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One of 5-year-old Nico's mothers, Jane Scolieri, promises to fight back if Measure 9 passes

The Last Time?

The OCA might go away if Measure 9 fails

Lon Mabon, at the helm of the Oregon Citizens Alliance since its inception, has implied that the defeat of Measure 9 could mean the end of his organization. It lost its two previous anti-gay efforts and has failed at multiple attempts to put initiatives on ballots throughout the 1990s.

Defeating Measure 9 could put the final nail in the OCA's coffin, as it faces mounting legal troubles, dwindling donations and obvious public relations problems. This is a history of the organization:

1987 The OCA was founded in Klamath Falls. Lon Mabon was named the executive director.

1988 The OCA's Measure 8 passed, rescinding Gov. Neil Goldschmidt's executive order prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation in state employment. The Oregon Court of Appeals later ruled the measure was unconstitutional. The executive order remained on the books.

1991 The OCA proposed a ballot measure to declare "pedophilia, sadism, masochism, homosexuality, bestiality and necrophilia (sex with a corpse) are recognized by this state as abnormal, unnatural and perverse conduct." The measure eventually was withdrawn.

1992 The OCA rewrote the 1991 measure, eliminated necrophilia and resubmitted it. Measure 9, a constitutional amendment to the Oregon Bill of Rights, would have forbidden the state from "promoting homosexuality." It failed 56 percent to 44 percent.