the new nuclear unit according to breeders, co-habitators, and visionaries
MAKE SOME NOISE

JULY 31, 2004
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from your editors

Between the two of us, we can probably count the number of people we know who do NOT want kids on one hand. Since that includes both of us, you can see we’re talking about a small number here.

So when we decided to do an issue on family, we were a little surprised that it meant talking about kids. A lot. Even among progressives and individualists and the kind of people that read Clamor, it seems that the default definition of family = parents + kids. We haven’t escaped the social stigma of growing old and unmarried, of having a partner but never having kids, or of just doing whatever the hell you want. That socialization, combined with all the legal definitions of family used to assign benefits, collect taxes, and categorize people, means that no matter how “progressive” you are, there are inherent contradictions in the word “Family.”

We put forth this topic to challenge the notions of family by giving some examples of different kinds of real families, different ways of raising kids (which could be a whole magazine itself), and different definitions of “family” beyond blood relations. We have an excellent article by Andy Cornell (p. 21) questioning the push for acceptance of gay marriage, an article about the nonmonogamous Mosuo culture of China (p. 9), and a feature (or two) on the evolution of the Hip Mama community (pp. 30, 32).

We hope that you’ll take away from this issue a sense of what family means to real people in communities just like yours - and not just what it means to the government or the mainstream media when they talk about adoption or queer marriage or family values or the nuclear family. And finally, in these times of war and crises, we have all come to rely more on family — including extended and nontraditional families — and we thought that was worth celebrating.

Thanks for reading,

Jen Angel and Jason Kucmna

PS: Keep an eye out for the upcoming “Stop Bush. Start Democracy” issue in September. If you’re a subscriber, it’ll be hitting your mailbox in mid-August (hint, hint).

Clamor's mission is to provide a media outlet that reflects the reality of alternative politics and culture in a format that is accessible to people from a variety of backgrounds. Clamor exists to fill the voids left by mainstream media. We recognize and celebrate the fact that each of us can and should participate in media, politics, and culture. We publish writing and art that exemplify the value we place on autonomy, creativity, exploration, and cooperation. Clamor is an advocate of progressive social change through active creation of political and cultural alternatives.
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SERVICE SECTOR BLUES
As soon as I received Issue 26 (May/Jun 2004), I immediately related to the older Krispy Kreme female employee photographed on the cover. I am one of many people forced to accept a low-paid job in the service industry. Despite my experience in the car business in support services, private security, and administrative duties, I recently took a job in a convenience store. The “good” jobs are no longer out there. Even the marginal jobs have flocks of applicants competing for that $8/hour position.

I have had no type of health insurance. There are no unions in Florida so I had no representation to help me fight for my job. I cannot afford the oppressive costs of private medical coverage. I went to work as a courier — using my own vehicle. For about eight months, I made very good money doing this type of work. Now, it is too costly work as a courier due to escalating gas prices.

I have done various security jobs in that period of time but most of those positions did not pay much more than working in a convenience store. I recently turned 40 and have realized that the idea of America being the “Land of Opportunity” is nothing more than a worn-out cliche. The naivety of my youth of working hard and “making it” died a long time ago.

Allison dasi Hergenrother
Winter Park, Florida

KEEP YOUR LAWS OFF MY FAMILY
Anne Elizabeth Moore is right in her point that we have to reexamine the role that the media plays in our lives ("Working in the Age of Reality TV," May/Jun 2004). The boy she refers to in her article is clearly a product of a TV upbringing. That’s where Moore misses the point, though.

No 12-year-old kid should be watching Jackass because 12-year-olds emulate stupid behavior all the time. But it’s not MTV’s fault for putting the show on TV! Where are this kid’s parents? Our obsession with TV has gotten so bad that we expect it to do our parenting for us. If you don’t want your kids to see things they shouldn’t, then monitor what they watch, and if necessary make sure the TV isn’t available when you’re not around.

It may seem like news to some people, but we don’t have to watch TV! If you don’t want to see it, or you don’t want your kids to see it, turn the damned thing off!

If we want our government to control what we see, here, and feel, then Ms. Moore’s opinion is a good way to go. It’s more fodder for Bush and his hacks to take away our free speech. We have to be responsible for ourselves, or risk the possibility of our government and our corporations taking away our freedom.

Kerri Danskin
Spring Lake Heights, NJ

THANKS, TANK
Thanks to Tank for the article on HPV ("In The Dark," Mar/Apr 2004). I learned a year ago that I had contracted HPV and, like the author, might not have contracted it had I known all of the facts.

The media and the government do a poor job of educating the public about the fact that HPV is an epidemic because it is so easily transmissible. While condom advocacy has been prolific, information on how to prevent STDs other than HIV has been severely lacking. Meanwhile, my gynecologist confesses that she might as well be called a “wart doctor” because of the prevalence of HPV in her practice. And those who suffer from HPV, Herpes, etc., do endure significant emotional, sexual and physical consequences.

My life has been permanently altered because of this experience, and it is really a comfort when I hear what others have been through under the same circumstances. Here’s to a cure for the 100 strains of HPV. Here’s to finding a way to have “safe sex” when no such practice exists.

Esa Tan
Austin, TX

McGARRY HAS LAST WORD?
I am writing in response to two letters that appeared in the Mar/Apr 2004 issue, in regards to my article "If you want to Smash Imperialism, Start in your own Community," Nov/Dec 2003.

I never told white people to "travel" (presumably a significant distance) into communities of color, and "offer support." What I said exactly was "committing ourselves to being allies with community organizations led by people of color ... that means organizing in the white community against racism ... It’s about creating humanistic relationships with people of color based on solidarity, community, and respect."

The other was the comments on how "middle class people of color" don’t fit "the analysis" purported by myself among many others. First of all, I was never referring to middle class people of color in my article. Yes, there are middle class people of color in the United States. Allowing some people of color to advance in Capitalist society and become part of the middle class is an integral part of maintaining Institutionalized Racism.

Members of the Michigan IMC Collective claim that I was "factually" incorrect in my claim about the lack of coverage on the Michigan IMC site. Let me quote my article: “During the not in Benton Harbor, and until at least the next day, there was only one post on the Michigan (Indymedia) web site.” I was trying to point out that it took one full day to get even one post about a riot that was occurring. To me, that shows a pretty distinct and large gap between the fans of Indymedia and the community in Benton Harbor.

I am fully aware that there was lots of posts and discussion about it later.

Sometimes white people don’t like hearing that they are in a position of privilege and power, and the point of my article was to show precisely that. It’s interesting that months after my article was published, there are two letters to the editor dedicated to my article.

My goal was to expose how white activists are neglecting the struggles of people of color in the United States. I think the objections brought up are not substantial, and not addressing the real complexities and interrelatedness of race and class. I share the concerns of both letters, but don’t feel there is sufficient evidence to back up their claims.

Brady McGarry | The ‘A’ Word Collective
Seattle, WA

CORRECTIONS
In the May/Jun 2004 issue, the illustration accompanying the Micron’s interview (p. 52) should have been credited to Kool Akem.

In the same issue, the photo accompanying the article, "Working it Out!" should have been credited to Danee Voorhees/courtesy of the Salt Archive. Danee’s web site is www.daneevoorhees.com. The author was Christina Cooke (not Cook).
The revolution won't be televised, but you can read about it. Books for a better world, by Mike Palacek, former federal prisoner, congressional candidate, newspaper reporter. Please visit: iowapace.com.

This is the Place: Queers from Mormon Families Stake Their Claim. You grew up queer and closeted in a Mormon family or household, but where are you now? We want to publish your story! We are compiling an anthology of such stories to arouse, to inspire, to entertain, to teach, and most of all, to claim our identities. This is the Place for queer writers with Mormon backgrounds to pioneer our own collection of groundbreaking memoirs, essays, and historical narratives. Send your stories by October 31 to: This is the Place, PO Box 1150, Bowling Green Station, New York, NY 10274. Submissions should be no more than 5000 words, typewritten in a 12-point font, double-spaced and single-sided. Please include a cover letter with brief bio and contact info, as well as a self-addressed stamped envelope of sufficient size for the return of your manuscript. Email thisisthplace@riseup.net for full guidelines.

Radio Radio! The Vinyl Hours with DJ Tina Bold from 7 to 9pm (pst) every Monday on KUCR 88.3fm (riverside, ca), or go to <http://www.kucr.org> to hear a live-stream version. Send demos to: KUCR Radio c/o Tina Bold, University of Ca. Riverside, Riverside, CA 92521

PUNK PAPERS: Three punk/academics are currently co-editing a collection on the contemporary (post-1980) punk and hardcore scenes. We are writing to invite contributions to the volume by punks/activists, most likely (though this is not a requirement) those who also have one foot in academia. The book will consider issues such as resistance, commodification, social class, geography, identity (gender, race, sexual diversity, etc), and activism. While we welcome ideas for contributions, we are less interested in those which are simply descriptions of local scenes or aspects of the punk movement. Each contribution should address larger theoretical and political issues in an explicit manner. We are looking for chapters of 4,000 to 6,000 words written for academic readers as well as punks looking for serious discussion of their movement. The deadline is July 1, 2004. For more information, please write to bookofpunk@yahoo.com.

CALL FOR PAPERS: The People’s Papers Project is looking for submissions of undergraduate or graduate thesis that have been written by people who juggle both activism and academia for consideration in our series, the People’s Papers Project. The People’s Papers Project is the brainchild of Jason Kucsma (Clamor Magazine) and Ailecia Ruscin (Alabama Grif). Both Jason and Ailecia self-published their American studies master’s theses so that they could share their academic labor with their activist communities. We are looking for more to publish in this continuing series. email ppp@clamormagazine.org.

WANTED: Clamor Prison Mail Correspondent: This is a monthly volunteer position to help us process the ever-increasing number of mail from prisoners that Clamor receives. You’ll be expected to read through mail, respond to requests, and document the correspondence. You should be able to drive to the Clamor office once a month to work about 3-5 hours on these letters. Please drop us a line if you’re interested: info@clamormagazine.org.

Clamor is looking for dedicated readers to take copies of Clamor around their cities or neighborhoods. If you would like to receive free copies to take to your local bookstores to encourage them to carry Clamor, or if you have friends who you think might be a likely subscriber, we’d love to work with you. This offer is available only to current subscribers and as long as magazine supplies last. Please write to info@clamormagazine.org and let us know you’re interested.

The revolution won’t be televised, but you can read about it. Books for a better world, by Mike Palacek, former federal prisoner, congressional candidate, newspaper reporter. Please visit: iowapace.com.
Agent Automatic (p. 17) is a post-futurist response to technology and culture and most recently appeared in Anarchy.

Breakfast (p. 46) lives in Vermont loves sheep, and can be reached at masturbate@homewithgod.net.

Joshua Samuel Brown (p. 9) is freelance writer, current whereabouts unknown. His work can be read at www.josambro.com, and he can be reached at jsb@monitor.net.

Andy Cornell (p. 21) is a writer and activist attending graduate school in New York City. You can reach him at arc280@nyu.edu.

Jessica DelBalzo (p. 38) is a freelance writer and mother from Flemington, NJ. Her work has been published in a variety of newspapers, magazines and online venues, and her social-issues column, "Alternative Reality" appears weekly in the Franklin First News. Her spare time is spent as an activist, working to abolish animal. She can be reached at donotadopt@aol.com.

Neil deMause (p. 57) has covered welfare and poverty issues for In These Times, Extra!, and his own magazine. Here (www.heremagazine.com), and is a contributor to an upcoming collection of essays by New York authors on the Giuliani years, to be published in 2005. He lives in Brooklyn with his partner Mindy, their son Jordan, and way too many e-mail addresses, among which is neil@demause.net.

Mark Dilley (p. 63) is a Union Organizer (based on IWW principles) who loves the open edit internet software called Wiki, where you can publish to the web. Find out more at: markdilley.2ya.com.

Sandy Williams Driver (p. 34) and her husband, Tim, live in Albertville, Alabama, with their three children, Josh, Jake, and Katie. Sandy is a full-time writer and her stories have appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies. She also writes a parenting column for her local newspaper. Please email her at SandyDriver@aol.com.

Katelan V. Foisy (p. 57) graduated from Pratt Institute with a BA in Illustration in 2001. Her work has been seen at The Society of Illustrators, NY, Kelleher Gallery, UK and various gallery shows around the US. Katelan is currently working as a freelance illustrator in NY. Check out her web site at www.altpick.com/katelanv.

Orion Gray (is an Oregonian currently teaching English in Hokkaido, Japan. SWF likes petting zoos, tofu, and smashing the state. Email her at orionisiggray@yahoo.com.

Stacey Greenberg (p. 30) is the creator of the zine Fertile Ground: For People Who Dig Parenting. She lives in Memphis with her family. Contact her at staleys@yahoo.com.

Ani Haines (p. 52) lives in Portland, Oregon with her family including a willful middle aged dog and 21 year old box turtle: she works at KBOO 90.7 FM Community Radio as the volunteer coordinator and co-produces a weekly talk radio show on the same station. She has been involved in community organizing, one way or another, for two-thirds of her life and is a Wiccan Priestess.

Emi Herscher/DJ Center (p. 48) is a Romanian-born DJ that currently resides in Brooklyn, NY. Alongside being the touring and recording DJ in Open Thought, Center is one of the two musicians in Playback Theater NYC, an improvisational Hip Hop Theater group. He also teaches a weekly DJ classes at the Hudson Guild Beacon Community Center. There he passes down his knowledge and love of DJ Culture and music to youth from the five boroughs of New York City.

Marrit Ingman (p. 46) is a freelance writer living in Austin, Texas. She is working on her first book, a memoir about postpartum depression. E-mail her at marrit@marrit.info.

Baba Israel (p. 48) is a Hip Hop performing and recording artist who rocks live shows with Open Thought and creates Hip Hop Theater with Playback NYC, Rha Goddess, and Full Circle. He is also an educator hosting workshops in Lyrics, Beatboxing, Music production, and improv theater all around the globe. Check www.openthoughtmusic.com.

J-Love (p. 12) is a Mother, educator, and activist.

Willie Johnson (p. 36) wants you to check out his zine at www.radixcollective.com or his art at www.kilttheelite.com.

Ellen Keohane (p. 60) is a former college textbook editor and soon-to-be graduate student. Her e-mail address is ekeohane@yahoo.com.

Dustin Krcatovich (p. 63) resides in Ann Arbor, MI. He edits and writes the Ion's share of the magazine Shuttle Bus, does cartoons and writing for various other publications, performs music alone and with various groups, and does many other things that will eventually cause him to collapse in the street from exhaustion. Most importantly, he co-runs Casanova Temptations Edutainment Consortium, a record label/publisher/etc., with Eliza Beatrix Godfrey. Contact: Casanova Temptations, PO Box 7814, Ann Arbor, MI 48107.

Bee Lavender (p. 32) is the co-editor of BREEDER: Real Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers and the upcoming anthology Mamaphonic. For more information about her various projects check out www.foment.net.

Nadxieli Manello (p. 42) is a struggling freelance writer and who most recently was the co-editor of Peace Signs: The Anti-War Movement Illustrated. She now spends her time rolling a groove in the carpet below her temp desk and dreaming of a living wage.

Sylvia Maya Huq Mitchell (p. 52) is 15 years old and a junior in high school. She enjoys music, theater, and especially writing — but not biographies. She is half Bengali and half white.

Theresa Mitchell (p. 52) is a 46-year-old pseudo-hermaphrodite; her mind and body were altered in 1957 by the "wonder drug" diethylstilbestrol. She enjoys volunteer broadcasting, playing Bach cello transcriptions on the flute, and avoiding menial labor.

Anne Elizabeth Moore's (p. 36) Hey, Kidz! Buy This Book: A Radical Primer to Corporate and Governmental Propaganda and Artistic Activism for Short People will be out "any day" from Soft Skull's new Red Rattle line for young adults. Find out more at anne@heykidz.org. Her next book, oddly enough, will be about sex. Please don't tell anyone.

Kevin J. Semanick (p. 49) is a human rights activist with many diverse interests including running, finance, and politics. He is located in Central, New Jersey just outside of Philadelphia and can be reached at ksemanick@hotmail.com.

Sunfrog (p. 15) is a busy writer, activist, teacher, editor, and publisher. Sunfrog lives with his extended, chosen family in the hills of Tennessee. He can be reached care of the Fifth Estate editorial collective: fifthestate@pumpkinhollow.net.

Fiona Thomson (p. 55) lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and writes at night when the baby is sleeping.
all-you-can-eat mutton, walking marriages, and the future of the Mosuo matriarchal society
Somedichards insist on clinging to the antiquated 1950s American sitcom notion of the “nuclear family” — one father, one mother, and a combination of siblings roughly divided up to make the average norm of 2.5 children. But there are some cultures in which this notion of family would seem bizarre, even unnatural. How, for example, would a matriarchal tribe whose language lacks even a word for father relate to this Father Knows Best concept that, for some (Republicans, mostly, especially during an election year), defines the very word family? This is just one of the questions on my mind as I wander around the place known throughout China as “The Kingdom of Women.”

Lake Lugu is the home of the Mosuo tribe, a matriarchal and monogamous society, on the border of China’s Yunnan and Sichuan provinces. At the center of their home and cultural identity is a sacred body of water that they call Mother Lake. Sitting at an elevation of around 7,500 feet, Lugu is a deep pool of pure azure water dotted by a few small, lush islands bearing Tibetan-style temples, shrines, and one monastery. The men of Lugu are uncommonly handsome, the women beautiful and exceptionally outgoing. While this trait is strange for rural China, in a matriarchal society it makes sense. In Lugu, women make most major decisions, control household finances, and pass their surnames onto their children.

But what makes the Mosuo truly unique is one particularly juicy facet of their familial relationships, their practice of zuo hun, or “walking marriage.” The Mosuo do not marry — rather, a woman chooses her lovers from among the men of the tribe, taking as many as she pleases over the course of her life. In Mosuo culture, having mothered children with different men bears no social stigma. Children are raised more or less communally, and in most cases grow up in the mother’s home, surrounded by any number of sisters, brothers, and “uncles.”

This highly personal practice (and not their colorful dress and tribal song-and-dance routines, as official Chinese tourist brochures would have you believe) has made Lake Lugu one of southwest China’s most talked-about tourist destinations, infinitely fascinating to Han Chinese tourists and foreign anthropologists alike. This, in turn, has changed the economy of the Mosuo from a herding and farming economy to one of titillation-driven tourism.

It’s at one of the many outdoor BBQ stands that line the shores of Mother Lake that I meet up with a young Mosuo woman named Yangmei. Though she tells me she’s 19, her face is still flush with shades of adolescence. Perhaps it’s her cheerful disposition that causes me to pick hers over the other BBQ joints on the town’s one dusty street. Maybe it’s the way she calls me over.

“Hey, handsome boy...” she yells in Mandarin. “Come on over, I just killed a goat.”

What man could resist a line like that?

“How much?” I ask.

“20 Yuan,” (about $2.20 USD) she replies, “with all you can eat and free tea.”

Twenty Yuan buys a lot of mutton outside of the big cities, so Yangmei and I have a lot of time to talk. After exhausting the usual foreigner-Chinese chitchat about language skills and chopstick proficiency, the conversation turns decidedly more intimate.

“Why are you traveling alone?” she asks. “Don’t you have a girlfriend?”

“No at the moment,” I answer. “But I think you’re a bit young for me.”

Thankfully, she laughs at this, as opposed to throwing tea on me. “I wasn’t propositioning you!” she says. “Actually, I have a steady boyfriend, though my mother doesn’t approve.”

This strikes me as strange. In Mosuo society, a girl is considered a woman when she turns 13 and has her skirt ceremony. After the ceremony, she’s one of age, free to choose lovers as she pleases. I ask Yangmei what her mother’s objections are.

“Mother thinks I’m being disrespectful to our heritage by having a steady boyfriend. She thinks I ought to follow the old ways, to take more than one lover. It’s a big problem between us. Actually,” she lowers her voice, “my boyfriend and I are thinking of leaving Lugu after the summer, and moving to Kunming [capital of Yunnan province]. We may get officially married.”

As we speak, two Han Chinese men with cameras and pockmarked faces walk by. They stop for a minute, not to eat, but to take pictures.
“They’re tourists, they don’t know any better. They don’t care about our religion, culture, or history. To them, Mosuo culture is all about sex, nothing else.”

“Why aren’t you wearing your Mosuo clothing?” asks one, seeming somewhat disappointed.
“Ah, I only wear those on special occasions. These are my everyday clothing.”
“You are very pretty! Did you do zaun hun last night?” asks the other, shooting Yangmei a sly, sideways leer.
Yangmei just laughs and offers to sell the men some mutton. They walk on, laughing and babbling in Mandarin.
“Doesn’t that bother you, two total strangers asking you about your sex life? I ask when they’re out of earshot. “Where I come from, a guy gets smacked for that.”
Yangmei shrugs. “I’m used to it,” she says. “They’re tourists, they don’t know any better. They don’t care about our religion, culture, or history. To them, Mosuo culture is all about sex, nothing else.”

In light of the tremendous amount of tourist money that’s come into Lugu precisely due to this perception (the Mosuo are the richest tribe in Yunnan), Yangmei’s tolerance of leering tourists is understandable. Still, I find myself wondering if perhaps tourism isn’t the ominous shark fin in Lake Lugu’s once pristine waters. In recent years, Han Chinese men have been lured to Lugu Lake by the prospect of easy sex, giving rise to various and sundry unsavory businesses on the outskirts of town. I ask Yangmei if that’s what the half-dozen or so single Chinese men walking up and down the town’s one dusty street are after.
“Probably,” she says. “With families, it’s the culture. They really like the singing and dancing shows, that sort of thing. But with single men, they think all they need to do is show up and they’ll be invited home by a local girl.”

“Does this ever happen?” I ask.
“No!” she answers, laughing. “Those guys will probably wind up spending the evening at one of the Karaoke parlors outside of town. The girls who work there aren’t even Mosuo...just Sichuan women playing dress-up.”

Yangmei and I continue talking until the sun goes down. I ask her questions about Mosuo culture, and she asks me more immediately practical questions (“How much will my boyfriend and I be able to make working in Kunming?”).

When the sun goes down, I return to my guesthouse, which bears the interesting though nonsensical name “The Customal Hotel of the Girl Kingdom.” Like most of rural China, women (in this case, Ms. Tsao, the proprietress of the hotel, and her three teenage daughters) perform the real work, while the men mostly seem to loaf around. In the center of the courtyard, a group of Mosuo men sit smoking and playing cards. The men have an air of serenity about them, a quality I’ve found in short supply in the rest of China. The older men, I find out, are “uncles,” fathers to Ms. Tsao’s daughters. The younger ones, I presume, are the daughters’ lovers, waiting for the evening to end and the night to begin. In the morning, if tradition is upheld, they will return to their own homes. It is from this, the sight of local men walking home after dawn, that the term “walking marriage” is derived.

In the morning, the men are gone, the women are working, and it’s time for me to be moving on. I decide to hitchhike out of town. The first vehicle to approach stops, and I hop into the back of a converted army jeep driven by a Mosuo man wearing a cowboy hat with a girl of about seven riding shotgun.

The pickup is rattling along the dirt road when the little girl spots something. “Uncle, stop!” she shouts, and the man dutifully obeys. A moment later, the girl is scrambling up a tree about 15 yards from the road. “Uncle, get a bag! There’s lots of fruit still in this one.” The girl starts throwing down a small yellow fruit, something like a cross between a kumquat and an apricot.

“Your daughter must have eyes like a hawk to spot those fruit,” I say, wondering if I’m making a false assumption about their relationship. The man just chuckles.

“Yes, that she does,” he says, and offers me one of the sour little fruits. “I couldn’t spot them from that far away.” I ask him where they’re both heading, and he says something that wouldn’t be out of place in many modern American father-daughter relationships.

“Back to my home. My daughter stays with her mother on the weekdays, but I take care of her on the weekends.”

As the van bumps along, I find myself thinking about Yangmei’s mother, and wondering if her concerns, which seemed so amusing to me yesterday, might not be legitimate. Might her daughter, by choosing to love in the way so alien to the Mosuo (yet normal in much of the rest of the world) be inadvertently planting the seeds of cultural demise? What will Mother Lake look like 20 years down the road? ★
In the Womb of Hip-Hop

Hip-hop and its constituents are growing older. As mothers abound in the hip-hop community, our culture needs to shift and incorporate new values, beliefs, and ways of living to address the needs of families. As mothers roll in with their strollers and breast milk to catch the latest hit record, how will we accommodate them? How are children received in hip-hop culture, and in what ways can we share our cultural hip-hop traditions with them?

As we move into a new period in hip-hop, family preservation is essential to securing our future as a community. Learn from several phenomenal women who are inextricably tied to hip-hop culture and are mothers. Raising their babies, our babies, hip-hop’s babies.

interviews by J-Love
**Hip-Hop Moms Discuss the Future of their Families and the Movement**

**Pri the Honey Dark**

How are you raising your child on hip-hop despite the widespread misogyny of women of color?

Well, to raise a child in hip-hop is to raise a child period. As far as my son is concerned, I teach him the difference in reality vs. the fantasy, and ego presented not only in music videos (hip-hop or otherwise) but also in movies, on radio, in magazines, and on the street as well. My son is treated and spoken to with respect (authority when needed). He is taught that however he treats me and views me is how he treats and views other women — with respect — but never to respect anyone who doesn’t respect him (male or female) and not to force respect on anyone who is not ready to respect themselves.

What is your outlook on particular issues within hip-hop now that you are a mother?

Well, I see no real problems in hip-hop as a culture. It’s the rap world that is taking what little hair I have. In the business there is too much selfishness, contradiction, and lack of overall control of our art form. How the hell are you going to shout how many drug addicts you supply, how much “ice” you own (vs. property and investments), and how you had a kat’s mother crying at his funeral on Thursday, then turn around and do a children’s benefit or public service announcement on Sunday? Makes no sense to me. But as long as we have no control over our business (and by now we should!), we have no control over what is presented to our children. We can only present to them the platter and hope they pick the right foods.

If you had one wish to bestow upon your child, what would it be and why?

Wealth of the mind. Anyone can get paid money and consider themselves “rich,” but not too many can actually become wealthy. Wealth is acquired through knowledge: not only knowledge of self, but knowledge of circumstance and knowledge of priority. Then and only then will you be truly rich. I want my son to use this knowledge to build himself up financially and mentally…. If I had my way, my son would acquire land and investments that would last longer than his in-hand cash (who knows how long the “green” will exist), and spreading that knowledge would be his ultimate power.

**Asia One**

b-girl and mother of Yazmin Joy

How are you planning to raise your baby on hip-hop despite the widespread misogyny and disrespect of women?

Since me and hip-hop are entwined at the root, I plan to raise my daughter up on the nurturing aspects of hip-hop, like the energy of the art, dance, and music — I’m speaking of b-girl dance, graf and hip-hop and funk music, soulful beats and breaks, lots of drums, the fly gear, and the love of cultural heritage. I feel that if you’re a fly mommi with your game tight, your daughter’s gonna look up to you for support and knowledge.

How are you teaching your baby a love and knowledge of hip-hop culture?

Since our shorties mirror what we project, I manifest the realness of skills with my b-girling, and I project strength with my organizing efforts and my dedication to keeping hip-hop a culture with all the elements recognized and co-existing together. She will be soaking up all of this, formulating her own wisdom and plan for her course in life.

What is your outlook on particular issues within hip-hop now that you are a mother?

A lot of things really started to stress me when I was pregnant, issues that I noticed before but let be. Like how women of color are trivialized in rap videos, lyrics, shows, and in life. Now more than ever our brothers are not doing their part to respect and present valuable imagery of women for the younger shorties to learn from. The bottom line being: what are the shorties being taught by all of this, and how will it affect the future of relations between men and women of color?
La Bruja

What are some lessons passed down from your mother that have helped you in raising your babies?

My mother always told me the truth when I asked her questions about life—she didn’t make up stories to shelter me. I intend to be the same way; take time to explain things when they want to know them, not lie. Keep open lines of communication from the start so that they will stay open in the future. Gotta keep it real, so they can be ready for the real.

If you had one wish to bestow upon your babies what would it be?

I wish for them to always strive for their dreams, not quit or settle for something less. I will be their biggest supporter. That is something that my mother has taught me too: even when I’ve had doubts, she has always believed in me and that has made all the difference. My mother is amazing; I want to be just like her.

What gifts do your babies bring to hip-hop?

Their most natural gift is innocence and that is what hip-hop needs more of. We need to restore sensitivity, respect, and romance...enough bustin’ nuts inside bitches and bustin’ slugs in thugs. We are just ruining the mindset of our people.

Any other comments?

We should always remember our roots, our ancestors, and teach our children to do the same. If we were flowers and we didn’t have roots, we would fall over and die. Let’s blossom, so that our seeds will continue to grow. To my seeds, Kelson and Carina, Mami loves you more than anything in and out of this world.

Zenzele Isoke

How are you raising your babies on hip-hop despite the widespread misogyny and disrespect to women, especially women of color?

The most important thing that I can impart to my girls is a deep, abiding love and respect for self. This means lots of hugs and kisses and telling them that I love them everyday. This also means respecting myself and insisting upon respect from others. I try to make sure that they are in environments where their intelligence, leadership, and emotional talents are nurtured, and keep them away from people and places where they are more likely to be knocked down. I can’t protect them from the media—and all the violence, self-hatred, misogyny, racism...gets propagated [there]. But what I can do is be honest, and answer questions honestly.

How are you teaching your babies a love of and knowledge of hip-hop culture?

Well, first we listen to hip-hop, music, and jazz. We dance. I know that the music that they hear on the radio is in many ways the background music of their childhood. But balance is important. When the DJs spin records about being a P.I.M.P., I turn the shit off. For me, hip-hop doesn’t always have to be rap music, and it certainly isn’t always about sex, drugs, violence, and money. It’s about experience. So we listen to a lot of different kinds of music in my home—Musiq, John Coltrane, Nina Simone, Tupac, old school Ice-Cube, Lauryn Hill/Tajnees, Kindred, Jill Scott, Carlos Santana, Res, BK Sonshine, Fela, just to name a few. For me, all of these genres are “hip-hop,” because they help me reflect on my life.

What are some lessons learned/passed down from your mother that have helped you in raising your babies?

As an adult I have a new respect for my mother, because black women have to work hard everyday to keep their jobs, pay their rent, look decent, and keep food on the table. I have carried my mother’s ambition with me, and I hope to impart it to my girls. I think it is important to sacrifice in other ways for your children. And, for me, this means sometimes putting work and career on the back burner and really taking the time to show my children that I love them.

If you had one wish to bestow upon your babies, what would it be and why?

I wish my children could grow up in a world where people loved and respected one another. Where they were taught to acknowledge the humanity in other people and to see aspects of themselves in others. I wish that world had some sense of empathy and compassion. And, of course, I [hope] they have the resources, the support, and the confidence to realize their deepest aspirations.

What gifts does hip-hop bring to your babies?

Confidence and freedom of expression. Hell, it is important for them to see sistahs like Eve, Lil Kim, and Rha Digga, in all their faults, to stand up and be who they are unapologetically! That is powerful, that is why hip-hop is so powerful.

hip-hop activist, graduate student, and mother

How do you want the hip-hop community to honor you as a mother?

Start working through some of its own bullshit. Start to honor a whole new set of emotions and experience. Start deconstructing and analyzing the problematical of its own fantasies. Hip-hop can stop pretending that the meaning of life is mansion filled up with strippers, drugs, and alcohol. Hip-hop can start to look itself in the mirror and truthfully articulate what the hell is staring back at it.

If you could change one thing about hip-hop's attitude toward family what would it be?

First hip-hop needs to understand that women are part of the hip-hop family and not just some ornament attached to it. Hip-hop needs to start acknowledging that family begins with truth and honesty, not lies, deceit, and empty promises. We all know who our real family is, and sometimes it has absolutely nothing to do with blood but with the people who love us at our very worst, who encourage us to follow our dreams, and who we can always count on to welcome us with open arms. Women are a central aspect of this family.

What do you believe is the future of the hip-hop family-hip-hop mamas?

Please. The sistahs of the hip-hop generation will soon be acknowledged to be the true leaders of our communities. Not just symbolically speaking, but in all of its social, political, material, and spiritual manifestations. It is the time to step, be heard and to lead!
Pranksters with a Purpose

The Neo-Tribal Family of Asheville's Surreal Sirkus

From the Bindlestiff Family to the Crispy Family, from the Bizzaro Future to the Cutthroat Freakshow, the underground customs of the alternative circus continue to captivate the minions traveling the margins of culture.

In the mid 1990s, at the same time a DIY sideshow revival was brewing all across America, a 20-year-old college dropout in Asheville, North Carolina, was contemplating the commonalities between surrealism and Hakim Bey. Embellishing, Surreal Sirkus co-founder Jim Genaro recalled, "A new vision descended on me like a bolt out of Heaven. A Surrealist Circus! That would be the vehicle for my creative visions, and a way to catalyze all of the amazing (and often directionless) artists that had made Asheville their little utopian refuge from various Southern hometowns."

Some sideshow practitioners are freak and geek traditionalists, trying to revive the lost arts of the century before television when people flocked to see anatomical wonders like the Alligator Man, while others are sword-swallowing, punk rock hobos—sort of like a hybrid of Boxcar Bertha and P.T. Barnum living the ethos of Book Your Own Fucking Life. From an politico-aesthetic perspective, the Surreal Sirkus probably owes as much to ancient god and goddess mythology as to punk rock—they are a performance art ensemble that's part collective, part family, part pagan church. But like legendary radical performers as divergent as the Living Theater and Fugazi, they simply hope to destroy the boundaries and dance the chasm between art and life.

"The Surreal Sirkus, it was clear, would not be a typical circus, or even a typical performance art troupe," Genaro said, describing the structure. "We do not have permanent directors or any other sort of hierarchy; people volunteer to direct shows as they happen, but there are no ongoing positions of authority. The themes of shows are decided by a process of mutual inspiration, and each individual creates his or her own pieces within those themes. Every element is original, from the music to the costumes to the content of the pieces. Each show is unique, and though we may incorporate elements from past pieces, it is more common to create everything from scratch each time. Improvisation and audience participation often play a role."

continued next page

Rachel Raimist

Filmmaker (Nobody Knows My Name, 1999), writer, and mother of Tiana Raimist-Carter

What is your outlook on particular issues within hip-hop now that you are a mother?

Honestly, everything has changed. I used to be much more tolerant of bullshit, hoes, and crap. Now I really can hardly stand the music industry.... Why is everything so centered around strippers and hoes now? Why all this pimp shit? So now, as a mother and a woman who is getting older, I can’t stand this shit.... It’s getting to be that more and more I don’t want to participate. I just want to develop a curriculum and teach it at a university so young people will think critically about the state of affairs within hip-hop and help push it back in a more positive direction.

What gifts do you believe your baby brings to hip-hop?

I believe she offers a new strength. I hope she brings things to an empowering and positive place.

What gift does hip-hop bring to your baby?

A community. A place where she can relate. It brings beautiful people, music, faces, and stories in and out of our home.

How do you balance your life as a mother with all that you do?

Sometimes I don’t. Mostly I try to stick to a routine and a schedule. I try to keep things for Tiana regular on the day-to-day. Some days I am good at keeping things together; other days we lie in bed together, watch cartoons, and eat ice cream and popcorn all day and night. I’m corny, so often we play some Whitney, “I’m every woman, it’s all in me!” and we dance around the living room with our deaf kitty. ★
The notion that a collective is a family and that collectives among collectives form a tribe is not new to the fuzzy and freaky fabric of American counter-culture.

As the gratuitous gross-out of television trash like "Jackass" and "Fear Factor" has stolen some of the thunder of the grassroots circus, these Asheville surrealists go in a different direction. Compared to some of the traveling sideshow acts for whom spiritual bliss goes no further than a bed of nails, these pranksters with a purpose raise a more blessed ballyhoo. For them, infusing art with magic is a stated intention — every show is a pagan ritual, and their lives as a loving, cooperating, performing community express their aspirations as much as any show.

"We have grown beyond our original intentions into a community of people, joined in a bond of love that bridges the gap between myth and reality, performance and ritual, art and work," Genaro elaborated. "Our communal activities are by no means limited to performances. Potlucks, rituals, 'love feasts' (meals in which everyone eats each other), dance parties, heart-sharing circles, camping trips, women's and men's gatherings, movie nights, and road trip adventures all make up the arenas in which our family gathers."

Whether a psychedelic tent revival on Halloween or a sardonic celebration of love and sex on Valentine's Day, a Sirkus happening is a seasonal event that catalyzes the connections between the spiritual and sensual. On Valentine's Day, guests were invited to eat sushi served on the naked bodies of two Sirkus members. On Halloween, participants and spectators alike shared the prayerful chills as one person skewered himself with hooks to be suspended above the crowd. Most shows spotlight the spectacular aerial dancing of Ambra Lionstone, whose ecstatic and acrobatic efforts remind me of yoga in the sky. The tent revival also included two preachers and a full choir singing heathen hymns such as a campy version of "My Favorite Things" laced with drug and sex references.

During his Samhain sermon, Genaro (a.k.a. the Reverend Pandoor) invoked the holy trinity. "Now I'm not talkin' about the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. I’m talking about the three fundamental forces of nature: Chaos, Gaia, and Eros." These Sirkus peeps are no more traditionalist in their neo-paganism than they are parading the fundamentalism that surrounds us in the South. Rather, they do what I'd call DIY religion; that is, instead of pretentiously claiming to reclaim some lost mystic art we can only read about in a book, they create artistic mysticism from their own experiences. "Our shows often involve the creation of new myths, and in turn we find ourselves, outside the realm of performance, embodying mythic forces and archetypal relationships within that mythic structure," the Reverend testified. "Thus life imitates art imitates life imitates art...ad infinitum."

When so many ascetics are energy vampires, guaranteeing that churches are bereft of all life force, it's no wonder that those wanting sustainable spiritual community have found it in the counterculture. While words like church and family might seem odd to describe an amalgamation of anti-authoritarian artists, they provide a palpable frame to hold space for these thrill-seeking spontaneity-mongers.

"What has been the most significant aspect of the troupe's evolution is that it has become the foundation for a larger community that behaves as a sort of neo-tribal extended family," Genaro reflected. "The relationships that have been forged in this group are deeper and more profound than anything I've experienced before."

By borrowing from examples as far-flung and far-out as the group marriage and the activist affinity group, the Sirkus refines family for themselves. "The model that we're building is that we don't focus all our emotional needs on one person," member Egg Syntax explained. "Even those of us who don't have multiple lovers have multiple intimate relationships with one another. I think another factor is that we're learning to embed relationships and the end of relationships in ritual; a relationship isn't just something that happens between two people but something that happens within the context of the community." Clearly, the hyper-autonomous entity of the postmodern consumer trapped in the nuclear family might find such a scene downright dirty, like some brown-rice purist hippie cult your parents warned you about.

"We have designed entire shows around a pregnancy and gathered in circle to support a divorce," goddess and solo elder Megan Davis said. "We have performed auto-conflicting and changing ideas about sex and relationships and have publicly wrestled and done magic in the way we have chosen. Being able to enact these traditions through movement, music, and dance is honor enough. To perform them for an audience is even more powerful! Personally, what I have learned being a part of this family is that the old family paradigm doesn't work for us. To expect a small belly-button family to fulfill all our family needs is outdated and so often results in disappointment and conflict."

No doubt, such an endeavor can be emotionally messy and intense. Sometimes people leave, new people come, and a certain ebb and flow of involvement among different members punctuates the group process as would be the case with any communal endeavor. On the periiphery of the Surreal Sirkus, there's a certain overlap with other subcultures like radical faeries, trance DJs, experimental musicians, and anarchists in Asheville's burgeoning alternative scene.

"We dance, we pray, we sing, we feast," Genaro said. "And of course we suffer and struggle and work and endure the inevitable interpersonal dramas that will always plague groups of people working so intimately together. But we do so with a spirit of mutual support and the intention of holding each other in our hearts and in our highest aspirations. To my mind, it is a wonderful model for a neo-tribal family."

The notion that a collective is a family and that collectives among collectives form a tribe is not new to the fuzzy and freaky fabric of American counter-culture. And the Surreal Sirkus is hardly the only collaborative troupe trumpeting the benefits of the contemporary tribe. But in these dark days of well-organized neo-fascists organizing witch-hunts under the banners of family and compassion, it's all the more profound, poignant, and politically important that we compose the pious authoritarian implications of these concepts and recycle the rubric of family for love and solidarity. And the Surreal Sirkus is one group doing just that. ★
within the
Temporary Autonomous Zone
by Agent Automatic

Where is the Temporary Autonomous Zone? It is in Detroit, in mid-July, on the end of a street amid old tenements and rowhouses that are threatened with condemnation. For one day a year, the residents of this neighborhood come together to build an organic culture, a society of mutual respect and resistance. They resist the city’s plans to build a new freeway, the state’s alcohol ordinances, and America’s tendency toward segregation of races and sexuality. It is a block party without parallel, and, for a few hours, the celebrants are family.

From the zone’s perimeter I can smell the smoke of bonfires and incense. Music runs together from multiple stages in a dissonant anti-melody. Electronic musicians and hip-hop artists follow each other onto stage. The Detroit Cobras belt out their own sultry blend of Motown and punk. People sit in cars, on hoods, lawn chairs, in circles on the ground, hanging out windows. Those with cars closest to the scene are clearly admired. In a city built on automobility, everyone dreams of convenient parking. Everyone — from the ostensibly homeless, to ruddy-skinned senior citizens, plastic kids in vinyl, hippics, and industrial types — is there.

The neighborhood is the last remnant of an area that was cleared for the expansion of a local expressway that is, not surprisingly, already at capacity. Thus, it is a matter of debate whether this strip of houses will be eliminated in order to build a newer, more efficient road. Curiously, this festival both provokes the city to demolition and simultaneously helps pay for lawyers to avoid that end. The new freeway will allegedly solve all the problems that the last freeway failed to correct. The houses are old in this part of town, built in the 1920s to lodge the flood of workers coming north for jobs. These same houses would now be demolished for the sake of those commuting to the city from the suburbs.

Today, the streets are lined with vendors, mostly residents who have set up tables in front of their homes. They sell beer, mixed drinks, vegan foods, Indian cuisine, pipes, t-shirts, and bizarre intoxicants. For those with an aversion to the cash economy, bartering is an option and nearly everyone is willing to negotiate prices. Nobody asks for identification to buy alcohol or anything else. There are no permits, door charges, fees, or — best of all — cops. Clothing is, for all intents and purposes, optional, but all styles are represented.

Bands play on the stages set up around the neighborhood. Other amenities include a structure made of junked cars, with flames jetting from the spaces between them. Some industrious types tapped into the local gas line, running it to the sculpture. The top car is a 1930s sedan with a windshield that glows like a coal fire despite being blackened with soot.

At the end of the evening, a lone police officer stands drinking beer out of a plastic cup. But instead of busting the lot of us, he stands laughing with a couple of cross-dressers and I know that, despite the fact I’m in the United States, I am far outside of America. ♠

TAKING LIBERTIES

Daniel Higgs
Magic Alphabet
Northern Liberties, 2004

Et At It
s/t
Northern Liberties, 2004

Northern Liberties is a new label organized by Ian MacKay of Fugazi and Dischord fame to issue music that “may seem obscure, but...speaks clearly to the point of music and expression.” Fair enough. These, the second and third releases on Northern Liberties, have great looking, all-paper packaging and certainly prove that obscurity ain’t a big concern of St. Ian’s.

First up is Lungfish frontman Daniel Higgs’s solo record Magic Alphabet. It consists of 17 explorations for the anglosaxon folk instrument known as the jew’s harp. There is subtle percussion on some tracks but by and large this record is, well, Daniel Higgs playing a jew’s harp. While this may be a must for Lungfish and punk jew’s harp completists, I’ve listened to it at work (prompting one of my bosses, Councilman Bob McCloskey, to ask “is that a jew’s harp? We had those when I was a kid...”), at home, in bed, in the shower, and in a car in an attempt to see if I’m missing something and damned if I can figure out what — maybe Ian and Dan are just a damn bit more sophisticated than this Midwesterner. I should give it to someone who thinks I’m really cool and see what they think I liked about it. Too bad no one thinks I’m really cool. Proceed with caution.

I have no such reservations about Et At It’s debut CD. With two guitars, a bass, and some electronics, these ex-members of Meltdown and Metamatics make a floating instrumental music that owes debts to psych-folk, minimalists like P. Glass and T. Reich, and Robert Fripp’s Craft Guitar stuff (not a comparison I’m sure they’d dig...) The press stuff sez it has an “organic robot quality,” but to me Et At It breathes more easily than a lot of jam and folk dived out there while expressing a laudably disciplined sense of songcraft. At moments, it seems to be driving in the direction of a Jandek-type of space and that’s a ride I’m always up for. Join me in digging this and looking forward to a full length.

-Keith McCrea

MEASURE TWICE

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-Jason Kucmsa
NEW!!

CITIZENS OF THE EMPIRE
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By Robert Jensen

"Robert Jensen has done it. At a time when world events and domestic politics could understandably lead to fatalism and despair, he has reminded us all what it means to be a human being to struggle for justice in an unjust society. With a clarity unmatched by most writers today, and with a hopeful tone utterly devoid of the cynicism that often derails progressive voices, Jensen challenges us to face the empire and resist, and reminds us that even when our efforts fail, there is redemption in the struggle itself."
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GLOBALIZE LIBERATION
How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World
Edited by David Solnit

We live in an era of a new radicalism, a worldwide challenge to global empire. Globalize Liberation weaves together the experiences and insights of community organizers, direct action movements, and global justice struggles from North America, Europe, and Latin America. Thirty-three essays provide food for thought, examples of effective action, and practical tools for everyone to use.

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To read the Advocate or other mainstream gay and lesbian papers in recent months, one might easily believe every queer person on the planet had suddenly gone marriage crazy. Since November 2003, when the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that banning same-sex marriage was discriminatory, national LGBT rights organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign and Freedom To Marry have been working at a feverish pace to make legal gay marriage a reality. The decision by the mayors of San Francisco, California and New Paltz, New York to perform same sex marriages — until legal injunctions ordered them to halt — drove the excitement level even higher. Now, with a constitutional amendment that would ban such marriages at the federal level looming darkly on the horizon, pressure is rising for queer activists and their allies to close ranks and make an all out push for marriage equality.

Thousands of same-sex couples packed courthouses in a handful of cities earlier this year to marry. Yet a sizable contingent of queer folks aren't feeling it.

Far from the cut-and-dried moral issue that it's been portrayed as, many radical queer question who benefits from the campaign, whether it disregards and hides others' needs, and what to make of its eerie tendency to echo conservative language and policies. As an effort to sort through the issues myself, I decided to ask a number of friends and acquaintances to share their thoughts on the politics of gay marriage.

Nava Etshalom, a recent graduate of Oberlin College who, like thousands of other young people, grew up in a queer family without any form of government recognition, reacted to the recent national debate about gay marriage with considerable ambivalence. "In some ways, just having some attention focused on the meaning of queer family has been exciting," she said. "But the way that that's functioning to narrow, not expand, meanings of queer family in the U.S. is scary."

The national LGBT organizations, which have been the most vocal advocates of gay marriage, consistently portray gay and lesbian couples as monogamous, permanent, and seeking family structures that closely resemble "traditional" nuclear models.

"My family is much weirder, much more sprawling, and much less nuclear than the Human Rights Campaign would have us believe proper gay families are," Etshalom said. "My core family is my mother, my sibling Shira, and myself. We also have my father, his wife, and their four kids in L.A.; my mom's ex-partner Julie and her five kids who live down the street; my step-mother (my mother's ex) Elisa and her sweetheart Steve down the other street; and my mom's girlfriend Davia upstairs. We are a bunch of queers with a lot of transgressive gender expression among us, with shifting kinship ties and family friends that raise us. We have hilarious family trees and a shifting sense of ourselves and a lot of love."

"At the same time," she said. "I do in fact know a lot of families who have two parents [of the same sex] and some kids at their core, and I don't want to pretend they don't exist, or force them out onto margins they might not want to be on."

This points to one of the most complicated questions surrounding gay marriage. How does one acknowledge and respect the fact that many gay or lesbian couples desire, or are now a part of, families that in many ways resemble straight nuclear families, while also making it loud and clear that thousands and thousands of others don't fit such patterns and have no intention to?

Arguing what's at stake, Etshalom said, "If marriage becomes entrenched as a way for queer people to prove they're not anti-social extremists and do want to belong to larger communities, families that don't choose to marry and in other ways don't follow straight models will be separated from families that fit; and we'll still have marginalized queer families, they'll just be even more invisible and without resources."

Emily Thuma, a New York City-based activist and student, had similar concerns about the narrow focus of the campaign.

"If the bulk of the resources of these national LGBT organizations are going towards the fight for same-sex marriage so that marriage is made into the LGBT issue," she said, "then issues like job discrimination or police harassment get left out of the picture."

Critics also contend that the marriage equality campaign has been forwarded using increasingly conservative arguments and rhetorical strategies.

"If you look at the face of the gay marriage campaign, how it gets narrated, it's white, it's middle class, it's normalized. It has moral language that animates it," Rich Blint, a graduate student living in New York, said. He disagreed with the way organizers of the marriage equality campaign seem to be saying, "We need to present ourselves in a respectable fashion."

"It's queer uplift!" Blint said. "And it's not enough."

Etshalom expressed similar discomfort. "Straight friends of mine keep offering expressions of solidarity," she said. "I know they mean well, but what are they expressing solidarity with? I should be glad
that they feel good about queer families looking neat, tidy up, and fitting in? Of course it's more complicated than that — but I do sometimes feel like it's not a support that looks me in the face."

Thuma noted further problems with relying on such argumentative strategies. "Similar to how the right for LGBT people to serve in the military is couched in the rhetoric of patriotism, the marriage argument is couched in a rhetoric of family values."

Lisa Duggan, a professor of history at New York University who has written extensively about gender and sexuality, argues that, over those functions from any kind of state provision."

Rather than uniting to address all the problems with marriage by creating an alliance with the community organizations and feminist groups mobilizing to oppose marriage coercion, LGBT organizations have often echoed right-wing sentiments, reasserting the sanctity of marriage as they organize for inclusion within it.

So what is the alternative? Mainstream organizations such as Marriage Equality and the Human Rights Campaign argue that only marriage will provide real equality. But Blint, Thuma, and Duggan all agreed that the potential for a much further reaching politics exists in efforts to expand and diversify the assortment of alternate statuses such as civil unions, reciprocal beneficiaries, and domestic partnerships that exist or have been proposed in numerous states.

Progressive and radical activists, they insisted, should argue for the separation of church and state, that marriage should be a private and religious institution, and that the state should offer a flexible range of benefits and recognitions for various kinds of households. Furthermore, access to resources such as health care and retirement benefits should not be tied to households or partnerships at all, but should be universal provisions instead.

"That would be so substantially more progressive a move," Duggan said. "It would undermine the gendering of marriage, it would undermine the privatization of care-taking, and it would undermine the privileging of the conjugal couple. It would do so much, and actually it isn't all that radical of a move. We already have domestic partnerships, civil unions, and reciprocal beneficiaries."

Duggan noted that expanding access to these other options could also help to meet partnership rights in a flexible manner could work in unison with, rather than against, feminist organizations promoting policies that protect women from necessary dependency on men. If successful, it also could provide a host of benefits to queer families that, like Eshsalom's, don't fit nuclear models, or don't care to "express [their] family-ness" through marriage.

So, why aren't the national LGBT organizations arguing for such policies now?

Duggan argued one reason lies with the desire to be recognized as "just like everybody else." "Marriage means to people a combination of state, kinship, symbolic, and religious sanctioning where all of these things are one big mush," she said. "You get the stamp of approval from the state, your family accepts you, and it's performed at the church — there is just this giant crescendo of social acceptance that surrounds marriage!"

"Civil unions can't carry that weight," she continued, "so the argument has to be that that weight shouldn't be carried by the state. The state should not be in the business of endorsing some, and not endorsing other forms of partnership and household arrangements based on any kind of moral or identity
One Proud Day

On June 10, 2003, the Court of Appeal for Ontario concluded that it was unconstitutional in Canada to deny same-sex couples the right to marry. A mere ten days later, Massih Moayedi and three partners hatched a business with one goal: to marry as many same-sex couples as possible. One Proud Day is a gay-owned and -operated same-sex marriage consultation organization based in Toronto that caters not only to Canadians, but also to American couples who wish to exercise the newfound right anywhere in southern Ontario. "It’s a grassroots business to spread [same-sex marriage] down to the states and to Europe," Moayedi said.

Moayedi is a young entrepreneur. A student at University of Ottawa, he is just twenty years old. Luckily, his family, who emigrated from Iran when he was two years old, is very supportive. "When I came out of the closet," Moayedi said, "my father just turned around and said, 'Okay.'" Now, he considers the push for equality in marriage a family effort. In fact, his brother and cousins all helped program the web site, Oneproudday.com.

One Proud Day facilitates the marriage license and certification process, provides information on everything from flowers and a cake to what the Toronto gay scene has to offer newlyweds on honeymoon, and offers special reservation packages. But, to Moayedi, the business was not just for cashing in on a newly created client base. "For me, it was a political thing, not a beautiful romantic thing," he said. "But it has turned out that way after all." One Proud Day also helps clients avoid the discrimination they might encounter outside of queer-friendly cities like Toronto and the discomfort of having to come out again and again at every step in the process.

Moayedi has encountered quite a bit of criticism from within the LGBT community for his efforts. "I’ve gotten emails that say, 'You should be ashamed for trying to conform,'" he said. But he maintains that his work is part of the struggle for equality and civil rights. "People should be aware of the civil liberties they have and the ones they don’t," he said.

Moayedi has lots of advice for same-sex couples thinking about getting hitched: "Plan ahead and always consider the worst-case scenarios," he said. "Always leave an emergency fund in case anything should go wrong. If you have a power outage, you can be prepared to rent a power generator." For gay weddings, "if you want to be original, different and avoid the boring heterosexual marriage," Moayedi said, "let your imagination go wild. You are making history, so make it worthwhile!"

-Amanda Luker
"We did want bin Laden and the other terrorists brought to justice and knew that there was a mechanism for doing that. But justice is separate from war. Justice and war are incompatible."

On a frigid Valentine’s Day 2002, a small group of families of September 11 victims gathered in New York City to launch hope out of the rubble of Ground Zero. They met some distance from the tragically historic site at the UN Church Center across from the United Nations office. One by one, they spoke to a spattering of press and public with a unified message: “We believe that peaceful tomorrows begin with what we do today.”

The press conference formalized the formation of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, but the work of the new organization had already begun. There had been visits to congressional offices, fundraising at churches, and long, healing marches. And even as the United States was busy fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan, the families were working on ways to help the residents of that country. All of this was a far cry from the days of silent rage and prayer vigils the families had endured in previous months. Now, at last, they were ready to turn their hurt and anger into positive action.

This evolutionary process actually began a few days after the terrorist attacks on September 11. Several affected family members became increasingly concerned about the possibility that the United States would respond in kind to the terrorists’ violence. While Americans in government and elsewhere were calling for revenge against al Qaeda, the families refused to join the chorus. According to Derrill Bodley, one of the group’s leaders, “We all had the common thought that we did want bin Laden and the other terrorists brought to justice and knew that there was a mechanism for doing that. But justice is separate from war. Justice and war are incompatible.”

Bodley, a music professor at the University of Pacific, lost his daughter Deora when Flight 93 went down in a Pennsylvania field after the passengers apparently wrestled control from the terrorists. The day after September 11, Bodley vowed that no more violence should be committed in his daughter’s name. “We are for a more peaceful culture,” Bodley explained during a recent visit to Minneapolis. “The proposed method of settling conflict may include war without end in order to preserve the peace. That makes no sense at all. We are seeking nonviolent alternatives to war.”

Immediately after the press conference, Bodley and his core group began the agonizing process of networking with other September 11 families. “Some were disconnected,” he said. “Some were reluctant to speak out about how they felt. It was very painful for them.”

Nevertheless, the organization has built its membership from 15 founders to more than a hundred families and joined with some similar groups under the umbrella of a Family Steering Committee. They also have established collaborations with large international organizations like United for Peace and Justice, Global Exchange, and International ANSWER. Bodley also belongs to a separate group — Families of Flight 93 — whose
main mission is to explore the circumstances and recorded history of the flight’s hijacking and to support the families involved.

Since its formation, September 11th Families has been at the forefront of the antiwar movement. In addition to speaking at peace rallies, Bodley and others have made media appearances and appealed directly to government decision-makers in the White House and Congress. Bodley, for example, asked President Bush face-to-face to use a nonviolent response to the terrorist attacks. The families have also appeared at international conferences on atom and hydrogen bomb manufacturing and testing held annually in Japan, Brazil, India, Italy, and Spain. Recently, their efforts have focused on the investigation into the causes of the September 11 attack.

This summer, the independent commission investigating September 11 is scheduled to issue its final report. The Family Steering Committee, including Peaceful Tomorrow families, deserves much of the credit for the formation of the commission. It was the pressure from these families that finally convinced Bush to establish the commission and to grudgingly agree to testify before it. September 11 families have also given testimony before the committee, provided it with suggested questions and monitored its progress, sometimes from front row seats at the hearings.

"The pressure [to form the commission] came mainly through letter writing," Bodley recalled. "We asked for a meeting with Bush and Rice but never got it. We did meet with some congressional leaders and developed campaigns with other organizations like MoveOn.org that have similar interest and overlapping activity."

Bodley has been to Afghanistan twice since the American invasion, accompanied by other September 11th Families members. Their mission is to help the war-torn families rebuild their lives from the bottom up. Bodley was discouraged by what he found in Afghanistan, noting that the U.S. policy “has done very little to help the populace,” and has resulted in war profiteering by outside corporations while warlords run the country. He is continuing to speak out on this issue and to find funding to help the Afghan citizens. He is planning possible similar trips to Iraq and Saudi Arabia as a way to better understand and communicate with the Muslim world.

The work of September 11th Families, who have published a book under the same name with RDV Books, has inspired other similar organizations to crop up. The most recent and most vocal have been the surviving relatives of Iraq War casualties. Several of them formed a group called Military Families Speak Out that has been using a “not in our name” strategy for Iraq, pressing for an end to U.S. involvement and for the troops to be brought home.

In every case, the decision to become involved in the public domain has been a difficult one for these families. It means continually conjuring up memories that are almost too painful to bear. One example shows through in the distributing of the victim compensation funds awarded to the families by the U.S. government. After months of delay and procrastination, 95 percent of eligible relatives of September 11 victims have applied to join the government’s ambitious but much-criticized compensation effort. “You have to understand how hard it is for the families to get through that process,” Bodley said. “It brings back a lot of painful memories.”

At the same time, the unwillingness to forget has been a catalyst for action. The families have published their stories in a book and recorded them on a video. And they continue to take their message to audiences everywhere. Two days after September 11, Bodley spoke out for the first time. He told a crowd of 18,000 students at the University of Pacific: “This is not about lashing out. This is not about vengeance. This is not about retaliation. This is about justice.” ⭐

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**Peace Signs**

Edited by James Mann
Edition Olms Zurich, 2004
www.edition-olms.com

When taking questions after his address to the United Nations defending U.S. plans to prosecute a unilateral war against Iraq, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell stood in front of a full-size replica of Picasso’s *Guernica*, considered by many the greatest anti-war painting ever created. No one noticed the silent testimony of Picasso’s impressions of the Nazi bombing of the Basque town of Guernica, however. U. N. officials had thoughtfully covered the painting so as not to discomfit Secretary Powell.

In one of the chapter intros in the excellent compilation of recent anti-war posters, *Peace Signs*, editor James Mann recounts this anecdote as an example of the warmongers’ understanding of the power of art. The 230 posters duplicated in the book beautifully act as a testimony to that power.

Peace Signs also underscores the international nature of the resistance to the United States’s hegemonic stand in Iraq. Artists from Afghanistan to Iceland to Malaysia add their voices to those of anti-war activists with the (ahem) “coalition of the willing.” Such contributions serve to remind us both of the global impact of U.S. adventurism and of the support that peaceful resistance commands throughout the world. And this book will likely open your eyes to artists whose work you’ve never seen before. While many Clamor readers are doubtlessly familiar with the work of Seth Tobocman, Winston Smith, and Chris Sperry, even a cursory glance through *Peace Signs* will inevitably lead you to some new work to be excited about. For my part, it was a pleasure being introduced to Mike Flugennock’s work.

The work that made the greatest impression on me, however, were the posters from Spain, where the willingness of the Aznar government to join Bush/Blair axis engendered passionate resistance from the Spanish people. While the ubiquity of Bush’s vapid features throughout these pages is a depressing reminder of how a small man can become a big problem, Spain’s contributions remind me that, like the Spanish people, we can dump our warmongering leaders for ones more willing to understand the realities of war.

-Keith McCrea
At Nagai Park, villagers and their friends celebrated New Year’s Day in the most time-honored fashion. Off a park road in Osaka, Japan, they took turns heartily pounding mochi, a chewy rice paste, in a giant mortar to the rhythmic cries of “Yosh!” (Move!) A grinning college student had the huge wooden mallet on the upswing, barely pausing for an activist with lightning-quick hands to dart in and flip the steaming mochi mass over for the next ferocious blow. Such mochi-pounding festivals, or mochi-tsuki, have been held every December in Japan from time immemorial. This one, however, was different.

Local activists organized the festival in the Nagai tent village to build community with the village’s neighbors, supporters, and surrounding homeless people, many of whom live in illegal tent communities. This is the side of Japan that many Japanese are afraid to admit exists. All those thousands of laid-off salary men, all those victims of Japan’s alcohol culture, all those casualties of the most expensive housing market in the world have to go somewhere. Some of them end up here.

In Nagai, residents find both strength in numbers and a kind of extended family — someone to cook with, someone to swap resources and conversation with, someone to notice if you don’t come home at night. Tabata-san, the 62-year-old camp cook, swears he grows younger every year he lives there. Community keeps him young, he says; his wide grin, bright eyes, and surplus of energy seem to confirm it.

Osaka has one of Japan’s largest day labor markets, where about 25,000 workers at any given time converge from all over the country to try their luck in Kamagasaki (recently renamed Airin by bureaucrats), a district in southwestern Osaka. Day labor brokers also converge there, to both legally and illegally hire workers for temporary jobs all over Japan, most often in construction. With the Japanese economy in a slump for the past 10 years, workers are desperate to take any job, leaving room for company abuse. In 2003, only a third of Japan’s regular day labor jobs were available, compared to almost 3.7 million during the peak of the bubble economy in 1990.

One hard-drinking old trade union organizer (who did not want his real name to be used), affectionately dubbed “Commandante N” by fellow activists, has worked in Kamagasaki for the past 30 years. He said advocating for older workers is now the top priority of his union, whose long name translates as the “Union of Older Day Laborers’ Special Working Opportunity.” There are a number of companies which have become notorious in Kamagasaki for bypassing the Labor Ministry’s registration process and illegally recruiting workers, especially vulnerable, older, and homeless workers, and then not paying their wages. The union’s concern intensified following last year’s discovery of three missing Kamagasaki workers. Their mutilated bodies were disinterred from the muddy campground owned by their employer, Asahi Kensetsu, an unregistered construction company with an unprecedented 180 complaints against it at the Kamagasaki Labor Center. The workers were believed to have been protesting unpaid

Japan’s Tent Villages
Building Community out of Poverty

words and photos Orion Gray
wages and other abuses when they were allegedly killed by the company’s founder, who is currently in prison for embezzling from another worker. Commandante N believes that the Labor Ministry is reluctant to crack down on the companies because the Japanese construction industry is heavily backed by the Yakuza (the Japanese mafia).

On the chilly December afternoon at the Kamagasaki Labor Center, men loitered around the rat-infested concrete vault, playing cards or reading, their breath making plumes in the frigid air, waiting hopelessly for the labor brokers to show up and offer them a job. Other men, too sick to work, laid on blankets and cardboard amongst the trash. Some had made coffins out of cardboard to protect themselves from the cold, making themselves unnoticeable except for the occasional coughing fit.

Nearby, a huge black market winds its way through Kamagasaki’s narrow streets, lined with flop-houses, cheap noodle joints, and the occasional social services agency. Tucked into this jumble of winding streets are entire homeless communities, some of which have been there for 40 years or more. Kamagasaki used to be a traditional slum, including many women and children among its residents, but now it is almost entirely single male workers. In the market’s alleys, men lined up to buy bowls of thin soup for the equivalent of a dollar, or shots of shochu (white liquor) out of the back of trucks. In the big public square at the heart of Kamagasaki, all hard-packed earth and scrub bushes, men were hard at work repairing bicycles for money. Groups of men stood in tight knots gambling in illegal, Yakuza-sponsored games.

In nearby Nishinari Park, over 100 homeless villagers have built facsimiles of real homes, complete with potted plants and artwork, a defunct Atari arcade game rubber shoulders with a chicken hatch. An older woman and her two lame dogs stopped outside one such house to chat with its young, spiky-bleached-hair resident. The man leaned next to some potted herbs on his porch — whitewashed plywood painted with big, red crosses and curlicues, looking like a ramshackle, Mexican roadside Catholic shrine. Other villagers busily repaired bicycles or stacked precious firewood as pet cats rough-housed in the dust.

For the villagers, these makeshift residences are homes. For the government, they are a public reminder of homelessness, an eyecare in a busy city. In several villages, the Osaka government has bulldozed the tent communities and replaced them with shelters. One shelter looks like a prison, complete with bars on the fire stairs, boarded-up windows, and chain-link fence over the roof. Although most of the shelters have clean communal bathrooms and cooking areas, one shelter has beds lined up in tiny cubbies barely wider than the size of the bed. When asked if the living space was too small, the shelter’s manager replied, with no hint of sarcasm, “Oh, Japanese people are small. They don’t need much room.”

Outside, back in the tent community filled with chickens, pets, companionable neighbors, and makeshift houses covered with art, it was not hard to understand why many villagers were reluctant to leave their communities for the shelter’s cramped quarters.

Instead of accepting the government-funded housing, many of Osaka’s homeless have decided to organize, creating the Kamagasaki patrol and the Poor People’s Association of Nagai Park. These groups and others assert their right to form autonomous communities together on unused land. At night, the patrol — mostly made up of homeless activists — conducts outreach to isolated campers, asking them about incidents of harassment, assessing their needs, and giving them information about activist events. In Nishinari Park, university students volunteering with the Patrol kicked down fences and signs prohibiting the homeless from sleeping there, bundled up the signs and wooden stakes, and gave them to villagers for firewood.

Rebel Jill is one of the core organizers of these two groups. A self-proclaimed “soldier of the anti-poverty war,” Jill is tall for a Japanese man, always clothed in the same army-green fatsigues and utility vest, with an onsen (hot-spring) towel tied around his neck. Osaka street-style. Rapidly maneuvering the maze of Osaka public transport, he pauses frequently to answer his all-important organizing tool — his cell phone — with a ring tone set to any number of digitally cheerful anarchist anthems. A remarkable man, razor-sharp, incredibly committed, and indefatigable, Jill is also a bit fragile from years of hard living and struggle. With his shly veiled smile, gentle voice, and the hesitant, oblique-angle-approach of a wild deer, he’s not immediately identifiable as the core of a resistance movement that would be remarkable even outside of the context of individual-crushing Japanese society.

Appearance aside, he is fiery when on the subject of the poverty war and its omnipresent Bad Guy, the Osaka Police. As the movement’s de facto English PR point man, poor people’s rights activists from Oregon to Toronto have become familiar with Jill’s prolific emails in English spiced with Esperanto and German, his third and fourth languages: “Ni venkos! Ni venkos! We are not dust and dirt, to be swept away!” Though he has a part-time job and basement-surfs with friends, he seems most at home around the family table in Nagai’s boisterous kitchen tent.

Jill was busy at an organizing meeting a few days later when around 100 Kamagasaki workers, including Nagai villagers, marched in the 36th annual protest march following the grassroots Winter Struggle Festival. The somewhat rowdy crowd, flanked by Communist Party flag marshals, weaved through the park’s burning barrels and filed past silent lanes of police with riot shields. As they marched through Kamagasaki’s winding streets, they shouted “Washo!”, an age-old exclamation of encouragement with no direct translation. The marchers, mostly out-of-work and homeless day laborers, chanted for employment, fair labor conditions, and an end to the police harassment they say is routinely dealt out in Kamagasaki. Over 100 grim-faced police shadowed the march but conflict was minimal.

In Japan, most people are not eager to address the problems that these villagers have spent the last several decades protesting. It is a well-known saying in Japan - “the nail that sticks out will be hammered down” — but in Osaka, I met homeless activists, a young man who had gone to Iraq as a human shield, and young people who had dropped out of college to join the struggle. After months of seeing nothing but the hammering, what a revelation it is to find that even in Japan, some nails are too stubborn to ever be pushed down. ♠
Highway Robbery illustrates the contributions of transportation policy, and transportation tax dollars, to racial and economic inequality. The authors combine academic research and grassroots perspectives to link national inequalities in transportation to larger economic, health, environmental, and quality of life concerns. Defining transportation equity as a critical civil rights issue, this groundbreaking collection details progressive transit activists' efforts to tip the scales of transportation justice.

WE WANT FREEDOM
A LIFE IN THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

MUMIA ABU-JAMAL
INTRODUCTION BY KATHLEEN CLEAVER

"Mumia’s keen analysis of the Panthers provides readers with a unique understanding of an organization J. Edgar Hoover deemed the ‘greatest threat to internal security in the country.’ Rewarding too is his fresh assessment of the role of women in the Party, which thoughtfully draws on the work of the late Safiya Bukhari.”
—Herb Boyd, editor of Race and Resistance and Black Panthers for Beginners

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A Poet’s Challenge to the Unelected President

In Memoriam was originally inspired by a person full of hope, curiosity, and goodness, Tatiana Prosvirmina, a student who died at the age of seventeen. The later poems of the collection were written in response to the reckless and immoral celebration of the militarism of the Bush Administration. After the 9-11 attacks the world needed vision, humanity, and sophistication; instead it got blind, simple-minded war mongering. The Bush Administration’s selfish commitment to war and wealth has been barbaric, obscene, and monstrous.

The Administration’s declaration of global war on terror is an antediluvian approach to finding ways to address the world’s problems of sectarian conflict, organized crime, overpopulation, poverty, hunger, despair, increasingly virulent diseases, environmental depredation, reckless depletion of global resources, and degradation of traditional cultures by the West’s culture of consumption, amusement, and spectacle.

That so many Americans voted against George Bush indicates that many millions of Americans are still inspired by a romantic idealism and spirituality rooted not in blind nationalism but in the love of family and community and in a reverence for nature—God’s handwork. This is a spirituality of love, not hate, a spirituality of the sacred moment, not an eager anticipation of Armageddon, a spirituality of sharing, not of greed, a spirituality that comes from living wisely, not simplistically.

It will be task of Tatiana’s generation to restore spiritual health to an American way of life that has become obsessed wasteful and destructive of habitat, human and natural, of families and communities, and of individuals. It will be this younger generation that will reestablish America’s moral authority in the world and make America a force of good for all human beings.
American Anarchists will cross borders to converge in the foothills of Appalachia to network, brainstorm, and discuss social change through building a positive movement toward a free and responsible society. We will focus on practical alternatives to problems associated with power-based governments, institutions, and internalized systems of oppression.

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BREAKING AND ENTERING:
STATE REPRESSION OF AUTONOMOUS ZONES
Currently in its creation stages, the book “Breaking and Entering” is seeking personal accounts of surveillance, violence, and reression upon temporary and permanent autonomous zones (convergence centers, info shops, community centers, squats, collectives, etc.). The book will be comprised of these accounts and supplemented with theory-based analysis on repression by both high-profile and low-profile activist intellectuals.

CONTRIBUTIONS REQUESTED
The effectiveness of this documentation relies on the participation of those who have been subjected to police repression. Through this compilation of accounts we will be able to compare similarities between the actions of the authorities (how, when, force used, etc.), their effects on our communities, and our responses. From this, we seek to learn valuable lessons in security and pro-actively confront this epidemic of repression. GET ACTIVE GET WRITING!

If you or anyone you know has been involved in an act of state repression, or witnessed an assault on an autonomous zone, we urge you to contribute to this project. For details regarding submission specifics, please contact us.
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A SISTER-CITY CELEBRATION!
86th ANNUAL TOLEDO AREA ARTISTS EXHIBITION
SELECTIONS FROM THE TOYOHASHI CITY MUSEUM, JAPAN
JUNE 11–JULY 25, 2004

The Toledo Area Artists exhibition is co-organized by the Toledo Museum of Art and the Toledo Federation of Art Societies. It is sponsored by Sky Bank and is supported, in part, by the Ohio Arts Council.
When I became pregnant in September of 2001, I officially stopped lurking on the Hipmama.com discussion boards (the online companion to Ariel Gore’s zine *Hip Mama*) and became a member. I had heard about the zine through a friend in town and found the website after ordering a subscription for my sister. I knew that if and when I became a mama, I wanted to be a hip one.

The Hipmama.com boards were absolutely radiating with good mama energy. At my fingertips I had access to all kinds of information having to do with pregnancy and parenting, as well as activism, current events, and pure fluff. I was immediately drawn in by the other members and knew that I had found a place that would make pregnancy cool and fun, rather than scary.

At the time, I had a desk job, a high speed internet connection, and lots of privacy. On the Hipmama.com message boards, I met women from all walks of life. Women I never would have met trapped in my office 40 hours a week armed with only a telephone and typewriter. Women I wouldn’t bump into at the local coffee shop or park. Women that I can’t imagine my current life without.

Hipmama is known for being radical and attracting “alternative” types. Single mamas, punk rock mamas, sex worker mamas, tattooed mamas, etc. It also attracted women who were raised fairly middle class, but who had a taste of the larger world and who questioned the status quo in American society. Despite looking and feeling rather mainstream, the more I discussed my plans for my child with my immediate circle of friends in 3D, the more I realized that the simple choices I wanted to make were being viewed as radical, even threatening. Turns out I wasn’t so mainstream after all. Having lived in Africa for two years as a Peace Corps volunteer, I lived among women who raised their children without the luxury of modern day inventions such as c-sections, bottles, diapers, cribs, strollers, and the like. They raised their children at their breasts, on their backs, and in their beds. After reading a mountain of books while pregnant, I found that these concepts were fairly in line with the parenting style known as “Attachment Parenting.” At Hipmama.com and other progressive parenting sites, AP was the norm. Suddenly I didn’t feel so alone.

Online, I joined a group of other women who were due in May 2002, my “Synchro Mamas.” We shared the ups and downs of pregnancy, our fears and hopes for the future, and the daily minutia of being pregnant. Now I had seven other women I knew who were planning a homebirth, five more who were using midwives, several who planned to leave their sons’ genitals intact, and a handful of whom didn’t plan on vaccinating their future offspring. Better yet, I had 15 women at the touch of a finger to tell me that my boss wasn’t an ass when she said I was gaining too much weight too fast. We had gift swaps, love

by Stacey Greenberg
fests, and communal rants. If we would have been menstruating, I’m certain that we’d have been on the same cycle. Today, I have about 30 synchro mamas I keep in touch with on a daily basis and 31 synchro babies who I have gotten to know as well as my own baby over the past 30 months. We post pictures as much as we can so we all have a really good visual image of one another. Several mamas have managed to meet up, but despite living in the distribution center of the world, I have yet to have this pleasure. At some point we will find a way to converge in one place, maybe next year or 10 years from now.

As our children are heading toward the terrible twos, many of us are working on adding siblings to the mix. We have seen each other through our first births, the early days when none of us felt like we knew what we were doing, first steps, first words, and so on. We support each other’s decisions to work outside the home, in the home, or not at all. We had one mama have her home destroyed by a storm, one who left an abusive husband, and one who won an Emmy. The support we have provided one another is invaluable. These women, whom I have never met in “real” life, probably know me and my son better than most of the people I interact with on a daily basis. The synchros provide me with unconditional love, a wealth of knowledge, empathy, and entertainment. And thanks to the Internet, it is instant. Not instant in the sense that I could confer with them about my child choking, but instant enough that I could come back from lunch and have a handful of opinions regarding my son’s frequent wake ups the night before or the weird rash I discovered on my nipples in the shower.

Having friends and information at my fingertips has allowed me to challenge the status quo and parent in a way that suits my family. Had I not found the synchros, and the larger online parenting networks like Mothering.com, I would have never known that progressive Jews around the country are choosing to leave their sons intact. With the information I was able to find, my husband and I had a meeting with our Rabbi and instead of discussing the details of our son’s upcoming bris or circumcision, we discussed alternate ways to welcome our son into the world on his eighth day. These online communities also helped me feel less alone when I got dirty looks from someone at the park while nursing my toddler or when fielding questions from concerned strangers on why I don’t vaccinate my child. Being a synchro mama gives me the courage and strength I need to stand up for my parenting ideals. Furthermore, I have found a community in which to spread my wings.

As I made my way around the Internet, I began frequenting Mamaphonic.com, a community for women engaged in creative pursuits. Mamaphonic.com opened up a world of mothers who were artists, writers, musicians, etc. Here I found the inspiration and support I needed to start writing again. In January of 2003, I put out the first issue of my zine “Fertile Ground: For People who Dig Parenting.” By June of 2003, I had been published in 10 other mama zines, on two parenting websites, and in one real live magazine. In addition I organized a collaboration between 30 other mothers who do zines, and together we put out the mother of all zines, “The Mamaphiles.” The women at Mamaphonic.com not only helped me find my voice, but to spew it all over the place.

Online mothering communities benefit all mothers with an Internet connection (or access to one), whether they are in cities, suburbs, foreign lands, etc. A lot of women who might otherwise be isolated can log on and find friendship and support in a matter of minutes. Online communities certainly helped me feel less alone and definitely boosted my confidence as a mother, especially in the early days. Sometimes just having a place to vent, ask a question, or read about someone else’s experience can make a difference between a really good or really bad day. These communities have helped me feel like I am not in this mothering gig alone, no matter what.

**Moms’ Online Media**

When I became the publisher of Hipmama.com, my goal was to develop an online community for progressive parents, a place where people could meet each other. Ariel Gore had already established the Hip Mama zine as a forum for young mothers, single parents, and marginalized voices, and her editorial vision qualified the publication for the title “conservative America’s worst nightmare.” I wanted to take the project even further. I wanted to connect all of the readers in a tangible way, in their daily lives. I wanted to help people find the allies and accomplices they would need to make real and immediate changes in the world.

From the beginning, Hipmama.com attracted a spectacular number of bright, savvy women who were eager to help in the process of organizing a new kind of community. The site grew from a modest size into a huge phenomenon. I have been honored to collaborate with moderators, technical volunteers, and editorial staff to create something that is truly useful.

The community at Hipmama.com does not adhere to any one particular political ideology aside from being explicitly feminist. The parents who congregate on the site are raucous, iconoclastic, aware, informed. Through the years, various pressures have pushed the site to evolve and change direction, but the core goal of facilitating connections between people has never faltered.

Over the years it became increasingly clear that a large general interest site did not serve everyone. Even people who agree on most things have wildly divergent opinions on some critical issues. I have no interest in debates that detract from the hard work of being a parent. I decided that the best way to promote a new social agenda was to start sites that articulated a clear manifesto. The first and most controversial was Girl-Mom.

I was eighteen and had just started college when my daughter was conceived. My professor told me that my choice was “anti-feminist” and that I was squandering my future. My advisor told me that I should drop out of school entirely. Of course this made me all the more furiously intent on staying in school. But my choice would have been much easier if I had found other young mothers to talk to.

When I was a teen mom, I wouldn’t have wanted to deal with condescending attitudes from older people, no matter how well meaning. I started Girlmom.com because teen parents deserve a safe place to seek peer support. The project functions as a true autonomous community, with participants making all editorial and community decisions. I provide financial and techni-
Indie rock is all about finding ways of preying open the popsong and making it real again. Many bands do it ironically (Pavement), by mixing rock’n’roll with electronica (Radiohead, Interpol), by going lo-fi (Sebadoh), or by feeling the Beach Boys (Apples in Stereo). But another important way of revigorating the three minute popsong is to just be so earnest that there is no way to run but into the song; it is heart-on-the-cuff rather than off-the-cuff. This is where Onelinedrawing (which, at heart, is Jonah Matranga) operates. Yes, it’s emo, but it picks up on the mother of all emo, the Cure, and adds just the right amount of strumming folk and DIY indie-rock. The strength of emo, that it distanced the listener through its early-techno sounds while bringing the listener near with its aching heart-felt painful lyrics, is also the reason why emo cannot grow, for the disjunction between technology and humanity has already been explored. Onelinedrawing brings the intimacy of DIY indie-rock to the intimacy of emo’s aching lyrics to stunning results. To sum it up, Jonah Matranga is the Jonathon Richman of emo.

-Francis Raven

Transistor Transistor/Wolves split CDLevel-Plane
www.level-plane.com

Transistor Transistor’s “side” of this CD was done in the first take.

The lyrics describe a dystopian present that, if it doesn’t change now, will end up destroying itself from within anyhow. All the songs are fast and heavy paced, with dual vocals, but leave time for the musicians to experiment with the rhythms and direction of the songs. And I would like to note that I really appreciate hardcore that I’m able to understand the lyrics being sung!

Wolves (made up of ex-members of Orchid) pick the pace up a little more. With grittier vocals than Transistor Transistor, Wolves keeps the second half of this CD flowing with more fast hardcore and poignant lyrics of cynicism and revolution. The four songs they play on this should really be listened to as one long story, with each chapter given us solutions to the general malaise that has gripped our sad, dying empire: “we want the sound, the sound, of the city burning down.”

-skot!

Want to write reviews for Clamor? visit www.clamormagazine.org/participate

Bee Lavender on the evolution of real communities borne of virtual roots

cal support, but the site is for and by young mothers.

I also conceived and developed a site for artists, Mamaphonic.com, where women can talk about the intricate challenges of remaining creative after having kids. That project grew into a book, to be published this fall.

When I realized that I was hunting through press releases and newspapers trying to glean information about changes in family policy and law, I realized that a news service for activist parents would be of great benefit. I founded Yomamasays.org to collect and convey the specific stories that are most relevant to our current political situation. The editor of the site provides frequent updates and can issue a call for action that generates a huge response instantly.

I like to know lots of different people and have lots of different kinds of friendships, and I think that the Internet is only one tool to build truly diverse and inclusive communities. The medium itself is not the point; what happens when you walk away from the computer is the critical issue.

This belief led me to organize public events. I lived in Portland, Oregon, for many years, and each summer the local Hip Mama community threw a public party. One year I had the grand idea of inviting everyone, and lots of volunteers collaborated to host the original Hip Mama Gathering. We had expected a hundred participants but over seven hundred people showed up. We were overwhelmed and humbled by the experience. European mothers held a Gathering in Paris that same summer. The infrastructure of Hipmama.com is not equipped to repeat this kind of effort, and I encouraged people to take the idea and make what they could of it. There is now a completely independent Mama Gathering coalition that stages events around the country.

Most parents are doing their best, and the rest need kind guidance, not withering criticism. The proliferation of parenting resources that profess to offer the best approach to raising kids is just another form of oppression. I do not believe that children can be raised like a loaf of bread. There is no recipe for success, no guarantee that a particular approach will work on a universal scale. I would never suggest that the way I interact with my kids is the best way for every family, and I think that it is really damaging to propagate rules.

The same can be said for online community development. I hope that the people who do not find what they need on my sites go forward and make their own; the Internet is as vast and complex as we want it to be. There is room enough for everyone, whatever our beliefs. ★
Firing the Babysitter

Stop now, and take a minute to think about the role television played in your family when you were growing up. Was it on during dinner? Was the fate of prime time characters a topic of conversation between you and your friends? How often was it off? Indeed TV-watching habits have changed dramatically over the last decade or so. The technology is now affordable enough to have multiple sets, and those with cable have hundreds of channels to keep them on the couch. But with all forms of technology - computers, the internet, PDAs, video games, DVDs, and cell phones included - taking up more of our time, in addition to the rise of obesity and diabetes linked to sedentary activities, many families (and individuals) are beginning to reassess how they are spending their time. TV turnoff campaigns are gaining in popularity in Canada, the U.S., and Europe. Each spring several organizations promote TV-Turnoff Week to raise awareness about the issue, and provide support for those trying to kick the habit. Here are some observations, suggestions, and statistics to help start a dialogue in your own family.

edited by Catherine Komp
Illustrations Corey Pierce

Talking with Frank Vespe
TV Turnoff Network Executive Director

How has television come to dominate so much of families' lives?

There are a couple of reasons. First, for a long time, watching television was perceived to be a consequence-free activity; we all thought that people, and even kids, could watch hours and hours of television without worrying about it too much. Of course, we now know that that is not the case. The other reason, I think, is that television is insidious. People don't realize how much time they're spending with the tube, or what a high priority they place on it.

What are the long-term consequences for an increasingly TV-addicted society?

It's clear that our national television habit is having a wide array of negative consequences for us as individuals and as a society. On average, American school children spend more time each year in front of the television set than in the classroom. All of this television time is simply unhealthy for growing minds, growing bodies, for our families, and for our society. In the long run, we must help children and adults to break free of TV - or these problems will worsen.

What are the most challenging aspects of helping families become TV-Free?

First, I think there's the challenge of raising awareness; too many folks still don't know how clear and strong the research is on this topic. In addition, you have the TV industry which has managed to convince a lot of people that a child brought up without Sesame Street has somehow been deprived and will lag behind his peers, which simply isn't the case. Second, many people tend to believe that if it didn't happen to them, it doesn't happen to anyone; in other words, a lot of folks say, "Well, I watched a lot of TV growing up and I turned out fine, so there must not be any danger." Those are the starter hurdles; once you get over them, you have the problem that television has become so ingrained in our culture — it's virtually everywhere — that it can be hard to get away from and to keep kids away from.

Finally, I think there are a lot of adults whose hearts are in the right places but who don't give kids the credit that they deserve. We often hear from people, especially so-called experts, that it's "unrealistic" to ask kids to go TV-free for a week, or to cut back on their TV time in the long haul. That's simply a failure on the part of adults to set the bar high enough, children are smart and they're adaptable, and if we challenge them to cut back on TV time — and help them do it — they'll be able to do it with ease.

What are the most helpful resources your organization offers?

TV-Turnoff Network offers a wide variety of resources. These include fact sheets on the negative impacts of excessive TV time, links to important research, suggestions of screen-free activities that folks can do instead of watching television, materials to help organize a TV-Turnoff Week in your school and community, and more. In addition, coming online in the next couple of months will be materials developed in conjunction with the American Academy of Pediatrics to help parents and families to control TV in their homes.

How do you make less-TV watching more of a popular issue?

Bit by bit, the word is getting out and people are starting to hear it. The percentage of kids under 12 with rules limiting their television time has risen from 63 percent to over 72 percent in six years; this translates to an additional 4 million kids with such rules. In addition, the proportion of children watching an hour or less of television has doubled in the last 10 years. There's still a ways to go, but more and more parents and families are making the choice to break free of TV.
10 Ways to Forget Television and Enjoy Life

Sandy Williams Driver

In 1996, my family moved to a rural area in north Alabama. The kids quickly spotted a major flaw in our newly rented house that my husband and I had overlooked: our televisions didn’t work because there was no cable, antenna, or satellite dish on the property. Josh, Jake, and Katie wanted to leave immediately for the nearest hotel and I was apprehensive myself. No television? We soon realized, however, that our tragedy was a blessing in disguise as we began to discover the world around us. Here are our top-ten favorite things to do:

Gardening: When my kids were younger, they loved running barefoot in the freshly-turned soil. Now, they enjoy planting seeds and watching their favorite vegetable spring from the ground.

Cooking: Preparing home-cooked meals isn’t boring for us. The kids are each assigned a night every week to help in the kitchen. Of course, they plan the menu with things like pizza, burgers, and tacos.

Games: Our evenings pass by quickly when the Monopoly board is spread across the dining room table. We also play Chinese checkers, cards, Scrabble, and our favorite, charades.

Bicycles: My children each have a two-wheeled vehicle and my husband and I even bought a couple for ourselves to ride with them and take longer trips. Peddling down a quiet street is very relaxing.

Sightseeing: We have discovered that there are lots of fun places to go without driving for hours. We enjoy the parks, libraries, museums, and lakes near our hometown and the best part is that they are FREE!

Reading: Spending time with a good book is one of my favorite things to do. My children prefer magazines, but as long as they’re reading something, I’m happy.

Pets: We have shared our home and our hearts with a variety of animals throughout the years: dogs, cats, a parakeet, goats, chickens, a horse, goldfish and a pot-bellied pig. A pet helps teach responsibility and provides wonderful companionship.

Exercise: Burning calories isn’t a chore for us. We walk through our neighborhood, go for hikes in the woods and take long swims in the summer. We always search for fun activities that get the heart rate up.

Puzzles: We are puzzle fanatics and prefer the ones with thousands of pieces. We also like crossword puzzles, word searches, and jumbles. Any brain teaser gets attention from our entire family.

Visit acquaintances: Even though life is hectic, we frequently drop in on nearby family and friends. Our visit even gets them away from the tube for a little while.

Five years ago, we bought a house closer to town and it came with several cable hook-ups enticingly distributed in every room. While we now have the choice to watch TV, days sometimes turn into weeks without it ever being turned on. Our experience taught us a very valuable lesson and we still don’t need a television to enjoy life. We have discovered the true meaning of family.

For More Information on Turning off the TV and Media Literacy: www.tvturkeff.org | www.adbusters.org | www.mediathek.org

TV Watching at a Glance

Average American watches 4 hours of TV per day.

98% percent of US households have at least one TV.

41% of US households have 3 or more TVs.

Kids ages 2-17 watch nearly 20 hours of TV per week.

56% of kids ages 8-16 have a TV in their bedroom.

Kids see 20,000 commercials per year.

Children can develop brand loyalty by age 2.

The number of obese children and youth has tripled to 15% since 1963.

30% of children develop Type 2 Diabetes, which previously only affected adults.

49% of Americans say they watch too much TV.

TV-Turnoff Week 2004 attracted approximately 7.6 million participants.

Source: www.tvturkeff.org
Look Who's Leaving

Quick: Name something so edgy even radical, punk-rock publications won't touch it.

Answer: The innocence of sweet young children.

I shit you not, although I do exaggerate the dichotomy. Kids today are what homosexuality was in the Fifties: an unspeakable pleasure. A hidden secret. A perverse desire. At least in some circles.

And I'm not even talking about “Family Values,” or it taking a whole village to raise a child. I'm not referring to No Child Being Left Behind or any of the kids — at least here in Washington state — that have been headlining new broadcasts as kidnap victims in the last few months. I'm talking about kids. Real ones. Gay, Latino, pregnant, White, angry, ADHD-havin', TV-watchin', Ritalin-'usin' regular kids. The confused, the frustrated, the angry. The ones that actually exist and will actually inherit the world. Not Britney Spears. Not the Williams sisters or the Bush daughters. Not the Olsen twins. The kids next door. The underaged girl your ex is actually sleeping with. The babies your best friends are having. The actual next generation. There are several reasons not to reach out to the under-16 age group. They can't legally vote, can't legally purchase alcohol, can't legally drive, and can't be registered in the Selective Service. Perhaps media such as the Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, and CNN can be forgiven for not catering to the needs of this demographic. But should the alternative media ignore kids as well?

When I was younger — and, frankly, hotter — I spent more of my time writing about sexual matters. Edgy, querying essays that always ultimately revealed me to be a sick pervert of some kind or another. My bizarre liaison with a straight lawyer girl. Comparisons between pastrami and the transcendent practice of cross-dressing. Vaginal surgeries. People who have sexual relationships with their dogs. My work in porn. Hands-on, easy-to-follow, fully illustrated S/M instruction. It went over quite well. Apparently, a cute white girl is allowed, in our society (and in our media), to explore the limits of her sexuality in public view.

But then that got a little boring. Sex is ok, sure, but it really isn't the only gig in town. And frankly, once you've (so to speak) mastered something like sex, or for that matter another human, you want to explore other things. So I delved a little deeper into my interests and began writing about — and for — kids.

It was a pretty short leap, in my mind; being openly sexual was only possible with healthy self-esteem, an interest in exploration and play, and some basic educational groundwork. It was too late to try for all this with most adults, but maybe the younger generations would be more receptive.

It was a classic career-killing move.

As soon as I began concentrating more and more on kids, and less and less on things we all pretend kids know nothing about, I suddenly found my work edited with an intensity I had not previously experienced. Editors stopped responding to me with invitations to hang out the next time I was in town (editors can be rather sleazy) and started asking how old I was. My work was rejected from many
of my favorite alternative publishing venues and suddenly I found myself hanging out with ladies at parties with boobs hanging out of their shirts nursing some brat or another, while we all commiserated about various aspects of child-rearing. I complained in the abstract: they in the physical.

It's not even like I advocate for bearing children; quite the opposite. I think abortions are great! I love birth control! I don't have any kids! And I never will have any! I don't even advocate for any of those traditional notions that, in the minds of some, precede the birth of children: love, marriage, monogamy, heterosexual activity, therapy, financial stability, and the purchasing of houses and eribs and clothes from Baby Gap. I just think kids present the most interesting political potential in our current society.

So I wrote about those potentials, and society's squelching of them. An essay on lowering the legal voting age written to agitate early teens was rejected from one magazine because it didn't jive with the age group of the mag: another journalistic piece on the death of an Indian girl was spiked because the story simply wasn't universal enough. (Punk Planet eventually ran this story, however, in a shortened form.) Publishers at social functions delegated me to tables with poets and other fantasists (most of them, coincidentally, female) whereas I used to sit next to the agitators, the politicians, and the drunkards. Editors politely queried me about current projects, and then politely let the conversation drop when I mentioned the vital youth movement for which I hoped to create tools. The phrase, “Ahh. Kids' books,” has closed more than one such conversation.

And yet these same editors and publishers finding no merit in this new line of work often emailed me for child-rearing advice, or educational approaches for middle-schoolers. I have little to offer: “You shouldn't have kids,” I tell some people. Or if it's too late for that, “Don't shake your baby. It's very damaging.”

It was all extremely confusing to me until I realized that friendly advice didn't require a paycheck. And perhaps more importantly, I realized that cute white girls are not allowed, in our society — nor in our media — to explore the potentials of nontraditional childrearing in public view. Apparently it reeks too much of commitment.

Kids right now get all their vital information about the world from a handful of sources. One of them is Burger King. Another might be school, or it might be the cable programs piped in to replace the teaching we aging punks might remember. Their alternative media is TV, movies, and pop music. Shouldn't we in alternative publishing feel a responsibility to right this ridiculousness?

The ghettoization of education and parenting as both “mainstream” and “feminine” concerns has absolutely got to stop. Hipmama is a great zine, so is Bitch. But those should not have been the only alternative publications that came to mind as you read this article.

Like it or not, the brat next door is going to inherit the world. Alternative media would do well to realize what mainstream media does not: that those brats need to figure out, now, what to do when they get their hands on it. ★

The One AM Radio
A Name Writ in Water
-Level Plane, 2004
www.level-plane.com

I know I'm probably not meant to be influenced (as a reviewer, as a buyer) obviously am meant to be) by the packaging, but the restrained design on this is beautiful. This was the happy surprise of the CDs I was sent. I hadn't heard The One AM Radio — or anything by Hirshikesh Hirway — before and now I am kicking myself for missing a show a month ago that I knew nothing about. What can you do? I need to outsource keeping up with good music to someone — someone like Clamor, yay! This is perfect cafe society music. Something like the Temperamental-era beat-driven Everything But the Girl, something like Beck when he's mellow, but with that extra freshness that makes it something new all of its own thing. Some of the tracks, such as "Those Distant Lights," occasionally jump up and get lively. You could almost see people getting up off their backsides to shuffle around together to this, but for the most part this is pretty mellow stuff. If it's punk, punk, and nothing but punk, this may not be for you but if liked the whole electroclash thing and enjoy chilling when the music tends toward the melodious side of things, then pick this up, get to the website, and make sure you don't miss out.

-Gavin J. Grant

TV on the Radio
Desperate Youth, Blood Thirsty Babes
Touch & Go Records
www.tgrec.com

What might have been refreshing is some irony, but what is actually refreshing is the lack of it. Complete earnestness or, at least, a few guys getting together to make a record. Some equipment in a loft, that's the story, and some humming. Obviously, there was a guy with a voice and a producer. The guy with the voice is Tunde Adebimpe and the producer is Dave Sitek; guitarist Kyp Malone (who also has an amazing voice) rounds out the team on the Desperate Youth album. I guess, it's not so much earnestness that's refreshing, but the lack of irony, the almost fuck-it-of doing something pro. Desperate Youth is one of the most anticipated albums of the year, following on the heels of TV on the Radio's amazing EP: Young Liars.

I've heard it called garage doo-wop. That's why I wanted to listen to the album, but there is some transcendence breaking into the traditional rock song. People, like myself, who are stuck on the rock song are finally understanding what electronic music can do for rock'n'roll. In order to get back to the perfection of that rock song TV on the Radio reminds us that we must go back to rock'n'roll's Rhythm and Blues roots. But those roots must not be investigated naively, as if the intervening half-century did not matter, but rather they must be examined using the tools and technologies of today. And this is where TVOTR's electronic, symphonic sound and its breathtaking production values have served its mission best.

- Francesco Raven
They Won’t Be There For You ...

“Friends” Makes Enemies for its Skewed Portrayal of Adoption

by Jessica DelBalzo

“She’s a mother without a baby,” Chandler says, “Please.” While the image of a would-be adopter begging an expectant mother to relinquish her child is familiar to my eyes, it is not something that should be portrayed as acceptable on a well-loved television program like “Friends.” In fact, I would go so far as to say the media should refrain from ever showing the act of adoption in a positive light.

Normally, I abhor the idea of censorship. I wouldn’t think of turning off the television because of sexuality or strong language, nor would I hide these things from my children. Sex is a very natural, necessary part of life, and words are words and nothing more. Yet unnaturally happy adoption stories will not be tolerated in my home: they are too dangerous.

As an individual who has spent the past eight years researching adoption, working side by side with adopted adults and parents who have surrendered their children, I know the media’s portrayal of adoption is not the reality for thousands of separated families.

How many television shows have you seen lately in which a well-loved character surrenders her child for adoption? I would dare say none. Yet several popular shows currently have storylines featuring happy adopters and characters planning to adopt; “Friends,” “Seventh Heaven,” and “Sex and the City” to name a few. Movies are equally at fault for neglecting to show the pain of adoption from the perspective of an exiled mother or father, though children’s shows like “The Country Bears” and “Stuart Little” certainly promote what an adopted friend of mine refers to as, “the myth of the grateful adoptee.” What a demeaning thing to show an adopted child, who is quite possibly feeling anything but thankful to have been separated from his or her natural family!

Even non-fiction media outlets neglect the dark side of adoption, while eagerly portraying happy adopters. Stories of satisfied customers who traveled overseas to adopt can be found in newspapers and on television with relative ease; all depicting the adopters as saviors who rescued a needy child. Never do we hear about the heartache experienced by the true mothers and fathers who are given little choice but to surrender their children to the false promise of a “better life” in America. And it is rare that we hear from the adopted adults who were removed from their homes as infants but later return in a desperate search to find their families and their own selves. It isn’t difficult to find mothers, fathers, and adoptees who are willing to share their gritty-but-true adoption stories, but it is near impossible to find a media outlet willing to make their stories public.

Unfortunately, the majority of Americans have fallen under the spell of the industry, treating adoption as though it were a sacred cow not to be questioned.

A study conducted by Market-Data Enterprises discovered the business of adoption brings in more than $1.4 billion each year. That’s easily enough to fund massive advertising campaigns, influencing public opinion and promoting adoption as the most “loving gift” a young, single, or poor expectant mother can give to her child. For example, the local radio station that is most popular with the teen and young adult crowd in my area is currently running advertisements for two large adoption agencies. Both spots insinuate that a young, single mother cannot possibly measure up to an older, married couple. And both clearly state that adoption is loving and unselfish.

Though high-profile adoption agencies advertise their services under the guise of helping a woman in distress, they neglect to mention that their supposed assistance will leave both the woman and her child traumatized in exile.

Despite the existence of myriad empirical and anecdotal evidence showing the harmful effects of adoption on surrendering mothers and their lost children, the industry continues to thrive. Because the media is so tightly controlled by pro-adoption special interests, it takes careful research to discover that adoptees are statistically more likely than their non-adopted counterparts to develop psychological disorders requiring residential treatment. Adopted children are also more likely to be convicted of juvenile felonies. According to the Center for Adoptive Families, 20 percent of adolescents in drug rehabilitation and residential substance abuse treatment programs are adopted. That last statistic would be meaningless if adoptees made up 20 or even 15 percent of the population, but the government estimates that figure at only two to three percent.

Joe Soll, an adoptee adult with more than 20 years of experience counseling adoptees and natural parents, writes, “You may encounter many adopted people along the way who will tell you that being surrendered for adoption hasn’t affected them at all. The adopted individuals might even say they are glad they were ‘given up.’ This is denial of the highest order. Just as it is impossible for a mother to lose her baby and not be severely wounded, it is impossible for a baby to lose its mother and not be severely wounded.”

The disproportionately high number of adoptees who suffer from attachment disorder, depression, and other psychological problems are swept under the rug, as are their devastated mothers. As long as infertile couples are encouraged to disguise their sterility by claiming another family’s child as their own, adoption workers will stop at nothing to increase the supply of adoptable infants.

In recent years, industry tactics have been expanded to include the false promise of open adoption in addition to the arsenal of shame, guilt, and misinformation used in the past to coerce expectant mothers into surrendering their children. In open adoption situations, mothers are offered contact with their babies’ adopters and sometimes contact with their children directly in exchange for relinquishment.

Although the concept is very pretty in theory, open adoption agreements are not enforceable in most states, and in the few legally open states, adopters are only obligated to pay a fine should they decide to close the adoption and sever contact with the adoptee’s natural family. My years in the field have taught me that many adopters promise openness only to disappear once the adoption has been finalized, having had no intention of following through in the first place or having been scared off by the obvious connection between mother and child.

Rather than improving on a terribly flawed institution, the open adoption trend has paved the way for expectant parents to endure an even greater load of guilt than they would normally encounter from the average adoption worker or agency. One look at the “Dear ‘Birth”
The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century
By Robert W. McChesney, Monthly Review Press, 2004

What’s wrong with the media? It’s a question more complex than it seems. People on all sides of the political spectrum have long blamed the media for their woes, such that the criticism has become almost devoid of meaning. But there is growing body of work trying to answer this question, especially in light of the rising corporatism of the media system over the past 20 years.

Enter Robert McChesney. The professor at Champaign-Urbana addresses these issues in his latest book, The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century. This book is an attempt at explaining what’s wrong with the current media system, how it got to be that way, and what can be done to change it.

The book is generally a well-written and accessible look at the economics behind media policy. Particularly important is his insistence that the structure of the media is not “natural” or “inherent” but rather the result of specific policies and practices crafted by the government and wealthy business interests for the benefit of the media system. With this understanding, McChesney exposes the problem—indeed, the contradictions—of having a for-profit news system, let alone one so heavily dominated by and beholden to advertising and public relations. McChesney shows himself adept at examining these corporate-friendly policies, their historical and economic roots, and their effects on locally oriented broadcasting and coverage. The weakening of journalism is particularly relevant in these times of war sloganeering. McChesney also offers a cogent argument against the right-wing attack on the so-called liberal media, showing how this criticism, backed by conservative foundations, serves to scare the media against voicing any critique of the right.

The primary issue with The Problem of the Media is that it criticizes media only along the axis of class and capitalism, ignoring the ways in which other factors shape media policy and media access. Viewing media only from this lens prevents one from seeing the ways in which racism, patriarchy, and heterosexism also shape the media system in conjunction with capitalism. When viewed from this more intensive approach, the problem of the media revolves around relationship to systems of power. And power in this country is defined by race, gender, ability, sexuality, geography, religion, and other factors, not just class.

McChesney seems to view media as an issue relevant only to capitalism, and capitalism is defined in a way that is separated from other systems of oppression, such as racism and patriarchy. The task as he sees it is merely to convince others to work on media issues as well. But such an analysis misses the fact they “They,” at least in the case of many on the left, often do work on “Our” issues. To think otherwise renders invisible the tireless work of many anti-racists, feminists, and other organizers who have dedicated a lot of time and effort to this issue. The birth of the media justice movement, led by people of color and indigenous people, is but one illustration of this point. (See mediajustice.org)

As media justice activists and others are quick to point out, the problem with the media isn’t just its for-profit status or the saturation of advertising. (Amy Goodman makes much the same point in her excellent new book, The Exception to the Rulers.) Rather, the problem is one of power—who has access to use, create, and disseminate media; who is given a voice; who is disempowered; what communities are specifically targeted. When viewed with this broader lens, media then becomes part of a broader social-political critique. That is, it no longer becomes an issue where “left and right unite and fight,” but rather a struggle waged by oppressed communities for self-determination. Community activists across the globe are working on media issues from this holistic framework, and this is where lies the greatest possibilities for change.

-Dan Berger
Shoplifting

OUT 7/27/04
Gravy Train!!!!

12"

120 NE State ave PMB 418 Olympia, WA 98501

For over twenty years, ABC No Rio has been merging art, activism and politics. What started as an art exhibit in an abandoned building to protest real estate prices has become a four-story community arts center with a computer center, photo darkroom, zine library and silkscreen shop. We also provide space to Food Not Bombs and Books Through Bars as well as offer free classes for youth.

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BABA YAKO DJ CENTER
OPEN THOUGHT
new york city hip-hop trio

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**Mêlée**

Mêlée (may-lay) n.1, Orange County band;
2. A compelling mix of pop melodies and indie rock sensibilities.
See 'Everyday Behavior' coming 6/29/04.
I want the city to deal with homelessness on every corner so I don't have to.
Originally mobilized around queer issues, Los Angeles-based artist-activist group THINK AGAIN has also tackled everything from gentrification to globalization while holding up a mirror to progressives that often don’t want to “dilute” their message by including gay rights.

That said, THINK AGAIN has not always touted the gay rights party line. Their 2000 mobile billboard campaign Popping the Question brought art activism to the streets with slogans such as the cheeky, “So you’re in love; what do you want, a medal?” and “The question isn’t whether the state should marry queers; the question is whether the state should marry anyone.”

Nadxieli Mannello sat down with THINK AGAIN’s S.A. Bachman and David Attyah to discuss queer politics, family values, and why gay marriage is looking so damn straight.

I came across your work through the antiwar movement, but for those who don’t know you can you tell us what brought THINK AGAIN together?

David Attyah: S.A. and I began to work together in the mid ’90s under the Clinton administration when there was another mainstream question on the board. We were together one night around S.A.’s kitchen table and she looked at me and said, “You know, I don’t think I can bear another Gay Pride parade where the focus is on whether or not we can get the attention of AT&T.” That’s very much what was going on during the Clinton years when gay politics were focused on getting mainstream attention via an acknowledgment in public life rather than in domestic life. We produced a set of postcards together and took them to Pride and started talking to people on the street about queer and coalition politics. And to this day our first impulse remains. Our goal is to explore the extent to which we can use art to prompt a political conversation.

You’ve chosen to go beyond just queer rights to address a multitude of issues and made their interconnectedness the heart of your political stance, what made you decide to do so?

David: S.A and I come out of a particular tradition of queer politics as opposed to gay and lesbian politics. Queer politics are based on a certain number of things, including the idea that we’re not just talking about rights and privileges for people who identify as gay. We’re talking about an understanding of sexual possibility and freedom that includes liberation for women, liberation for queers of all types, and by extension includes a critique of gender roles in the culture. We certainly believe that there are no queer issues that are not also issues of class, gender, and race.

So it’s not a contradiction for us to do work on the rape of women in Juarez in the same year that we’re doing work on militarization in the Bush administration or we’re dealing with gay marriage. It allows us to move out from this idea that political issues are naturally separated and that it’s the natural terrain of women to only be interested in women and queers only in queers. We work against that, towards the idea that if you are progressive and have a sense of social justice that

A LONG WAY, BABY?

THINK AGAIN.
you are by nature interested in all of these and interested in working on all of them together.

Popping the Question addressed gay marriage, social discrimination, and legal benefits with a slew of great slogans including, "We know you want security, but does someone have to recite marriage vows to get healthcare insurance?" Can you tell us a little more about that campaign?

David: I just want to point out that at the time we did the Popping the Question campaign the issue of gay marriage wasn’t really on the national agenda. Part of the reason why the project is still important and timely is that Bush has really upped the ante with 1.5 billion dollars to encourage heterosexual marriage and initiatives to link welfare to marital status. Now we’ve got his willful confusing of the terms “the legal institution of marriage” and “the moral institution of marriage.”

S.A. Bachman: Popping the Question is really typical of the kind of thinking that THINK AGAIN is interested in. We wanted to not only talk about these issues in the most personal terms but also to reveal the multi-billion dollar wedding industrial complex, for example — linking people’s individual sense of what they want in their own emotional and personal life to what legal institutions are saying and the global economy that produces the material objects involved in these rituals. The project is pretty deliberately designed to try to move people up and down those levels of experience, from the personal to the political and back again.

Do you think, as a recent issue of the Socialist Worker suggested, "Those who dismiss this battle for gay marriage as an embrace of bourgeois morality are missing the context in which this fight is taking place?"

S.A.: Right, because again there’s the argument, “I just want to express my love; it’s a private matter.” But no one is talking about the fact that privileges should not have to exist based on coupling of any kind. One of the main texts in Popping the Question talks about marriage being an institution of discrimination and one of the main targets is single people. One thing we know is that in recent years families have gotten more complicated and more multigenerational. People are living with parents and grandparents and with friends and roommates for much longer for economic reasons and certainly we would like to see that addressed.

David: And we need to distinguish these two issues. We’re talking about the legal phenomenon of marriage and then we’re talking about relationships in society. As S.A. has pointed out, we’re interested in de-coupling rights and privileges from people’s marital status. For example, the Bush administration’s proposal linking welfare benefits to whether or not poor people stay married is ridiculous. We are absolutely opposed to the idea that one’s legal status under the law has anything to do with whether you choose to take a traditional long-term partner or not.
At the time we did the Popping the Question campaign the issue of gay marriage wasn’t really on the national agenda. Part of the reason why the project is still important and timely is that Bush has really upped the ante with 1.5 billion dollars to encourage heterosexual marriage and initiatives to link welfare to marital status.

On the flip side there’s all this talk about whether gay relationships are legitimate. Why are we talking about making only our romantic relationships legitimate? If any group in society should understand the value of friendship it should be gay and lesbian people, or the value of alternative housing situations or the value of intergenerational parenting...

So one of the concerns we have as we race towards gay marriage is, for example, the gay male communities’ long history of best friends being essentially medical caretakers in the face of AIDS. What we’re not doing is talking about a very long tradition of deciding you’re not going to have your healthcare decisions made by your biological family or the person that the law has decided is contractually obligated to do so. And I guess that’s the shorthand way of saying, well, what about the young woman who wants to raise a child herself with the help of her two best friends? How did we get to the point that we’re now going to use gay people to leverage an argument about traditional family values such that a woman can’t do that?

What do you say to people who argue gay and lesbians could engage more fully in reforming social and family organizations, healthcare benefits, and the conferring of legal rights “from the inside”?

David: Transformation becomes quite interesting for us; this idea that if you work within the system you can achieve a certain kind of transformation. I think we could have a really big debate about what we’ve really achieved with the *L Word* and *Queer As Folk* on television. One could argue that we’ve mainstreamed gay culture and that’s a good thing. S.A. and I are generally people who don’t agree that working from the inside leads to transformation... I mean after a decade of AIDS activism I challenge someone to find a condom in a school in a suburban or rural community. And from the vantage point of other attempts to mainstream gay politics and get people into mainstream life, the cynical answer is that visibility is achieved for queers in only decidedly upper middle-class ways where we get to be consumers and television characters that have law degrees.

We haven’t necessarily seen that starting in the place most palatable to mainstream heterosexual upper middle-class culture leads to the most political change. And one of our concerns is that gay marriage will move forward and continue to de-politicize the range of things queer people are interested in organizing for. Do we really believe that once gay people have achieved a certain level of marital security and status in this society that they’re going to go to bat for reform of sex education in schools (which doesn’t privilege abstinence and marriage) or for revisionist history in schools that includes gay and lesbian people....?

S.A.: Let alone fair labor practices or universal healthcare or a living wage. Historically at its worst the gay and lesbian movement has remained largely silent on issues pertaining to class, race, and sexual difference, not to mention misogyny in certain ways. And there’s no reason to think that once marriage rights are in place the silence is suddenly going to disappear. I just don’t see that.

What are the next steps then? How do we define an agenda and mobilize people in a way that there’s cross-pollination of ideas and support?

S.A.: One of the things we have on our agenda is a project titled *Priority List*, which encourages people to address exactly your question about defining agendas and give us feedback on the issues they think are important. Then, of course, we’re interested in taking all those local issues and linking them both to the personal and to the global. ⭐

For more information on THINK AGAIN and their new book *A Brief History of Outrage*, visit www.agiart.org. Proceeds from *A Brief History of Outrage* support the donation of graphic materials to activist organizations, queer youth groups, and schools.

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**Kiss Ups/Kitty Little**

The Kiss Ups are the voice of youth revolution. They call for a punk rock party that includes everyone who might have ever felt excluded. Witness “Seniors and Keyboards” where the duo scream for girls, queers, kids, seniors, geeks, fat kids, and dirty ugly faces breaking social graces to pick up guitars and cut loose. Anyone who has ever seen the Kiss Ups live will know that they live up to their inclusive message by drawing diverse crowds and rocking them until the wee hours.

This record is rougher and more aggressive than their most recent *Coffee Sessions* album, with a clear desire to make the crowd move. The return to the rock has treated the band extremely well. Their power-pop sound cuts cleanly and the hyper-aggressive poignant lyrics move both the heart and the ass.

Adding a powerful contribution to this split, Kitty Little rock and roll through nine songs lunging for grace amidst slashing guitars and high-speed songs about lost love and the power of rock n roll to lift us all up. Broadcasting their unabashed adoration for the music they play, Kitty Little give every ounce of their energy on this record.

Before folks were too cool to admit that they loved to ROCK, they would worship bands in small towns like the Kiss Ups and Kitty Little. This album is a testament to the love of DIY culture, hometown rock n roll, and beautiful creativity.

- Maxwell Schnuer
On the Road with Baldo

words Marrit Ingman illustration Breakfast and Chris

Friday

I am writing this sentence on a swaggy notepad from the Los Angeles location of a national hotel chain, room 1036. We are 1,500 miles from home with a 17-month-old who has, since our departure two days ago, cut four molars and an incisor. We have all been awake since 4:30 a.m. This is Extreme Parenting. There’s no room for a laptop.

We are here with approximately 200 mamas, daddies, babies, and kids at an event called Mama Gathering 2003. We are talking with one another about educational options, peaceful parenting, the mass media, teen parenting, and zine publishing. One session, open only to adult women, is devoted to empowerment through stripping; another elucidates the world of sex toys. There are dreadlocked hippies in hemp drawstring pants, hip-hugging scenester chicks with little cat’s-eye glasses, and Radical Cheerleaders in jackboots and split skirts. There are toddlers wearing mari- bou boots and Elton John sunglasses. There is a guy named Bruce whose T-shirt proclaims in 1970s felt iron-on letters, “Sperm Donor Dad;” he spends the session picking his toenails and hyping his zine about taking preschoolers to political demonstrations. Others in the group are bona-fide Internet celebrities, with only their LiveJournal screen names printed on their badges.

I initially react with a crisis of coolness. I am not worthy of these people. The Crib Police are going to break down our door and put the baby back in our bed. They’ll confiscate our crappy snacks and make us unschool. Other mothers are bonding at the bar, emitting girlish squeals and puffs of secondhand clove smoke. I feel a shit fit coming on. Sure enough, I’m starting my second postpartum period. Unprepared, I stuff a size four diaper in my pants and head to Ralph’s.

None of the hotel’s other guests know what to do with us — not the new-agey spiritual people using the ballroom, not the family reunioners wearing matching T-shirts, not the Korean tour group. If you really want to freak people out, assemble a large group of children and mothers in a public place without apparent purpose. It’s some freaky shit — freakier than a Critical Mass bicycle demonstration or mimes in a park. People get scared. What are they doing here? Don’t they have somewhere else to be?

We conclude the evening with a potluck at Chace Park. Toddlers run amok, climbing trees and rolling down hills. A single student mama is shooting her thesis film; her four-year-old feeds strawberries and a non-vegan chocolate cake to my toddler, whom we’ll call “Baldo.” There will be eczema tomorrow but it’s worth it.

I am beginning to feel comfortable with motherhood at last. My child is doing nothing other children aren’t doing. Nobody has X-ray vision that will see through my pants to my cesarean scar. I have something, at least one thing, in common with everyone here. I take a deep breath, the first in a long, long time.

Saturday

I miss the morning session on educational options because Baldo is teething, screaming, and whining around. We spend the 90 minutes climbing up and down the stairs, then passing out in our room.

The bad news is that lunch, for us, is sandwiches with hummus and sprouts. All
the other available options have some form of nuts. (Why do vegans eat so many nuts? Don’t they worry about allergies? We are truly becoming The People Who Could Eat Nothing.) The good news is Jim volunteers to go shopping with Baldo, leaving me to attend the last two sessions solo. I can hit the bar with other conventioners — part of the Minneapolis contingent, the sound recordist from the thesis film, and a Los Angeles mama with a lip ring and Bettie Page hairdo. I just have enough time to pound a whiskey sour on my almost empty stomach and run off to my session on zines and alternative media, where I drunkenly accost the moderator.

Dinner is a party with a buffet. Sugared-up and napless toddlers surround the toy pile like carnivorous ants from the Amazon eyeballing a cricket corpse. Baldo patiently waits his turn for a kid-sized electric guitar, with pickups and everything; then he begins pouring it into the floor. Jim is secretly pleased. “Like Kurt,” he tells me later.

A crunchy couple in line with us for avocado burritos observes Baldo and asks how he’s sleeping. Their four-month-old is slumped angelically on the father’s shoulder. We explain about the teething. I gush about how I don’t want to use TYLENOL — it’s hard on their livers and can have adverse reactions and I know I really should be able to just use organic chamomile tea or clove oil and nurse on demand. I should be supporting our cooperative supermarket. I’m getting really wound up and they’re waving their hands at me to calm me down. “I’d totally do it,” the woman says. And the Baby Orajel? “Oh, yeah,” she agrees. “If I had to, sure.”

Monday

We have errands to run in L.A., including a visit to the Directors’ Guild of America building, where Jim has a meeting. Maybe I should be uncomfortable about our whole family barging in, but the office appears to be staffed entirely by women, and they know we’re on vacation.

I breastfeed looking out the window at the Sunset Strip. As we are trudging down the hall, people come out of their offices to see the baby. I’m afraid we’re disturbing them, but they’re smiling and laughing, telling Baldo he’s cute, which makes him preen.

Tuesday

Morning is spent at Big Corona, the beach where Jim and I went to wade after we decided to get married over breakfast in a diner. We heft Baldo’s stroller and carry it like an imperial litter onto the sand. He’s never been to the ocean before, but he toddles into it fearlessly, laughing.

He only cries when we eventually have to pack up and clean off. We hold him under the showers and rinse the sand off. The water is cold and he curls up like a fish.

Wednesday and Thursday

It is raining for the second day, forcing us to scrap our outdoor plans.

I tire out at the aquarium. I want to sit down and stop making decisions for a while — where to go, when to leave, where to park, what to eat, whom to call. I want to make a sandwich and sit on my own couch.

Baldo’s teeth are going to be the end of me. I’m so tired of giving comfort all the time. All the pain, the insecurity, the big scary developmental milestones. The fantasies of being single intrude. If somebody gets hurt and needs a Band-Aid, all heads turn toward me. I’m The Mom now. I’m the one who brings along home remedies for heartburn, jellyfish stings, and road rash.

dump waste. We spread Caulerpa taxifolia everywhere. Why do we have to destroy everything? I couldn’t even look at the guitar-nosed shovelfish without wanting to eat it.

Jim’s red cap bobs toward me. Baldo is grinning.

“We looked at all the animals,” Jim reports. “And we touched the back of the swordfish and felt it move.”

It’s affirming when your child touches something for the first time. The neurons fire and information becomes a sensation, then a memory, maybe even part of a personality. Maybe you’ve watched a person change forever. It’s not the Maybe he’ll be a brilliant biologist! but. Maybe he’ll be a telephone lineman. But he’ll be a telephone lineman who felt a swordfish react to his touch, who felt its scales ripple and smiled because it was beautiful.

Friday

Jim’s family comes over to meet Baldo, many for the first time. Jim’s “Aunt” Catherine is telling me about her daughter’s colic.

“We’d all put on our pajamas at night and drive 30 miles until she stopped screaming,” she explains. “If it hadn’t been for my mother helping us, I don’t know if we would have made it.”

What does it mean to ’not make it’? I want to ask. What would you have done?

I imagine that I am standing across from a 30-years-older version of myself. She’s gracefully holding a drink and laughing. She has become What We Mean When We Talk About Mothers — nurturing, encouraging, gentle, and composed.

But she’s still me. She finished her Tom Collins a little too quickly. She has a tiny little pinprick scar where her nostril used to be pierced.

And maybe when the party is over, when fiancées have been met and graduations celebrated and houses warmed, she’ll say her goodbyes — heels clacking down the driveway, keys in her pocket, and Public Enemy waiting in the stereo.

Mama Gathering 2004 is scheduled for July 16-18 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. For more information, visit the official Gathering web site at www.mamagathering.org.

I’m so tired of giving comfort all the time. All the pain, the insecurity, the big scary developmental milestones. The fantasies of being single intrude. If somebody gets hurt and needs a Band-Aid, all heads turn toward me. I’m The Mom now. I’m the one who brings along home remedies for heartburn, jellyfish stings, and road rash.
Thicker Than Blood

by Baba Israel & Emil “DJ Center Herscher of Open Thought

Baba:
Family is a word that has never been clear-cut for me. My parents were both rebels breaking away from their respective families. My father left his Jewish immigrant experience of 50s Brooklyn to explore the world through art and politics. My mother left Australian beach culture to travel to Amsterdam via India to explore experimental film. They met in a new family — The Living Theater, an anarchist non-violent political theater company.

I was raised in the Living Theater. It was my first family and took the place of cousins, aunts, and uncles. My family was Jewish, black, gay, straight, old, young, and all artists connected through vision — not necessarily blood. We lived collectively, but when my parents decided not to go back on the road with Living Theater we moved to downtown New York. We went from a group of 10 to a nuclear family of three. We had no car, no house, just a small apartment in New York City. I had limited experience with my blood relatives. We were always the weird family members with different clothes and different beliefs. As I stepped into my own life, I found that community and building collectives became important to me. It brought me back to my roots and filled that family void. I went from group to group searching for people I could truly call family.

When I went to Australia for the first time as an adult in 1995, I met some of my blood relatives and just could not connect. Instead, I began to build a new community connecting with amazing artists who were intelligent and full of passion and compassion. I went on a three-year journey forming the hip-hop group Meta Bass ‘n’ Breath. This group was a family for me. I grew, learned, and made mistakes, but they stuck by me. It has been within the family of choice that I have found resolution, inspiration, and support to carry through life.

A couple of years back I inherited some cousins — Emil and Yako, two cats with beards who were into good food and hip-hop.

Together we formed the group Open Thought. People always ask if we are related, and in a way we are. I have started to feel more and more that relating and family are not so much based on blood, but the creative expression and purpose that really brings people together.

When Open Thought got the opportunity to tour Australia and New Zealand, I was excited; it was a chance for the two sides of my family background to meet. It had all the emotion I imagine a family reunion would have — plus turntables, a sound system, and Afrika Bambaataa (who we opened for on the tour). My old friend Trent Roden was the man to help get us out there, releasing our record on his indie label Earshot. We toured with my old friends and Australian artists DJ Nic Toth, Trey, and Maya Jupiter, and performed shows with Morganics, Elf Transporter, Rory, and Sloth of Meta Bass ‘n’ Breath. It was powerful and a lot of fun to watch my creative ‘relatives’ build, speaking that common tongue of hip-hop and love of music.

Emil:
Arriving in Auckland, New Zealand, we could already feel that things were different on this side of the world. Folks seemed to be generally less stressed out and more open to building with people they didn’t know. When we connected our flights and landed in Sydney, we could feel this same openness alive in the media. Listening to the radio we heard musical matches that could never have been found on commercial radio in the U.S. Sure, we heard the same Missy Elliot jams that Clear Channel runs every 15 minutes, but down there mainstream artists from America are played less, and dispersed between them are an incredible amount of local artists that get love on national radio. Driving in a cab, we heard songs from Morganics, the Heard, and 1200 Technics, in addition to indie artists from the U.S. like Mr. Lif, Aesop Rock, and ourselves. Local and independent artists are lucky to chart on college stations here and, even then, those college radio signals only reach an eight-block radius. These radio waves were traveling throughout their country.

In Wellington, we found a rich and collaborative musical family with musicians moving from group to group to create a vibrant scene of hip-hop, soul, jazz, dub, drum ‘n’ bass, and afro beat. The local “One Love” Festival brought out around 10,000 people to enjoy free local music organized by community station Radio Active. We met groups such as Trinity Roots, GND, and members of Fat Freddy’s Drop. We were welcomed by local organizers Topie and Tara who connected us with the local artistic community.

Another aspect that stood out to me was the amount of community support local artists received. An artist like King Kapısı can fill the hip-hop tent on Australia’s Big Day Out tour, with the majority of the audience going lyric-for-lyric with him during his set. Elf Transporter can pack a club every week at the Phat Logic night in Melbourne, to an audience that holds no preconceived notion of what they need to hear to make them feel good. Only this level of openness and artistic freedom can produce nights that feature the tongue-twisting ragga lyrics of Elf, B-boy Acrobatics of Morganics, and a full on Meta Bass ‘n’ Breath reunion set complete with as much lyricism as magical theater antics. The government of New Zealand funds local music and requires the radio broadcasters to support local artists. It’s this kind of upbringing that nurtures the artistic families of Australia and New Zealand and allows these artists to keep creating the music they love and keep talking about race, gender, and class issues that are relevant to their lives, while maintaining the support from fans.

To find out more about Open Thought and their travels, visit www.openthoughtmusic.com.
Mehdi and Leyla Zana aren’t your traditional married couple. After celebrating their wedding in 1976, only seven of those 28 years have been spent together in freedom. For years, they have worked to give the Kurdish people a voice. Peacefully expressing her beliefs has come at a cost for Leyla, landing her in a Turkish prison for the last ten years. Sadly, this situation is all too familiar to the Zana family, as Leyla’s husband Mehdi Zana has been similarly jailed on four separate occasions for a combined fifteen years.

This past November, Amnesty International invited Mehdi Zana to speak to U.S. audiences on behalf of his wife, about his own ordeals, and Kurdish human rights, making stops at Brown, Princeton, and Boston University to share his stories. While in New York, he visited a demonstration in his wife’s honor outside the Turkish consulate, and spoke to various government officials and media outlets while in Washington D.C.

Even though it’s no surprise that he is advocating his wife’s release from prison, it is surprising that their lives have rarely intersected. Just after Leyla’s birth, Mehdi was already 20 years old, returning from Turkish military service to continue his work as a tailor in the Southeastern section of Turkey, which houses a majority of the country’s 15 million Kurds. He slowly explains through a translator that while he was a tailor, he saw the discontent of the common Kurd. His people were being stripped of their heritage and dignity simply because they were the minority population in Turkey. With knowledge of this repression, he was motivated to become politically active.

After organizing the first rallies of Kurdish people in over four decades, Mehdi was jailed one year for his distribution of leaflets and again later for three-and-a-half years after holding a public meeting to discuss Kurdish rights. While gaining respect throughout the region, these arrests inspired his passionate rise in national politics.

The small-town tailor with little formal education was democratically elected in 1977 to be mayor of Diyarbakir, a city consisting mostly of Kurds. Located in Southeastern Turkey, many consider the city to be the cultural and political capital for the Turkish Kurds. By winning over 50% of the vote, while competing against 14 candidates, his immense popularity in the region was validated.

While mayor, the Turkish authorities despised his efforts, even instituting an economic blockade on the region. Rather than letting the region crumble, he brokered a deal with France to bus in thirty truckloads of food and other necessities. It was these efforts that made Mehdi so popular among the Kurds and so loathed among the Turkish authorities.

The reverence that the Kurdish people have for Mehdi was evidenced by their reaction to his tour. At the speaking stop in Princeton, New Jersey, four fellow Kurds arrived early to meet Mehdi. The men had recently immigrated to the country and currently reside in Paterson. “To our people he has done so much. He is famous for all the good he has done for the Kurds in Turkey. When we heard he was coming to New Jersey we had to meet him.”

Unfortunately, all the progress that Mehdi struggled to gain ended in 1980, the year of a violent coup, which brewed new feelings of contempt for the Kurds and landed him in prison for a third time. This time Mehdi was imprisoned as a father as well, leaving behind his pregnant wife and Ronay, his five-year-old son. Mehmet Akbas, a Kurd now living in Rhode Island who helped in the planning of Mehdi’s tour, explains, “It was at that time I started to develop an admiration for him because he was willing to stay in prison because of his insistence in speaking Kurdish.”

Leyla spent those long years providing for herself and raising her two children in a hostile society. Repeatedly being refused to visit Mehdi after waiting all day and night on numerous occasions, prompted Leyla to protest with the other visitors. It was her first taste of Kurdish activism. She continued by learning Turkish and getting a high school diploma, while working with women’s groups and a Diyarbakir branch of the Human Rights Association.
During his speeches, Mehdi captivates the audience with his harrowing imagery. Shocked, they sit in grave silence at human rights violations Mehdi was forced to survive. His stories are unforgettable, as he describes his cell: “They were real small, about 2 meters long and not even a meter wide. The bed was small, I could only lay on my side, unable to sleep. I felt like I was in a coffin. I could not move or even extend my arms. I felt twice imprisoned: deprived of my freedom and without any power to move.”

While Mehdi was struggling to live, Leyla was struggling to keep her family together. During his imprisonment Amnesty International named Mehdi as a prisoner of conscience for his arrest based solely on non-violent words and political thought. Along with working to free him, the organization also sent funds to help Leyla support her children.

For the briefest time, the couple enjoyed freedom together. The same year Mehdi was released from prison, Leyla was democratically elected to the Turkish parliamentary to represent the Diyarbakir region. Two years later, she infuriated Turkish authorities by speaking out in Washington D.C. before the U.S. Congress. During the briefing, she shared her stories of atrocities committed against the Kurds and laid out the necessary steps towards reform. Human Rights Watch reported in Free Expression in Turkey that this Washington trip led to charges against Leyla.

By the end of 1994, an unfair trial left Leyla Zana and three colleagues in jail with a fifteen-year sentence. Simple peaceful expressions, such as wearing clothes with the traditional Kurdish colors of yellow, green, and red, led to their guilty verdict. “Most traffic lights are red, yellow, green, but not where I was mayor,” says Mehdi of the colors, “Instead the light that means ‘go’ is blue because they don’t want it to remind us of our Kurdish heritage.”

After taking her oath for parliament in the Turkish language, Leyla proceeded to take it in Kurdish as well. These actions also led to her conviction since Turkish authorities did not permit the Kurdish language in public, even if it was a democratically elected representative of the Kurds. Leyla felt protecting her language and culture was too important to ignore as she describes in her book, Writings from Prison.” “The relation to language is vital, essential. It is an almost physical love. Nothing in the world could get us to give up our mother tongue. Look, every bird likes to sing in its own way.”

The trial was fraught with irregularities, including the murder of her defense lawyer. Despite the outcry of many international organizations, including the European Court of Human Rights, Leyla was imprisoned and forced to work for Kurdish rights from behind bars. Numerous nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize helped recognize her desire for a better Turkey. She was rewarded for her efforts with the respected Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 1996. Unable to attend the award ceremony due to her circumstances, she wrote a letter to the committee, in which she states, “My family and I have suffered great hardship and persecution, but I do not feel hatred for anyone. My only passion is justice.”

Coinciding with mounting pressure from around the world, Leyla was offered a medical release, but refused to accept the injustice. She felt it was important to be released unconditionally to show her innocence and as a sign of reform and progress.

Leyla’s activism from prison is improving Kurdish rights, albeit slowly. Turkey is also trying to implement some changes as it attempts to gain admission into the European Union. Before accession talks begin, certain human rights reforms must be met.

These reforms include the retrial of Leyla and her colleagues. The retrial started over a year ago, and there has been a flurry of national and international media activity. All of the reports admit that the second trial is much like the first, with similar irregularities in the proceedings. On eleven separate occasions, their appeals for release during retrial has been rejected. The trial has been marked as so unfair, that Leyla and her colleagues have begun boycotting the proceedings.

Leyla remains in Ankara Central Prison, despite the outrage of the world community and those advocating human and Kurdish rights. In a letter addressed to Amnesty International members, she speaks of the most recent reforms, “As you know, winds of change [have been taking] place around the world, [and] has also been affecting Turkey. The speed and intensity of this wind is varying from on geography to another. Sometimes, it loses its strength because of those who persist on the status quo and sometimes it gains extreme speed when taboos are collapsed. Persistence on the old system, political and social unrest and alternating between darkness and lightness does prevent change from taking place.”

Even when she eventually reunites with Mehdi and her two children, Leyla and her family will continue pushing for reform. Her letter concludes, “the greatest service to mankind is to help bring peace to our country, then to the region and the world with emphasis on friendship, brotherhood, and respect.”

The first thing that you notice on Someone for Everyone is Julie Shields’s voice. Her plaintive, little-girl vocals dominate the eleven tracks of this release by the Lawrence, Kansas-based trio. Although they do not vary much, they are effective, since both the production and the songs are built around them.

This is only the group’s second release, but Jason Shields (bass and loops) has mastered the studio. There is a lot of variety, with some parts backed quietly by Julie’s guitar, some by the band, and others enhanced with electronic effects or Julie’s Farfisa. Kevin Trevino is a percussionist with the Kansas City Symphony, so he often veers from the usual four-to-a-measure drum beats with unusual rhythms.

The Capsules have been described as a shoe-gazing group, which is sometimes a warning that things can get slow in the middle of a CD. Fortunately the melodic tunes can support interesting lyrics like “Bright day glows with light/From holding hands at night/We make a net of ghosts/Of lives we used to know,” from “Net of Ghosts.”

This is a quiet CD, but the energy never lags. The riffs are simple, but they are always in the right place and appropriate for the song. There is a good portion of a garage/indie sound, but neither the guitars nor the rhythm will overwhelm those who like quiet listening. This is a mellow work without being trite or boring.

And the group was asked to record a song for the Nickelodeon NickToon “SpongeBob SquarePants.” How much more appealing can you get?

-Dave Howell
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Slowly, mainstream society is beginning to toss that idyllic portrait of what family is supposed to look like. As this country becomes more tolerant and diverse, so do our families. There are single moms and dads, interracial families, and same-sex parents, all of whom face particular challenges within their nest. But beyond these unique snapshots, there are also a number of universals which all families experience. There is planning, eating, and shouting; laughing, dreaming, and yard work. Meet Theresa, Ani, and Sylvia, a family just like yours. And pretty different too.

I set my alarm clock at 7:40. That's the time my daughter Sylvia likes to get up for school. If I try to wake her earlier, she'll sleepily remind me that it's not time yet. When the alarm goes off, I put my glasses and my nightgown on, and crawl across my spouse. She affectionately cups my breast with her hand as I pass. I go to Sylvia's room and tap on her door.

I get off my work shifts at midnight, but I don't start until 3:00 p.m., so I choose to take Sylvia to her alternative-pedagogy high school in the morning. This means I get to see her during waking hours. "I love you tons," I tell her. "I love you infinity percent," she says. I love that. She first said that when she was seven.

On the way to school we grab a snack. Sometimes I forget to give her lunch money, and she has to borrow from friends. I'm sleepy and forgetful in the morning, although I'm less so now, because I take a diazepam before I go to bed.

My doctor prescribed the calmative because I find it hard to sleep well after a night of driving a municipal bus. It isn't the bus driving that bothers me, but the number of people who loudly challenge me as a punishment for being a "fucking faggot." I have "transitioned" long enough that I pass for most people as a woman, but there are many who hold a grudge. They remember when my makeup could not hide my beard, when I had a flat chest. "Hello, SIR," they snarl as they board.
My family — what’s not to love? At the core I have an adoring partner and a brilliant 15-year-old step-kid. We strive for honesty, humor, and compassion in our communication and have a deep respect for one another.

In my life, gaining self-knowledge and being true to me is of highest importance. The first time Theresa invited me over to her apartment, our conversation turned to the importance of self-knowledge and awareness — a yearning to quest for truth and beauty that we both felt strongly about. Throughout our relationship, we have challenged and nurtured each other to live up to those values.

Allowing myself to be with Theresa, at first, was a challenge — I knew I was intrigued by her mind. Our conversations would be spoken at lightning speed in a rush to get all of the ideas we sparked off each other out on the table, and I thought that getting an adorable 5-year-old to hang out with was a great bonus. But I had never pictured myself in a long term relationship with a man, and for all intents and purposes, Theresa (then Steve) seemed to be just that. Still, I would joke with friends that I hadn’t put myself out there as a queer activist to fight the right to love whomever I want and to love freely just to fetter myself, as the universe enjoys a deeply ironic and wry smile.

But hey, I enjoy a good ironic plot twist myself, so I opened up to the love that was growing between us. Discussing gender is something that we have always done — as a dyke, I was not used to doling out chores by gender role. When Theresa and I began living together, assumptions about gender would surface, providing great opportunities to sort out how artificially imposed ideas of gender have a way of worming themselves very deeply into one’s consciousness — even when one has tried hard to unlearn sexism. This was true for both of us — in three of four relationships with women, I had usually been the person that would keep up on some car maintenance like adding oil and water, inflate tires, etc.; however, I found that within weeks of being with Steve, he began to just do it, and I was very happy to let him — until one day our conversation turned towards encroaching gender role typing.

It was in talking through gender and our feelings about gender that about four years into the relationship, I began very strongly to get the idea that Steve was transgendered. It has taken a lot of encouragement from me and many other close friends and family members to allow Theresa to emerge. And she is precious.

I feel very fortunate to have gone through such an intimate process with a partner — that we both had the courage to stick together and nurture each other through this transitioning. And as if that wasn’t enough, Sylvia has been very accepting and supportive throughout this time as well (Theresa came out to Sylvia when she was about 10 as a transgendered person, but none of us were quite sure what that would eventually come to mean). The process is ongoing, with Theresa living, breathing and being Theresa 24/7 for the last three years.

We have many of the challenges that most couples face — conflicting schedules mean we don’t see very much of each other.

continued next page
Sometimes, when I’m feeling particularly provocative, I like to tell people that I have three moms. My true “Mom” is Irene, my biological mother, who is Bengali and a converted Reform Jew. I have known my stepmom Ani since I was five, when she began courting my father, Theresa, after Theresa (then Steve) and Irene separated. If the definition of a mother is a woman who acts as a parent to a child, then all three of these people are mothers, and I don’t have a dad. But I do, and I still call Theresa “Daddy”.

People I meet have a really hard time with this. “But ‘Dad’ is a male pronoun,” they tell me. “How can you believe your father is a woman if you still call him ‘Daddy’?” I don’t see what the problem is. “Daddy” is just a name, not a role. And Theresa still fulfills her “roles” as a father — she just wears a skirt while doing it. It seems to me that when someone comes out as another gender in this culture, common protocol is to dump all past identification and become a completely new person. I think that it has to do with the definition of gender in our culture. You recognize a woman by her made-up face and her breasts. A man has chest hair and a deep voice. I was raised to reject these definitions, and so I was shocked when my Dad decided that she needed to wear makeup and have larger breasts in order to be feminine. As far as I could tell, so was Ani. “Why would you do that to yourself?” we asked her. “Why succumb to those ideas of what a woman is?”

I understand now how hard it is for my father. She works five days a week as a bus driver, mingling with all sorts, including homophobes. I nurse the idea that these jerks are simply stupid, and that’s why they feel the need to point out Theresa’s “faults.” But really they are working as hard as they can to suppress her, to enforce her role as a ‘man.’ These people must seek others out, searching for what they see as abnormalities. Maybe they are closeted and projecting their self-hatred. Maybe they are conspirators, at the ready to crush gender variance wherever it raises its head. The reason may not matter in the long run, but the effect bothers me. I worry about Theresa.

I go to an alternative K-12 school, and within my group of friends, my Dad isn’t really a source of much speculation. They all refer to her as “she” and “Sylvia’s Dad.” I have had some trouble in the past with teachers, but I have so little patience for adult ignorance that I end up shouting over them, going over their head to the Principal or counselor. All of the staff at my school are great. Some of the younger students (freshman and middle school kids) have given me
How To Get Pregnant
by Fiona Thomson

Most women who want to get pregnant do it the old fashioned way: they find the right guy, get married, and, well, you know. But what about those gals who want to have kids but don’t have access to the necessary bodily fluids? Single women, lesbians, or women whose guys lack the ability or inclination to share are faced with a problem. A problem to which there is a solution! DIY pregnancy may not be for everyone, but it worked for me.

1. **Find a guy.** While this may sound old fashioned, there’s no getting around it. Until science provides an alternative — you gotta get the goods from the source. (At $175 a pop, plus “registration fees” and up to $140 shipping, the sperm bank route just wasn’t an option for me.) I asked a few folks before settling on Mr. Right — the partner of a friend, someone a bit older than me who already had kids; not someone likely to have a change of heart or to sue me for custody. He’s a wonderful, bright, generous guy with a minimum of inheritable illnesses. I’ve gotten to know him more since he volunteered to help, and I just feel better and better about him.

2. **Protect yourself** — healthwise and legally. Everyone involved (the donor and I) got tested for the most popular STDS. Enough said.

   I did some research and found that in my state, to protect my donor from child-support claims and me from a custody battle, the vital fluid had to pass through the hands of a medical intermediary before I used it for my nefarious purposes. After a number of phone calls, I found someone willing to help out. My donor and I met at her office. He handed her a bag containing a jam jar, and then she handed the bag to me. Instant legal protection. (Please note: The laws around donor insemination are still new, they vary from state-to-state, and are hard to enforce.)

3. **Do the deed.** You can have your midwife, nurse practitioner, doctor or partner do this for you, but to be truly DIY, you’ve gotta “do it yourself.”

   First of all, act fast. The swimmers will live for a few hours if kept warm, but the sooner you use them, the better. And don’t be squeamish! When I unwrapped my jam jar I was a little surprised. Having learned all I know about the subject from gay male porn, I expected about a quart of fluid, but was pleased to find a much more manageable quantity.

   You can use the classic turkey baster, a syringe with the needle removed, or an oral medicine syringe. I used a method suggested by friend — the Instead cup. The Instead cup is a relatively new product that is used instead of a tampon. It looks like a diaphragm. (A diaphragm or cervical cap would work just as well.)

   I poured the Stuff into the Instead cup, and then, being very careful not to spill, put the Instead cup in, well, you can figure it out. I laid still for about half an hour, and just to be sure, left the cup in place for the rest of the day.

   It didn’t take the first time, but the second try worked — pretty impressive by any standards.

   Once I found myself pregnant, I was shocked and awed to discover my body changing, growing and behaving in new, uncooperative ways. I felt exhausted all the time. I started peeing all the time. I threw up periodically. In a few months, I started to feel a little someone swimming in my belly and at the end of the required waiting period, I found myself pushing a 5-and-something-pound miracle who appeared to have just arrived from outer space out of my womb and into the competent hands of my midwives.

   Now, a year and a half later, thanks to a very generous guy and some DIY hoodoo, I’ve got a charming monkey to keep me busy for the next couple decades. In retrospect, getting pregnant is clearly the easy part — even if you don’t do it the old fashioned way. ✠
Do you recall, by any chance, Section 101 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996?

This was the opening section of the bill more commonly known as “welfare reform,” a 260-page document that, when President Clinton signed it in August of that year, earned the odd distinction of being the only pledge from Newt Gingrich’s Contract With America to survive into actual law. That law technically expired in September of 2002, except that Congress kept putting off a decision on what to do next. Staring down the maw of nasty partisan debates, those in Washington concluded that it was easier to live with a system that everyone had grown used to, even if some kept pointing out that its one definable accomplishment — reducing the number of people receiving welfare benefits — was akin to bragging about the role of tobacco companies in keeping down Social Security payments. Inertia is a powerful thing; in politics, doubly so.

But we were talking about Section 101. For a law that is ostensibly about aid to impoverished families, it’s a rather unlikely opening, saying nothing at all about welfare, or for that matter about poverty. It begins:

(1) Marriage is the foundation of a successful society.

It then continues:

(2) Marriage is an essential institution of a successful society which promotes the interests of children.

This goes on for quite a while. Section 101 contains much talk of “responsible fatherhood and motherhood” and the percentage of parents who pay child support, detouring into teen motherhood (“(D) Mothers under 20 years of age are at the greatest risk of bearing low birth weight babies”), before concluding with the declaration that “in light of this demonstration of the crisis in our Nation, it is the sense of the Congress that prevention of out-of-wedlock pregnancy and reduction in out-of-wedlock birth are very important Government interests.”

Reading Section 101, you’d think that the welfare law wasn’t about welfare at all, or getting people out of poverty, or who the government will aid and why, but about the sanctity of families. If so, it has a funny way of showing it.

There’s a problem with writing about welfare, one that most every journalist who’s tried to take on the task has run into: The subject refuses to stay put. Ask someone who’s been on welfare about the system, pre- or post- “reform,” and the conversation will soon be ranging far afield, taking in everything from child care to medical bills to job prospects. Ask someone about welfare, and before you can stop her, she’ll be talking about her life.

Take Jennifer. She first came to my attention when I was researching an article about welfare and education — a combustible mix, given that the 1996 law demanded a one-year limit on time spent in school while getting a welfare check. (The one-year limit has, like much of welfare reform, been applied stringently by some states and ignored by others. One of the never-ending debates over reauthorizing the 1996 law is whether to close these loopholes or blow them wide open.) As I pored through the statistics — a high school diploma can boost earnings by more than 30%, a B.A. by almost double — and searched for the two-line quote that would distill the experience of a million varied souls, a message showed up on an e-mail list for welfare experts and
researchers: My neighbor is on welfare, and her caseworker is telling her she can’t go to college. Is there anything she can do?

Jennifer lived in Southern California, and though she didn’t want her full name used for fear of retribution from welfare workers, she was happy to tell her story for the public record. “Call whenever you like,” she says. “My car’s not working right now, so I’m not going anywhere.”

“It all started out,” she began, “when I got laid off work about three years ago.” At the time, she had two small children and a third on the way, with few options to support herself. The father of her younger child refused to pay child support. Her oldest’s dad, her ex-husband, paid all of $389 a month. Evicted from her apartment, living in a motel with her newborn while her two eldest went to live with their respective dads, she saw only one option remaining: “I ended up having to bite my pride and go down and apply for welfare.”

The welfare office was less than helpful. “They said, ‘Go to a shelter, that’d be better for you.’ They argued with me, why didn’t I come get welfare earlier,” she said, “I thought you’d be glad I wasn’t taking advantage of the state. I’d rather struggle and try to do it on my own. And I tried, but now I need help.”

“She couldn’t understand that. She thought I was slow, or learning disabled, or on drugs; because what was my problem that I couldn’t get a job?”

Finally, after a couple of nail-biting weeks, Jennifer was approved for welfare benefits. Under welfare reform, the checks — about $600 a month, in her case — come accompanied by a demand: participation in “work activities,” an odd euphemism that can include everything from a paying job to “workfare” (in which your welfare check is your only pay, your hours carefully calibrated to ensure you’re earning minimum wage) to “job search,” which in some states has meant plunking you down in a room with a Yellow Pages and a pencil. This is the wildly popular element that helped carry the 1996 bill to victory: No more would the poor be encouraged just to sit at home with their kids and cash those $600 checks; instead, they’d be launched into the workforce to become productive citizens. As welfare-reform guru Jason Turner, who remade the welfare bureaucracies of Wisconsin and New York City before going on to a job in the Bush administration, told an NPR interviewer: “Work will make you free.” Neither Turner nor the interviewer noted at the time that this phrase had previously been inscribed over the gates of Auschwitz.

As the mother of a baby under six months old, Jennifer was at first exempt from the work rules; then her four-year-old daughter developed a hip displacement that required surgery, spending six months in a body cast and earning her mother another respite. The cast finally came off, though, and Jennifer reported for her work activities.

Unlike the so-called “multiple-barrier” hard cases that welfare reformers like to bemoan, this was not someone unfamiliar with the working world. In an earlier life, Jennifer had held down a job as an administrative assistant, earning $12 an hour, enough to pay her bills. “I used to have, I thought, somewhat okay job skills. But my self-esteem was shot. My skills are totally rusty, I know — I’ve been watching *Barney* for three years! I have not socialized with anybody, I have no friends, it’s my children and me — I’m on welfare, I don’t go out. I talk to children all day, that’s about it.”

Jennifer was promised a four-day workshop on finding work, but that never materialized. Instead, she was instructed to put together a resume and sent to “job search”: endless hours sitting in front of job center computers, scouring the Internet for postings. On her second day, she was pointed at a job fair and instructed to ask everyone there for a job. “I thought, ‘I am not prepared for this’...”

Jennifer was hoping to get a job assessment to find out what jobs were available, but her caseworker would have none of it. “She said: ‘We don’t care if you get a good job, just get a job.’ Those were her exact words: ‘We don’t care if you get a good
One of the bitter ironies of the “end of welfare” is that with many of the jobs available, the pay is so low that workers are still eligible for public assistance. Last year Wal-Mart was revealed to be handing out instructions to its low-wage workers on how to apply for food stamps and Medicaid to supplement their meager wages.

job, just get a job.’ She said, ‘You can still get welfare.’ Well, heck, sign me up!”

(One of the bitter ironies of the “end of welfare” is that with many of the jobs available, the pay is so low that workers are still eligible for public assistance. Last year Wal-Mart was revealed to be handing out instructions to its low-wage workers on how to apply for food stamps and Medicaid to supplement their meager wages.)

Meanwhile, another consequence of Jennifer’s decision to apply for welfare was coming back to haunt her. When she first applied, Jennifer knew that more than her pride was at stake: she would also have to give up the child support payments she was receiving for her oldest child, and allow the state to go after her daughter’s father for child support money as well. This practice, known as “recoupment,” is another arrow in the welfare reform quiver, ensuring that poor women have exhausted every last source of income before turning to the state for help.

For Jennifer, it unleashed a nightmare. “During the time when my daughter was having surgery, her father decided to take me to court for full custody, because the D.A. had gone after him for child support. That’s another reason I didn’t want to go on welfare: I wasn’t getting child support from my daughter’s father — I’d rather do it on my own, and struggle, than to have to deal with his crap. He never saw her for two years, but now he wants full custody. He waits until my daughter’s in the hospital, a pain-release thing injecting morphine every five minutes. I was just run-down ragged.”

The court gave the father majority custody, a ruling Jennifer blames on a lousy lawyer. (“When I represented myself, I did fine. When I hired an attorney, I got my daughter taken away.”) The welfare department promptly decided that since she was no longer her daughter’s sole caregiver, she was no longer eligible for cash aid. “I notified the child care worker that I have my daughter during the summer every other week, so I need child care paid for a whole week. She said, ‘We can’t do that.’ I would have to pay for it on my own. Mind you, in order to go to the job search program, I *have* to have child care. So do I pay for it on my own? I don’t have a dollar extra, and I’m not getting paid for the job search.”

We’d been on the phone for over half an hour now, and Jennifer had finally gotten around to talking about what I’d called about: her failed attempt to get the welfare department to let her go back to school instead of banning her head against the “job search” process. “I kept telling my case manager, ‘I’m not asking you to pay for my schooling.’ I don’t want to be a rocket scientist — I just want some kind of trade so I can support myself.” She was informed that she was welcome to take classes — so long as it wasn’t during her 32 hours a week of work activities.

“And when,” she asked, “do I see my kids?”

At this writing, Congress had just deferred yet again a decision on renewing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act, putting off a vote until at least June. Advocates for the poor are bitterly divided over whether this is a good thing or bad: the Senate bill (though not the House) includes $1.2 billion a year in new child-care funds, but these would come packaged with a requirement of more hours spent in work activities, possibly gobbling up any gains with the need for more babysitting hours. More education options are another possibility, but with its other hand Congress is threatening to hike the “participation rates” required of states, eliminating a loophole that has allowed states like Maine to run successful college programs for welfare recipients.

At the end of our conversation, I asked Jennifer what she’d like to see Congress do. She paused, possibly considering how to legislate nicer caseworkers or an employer who would hire her at $12 an hour. Then she said: “Doing something to make sure you don’t end up on it again would be nice.”

There have been a couple times in my life I really could have used a book like this, and there is also a lot of information in here. I hope I never need to use. This is an amazingly readable guide for how to deal with a with law enforcement. It goes through everything from simple encounters like traffic stops through surveillance, warrantless searches, the rights of non-U.S. citizens, and working effectively with lawyers. The book is thoroughly illustrated with cartoon scenarios by Tim Maloney that clearly explain the fundamentals of situations being discussed in the chapters. The cartoons help to give a little levity to the subject while at the same time giving a very clear picture of how these encounters can and do take place in real life.

Law enforcement officers are trained professionals, they use specific procedures and methods of questioning and extracting the information they seek. The average citizen is not trained in those procedures and may be intimidated by the situation into giving up the rights they are due. Law enforcement officers use their methods of questioning in and day out on the job, they have a lot of practice at getting to information they are looking for. Beat The Heat helps citizens understand their rights and how they might be denied.

We should all know our rights, especially in these times with the growth of the domestic security state, and the increasing militarization of the police in this country. Konisaruk deserves much respect for writing this book and making these scenarios understandable and accessible for people outside of the legal and law enforcement professions. Who said all lawyers are bad? Know your rights!

Brandon Bauer
Intentional Communities
Models for Living that Expand Traditional Definitions of Family

Although Barbara Hirshkowitz is not biologically related to any of her six housemates, who include two couples and four children, they share meals, spend holidays together, and divvy up chores. In many ways, they are family. “This (living situation) has immeasurably enriched my life,” said Hirshkowitz.

Hirshkowitz lives in a land trust house named The Vortex owned by the Life Center Association (LCA), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote affordable housing for activists. LCA owns seven other properties in Hirshkowitz’s Philadelphia community. While rents in the neighborhood have more than tripled since the land trust was first established, the fees Hirshkowitz pays in exchange for living at The Vortex have only marginally increased since she first moved into the house in 1992 — but cheap rent is by no means her only reason for living there.

At 54 years of age, Hirshkowitz is the oldest person in the house; the youngest is 20 months old. Not wanting to have children of her own, living in The Vortex has given her “...the opportunity to participate in the lives of these four children in a very intimate way.” Hirshkowitz was present at the commitment ceremonies of the two couples she lives with as well as the births of their four children. They have also lived through the deaths of two housemates, which has brought The Vortex residents closer together. “By default we may not be best friends, but we are best known to each other and very close and supportive,” she said.

by Ellen Keohane

picture left - Sam (9) and Ray (5) assist their dad, TL, in making waffles almost every Sunday morning at The Vortex top right - Cobb Hill Photos courtesy of each community
From Student Co-ops to Religious Compounds

For many who are seeking like-minded people to share a life with, joining or establishing an intentional community can be a way to create their own extended, alternative family. People in intentional communities often come together because they have similar values, interests, or beliefs. In general, intentional communities are a safer place for many people to open up and find a sense of belonging.

The Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), a nonprofit organization that publishes a communities directory as well as a magazine, estimates there are several thousand intentional communities in the United States. Although there is no official definition for an intentional community, the FIC defines it as “an inclusive term for ecovillages, cohousing, residential land trusts, communes, student co-ops, urban housing cooperatives, and other related projects and dreams.”

According to Geoph Kozeny, an author and documentary filmmaker who has visited approximately 370 different intentional communities in the United States and abroad, “there’s no ownership of the definition of an intentional community...people use the term to mean wildly varying things.”

While Kozeny has found that no two communities are exactly alike, they all have certain qualities in common. “All are based on a vision of creating a better life.” In general, the more communal life is in a particular intentional community, the tighter knit the community tends to be. For example, those that work and live together, and share property and childcare, tend to develop closer and more personal relationships with one another.

Whatever an individual’s reason for living in an intentional community, residents have been brought together by shared interests, goals, and/or beliefs. Some communities’ goals are to work toward environmental sustainability: growing their own food organically, composting waste, and living in energy efficient housing. Others share the same religious or spiritual faith. Many are advocates for social or political change.

Some hold onto unfortunate misperceptions about intentional communities, associating them only with the Branch Davidians in Waco or the events that occurred in Jonestown. While violence and exploitation certainly exist in some intentional communities, there is no evidence that they are more prevalent in intentional communities than in more traditional environments.

Working Together:
The Farm and Alpha Farm

Many intentional communities grew from the hippie subculture of the 1960s and 70s, like The Farm in Summertown, Tennessee and Alpha Farm in rural western Oregon. Both have evolved over the years, losing and gaining members, but many of their original residents still remain.

Caroline Sespes has lived at Alpha Farm for 32 years. She was 42 years old when she first moved there with her husband and two teenage children.

At Alpha Farm, residents not only live, but also work together. On their website, they describe themselves as a “close-knit expanded family.” Thirteen people currently live in the community; more will be coming in the summer. The ages of Alpha Farm residents range from 4 weeks to 83 years. Child care is considered a responsibility for the entire community. “Children have more role models...there’s more people to pay attention to them than just their mother and father,” said Sespes. As privacy is honored at Alpha Farm, everyone has their own room, but not everyone has their own house. Residents live in cabins, buses, and lodges, or one of the two farmhouses on the property. All decisions related to the community are made by consensus.

All but one Alpha Farm resident work for community-owned and operated businesses including Alpha Mail, which operates under contract with the U.S. Postal Service; Alpha-Bit Café, a bookstore and gift shop; and the Alpha Institute, which runs workshops on consensus decision making. All residents’ incomes go to the farm and are shared by the community as a whole.

According to Sespes, most people who have chosen to live at Alpha Farm are looking for more control over their life and a different way of relating with the earth. Many have found life outside of Alpha Farm to be unsustainable, uncreative, and alienating.

Separate from Alpha Farm, Douglas Stevenson and his wife first came to The Farm in 1973, when they were both 19 years old. Both of his children were born on The Farm and his grown daughter also lives there with her husband. Stevenson and his wife originally moved to The Farm because they were fed up with city life and wanted to go back to nature, a place they associated with purity and peace. “We were looking for some spiritual path and were interested in social change,” said Stevenson.

The Farm has undergone many changes over the past thirty years. However, the same sense of community and family exists as it did when the community was first established. “Everyone is extended aunts and uncles to all the children,” said Stevenson. Parents watch each other’s kids. Long-term relationships have been established over the years and close relationships developed. People continue to live and work together. The Farm’s current population consists of 125 adults and 150 children. Even those who have chosen to leave often remain in close touch.

When Stevenson and his family first moved to The Farm, each house had twenty to thirty people living in it. Later on, people felt they needed more space and the community evolved into mostly single family homes. Stevenson and his wife actually live in a house with another couple. They share utilities and a roof, but each family has their own private kitchen and living room. “We’re not up in each others’ business all the time,” said Stevenson. That’s what makes it work, he explains — although after sharing the same home for close to thirty years, the two families share a special and close bond.

Approximately 50 percent of The Farm’s residents work at community-owned and operated businesses. Despite their community’s name, residents don’t actually “farm” anymore, aside from their own personal gardens. Instead, they produce pocket-sized Geiger Counters (nuclear radiation detectors) which are used by the nuclear industry, government, hospitals, and laboratories. The Farm also has its own book publishing company. “Our cookbooks have brought tofu to the masses,” said Stevenson. In addition, they run midwifery workshops and host conferences and workshops on sustainability, community, and political activism.

Stevenson feels that one of the major advantages to living in an intentional community is having tremendous leverage to initiate social change. Working together, The Farm

Yoga at The Farm Community in Summertown, TN
ECONOMICS

has established the Swan Conservation Trust, which will turn 1,100 acres adjoining The Farm into a nature reserve. They also run the “Kids to the Country” program for city kids from Nashville. Their on-site Ecovillage Training Center offers courses and workshops, apprenticeships, and special demonstrations in green lifestyles, such as organic food production and natural building.

If It Takes a Village ...

Unlike The Farm and Alpha Farm, most of the residents who live at Cobb Hill Co-housing in Hartland, Vermont work outside the community in a variety of professions. Cobb Hill is a fairly new intentional community consisting of twenty-three families including thirty-five adults and ten children.

“It’s a close community,” said Edie Farwell, who lives at Cobb Hill with her husband, Jay Mead, and two children, Cedar and Silas. Farwell’s family has lived at Cobb Hill for two and a half years. Edie admits that they have gotten to know the other residents in Cobb Hill much better than in her former San Francisco neighborhood. “The kids love it here... There are lots of children to play with and a lot more land,” said Farwell.

Cobb Hill is based on a concept of co-housing originally developed in Denmark during the 1940s. Houses in the community are built closely together to recreate a traditional neighborhood or “village” atmosphere. Residents own the houses they live in and the footprint around their home. The surrounding land, a common house, and two farms are commonly owned with the other Cobb Hill residents. Two farmers who live in the community work the land and sell organic vegetables, milk, and meat to the other residents. They have a shared budget that covers water, electricity, heat, snowplowing, and repairs for the common buildings. Decisions within the community are made by consensus.

Whether people live in a residential land trust like The Vortex, a commune, ecovillage, or a cohousing community, people most often are attracted to situations like these by the sense of community that can be created. “Anything can work, what matters is if people believe in it and have enthusiasm,” said Kozeny. ★

For additional information www.ic.org.

Banana Republicans landed in my mailbox at just the right time. The 9/11 hearings, the disintegration into chaos the war in Iraq, and the continuing stonewalling of the administration has been on my mind a lot lately. How could they not?

Rampton and Stauber’s book helps explain this rise to power of the Republican — or more accurately the far-Right wing — agenda, with an eye to helping us understand what lessons might be learned from the Right’s ‘planful’ discipline (not exactly a word in my dictionary, but a good one for what the Right has done). It is also a book with a mission: encourage progressives to develop an equally planful vision.

(As the interest of full disclosure: I know Rampton and Stauber personally and have been a longtime fan of their non-profit Center for Media and Democracy and their books. Trust Us, We’re Experts is still one of my all-time favorites. I often refer back to it when I want to taste the fiery energy of outrage. Their editor is also mine at Tarcher/Penguin.)

Banana Republicans is the best analysis I’ve seen of how the neocons have taken over our collective consciousness. How we’ve become increasingly a country that fears big government, affirmative action, and political correctness without really understanding what any of these terms actually mean for us and our quality of life and how conservative political strategists like Grover Norquist have led us down this path with the explicit goal “to cut government in half in twenty-five years, to get it down to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub.”

Rampton and Stauber explain how this Right-wing agenda has been carefully constructed in the collective imagination, through the media, grassroots campaigns, political lobbying, and deceit. Rampton and Stauber argue, for instance, that the conservative-dominated news cycle turned political coverage during the Clinton years into “a Seinfeld-like sitcom, in which ‘nothing happened’ but everyone talked about it” — think Troopgate, Whitewatergate, Monicagate, and Scissorgate (the story, which turned out to be fictitious, that Clinton held up traffic at LAX for a fancy haircut).

This is Rampton and Stauber’s second book in under two years (see Weapons of Mass Deception for an astute deconstruction of the media spin on the war in Iraq) and in their rush to get it out, they do miss a few dots on their i’s.” Not that they get anything wrong, but they miss moments to make their case as bulletproof as possible.

In one instance, the authors mention the Collegiate Network, Inc. which bills itself as a network to “to nurture student journalists and provide an alternative voice on the college campus through its network of 80 college newspapers that focus public awareness on the politicization of American college classrooms, curricula, and student life...” This Network spends $300,000 a year on 80 papers, but that was in 1996 (according to the footnote). With a little foray on my favorite website Guidestars, a searchable database of every non-profit in the country, I could download the Network’s latest Form 990s to learn that they actually spent $762,076 on “program services” in 2002, with $172,258 going directly to fifty papers that year, including $15,000 to The Fountainhead, $3,571.77 to The Collegiate Conservative, and $6,000 to The Princeton Tory. The Network spent a whopping $167,237 for “Travel,” with a total budget that year of $929,328.

Such observations, however, are just nibbling in a book that’s as chockfull of information as a fruit cake is fluorescent green pineapple chunks.

The authors end with an energizing message: “Democratic renewal in the best American tradition will have to emerge from the initiatives of numerous individual citizens acting separately and yet inspired by common goals.” We may have never been alive at such a time of clear and common goals for progressives. Banana Republicans is constructive fodder for getting millions to see just how critical progressive ‘planful discipline’ is, for ourselves and for future generations. — Anna Lappe
It’s Just a Retail Job!

words Dustin Krcatovich
photos Mark Dilley

Pro-union but most lost they bite
Anti-muthafuckas crossin’ a strike
Take a look around and be for or against
But you can’t do shit if you riding the fence
—Boots Riley of The Coup

I can’t say I was embarrassed at how loudly I cheered when Riley got to this part of the song “Ride the Fence” when I saw him perform it live in November 2003. Being four days into a strike of my own at the time, I identified with lyrics railing against society’s tendencies toward apathy, urging people to stand up for what they believe in. Fighting for a union contract from the second-largest book retailer in the United States has a way of reinforcing your feelings on such issues.

My employer, Borders Books and Music, has seen over 20 attempts to unionize its various stores in the last decade. You may remember one of these attempts from Michael Moore’s 1997 documentary, “The Big One.” Near the end of the film, some of the workers at a Borders in Des Moines, Iowa, are celebrating because the employees have voted to be represented by a union. One is given the impression that the workers finally had the union they’d been working so hard for. Unfortunately, they didn’t. The Des Moines store, like almost every other union attempt at Borders before and since, never made it through negotiations.

As of last year, there was no union representation at any Borders stores. This may surprise some people — after all, Borders has much of the public under the impression that they are a fair and progressive company. Certainly, it is true that Borders Group, Inc., does not discriminate against alternative lifestyles in the work place; they also have a lax, carefree dress code that allows people to “be themselves.” I walked into my first day of work with a mohawk. If they’re cool in these ways, it can’t be that bad, right?

Unfortunately, it’s naught but a clever ruse. Borders tries hard to give both employees and the public the impression that they’re a hip, scrappy underdog in the same way that their main competition, Barnes & Noble, is an uptight prude. What you can’t see from a Borders employee’s pierced lip and threadbare t-shirt is that the Borders company-wide starting wage of $6.50-$7.00 hasn’t seen an increase in seven years. In fact, it’s only gone up fifty cents in over a decade. This is made all the more ridiculous when you note that, as of a decade ago, the company had a profit-sharing program for employees that afforded them extra quarterly checks; this program, naturally, has long since ceased.

In a place like Ann Arbor, Michigan — a college town with a lot of rich people and a very high standard of living — seven bucks an hour pretty much translates into people with full-time jobs living on baked beans and ramen. Not that Borders hires many full-time people nowadays, given that part-time employees are cheaper and easier to get rid of. Add the fact that the ever-increasing cost of medical benefits routinely exceeds any annual raise a Borders employee might receive and you come away with the fairly accurate picture that Borders employees are financially screwed.

In addition to these monetary concerns, there are several other issues. Borders employees, like most people in the retail sector, are “at-will” employees. If you’ve worked in retail before, you know that this is just fancy industry talk for “readily disposable.” Borders also lacks a proper grievance procedure, instead opting for an “open door” policy. To again translate the language of industry, this means that we direct our complaints to in-store management, after which the complaint becomes a cloud of dust, drifting away with the breeze, never to be seen or heard from again.

Time for Action

With these and other matters in mind, the employees at the downtown Ann Arbor Borders decided sometime in 2002 that it was time to give union representation another shot (there had been a previous, failed attempt in 1996).
Recognizing the Boss’s Face

by Doug Henwood, from an interview by Damon Rich

There’s a great aphorism from Tony Negri, one of the most lucid things he ever said, which is, “Money has one face, that of the boss.”

When you go buy something, you get a product, you exchange it for money, it looks somehow like there’s this exchange of equivalence; it looks just like a world of freedom. I want something and you’ve got it, so we just exchange these things. But behind that monetary relation is this whole system of hierarchy and exploitation. It’s hard to see, but it’s there.

Things like unions, welfare states, can change the balance of power, which is why those things are good, but until we can somehow come up with the utopia of universalized ownership, then we just have to satisfy ourselves with those second-best kinds of approaches...

I think a lot of anarchists and young radicals — not all, but a lot — are instinctively opposed to this idea of globalization. A lot of people want to talk about local production and very small-scale stuff. I think this is not practical in the sense that you can’t produce complicated stuff on that kind of small scale. But I also don’t think it’s very desirable — there’s certainly a lot to be gained by having the international linkages that we have now because of technological and organizational complexity....

If we’re talking about relations of inequality and exploitation, that’s the problem — it’s not the internationalization that’s the problem. It’s more about the relations and hierarchies that are actually involved and the ends to which all these things are put.


Borders’ reaction to the union drive was predictable, but no less deplorable. Secret meetings were reportedly held among store management to decide who managers would have to drive out of the store to put an end to union activity. No union organizers were successfully fired, but some staff members were — one illegally replaced by a temp, reducing the number of people eligible to vote for unionization. Corporate stooges from the home office were also sent in to pacify us. Their goal, it seemed, was to convince us that we were making a mountain out of a molehill. They assured us that they would take care of our issues without a problem. We didn’t need a union for that.

These tactics may work well on kindergarteners, but they just couldn’t seem to take with the Ann Arbor store’s decidedly astute staff. On December 6th, 2002, my coworkers, agreed, in a vote of 51 to 4, that we wanted the United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 876 to represent us. Like the aforementioned store in “The Big One,” we thought we had won.

Of course, our fight was only beginning. Now came the hard part — negotiating a decent contract with the company. This is where Borders pulls out the big guns — the pricey law firm Jackson Lewis, one of the most infamous union-busting firms in the United States. It is extremely rare that a union is able to play through the firm’s endless battlefield of rhetoric and dirty tactics. With this knowledge at hand, representatives from the union and the store began negotiations in January 2003.

Fast forward about six months or so. Despite the early success of the union drive, things were beginning to seem grim. As contract negotiations dragged on, employees in the store began to lose interest. All the while, the representatives from the corporate office had remained a brick wall, refusing to move for anyone or anything. As one might imagine, stonewalling on negotiations is one of the corporate world’s most popular union-busting tactics. The whole thing, quite frankly, was starting to get a little tired.

Eventually, the store’s more stridently pro-union employees began to get fed up. Big words started to get bandied about — one-day walkout. Public demonstration. Strike. All of this was spoken in whispers, but before long the whispers began to get louder. The UFCW encouraged us to make a move, lest the company be allowed to stall forever.

Then, something miraculous happened — Borders offered a contract proposal! Oh, but wait ... the proposal itself was not quite so miraculous. Actually, it was precisely what the workers already had, practically copied out of the employee handbook, except with the addition of a grievance procedure (which was good) and a potential cut in annual raises (hey, wait ... that’s bad!). This insult of a contract seemed to help pique a revived interest in the union. Employees decided that it was time to quit being stepped on. It was time to strike.

Sadly, though, despite a vote that indicated the employees were by and large in favor of this action, many of my coworkers did not go out on strike. Some cited financial woes while others pointed to serious health problems. Naturally, there was also the expected minority of people who were against the union from the get-go, but regardless, it didn’t matter. The majority had ruled. The strike was on.

Strike!

The festivities kicked off on November 8th. With it came an accompanying boycott, which proved for many to be the most emotionally taxing part of the strike. It’s hard to convince people to break their routine and shop somewhere else, even when you’re in a place like Ann Arbor that is abundant with independent bookstores. Ann Arbor does fancy itself to be a largely “liberal” community, but it’s also a very wealthy community; with that knowledge, it’s little surprise that the town’s supposed liberalism is of the sort that is focused on broad social issues. In other words, the city’s liberal population consists primarily of what one refers to in the vernacular as “armchair liberals.”

Many of these armchair types felt that they simply couldn’t honor the picket line, offering many a ludicrous excuse. I personally lost quite a bit of respect for several acquaintances of mine, who simply “couldn’t help” making a purchase at Borders. It’s a sad, cynical, apathetic world we live in where one could cross any picket line, much less one being walked by a friend or acquaintance, because they feel they “need” a CD laser lens cleaner. I saw plenty of supposed punks, progressives, and artists try to convince themselves that their own back-stabbing materialism could be brushed away with little more than a half-assed excuse and a bit of faked guilt.

So it went ... and went. As it started to get colder, the crowds at the Friday night rallies began to shrink. But we, the workers, did not budge. Even when corporate representatives canceled a much-anticipated negotiating session because some “direct action” doofuses wrote graffiti on the store’s doors and windows and disabled its locks, the strikers...
stayed strong. To paraphrase an old labor song, like a tree that’s planted by the water, we would not be moved.

Christmas came and went with strikers still standing outside. Yet, on the afternoon of December 30th, a call came from one of our coworkers. He was in negotiations, and he said that things were actually moving along for a change. A little later, he called and told us we had reached a tentative agreement, with contract ratification planned for the following week. The strike was over.

Victory

Later that day, I went back into the store, into the upstairs music section where I typically work. For the first time in months, I looked around this corporate behemoth of a store with its hideous paint job and overflowing shelves of Simon & Garfunkel CDs that I would undoubtedly have to get under control. I saw my coworkers who didn’t go out on strike, friends who I’d only been able to talk to in short bursts before the blustery Michigan weather drove them back indoors, standing there at the information desk, welcoming me back. Despite all of my hopes and efforts to do otherwise, I started to cry. It wasn’t that I was happy to be going back to work... hardly. It had just hit me – I had done my part to actually accomplish something extremely constructive and positive, both for myself and for my coworkers.

On January 8th, 2004, the contract was voted in. It’s not an amazing contract, really, but it’s a solid start – starting pay went up a quarter and wage caps were removed for senior employees. We got our grievance procedure. We even got the company to agree to meet with the union twice a year to discuss workplace issues. Like I said, it’s not amazing, but it’s a start. We won.

However, that’s not quite the end of the story. As of this writing, a Borders store in Minneapolis is still trying to wade through its way through contract negotiations, jumping through the same hoops the company tried to put us through. According to some reports I’ve heard, the employees at this store are extremely wary of going on strike, for fear that Borders will just shut the store down and leave them out of work. If push comes to shove though, I’ll be ready to help them in whatever way I can.

As long as greedy corporations send factories overseas for cheaper labor with less rules, the manufacturing industry in this country will continue to erode. The retail industry, by its very nature, cannot be sent overseas and, as such, it is quickly becoming our country’s most dominant form of employment, particularly in the form of soulless corporate boxes like Wal-Mart, Best Buy, and, of course, Borders. Despite this fact, the work of customer service is not looked upon with the same respect as that of a factory worker, which allows for an even greater level of abuse on the part of these corporate giants. Many people seem to think that because “it’s only a retail job,” the employees don’t deserve the same respect and decency that everyone else deserves. They’re wrong. But sometimes you have to work for your respect. Standing up for one’s self and organizing a union can be an important first step. ♠

\[other\]

\[\text{If the editors of the Atlantic Monthly got high and decided to start a revolution, they might come up with something like other magazine ... Published three times a year, other is a journal of dissident nonfiction, transgressive fiction, freethinking comic art, and experimental poetry.} \]

— The Boston Phoenix

Coming late June: the Church and State issue, featuring George McGovern's regret, patriotic ballgowns, weird elections, sex fundamentalism and neuroscience fiction.

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Something’s Happening Here

The March for Women’s Lives — April 25, 2004

An activist by profession, enduring long hours with little or no pay and rarely any clear idea of the short or long term effects of our work, it is easy to get caught up in the downward spirals of cynicism, skepticism, and hopelessness. But while what happened on April 25th in Washington D.C. at the March for Women’s Lives wasn’t “exactly clear,” indeed, something happened, something powerful and tangible, with lasting effects on both seasoned activists and those for whom the march was their first political action.

As Moby and Nellie McKay echoed the words of Buffalo Springfield from a grand stage to an audience exceeding a million, something was happening. Women, men, and children of all ages, races, sexual identities, political affiliations, and socioeconomic classes were marching around the National Mall in support of reproductive rights and personal privacy and freedom. The diversity and the unity of the march — sponsored by seven national organizations who worked for a year — not only set a precedent of connecting often-separate groups, but also empowered and inspired each individual to continue their action after the march with the knowledge that the brothers and sisters they marched alongside will also be taking the energy of the march home, to continue the struggle to uphold the right to choose.

Family — in the broadest, most beautiful definition of the word — was central to the rally. Hundreds of families were represented by several generations, husbands and fathers marched in support of their wives and daughters; and children bounced around their parents amid the excitement. And, despite “resistance from behind,” over one-third of the marchers were under the age of 25, not just “speaking their mind” but activating their friends and peers to join the cause, proving the strength of youth and showing the country that the next generation will be the torchbearers who lead our country out of political darkness.

The loudest message of the day was to take the energy — and the personal and collective political power it reflected — and use it to effect November’s Presidential election. No recent political event has had the opportunity to make light of their issue, with signs like “Terminate an Unwanted Presidency” and “Keep Your Laws Off My Bush, Bush!”, while echoing the day’s resounding theme — vote out Bush and his administration in November and vote in a pro-choice President. The events political diversity — which including a large delegation of “Pro-Choice Republicans” and Republicans for Kerry - helped affirm the political potential of the pro-choice public. As Hillary Clinton, one of the guest speakers, reminded the audience, the last time a major march for reproductive rights was held on the nation’s capitol, her husband was six months later elected into office. Thanks to the energy created through the march — and the million marchers who returned to their homes, energized and ready to act — the hope for history repeating itself is becoming more of a reality.
Clamor editors Jen Angel and Jason Kucsma are proud to present to you the 8th volume of The Zine Yearbook — a collection of the best of the underground zine culture from the last year. Whether this is the first time you’ve heard the word “zine” (pronounced “zeen”) or you are a seasoned veteran of zine culture, The Zine Yearbook is your window into the world of underground publishing and a document of a unique historical moment.
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