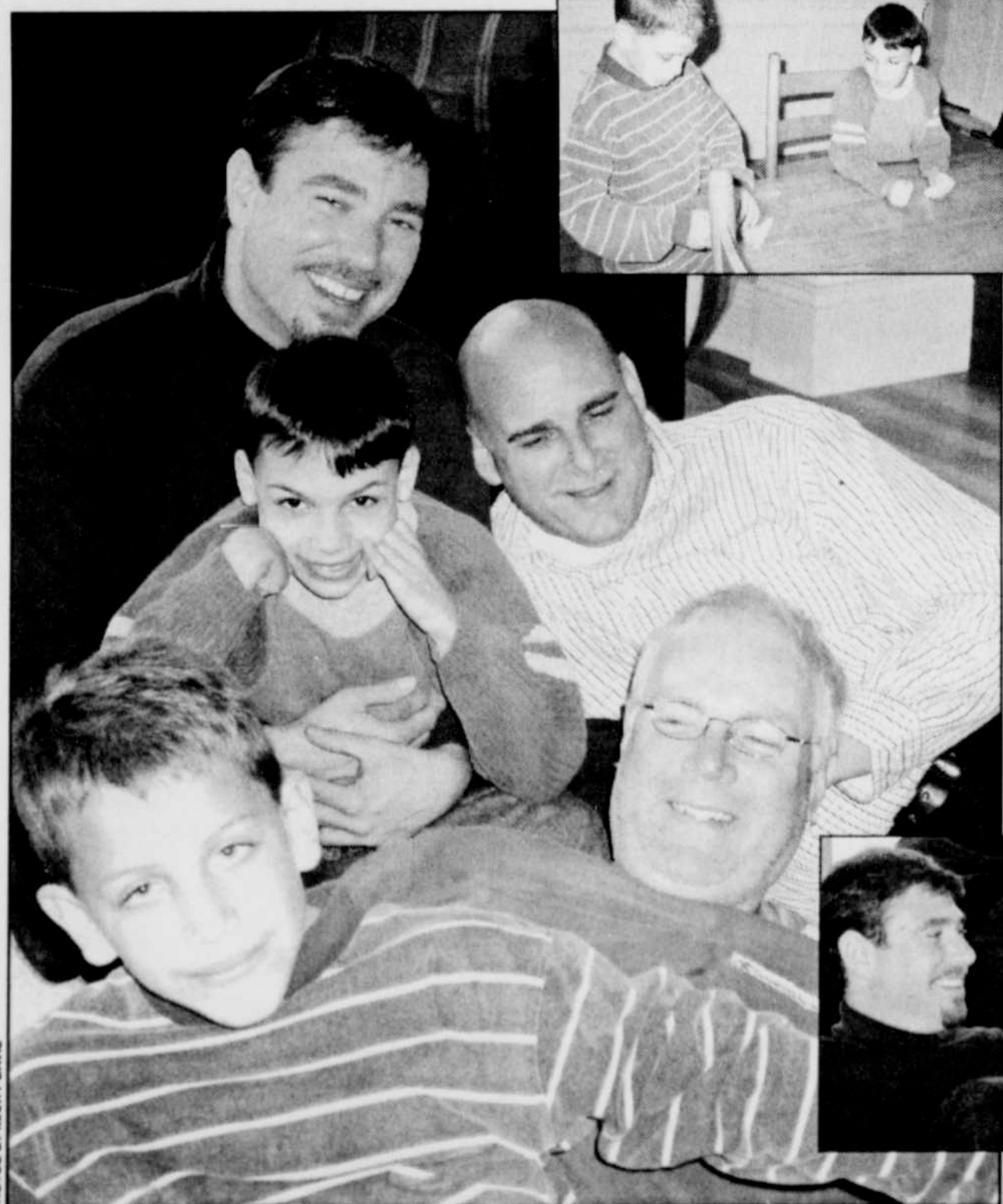




Through adoption, foster families, artificial insemination and surrogacy, Portland gays and lesbians are learning how to become parents

by Jodi Helmer



PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS

Wrestling at home are (clockwise from above left) parents Mitch Zahn and Steve Wagenhoffer, family friend Uncle Bob and adopted children Scott and Alex

The decision to become a parent can be both exciting and scary, and the sheer number of options can be downright overwhelming.

"We believe that every adult has the right to choose, create and structure their families," says Bonnie Tinker, executive director of Love Makes a Family, a nonprofit organization in Portland that advocates for the rights of all families. "If you want to have children, you should have a way to do that."

Tinker believes that regardless of a prospective parent's sexual orientation, the fundamental consideration remains the same: Are you ready to make a child the most important part of your life?

Once that decision is made, then it's time to decide which path to take, from surrogacy and artificial insemination to foster families and adoption.

"Many prospective parents aren't sure how to go about creating their families and are often daunted by the process," says Susan Rosenthal, a clinical social worker in Portland who specializes in working with same-sex couples to address the issues of creating a family. "There are so many questions about how you [create a family], the legal issues, how much it will cost and where to get the money."

Rosenthal believes it's important for people to recognize all of their options and to start by asking themselves difficult questions. She suggests prospective parents consider whether they want

biological children, whether the age, sex and race of the child are important and whether to be "out" when applying.

"People usually start out by leaning

toward one option," she says. "Once they have decided which path to take, they realize there is a way to make it happen."

Adoption

When Barbara Bond, 45, and Cathy Martin, 46, decided to start a family, one of their biggest questions was *how* to have children. "We talked a lot about whether we should adopt or whether one of us should have a biological child," says Bond.

The couple decided insemination was a natural place to start, but after several unsuccessful attempts, they chose to change paths and pursue adoption. "It was more a matter of practicality," explains Martin. "We didn't want to continue to invest time and money in a process that may or may not result in a child."

After researching private adoption agencies, the couple eventually found a gay-friendly agency in their hometown of Chicago, and in 1994, just a few short months after filling out adoption applications, the couple adopted an infant daughter named Thalia. Two years later, Bond and Martin worked with the same agency to adopt their son Evan.

Though the couple had little difficulty being matched with a child, they faced numerous challenges in becoming legal adoptive parents. "There was no such thing as second-parent adoption at the time," says Bond. In order to adopt,