

BOOKS

THE LESBIAN PARENTING BOOK: A GUIDE TO CREATING FAMILIES AND RAISING CHILDREN by D. Merilee Chanis, Ph.D., and G. Dorsey Green, Ph.D.; Seal Press, 2003; \$18.95 softcover

A helpful resource guide, *The Lesbian Parenting Book* offers insight into things you may not have considered. For example, it includes information about homophobia in childbirth classes and how to choose a lesbian-friendly physician. Yet, like any book that attempts to take on such a broad subject matter, it's hit and miss.

A total of 17 chapters cover everything from deciding whether to have children to the role of lesbian grandmother. The book is divided into two sections: The first addresses issues common to lesbian families, such as coming out and the role of partners and attempts to tackle big issues like racism and homophobia; the second offers information about different stages of child development, from prenatal and birth to dealing with adult kids.

The best thing about *The Lesbian Parenting Book* is the inclusion of vignettes from a diverse group of lesbian parents. Reading about other people's experiences shows that there really is no one way to be a parent and that moms need to figure out what works best for their families.

The authors should have stuck with the unique aspects of being a lesbian parent—it is here that they shine. Whereas I appreciate

(S)he's having a baby

Child-rearing advice for all-girl and all-boy parents

their effort to include information on dealing with racism, the chapter simply skims the surface of this deep and complex topic. The chapter on coming out to your children, however, is highly informative and would be helpful to people with kids of any age.

The book is well-organized so finding a chapter on your particular interest is easy, and an excellent resource guide and bibliography are included.

—Kathy Belge

GAY DADS: A CELEBRATION OF FATHERHOOD by David Strah et al.; J.P. Tarcher, 2003; \$23.95 hardcover

The instinct to father children is completely unrelated to one's sexual instincts. There are heterosexual men who haven't the slightest need or desire to be a parent. And



there are men who wouldn't dream of putting their penises into a vagina but who have an overwhelming biological urge to be a father. Parenting, in the end, may be a much deeper and more complex drive than we ever thought it was.

This seems to be one of the messages of *Gay Dads: A Celebration of Fatherhood*, a new collec-

tion of positive, inspiring portraits of gay men who have chosen to be dads. This is not a how-to book, nor is it a parenting aid for the gay dad. This is story after story of what drove gay men, both alone and with partners, to go through the sometimes grueling process of becoming a parent.

The authors are unabashed in their desire to tell only the stories of successes, since there are enough naysayers in the world and few inspirational sources. "This is a door," says one



Gay Dads includes painfully cute photos of gay men and their families

father, "that as a gay man I had closed many years before; having it open was a miracle."

But not always an easy miracle. These stories have recurring themes: The process of becoming a parent often takes a lot of time and requires hours of research and extraordinary reserves of determination. The good news is *Gay Dads* also points to the uniquely bountiful, life-affirming rewards and joys that parenting can bring.

There are stories of multiracial adoption, of surrogate parenting, of single parenting, of international adoption—stories of men who lied to get a child, men who fought the system and won, men who got a child only after the hardest, roughest roads.

Any dumb straight guy has the plumbing to birth a child. *Gay Dads* is about those men whose drive to be committed, loving fathers leads them to extraordinary measures and, in the end, glorious successes. Any gay man interested in parenting should read this book first—and maybe again and again and again.

—Glenn Scofield Williams

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