

Children's Books: Reading for the New American Family

Deborah Lashman

The lesbian and gay baby boom has resulted in a growing number of children's books aimed at this new family; in fact, so many that the Gay and Lesbian Parent's Coalition has published an annotated bibliography.

While a number of publishers, both large mainstream houses and the smaller lesbian and gay presses, have printed an occasional title, the leader in "alternative" children's publishing is Alyson Press in Boston. Alyson has established an entire division, Alyson Wonderland to handle and promote children's titles.

Among their titles are books for kids of lesbian and gay parents, as well as stories in which a variety of family alternatives are presented. Leslea Newman's *Heather Has Two Mommies* (originally published by In Other Words) and *Gloria Goes to Gay Pride*, feature preschool daughters of lesbian couples. In another Newman title, *Belinda's Bouquet*, the title character's friend has two lesbian parents whom we meet naturally in the course of the story. Other Alyson Wonderland titles include *How Would You Feel if Your Dad Was Gay?*, *Daddy's Roommate*, and *The Generous Jef-*

erson Bartleby Jones, all featuring kids with gay fathers. One of their newest titles, *The Duke Who Outlawed Jelly Beans* by Johnny Valentine, is a collection of original fairy tales, featuring kids with lesbian and gay parents and a variety of racial backgrounds. The title story revolves around what happens when a Duke outlaws all families that aren't like his: the traditional mother/father set-up. Alyson even publishes a coloring book, *Families: A Coloring Book*, showing a variety of families and their activities.

There are a number of books showing that families come in all types; one of the earliest still in print is Little Brown's 1981 title *Families* by Marilyn Hafner. The lead character, Angie, describes the different types of families her friends have, including Susie who "lives with her mother and godmother. When I asked where her father lived, she said she didn't have any father."

While most of the newer books are aimed at younger children, preschool through 6th grade, there are some titles for teenagers. Betty Greene, perhaps best known for her first teen book, *Summer of My German Soldier*, has written a novel

loosely based on the gay bashing murder of a gay man in Bangor, Maine, by a gang of teenage boys several years ago. *The Drowning of Stephen Jones*, published by Bantam, is told through the eyes of the girlfriend of the leader of the gang. Another new teen novel *Bad Boy*, by Diana Wiener (Delecorte), describes what happens when one of the players on a high school hockey team discovers that his best friend and one of the star players is gay.

Among the non-fiction titles describing diverse families are *Families: A Celebration of Diversity* from Houghton Mifflin, based on an exhibit at the Boston Children's Museum and Tabor Sarah's *Chag Sameach (Happy Holidays)*, which is an introduction to the Jewish holidays featuring diverse family backgrounds, including a family with two lesbian parents.

There are any number of children's books, fiction and non-fiction about AIDS. One of the most sensitive I've read is *Losing Uncle Tim* by Mary Kate Jordan, Albert Whitman Co.

While it's not as easy to find as the mainstream literature, there is a growing wealth of books out there for our kids. Ask your bookstore, school, and local library to carry these titles and more like them.

For more information on these titles you can contact the publishers or:

Alyson Wonderland, 40 Plympton St, Boston, MA 02118, (617) 542-5679.

Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International, PO Box 50360, Washington, D.C. 20091. ▼

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