

▼  
**SUSAN MCKENZIE MS**

**ELLEN KIRSCHNER CSW**

**MARJORIE ROBLIN CSW**

*announce*

*the joining of their practices*

*and the opening of*

**THE  
 WOMEN'S  
 THERAPY CENTER**

*A Feminist Therapy Practice*

▼  
 2 Church Street  
 Burlington, Vermont

860-7454

## "Doing What was Best for Us as a Family"

Sage Russell

Activists aren't always the people marching in demonstrations, waving placards or standing on the steps of the Statehouse. Oftentimes, activists are quiet people living their own lives and just doing what they think is right. Beth and Laura, the parents in Vermont's first gay/lesbian second parent adoption, are a good example. They live quietly in rural Vermont, and describe themselves as "quiet, shy, homebodies." Yet by doing what they thought was right for them as a family — having both of them legally adopt Hannah, the toddler who has lived with them since she was a month old — they have helped to establish a stunning legal precedent in Vermont, which will benefit the many lesbian and gay couples who wish to do the same. They agreed to talk to *OITM* about the adoption, on condition that their real names not be used, for Hannah's protection.

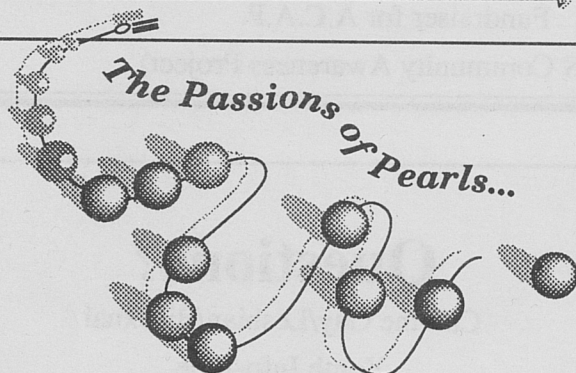
Someone meeting them for the first time would probably be struck by how matter of fact they are about the whole thing. They feel that they have been a family ever since Hannah came to live with them; Laura's adoption of Hannah simply legalizes a relationship in the eyes of the world that for them existed from the beginning. As Laura puts it, "She was my daughter from the time she was born and I didn't even know what she looked like." And they have been treated as a family by their friends, neighbors and co-workers right from the beginning. When Beth adopted Hannah, both Beth's and Laura's co-workers gave showers for them.

Certainly there have been changes. These days Laura doesn't worry as much. She has the security of knowing that she can make decisions on Hannah's behalf with school and medical authorities. They know that if something happened to Beth, Laura would not have to fight for custody while she was grieving. Laura's family, her mother in particular, used to think of Hannah as Beth's daughter, and now they are beginning to see Hannah as equally Laura's child. The second adoption became final on January 20. The changes are still new, and take some getting used to. Laura retains a lingering fear that something could go wrong someday and the adoption be declared illegal.

Beth and Laura feel their lives changed more with the original adoption. They feel that that made them a legitimate family in the eyes of the world, and made their families, colleagues and neighbors take their relationship more seriously — after more than ten years together!

When asked why they think this worked for them, both agree that they were lucky. They feel lucky to live in Vermont where "the legal system and the Legislature are very in tune with human rights" and where they were treated with respect in all phases of the process. They feel lucky that Laura's home study was done by Ann Clark of Vermont Children's Aid, who was "very open and realized that the security, the equalness, the validity of this relationship is the same as a heterosexual relationship." They feel especially lucky that their lawyer was Susan Murray and the judge was Chet Ketcham.

Susan Murray worked extremely hard on their behalf, spending hours tracking down the handful of second-parent adoptions in this country and researching the legal issues. She kept them informed of every step in the process and send them lots of documents, to the extent that Laura in particular became quite fascinated with the legal issues in the case. Beth says, "She



- Sun. March 1** **Mardi Gras**  
 Sponsored by Mansfield Bucks  
 \$3.00 6 p.m.
- Fri. March 6** **Women's Buffet Dance**  
 \$5.00 5-9 p.m.
- Wed. March 18** **Pasta Night-All you can eat**  
 \$5.95 6-9 p.m.
- Thur. March 19** **Juice Bar - 18 & Older**  
 \$3.00 cover 9 p.m.  
 Smoke and alcohol free
- Sat. March 21** **Ladies Lounge Dance**  
 \$1.00 7-10 p.m.
- Sat. March 28** **Men's Dance - Buffet**  
 \$3.00 7-10 p.m.

Dollar at the door 9:00 - 10:00 PM Friday and Saturday

**Pearls**  
 135 Pearl Street • Burlington, Vermont