

Personal Perspectives

A Different Life: Family

by Patrica J.

After spending my vacation with a lesbian couple and their 8 year-old Indian daughter, I'm once again rethinking what family means. I do that often these days...when my married brother is always referred to as having a family and I am not; when I meet a young woman with an infant at her shoulder and later meet her partner, the biological mother of this child they've chosen to have and raise together; when an aging gay man sits beside the bed of his dying partner; when I see and hear us - gays, lesbians, and bisexuals - referring to the home we came from as "family" but too seldom the one we're in; when a gay man introduces me to his teenage son. The list goes on and on.

Identifying oneself as gay, lesbian, or bisexual often brings with it a stereotype of being anti-family, of being "only in the relationship for yourself." Because many of us are single or present that appearance, we often feel excluded where "families" gather and too often in our own families of

origin we are excluded. If this doesn't happen deliberately, it happens subtly - for example, when the conversation and family celebrations focus on married children and grandchildren as though we have nothing in our lives worth inquiring about or celebrating.

Gay and lesbian couples who decide on parenting have new and often difficult trails to blaze, and I hope the time comes soon when we're able as a society to see who they are and to witness the love and commitment they're sharing.

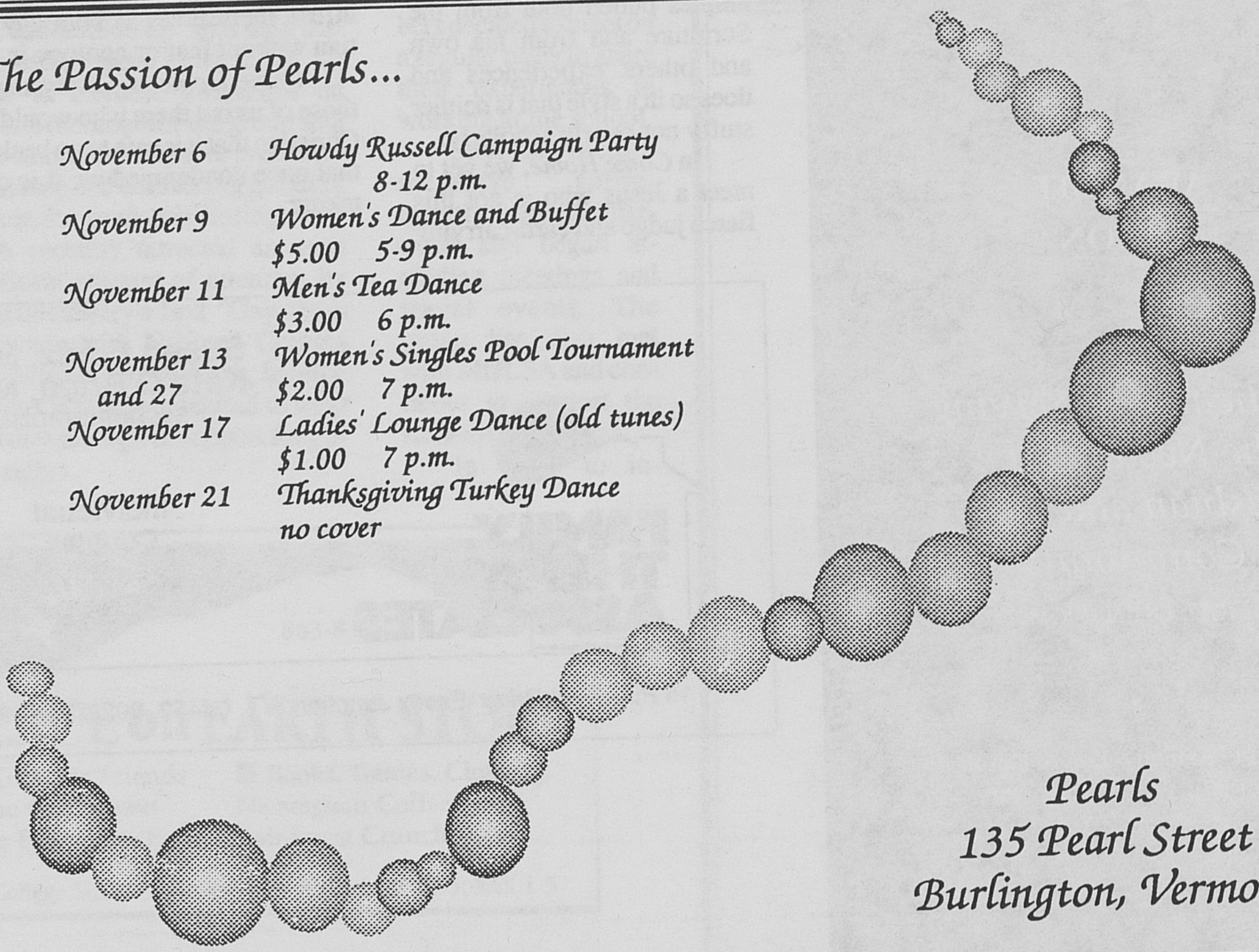
My friends' daughter has grown 6" in her year with them. She speaks English fluently now, having known only a few words when they brought her home. She's received medical treatment that will probably allow her to live a longer and more independent life than in the crowded orphanage in India. What impressed me most after seeing a video of her a year ago and being with her now is the vivaciousness of her spirit, the blossoming of a weak, depressed child into a daring and engaging one.

As the two women told hospital stories, explaining their co-parent role and the coming-out it required so that the child wouldn't be deprived of either of them, or they of her, I saw that some things are changing...that when we believe in who we are, in the power of the love we have to share, and then dare to present that to our world, words take on new meanings. We who seem not to fit into the traditional definition of "family" still know only too well what family could mean. We know because we've often had to create it for ourselves -- when we commit ourselves with a partner to a shared way of life, when we discover that the feelings and support among us are stronger than any "family" has offered, when we decide alone or with another to parent children because we know that what a child needs most is love.

We may not look like "family" and we may feel ostracized or merely tolerated in the one from which we came, but we also are creators of new families where love and acceptance and growth are once again ours.

The Passion of Pearls...

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| November 6 | Howdy Russell Campaign Party
8-12 p.m. |
| November 9 | Women's Dance and Buffet
\$5.00 5-9 p.m. |
| November 11 | Men's Tea Dance
\$3.00 6 p.m. |
| November 13
and 27 | Women's Singles Pool Tournament
\$2.00 7 p.m. |
| November 17 | Ladies' Lounge Dance (old tunes)
\$1.00 7 p.m. |
| November 21 | Thanksgiving Turkey Dance
no cover |



Pearls
135 Pearl Street
Burlington, Vermont