

Family Matters: Making Love Visible: In Celebration of Gay and Lesbian Families

Photos by Geoff Manasse, Interviews by Jean Swallow



(Photo: Geoff Manasse, from *Making Love Visible*)

The Goldstein-Perdue Family

An *OITM* Review by Moira
OITM Staff

WORCESTER -- At first glance, *Making Love Visible* might seem like just another pretty book to have on your coffee table. You know, that gay/lesbian chic type, so handy when friends are over waiting for the popcorn or espresso and the conversation lulls. But this collage of real family stories, including that of a Worcester, Vermont, family, touches much deeper than that. In fact, the book's cover design itself reveals the self-respect evident within. In a brief phone conversation with one of the publishers, she explained that the designer, Lee Sylvester, had a definite concept for the whole book. Each careful aspect of his design adds to the collection's classic look. Crossing Press, the book's Freedom, California-based publishing company, also agreed to a picture-less cover, giving it the look of a family photograph album.

Inside, we are introduced to 24 families, each voiced with personal interviews from the various members. Swallow's knack for making people feel comfortable enabled her subjects to open up with noticeable honesty. As I read through the book, I felt as if I were let into 24 different living rooms and was extremely privileged to be there.

The book contains so many moving stories ... We meet Marcia Kawahara, who struggled with her lesbianism until she was in her fifties, finally breaking from her family in Kauai and eventually meeting her life partner. They now live and love in Los Angeles.

I loved reading about Erin Ferguson and her family. Erin is 18, out, and has a conviction that is infectious. Along with her self-confidence, she has the support of her parents, helping her attend high school as an out lesbian. In the book, she says, "Being lesbian is the best thing that ever happened to me; it's a wonderful culture to be apart of." Now that's the '90's! Her optimism balances the struggles other older g/l/b folks experienced when coming out.

In a different section, we meet the men of Portland, Oregon's "Rose Court of the Inland Empire," drag queens who raise money for charity. These men shared with great emotion what holds them together. "Honesty has worked for us, and deciding things together, planning. And respect. That sense of having someone there for me all the time has been really important for me."

Adding to the interviews are the photographs of Geoff Manasse. These are not airbrushed or theatrical, but the kind you would take if you only had a camera handy in those everyday yet special moments -- shots that might catch a quick kiss between partners at a barbecue, or a woman playing with a long-revered cat, or the expression of pride as one watches their long time companion at the piano. All these candid yet invaluable moments are

presented to us through Manasse's lens. Pictures that capture both the compassion and pain in Sharon Kowalski's eyes, in Scott's care as he tends to his dying partner, in the intimate moment between Keith and Charles, partners for over 40 years.


Vermont is represented in this collection through the very large Goldstein-Perdue family. Holly Perdue and Cheri Goldstein have been active in Vermont's g/l/b community for many years, through Holly's work in the political arena and Cheri's past involvement with *Out In The Mountains*. Since their interview for the book, they have successfully finalized on two-parent adoptions for two of the four boys that live with them. They are working on doing the same for the other boys. Holly and Cheri also parent two grown women who have been labeled as "retarded." That makes eight! In a recent phone conversation, Cheri said that they are looking for other children to adopt.

Life has remained the same for Holly and Cheri since the book was published. Their community has been accepting of them, and their family has continued in the same way it has done before. In reading their chapter of the book, the tremendous commitment they have to these children is made quite visible. In the book, Holly states, "There are lesbians who can parent and lesbians who don't have a clue how to parent, but who my primary relationship is with does not determine my value as a parent. Being a lesbian doesn't make it right or wrong, it only makes it harder. Other people expect you to be as good as they are, but in doing so, they expect you to be better than they are because they see themselves as being better than they are."

Making Love Visible broadened my idea and concept of "family." This realization struck me as odd since I too have an alternative family. We are a by-choice-group, with some biological ties and others that have been forged by time and commitment. My partner and I wake to greet each day, caring for our children, either two or four of them depending on who is with us. We are reminded daily of our great fortune in finding each other and in the joy children bring us. We value family, our family, all families. But somehow, in reading *Making Love Visible*, I saw possibilities I had yet to even consider.

As with all of the families in the book, there is the element of real life struggle and the magical rewards one gains from such bonds. In my own family, our time together is a well-guarded treasure, partly because we come together by choice but especially because in doing so we are making our love visible.

Making Love Visible is available at your local bookstore or through *The Crossing Press, Inc.*, by calling 1-800-777-1048. ▼

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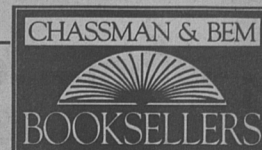
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