

PREFACE

This book has been written and published by men who know the special joys and special fears of being gay and being fathers. It is written for our children and their mothers in the hope that they may read it some day and understand more fully and deeply what was going on. But it is written chiefly for other gay fathers, those who are unknown to us. We write for them so that they may better understand what is happening to them now. As far as we know, the book is the first of its kind — the first attempt by a group of gay fathers to talk about themselves and their lives in their own voices.

In making our statement, we have chosen to remain anonymous. We do so partly because the book is a collective effort. But we do so also because we are thinking not of ourselves, but of our children and our families. Society still inflicts painful wounds on those it calls "homosexuals." Indeed, it often uses other words for them, words that are as sharp and destructive as fang and claw. Most homosexuals, however, who feel at all good use another word. They call themselves gay, but society regards their use of that word as theft and for the most part will not use it. But society, of course, makes no protest about its theft of the words that give pain — "queer," "faggot," and "gearbox" among many others.

When it speaks its poisoned names for us, society is also calling us dirty, sick, sinful, criminal, and perverted. Faced with this indiscriminate barrage, those who stand by and support homosexuals — their parents, friends, wives, children — also become targets for the anger and injury that is directed at homosexuals. Many now stand and face the worst society can do to us, but we want to spare others — especially our children — from the most bitter and punitive reactions that this book may trigger.

We welcome your comments on what is written here. There is much we have not said about ourselves that should be said. We will no doubt be accused of giving a one-sided view here, a view biased by the interests of male homosexuals who are fathers. We did not set out to say everything that could be or ought to be said on this topic. We claim only that what we are saying is true to our experience. What we have said needs to be said. We do not deny there is more to say.

The book is the work of many people. All of the two hundred or so men who over the last three years have had fleeting or extended contact with Gay Fathers of Toronto are in the book. Some of them are there as little more than echoes, while others are in it vividly like characters in a play. All of them are real and true, although truth, as Oscar Wilde said, is rarely pure and never simple. The people around us are in the book too — women, children, friends, and family — although the book is not about them in the same way it is about us.

The writing of the text was the work of many hands. We will identify them as L, R, M, R, and H, E, T, and H. For those who need a name, therefore, the author is LoRMaR HEaTH. So Lormar Heath did it all, but he (or she) will never make public appearances or sign autographs for devoted readers.

Our thanks to the Gay Community Appeal of Toronto for their generous support of the project and to our other benefactors in GFT itself. Some of them gave until it hurt so they see this book in print. We are indebted, too, to Derek Rainer who designed the cover. Margaret McCabe typed and re-typed the manuscript several times and with cut-and-paste and valuable advice made the final product look good. We thank PinkType and the Ryerson Copy Shop who set the text in type and printed it.

Gay Fathers of Toronto

I. INTRODUCTION

Homosexuals live their lives in many ways. The images we have of them often come to us as stereotypes that range from the outrageous, flamboyant gays to the clones with jeans, sneakers, checked shirts, and carefully trimmed moustaches; from the "radicals" waving banners in the street, to the suburban gays living in houses behind white picket fences. The reality of their lives is, however, always more complex, human, and interesting than these stereotypes. One partial reality, however, is the homosexual who lives behind the facade of the straight life with a wife and children.

Is this your situation? Perhaps the pressures of family expectations and society at large were too great for you to avoid marriage. ("When are you going to get married and settle down?" was the persistent question, delivered with knowing looks.) Perhaps you believed counsellors, friends, or psychiatrists who told you it was just a phase you were going through. Perhaps you desperately wished your deepest fears were not true. And how better to disprove them than by getting married? Perhaps no one before had ever asked you to get married, and you took this as a sign that you were "normal" after all.

For whatever reasons, many men who are homosexuals do marry or establish continuing relationships with women and do father children. The lives of these men often appear to work for some time. Then the strains begin, and what started as a dream becomes a nightmare. What started with promise and hope begins to appear as a terrible mistake that cannot be rectified without doing unthinkable damage, both to the father and to those he loves dearly. His life is often fraught with the fears and anxiety that come from leading a double life — the increasingly persistent fantasies and perhaps the increasingly common but furtive excursions into homosexual activity. He lives with the recurring promises he makes to himself to reform, and with the sense of defeat and desperation that comes when the promises are always broken again. He lives with the terrible delusion that he is the only person in the world who is married, a father — and gay.

This book is for those men — and there are many of them — who are asking what it means when father is gay. It is directed to those men who may now be ready to accept the fact that they are fathers and also gay. It is directed to those who wish now to deal with this fact directly and honestly. We, the writers, are a group of men who began from a position in which each of us was living in a family setting when the realization finally dawned as to who we were and what we had done. This realization did not make us want to wish away the past. We accept the fact that we were, or still are, married, and we accept the fact that we are fathers. And we acknowledge the love that made these circumstances. We accept what is. We do not want to turn back the clock to start again without the women and children who are now part of our lives; but we also acknowledge that we are homosexual and that we must face this fact and somehow deal with it.

We are gay fathers, and you may be one too. If you are, we are writing this book now for you. We know the lonely road you are on. We know because we have traveled that way before you, and we remember the feelings you have now as our own at one time. We know the doubt that says "Why am I on this road at all?" and we know the need to talk to someone else about what lies ahead on the road. We know how important it was when we were beginning to have help from those who had traveled farther along the road than we. Now that more of us have made this journey, we believe it is time to talk about it and to make at least a rough map showing the valleys of despair it

sometimes goes through, the peaks of joy it sometimes reaches, and the sense of relief, comradeship, and acceptance that comes to those who stick with it until the way becomes wide and comfortable. Some of us were desperate before we found the road. A thought sometimes that to take flight or to destroy ourselves was the only answer to the problem. And we sometimes thought of taking others with us — everyone in the car, driving over the cliff. We know, and always knew, that these were not good answers, but we now know too, that there are indeed better ways of dealing with the problem. We hope that this book will help you to find those ways, as we have.

We assume, if you are now reading this introduction — whether in the public library, furtively in a bookstore, or tucked into your copy of *Health and Strength* — that you have reached stage of awareness, if not of acceptance. You are beginning to recognize a part of yourself the society still largely regards as taboo. Homosexuals are the modern-day lepers, as the opinion still prevails among people that we are sick, sinful, perverted, and misguided. You are experiencing the conflict between what society expects of you and what you are coming to realize is a deep and unalterable part of you. You may be aware only of a nagging discomfort that is becoming ever-more insistent. Perhaps you have not asked yourself questions about all of this, perhaps you are bursting with them.

"Can I face this? What should I do with my life? Should I try again to forget it, or go on with the lies? How do I tell my wife and what do I tell her? What about the kids? Should I tell them, my mother, the mailman? What will the guys at work say? How much do I tell? *What should I do?*"

There are no easy answers to these questions — at least none that we can give. We don't know you, your mother, your wife and kids, or your mailman. We *do* know what happened to us and what we are doing now. We can offer a glimpse of our lives to give you a sense of what may ahead; but everyone is different, and what happens to you will depend on you, the people around you, and the circumstances that bind you and others together.

Take heart. Don't be discouraged. At least read further in this book, and make up your own mind as to whether you have anything to learn from us. Knowing what has happened to others like you may reduce the guesswork in what you now do. We believe there are some generalizations that can be made about our experiences and we hope these may be helpful to others. We have stood where you stand and can look back now fairly calmly at events and feelings that were surely terrifying at the time.

Who are we? We are the Gays Fathers of Toronto. In 1981 our group had thirty-one members. Since the group began in early 1978, about two hundred other men have been in contact with the group. Some were never more than an unidentified voice on the phone. Others came for a while to our meetings and then, for various reasons, left. Some have continued with the group and worked to make it something that is very important and meaningful to us. We meet every two weeks and each meeting sees a dozen to fifteen people in attendance. We feel that we are making progress, both individually and collectively, in working out a variety of answers the problems involved in being a father and being gay.

Perhaps the following article from the February 1980 issue of the *Body Politic* says briefly and well who we are.

GAY FATHERS FIND A WARM WELCOME AT TORONTO'S GFT

The responsibilities and burdens of parenthood are well documented. They become even heavier to bear when the parent is also gay.

As gay fathers and mothers we must consider those we have brought into the world, and our partners who have shared in this, as a very important part of our lives. We have the need to express our

sexual identity but we do not want to jeopardize our relationship with our children or damage them in any way. We feel held back by the parental instinct to protect our children — what will breaking free, coming out, do to our children? With no one to turn to, with very little literature on the topic freely available, with the prevailing societal attitudes saying: "Broken marriages damage children, it is wrong, immoral, bad," the emerging gay father or mother often feels lost, condemned to a life he or she feels increasingly intolerable, and totally alone. Unless the gay person is unusually brave, the first attempts at gay contact are often clumsily anonymous or deliberately false, and to someone still so unsure of him — or herself, can result in a drawing back to the safety of familiar (i.e., family) situations, and a blocking of further healthy development as a gay person. If only there were someone to talk to who would understand!

Gay Fathers of Toronto addresses itself directly to this need. The different lesbian organizations have contacts for gay mothers, but very little exist for gay fathers. So GFT, in existence for two years, offers support, understanding and direct experience of the problems facing the gay man who is a parent.

Our basic message is *you are not alone*. We have all been there, or are still there. We know what it's like. Our members represent most facets of the gay father situation: some are divorced, some still married, some are separating, some have custody (full or shared) of their children, some are "out" to their wives, others are not. Some are not even fathers, though we all stand in a meaningful relationship to some child.

One of our strengths lies in our contradicting stereotypes. We share the concerns of all parents for our children's good, and we want to see the kind of sexual stereotyping that helped shape and distort our lives put out of society, and especially out of the education system.

We are more widespread than our name indicates. We trek regularly from Hamilton, Guelph, Peterborough and smaller centres in between, from the suburbs and the inner city. Our meetings are held, usually every two weeks, in various members' homes, and take the form of a discussion group followed by a pot luck supper, wine and relaxed socializing.

At the moment, we are engaged in putting together a book for gay fathers to reach out further than our own boundaries, again with the message: *you are not alone*.

To find out more about the Gay Fathers of Toronto, listen for information about our meetings on 923-GAYS, or call (416) 532-2333 or (416) 967-0430. Those gay fathers who live out of Toronto, or who cannot call, write to us c/o MCC, 730 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2R4. We welcome input from groups or individuals in other cities, so if you have something you think is relevant to us, or if you think we have something that could be relevant to you, please call or write.

We are still a small group, yet we know that the number of men who are gay and parents is large. Perhaps we will hear from you. *You are not alone*.

This book is not a guide for gay fathers. It does not set out to say: "Do *this* and *that* will result." It doesn't even say: "We know we're right." It does say: "We know; we understand."

From the personal stories that follow you may draw parallels to your own experience. You may even see things in them that you would wish to avoid. That's always a help!

The book contains four chapters. The introduction provides an overview and the three following chapters deal with a progression of themes and problems that are common to the experiences of gay fathers: coming out, re-establishing life as a gay father, living with children and others as a gay father, and gay parenting and the law. The book also has a chapter on the future — a chapter that is not a chapter because it has yet to be written. To help you with your own future, the book ends

with three appendixes. One describes the organization and objectives of gay fathers' groups, another prepares you to deal with anti-homosexual hate literature, and the third discusses steps you may want to take after you have read the book. There is also a selected bibliography on homosexuality in general, and gay parenting in particular.

It can, of course, be read in any order you wish. It's your book. It's our book, too. It has our pain, our joys, and our experiences within its covers, and it contains one great truth that cannot be repeated too often: someone understands, someone cares. *YOU ARE NOT ALONE*.

Next is the story of a father who thought he was alone and who tried over many years to sort it all out by himself. Indeed, it is the aloneness that makes the gay father's life difficult. He sees no alternative but to face by himself the harshest verdict his family, friends, and colleagues can render. He likely believes he would condemn his own conduct just as strongly as they, if he were in their place. We draw no moral from David's story. We only say that no matter what you have done, or what you think you have done, someone has already been there before you — and survived. Some of the survivors are writing for you now.