

All You Need is Love...

and Maybe Pudding

a review by Maxwell Stroud

On my shelf is a photograph that was taken by my father on Christmas about four years ago. It shows my oldest sister with her husband, my other sister and her female partner, and me, all gathered in the living room of my parents' home. The photograph itself tells a story of love and acceptance, but ask any one of us about it and you will get a deeper picture of how we negotiate the terms of family.

For myself, that image evokes both memories and musings. I remember my mother's dilemma that Christmas: her son-in-law should have a stocking with his name embroidered on it, but what about my other sister's partner? I wonder how this image of my family has changed and will continue to change: since that day, one partnership has faded, and I have come out as bisexual, bringing possibilities of different configurations.

A review of other family portraits, that ritual of holidays major and minor, offers a variety of glimpses of the people I called family on any given day in my past. It poses a direct challenge to political family-values rhetoric and arguments over legal recognition of queer family that overwhelm us with the idea of a family as a static object, looking the same over time.

And just as my album does that for my family, *Love Makes A Family: Portraits of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents and Their Families* questions dogma and stereotype surrounding cultural visions of the unchanging nuclear family.

Gigi Kaeser and Peggy Gillespie weave together intimate family portraits and narratives that invite the reader to meet 43 diverse families as they explore their notions and negotiations around family, love, and commitment. The beautiful art book is based upon the eponymous photography and text traveling exhibit that has been on display on university campuses and in elementary schools around the country.

The book also combines interviews and photographs, as in the exhibit, to document the experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered parents



and their families. It allows all of the family members — including the children — to speak candidly about their lives, their relationships, and the ways in which they have dealt with the pressures of homophobia. As Peggy Gillespie says of her work, "At the most basic level, *Love Makes A Family* combats that homophobia

Photos aside, the words of the children also evoke powerful images: schoolyard discrimination, classroom activism, and meaningful family times at home. One 10-year-old girl said "Recently, I had a dream that we were in school, and the kids were asked what they really thought of gays. Then we talked about

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Gigi Kaeser, the compilation's photographer, added, "By educating people of all ages — beginning in early childhood — to celebrate and appreciate diversity, this exhibit contributes to the process of dismantling the destructive power of prejudice and intolerance, thereby making the world a safer place for all families."

what being gay is really about. At the end of my dream, the kids looked at being gay in a whole different way." A nine-year-old said, "All I know is that I love my mom, and I really like my mom's girlfriend. I keep bugging her because I want her to marry my mom. That's all."

But perhaps the most telling evidence that family is family is family came from a five-year-old, who said simply, "I like eating pudding with my family." ▼



Love Makes a Family
Peggy Gillespie and Gigi Kaeser
University of Massachusetts Press

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2nd & 4th Fri 7:30pm
Lake Champlain (CH. 2) 1st & 2nd Mon 11pm and
1st & 2nd Wed. 10pm
Helicon (CH. 7) (Barre) 2nd & 4th Mon 8:30pm
BCTV (CH. 8) (Brattleboro) call 257-0888 for air days/time
MCTV (Middlebury, E. Middlebury, Weybridge) 388-3062 for airtimes
MMCTV (CH. 3)(Richmond, Jericho, Underhill) call 434-2550
for air days/time
WENO (CH.15) (Enosburg, Berkshire, Richford) 1st & 3rd Sun at 8pm
CA-TV (Bennington, Pownal, Shaftsbury, Woodford, Hoosick Falls)
call 442-8868 for air days/time*