

GFT

GAY FATHERS OF TORONTO

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PRESS RELEASE

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Three years ago a group of men who were otherwise strangers to each other decided to share their experience of a central fact in their lives. These men had once denied this fact to themselves or had kept it carefully hidden from others. What binds these men together is simply the fact that each of them is gay and each is also a father.

The group they formed is called Gay Fathers of Toronto. Members of it have now written a book about their lives and called it GAY FATHERS: SOME OF THEIR STORIES, EXPERIENCE, AND ADVICE. (ISBN 0-969-0947-0-1)

The gay father's history is almost invariably one in which he struggles to face the truth about himself. It is a history of long practised deceptions that seem at first to serve him well, but that ultimately serve only to increase his desperation and loneliness. His sense of alienation and difference from the world at large is therefore like that of all homosexuals who ask only for the right to be themselves. To win this right they must first come to accept themselves as they are, even in the face of social condemnation. But the gay father's struggle for self-acceptance may be longer, more painful, and more poignantly involved with the lives of others than is the case with homosexuals who have never married or fathered children.

The gay father's life is founded on contradiction and ambiguity. To recognize his existence is to acknowledge that homosexuality can and does exist within the bonds of an apparently heterosexual union and even within the sacrament of marriage. The gay father's life proclaims that homosexuals do indeed establish continuing relationships with women and do father children. Although these men are homosexuals, they are also husbands, lovers, and fathers within a continuing family.

The book is about the lives of the men who wrote it. But in writing their book, the Gay Fathers of Toronto aimed chiefly to help other fathers who are still struggling to accept the fact that they are homosexual. It is written for those other gay fathers to tell them that they are not alone. Many such men think their circumstances are unique and they can hardly imagine that others have already coped with the terrible reality that has come to dominate their lives. They feel isolated and intensely alone.

The book makes clear that being married, being gay, and having children is rarely easy, although it also shows that such a life can be deeply rewarding, loving, and touchingly human. Being a father and being consciously gay brings special joys and special fears and problems. And in most cases, it also requires change within the family. Reflecting a fundamentally new attitude towards himself, the gay father precipitates change in others as well. But behind the polished performance, dynamic forces have long been working to weaken the straight facade until one day it is swept away.

The man who is both homosexual and a father often stands alone. Behind a well-managed facade, he lives a secret life that turns on a painful combination of desire and denial. If the straight world recognizes him at all, he is regarded with an attitude that hovers between derision and contempt. For the publicly gay father, the politest reaction that greets him is usually silence with the face turned away. The most wounding responses regard him as a social and biological impossibility. The fact of the matter, however, is that a large number of men who are homosexual do establish continuing relationships with women -- usually within marriage -- and do father children. Many of these men seek out such relationships as proof that their darkest fears about themselves are untrue.

Their unions often appear to work for a time, but ultimately the dream turns into a nightmare. Escape seems impossible, for now in addition to the enormous social pressures that made the union in the first place, there is also the bond to a woman and above all, there are the children.

This book is written by men who know the special joys and fears of being gay and being fathers. They have at last faced a fact that they for so long denied. They speak here in their own voices about their experiences. In doing so, they do not try to wish away the past; they acknowledge the love they offered and the children that sprang from it. They seek only to understand better what happened in their lives and to share that understanding with others -- with their families and with their children. Here they speak chiefly to those many fathers who are homosexual and who still try to deal with their torment alone. They have something to say to such men. You are not alone. Others have gone this way before and found release in self-acceptance and greater honesty with others.

The authors of this book are writing about their own lives and experience. Besides their own stories, what these men offer is not so much advice as understanding -- understanding of what it is like to marry, to have children, and then to realize that you are basically, truly, and unalterably gay.

The advice and understanding they offer will not likely help anyone with the day-to-day decisions and activities of life. Instead the book tries to help by letting readers see something of the lives of gay fathers. After taking a long,

steady look at themselves, the authors of the book have tried to write down what they saw. Their message is simple and powerful, but it may seem odd and disturbing as well. Listen to what they say for themselves and learn to see them as they understand themselves.

"Look what has happened in our lives and how we have coped with some circumstances that we once thought were overwhelmingly difficult and impossible to change. But we have changed. We now know we are gay and probably always were. Yes, we have children and most of us are, or were, married. This is how we have come to think about ourselves and how we now order our lives, but we would not presume to tell others what they should do with theirs. We do have something we want to say to you about being married, being gay, and having children. And if you are interested in these matters you may want to listen to our experiences and consider what we think about things. Perhaps you are just curious about us. That's fine. Perhaps you are a wife, son, daughter, or parent of a gay father and want to understand him better. We think we can give you that understanding. Or perhaps with despair, but now finally with hope and acceptance you are coming to realize that you are married, a father, and gay. If this is your case, we want to speak most urgently and directly to you. Our message for you is simple and we say it many times throughout the book and in many ways: YOU ARE NOT ALONE."

Homosexuals always feel special strains in dealing with a society that wants them to be something other than what they

are. One way of dealing with this pressure is to pass as straight, to do a performance that fools everybody -- even the performer. The gay father is someone who begins by trying to pass in this way. As perhaps the ultimate cover for his homosexuality, he embraces straight life and straight wife. When children arrive, the promise is apparently fulfilled. It says, "You, too, are straight." Then the strains begin to show.

The social pressures that maintain the heterosexual ideal are unrelenting, universal, and powerful. They require that everyone at least try to be heterosexual and minimally that everyone appear to be heterosexual, that is to say normal. There are no fiercer or more destructive forces than those that play upon the homosexual whose union with a woman has produced children within a loving and continuing relationship.

This book is about circumstances in which men have come to realize that they are homosexual within families that they themselves have established. It is about the ways these men have coped with the experiences that made their lives. It is about the anxiety and self-doubt that afflicted them and it is about the ways in which these men came finally to accept that they were married, that they had children, and that they were gay. With understanding comes acceptance and a new, happier life.

In telling their stories, these men are writing for many kinds of people. They are writing for a professional audience made up, among others, of doctors, psychiatrists, and social

workers. This audience of professionals includes both those who are understanding of and sympathetic to gay reality and it includes also those professionals whose attitudes to homosexuality are hostile and punitive and whose attempts to cure or treat it have often given unnecessary pain. All professionals may learn something from this book -- most of all perhaps those who have inflicted pain on homosexuals out of either misplaced zeal or simple ignorance.

The book is also directed to those who simply want to know more about how it is that homosexuals can marry and have children. And it will certainly interest those whose lives are touched by homosexuality -- as parents, children, wives -- but who are themselves not homosexual. But most of all it is directed to those who in fear or exhausted relief are coming to understand and accept that they are one of them -- a gay father.

This book is therefore for those men -- and there are many of them -- who are asking what it means when father is gay. It is directed to those men who may now be ready to accept the fact that they are fathers and also gay. It is directed to those who wish now to deal with this fact directly and honestly. The writers of the book are a group of men who began from a position in which each was living in a family setting when the realization finally dawned as to who they were and what they had done. So listen again to what these men say for themselves.

"Awakening to the realization that we were gay did not make us want to wish away the past. We accept the fact that we were, or still are, married, and we accept the fact that we are fathers. And we acknowledge the love that made these circumstances. We accept what is. We do not want to turn back the clock to start again without the women and children who are now part of our lives; but we also acknowledge that we are homosexual and that we must face this fact and somehow deal with it."

"We are gay fathers, and you may be one too. We know the lonely road you are on. We know because we have travelled that way before you, and we remember the feelings you have now as our own at one time. We know the doubt that says, 'Why am I on this road at all?' and we know the need to talk to someone else about what lies ahead on the road. We know how important it was when we were beginning to have help from those who had travelled farther along the road than we. Now that more of us have made this journey, we believe it is time to talk about it and to make at least a rough map showing the valleys of despair it sometimes goes through, the peaks of joy it sometimes reaches, and the sense of relief, comradeship, and acceptance that comes to those who stick with it until the way becomes wide and comfortable."

"Some of us were desperate before we found the road. We thought sometimes that to take flight or to destroy ourselves was the only answer to the problem. And we sometimes thought

of taking others with us -- everyone in the car, driving over the cliff. We know and always knew that these were not good answers, but we now know, too, that there are indeed better ways of dealing with the problem. We hope that this book will help you to find those ways, as we have."

"As far as we know, this book is the first of its kind -- the first attempt by a group of gay fathers to talk about themselves and their lives in their own voices. We welcome your comments on what we have written. There is much we have not said about ourselves that should be said. We will no doubt be accused of giving a one-sided view, a view biased by the interests of male homosexuals who are fathers. We did not set out to say everything that could be or ought to be said on this topic. We claim only that what we are saying is true to our experience. What we have said needs to be said. We do not deny that there is more to say."

The book is the work of many people. All of the two hundred or so men who, over the last three years, have had fleeting or extended contact with Gay Fathers of Toronto are in the book. Some of them are there as little more than echoes, while others are in it vividly, like characters in a play. All of them are real and true, although truth, as Oscar Wilde said, is rarely pure and never simple.

The book contains three major chapters dealing with coming out, establishing a new life, and gay parenting. In addition, there are several smaller sections, three appendices,

and an annotated bibliography. Stories about the lives of gay fathers are interspersed throughout the book. Some of these are imaginative portrayals of gay fathers leading their sometimes difficult, sometimes funny, but always complex lives. Others are recollections by gay fathers of their own experiences.

One of the appendices offers some practical suggestions for coping with the stress of coming out or re-shaping family relationships. Another discusses how to organize and run a gay fathers' group, and the third shows the kind of material that gay people often have to face in hate literature.

The book has been published entirely by members of the Gay Fathers of Toronto. They wrote the text, revised and edited it until it seemed good enough to print. They also took the photographs that the book contains. Generous financial support for the project came from the Gay Community Appeal of Toronto and the remainder of the money needed to complete the project came from angels within the GFT itself.

We wish to acknowledge the encouragement and interest shown in our project by the Gay Fathers Coalition of Washington, DC. The Coalition primarily links fathers' groups across the United States, but we have been welcomed and made to feel at home as an affiliate of the Coalition. We have benefitted greatly by the example and advice we have gained from our association with the Coalition and its members throughout the United States.

The difficulties and challenges of being fathers and being gay are the same in many respects in both the United States and Canada, but there are some differences. We have learned a great deal from their longer experience with Gay Liberation and the perhaps more organized political action of gay fathers in the United States. We hope that this book will enable people everywhere -- both gay and straight -- to learn something from us.

Copies of GAY FATHERS: SOME OF THEIR STORIES, EXPERIENCE, AND ADVICE may be purchased from the following address:

Gay Fathers of Toronto (or GFT)
 PO Box 187, Station F
 Toronto, Canada
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Please make cheques payable to Gay Fathers of Toronto.

Those who wish to contact the Gay Fathers Coalition may do so at the following address:

PO Box 50360
Washington, DC 20004
(301) 984-9449

For anyone wishing to learn more about organizing a gay fathers' group, the Coalition will send materials, or will put the inquirer in touch with the nearest operating group. The coalition also has other valuable programs and services of interest to gay persons.

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For the Gay Fathers Coalition

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