

One Gay Kid's Travels

It's Been Rough, But It's a Story with a Happy Ending

by Bruce Mirken

When Lyn Duff came crashing into my life a little over a year ago, I never imagined her story would have an ending like this. After all she went through I still find it hard to believe.

I first wrote about her last February, as part of a *Los Angeles Reader* cover story on gay and lesbian teens, using the pseudonym "Laura." After two more installments I had to stop even the disguised accounts for Lyn's safety's sake, for reasons which will soon become obvious. At last it's possible to tell the whole tale.

"Help me, please"

My friend Rob Nemchik introduced me to Lyn (her legal first name is Athena, which she hates) on October 23, 1991, at a demonstration protesting against Governor Pete Wilson. She was having trouble with her mother, who couldn't handle her 15-year-old daughter being a lesbian and was threatening to send Lyn to an institution in Utah to be "cured."

The problems started, Lyn recalls, when her mom (her parents have been divorced since she was little, and her father lives in Massachusetts)

read a poem Lyn had written in her diary, a love poem about another girl. "She kind of flipped," Lyn recalls, and began sending Lyn to psychiatrists. Meanwhile Lyn, who freely acknowledges being quite a rebellious teenager, was surreptitiously going to a youth group at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center and attending events sponsored by activist groups such as ACT UP.

The activism proved to be her undoing. One day toward the end of summer she went to a pro-choice rally wearing a T-shirt proclaiming, "Nobody Knows I'm a Lesbian." She recalls now with a smile, "My mom gets a call from her next door neighbor: 'Your daughter's on TV with some gay group!'" That's apparently when her mother got serious about doing something about her daughter's "problem," and a roller-coaster ride of strained relations and attempted institutional placements followed.

And that's where things stood when Rob introduced us. We had a more detailed phone conversation a couple of weeks later, and I could tell that, if nothing else, this kid was extremely bright and unbelievably aware for her

age. I was worried enough by what she was telling me that I decided to put aside any pretensions of journalistic detachment and help get her hooked up with an attorney. After that things seemed to smooth out for a while, and we arranged to get together December 19 so that I could interview her for my story.

She didn't show. But 15-year-olds aren't famous for being responsible, I figured; I'd probably hear from her in a day or so. I was wrong.

My phone rang at about eleven that night. It was Lyn, and there was a frozen terror in her voice. "Bruce, help me, please. Call my attorney," she begged, almost unable to get the words out. "I'm in Nevada. They're taking me to Utah." Before I could ask for more details we were cut off.

At 7 A.M. the next morning she called again, collect, from a motel in Utah. While her mother was briefly out of earshot, she quickly gave me what details she could: The place she was being taken was called Rivendell Hospital (frequently referred to in its advertising as "Rivendell School"), a residential treatment facility for supposedly troubled adolescents located in the town of West Jordan, Utah, outside of Salt Lake



Lyn Duff

(Photo: Jane Philomen Cleland)

City. I told her I'd already been in touch with her attorney, Richard Novak of Public Counsel's Homeless Youth Project, and would pass the information along. After only about a minute, she had to go.

"Sex: The Pits of Hell"

As Lyn describes it, Rivendell is an octagon-shaped structure, with the business and administrative offices in the front. The rear section, where the kids are kept, is locked at all times. (This is one of many charges that Rivendell's management denies. See accompanying piece, *A Look at 'Rivenhell'* for more on contrasting views of the facility and the use of tax dollars to send L.A. kids there.) Each room houses two or three young people and is furnished with heavy wooden beds with drawers underneath where the relatively few belongings the kids are allowed to keep can be stored. "They have these slits on the sides so they can put you in restraints," Lyn notes, adding that the use of restraints was common.

Rivendell has several different units, each focusing on a particular type of behavioral problem — alcohol and drugs, criminal/gang involvement, etc. Lyn was in the unit treating kids with "sexual issues." "The whole Rivendell program," she wrote in a letter to me on January 9, "is based on peer mentoring, which basically boils down to kids raving on other kids." Each young person is assigned a level based on their progress, with youths at higher levels being granted more privileges and freedom of movement. The day is divided between schooling and therapy. "In between meals and therapy," she wrote, "all we do is stand facing the wall; it [is] our punishment for being 'bad.' If anybody talks, we have to go scrub the gym floor with a toothbrush. I never knew that they did shit like this in the '90's."

Mail was censored and restricted to "approved" individ-

uals on the outside, but Lyn quickly figured out ways of getting letters in and out through sympathetic staff members or higher-level kids. Meanwhile, her therapists set out to "cure" her lesbianism, using hypnosis, drugs (including Prozac, lithium, thorazine, and several others, which she later identified with the aid of medical reference books), and group and individual therapy.

"They drug you out," she recalls, "make you really tired and cloud your thinking." In her individual therapy sessions, "They'd say, 'When you think about girls sexually, push that thought back into a closet in your mind, then lock the door and throw away the key. Then think about something good, like God or praying.'" In word-association exercises, she was encouraged to equate sex with "the pits of hell."

Lyn says that she was given a heavy dose of Mormon religious doctrine as well, including a Book of Mormon inscribed to her by her principal therapist, Dr. Mark Hinckley. People from Evergreen, a Mormon missionary organization, visited regularly to proselytize. "For the Strength of Youth," a church pamphlet Lyn says she was required to read, declares, "Homosexual and lesbian activities are sinful and an abomination to the Lord (see Romans 1:26-27, 31). Unnatural affections including those toward persons of the same gender are counter to God's eternal plan for his children."

All through the winter Lyn continued to write, her letters consistently describing attempts to change her sexual orientation. Sometimes her tone was one of fear ("I'm not doing so great, Bruce. I'm really scared, I don't wanna be straight"), but just as often they were playfully defiant ("Do you know any teenagers who would want to write to me? Any cute dykes, perhaps?"). Two elements remained absolutely constant: They were trying to make her straight, and she wanted

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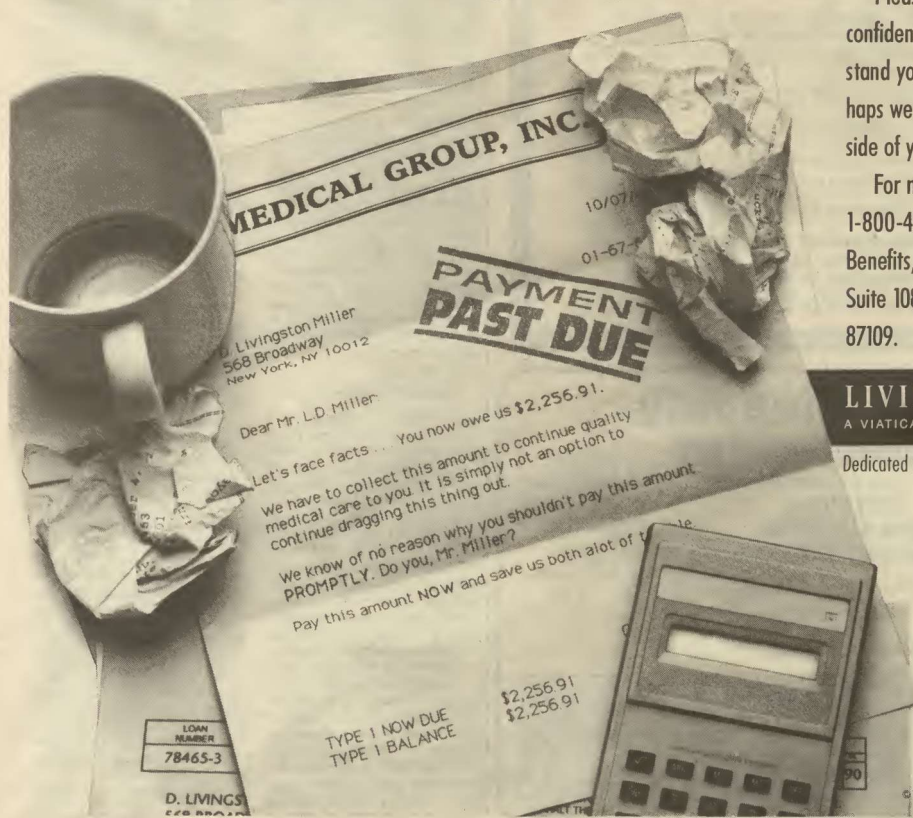
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Gay Kid

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to get the hell out of there. But in late March I received a postcard mailed from her mother's address in South Pasadena. I later discovered that two other gay friends got identical cards:

"Dear Bruce,
"I am choosing a set of values in my life that are inconsistent with my previous behavior, thus, I am changing my behavior. Thank you for the degree to which you have shown me acceptance and friendship. But from this point forward, for the sake of my own peace of mind and happiness, I must refuse to reciprocate."

"Thank you and with absolute sincerity,
Athena Duff"

I had no idea what to make of this. Had she in fact been "cured"? A number of things were strange, starting with the fact that it was a postcard; she'd never sent a card before, only letters. The handwriting was definitely Lyn's, but the style wasn't: The vocabulary and phrasing didn't sound anything like the kid I knew. Worried and confused, I wrote back, telling her that I respected whatever decisions she made and that I would always be there if she ever needed me.

And then I waited, wondering if I would ever hear from her again, wondering if I would ever know what had really happened.

Escape

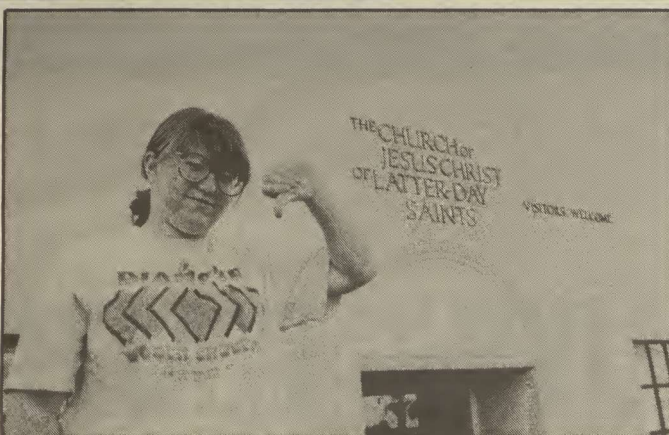
Over a month went by be-

fore I got my answer in the form of two letters, one mailed directly to me and another relayed through a friend. This was definitely the Lyn I knew, saying she'd written the cards to "bullshit my therapist," and calling the place "Rivenhell." She'd decided she'd do better if she convinced them that the "treatment" was working.

More importantly, she was going to be in L.A. for a few days starting May 10 for minor surgery and would be staying with her mother. She was thinking about running away and perhaps heading for San Francisco. Her lawyer (a new attorney, Gina Calabrese, had recently taken over the case) had told her that the best legal option might be to get her mother to compromise on some other, more acceptable placement, but Lyn wasn't satisfied. "I just want to get away from the social workers and foster homes," she wrote. "I don't want to go to another placement. I'm sick of just being a case number. I'm a person, too, even if I am gay." She was beginning to believe that the system couldn't save her; she'd have to do it herself.

The trip to L.A. was postponed, apparently because inquiries from Calabrese were making Lyn's keepers nervous. But several more letters and two brief phone conversations made it clear that she was dead serious about escaping if she got half a chance. I'd seen and heard enough horror stories about what happens to runaway kids that I tried to discourage her. It didn't work.

She called again June 15, from her mother's place in South Pasadena. She was go-



Lyn Duff

(Photo: Jane Philomen Cleland)

ing to run the first chance she got and was pretty sure she had a ride to San Francisco. Would I help her get to her ride's place if she needed it? I reluctantly but firmly declined — I was scared to death, both for her and for me, and wanted no part of this. But I did make one suggestion: If she got to San Francisco she should call Ken McPherson, an activist friend of mine who hosts a gay/lesbian radio show called "Hibernia Beach" and who seems to know just about everyone up there worth knowing. I had no idea that I had just, inadvertently, put the critical element of the equation into place.

Lyn made her break that

night, but things didn't go quite as planned. The friend with whom she was going to go to San Francisco changed plans and cancelled her trip. Lyn was still able to stay with her briefly, but the friend didn't want her roommate to know what was going on and Lyn had to stay hidden. "I stayed in her closet for two days," she shudders.

Meanwhile, I called Ken and told his answering machine that he might hear from a young friend of mine. And Lyn's mother called me. First she called the Reader, then (presumably having found the number by searching Lyn's things) she called me at home.

She seemed like a very pleasant woman, not at all like the monster I had been expecting — or perhaps wishing — her to be. She wondered if I had any idea where her daughter was. Shaking inside, I told her that I didn't, which was the truth — carefully omitting the fact that I had gone to great lengths to make sure that I didn't know Lyn's whereabouts. I explained that I had dealt with Lyn as a confidential source in my professional capacity as a journalist, and couldn't divulge anything she might have told me without her permission — that even if her daughter did tell me her whereabouts I couldn't say. She implored me, in case I heard from Lyn, to ask her to call. "I just want to know she's okay," she said, sounding anxious, worried, and very, very sad. I told her I would and ended the conversation as quickly as possible, wondering what the hell I'd gotten myself involved in.

"It scared the shit out of me"

On June 21 Lyn finally took a bus to San Francisco, where she promptly called Ken McPherson, who still had no more information than what was on the brief message I'd left before. The gregarious on over. "I said, 'No problem!'" he recalls, "not having the slightest idea of what I was getting myself into." Then he called me for the details, and once he realized all of the potential ramifications, he says, "it scared the shit out of me."

But McPherson didn't back away as I had tried. He felt he had a responsibility. "One of the things I believe about gay people," he explains, "is that we're all parents. Because the next generation of gay and lesbian young people coming along — their parents may not

be equipped to deal with them." After getting some quick legal advice, he got to work.

He immediately got her set up with two youth service agencies: Larkin Street Youth Center, which provided counseling, education, and psychological and emotional support, and Diamond Youth Center, which gave Lyn a place to stay. Things seemed to be going okay although, says McPherson, "it was very clear that people didn't know whether to believe Lyn or not" about her treatment at Rivenhell. But the kid herself was ecstatic at finally being among people who seemed to care, and where being a lesbian didn't make her a freak. "Two weeks after I left Utah I was marching in Gay Pride in San Francisco!" she grins.

But the happy times were short-lived. On July 15 McPherson got a phone call. It was Lyn, and she sounded desperate. "I'm back in Utah," she told him. "She grabbed me and took me back."

Lyn had herself to blame this time. She'd called her mother, who'd sounded cooperative and willing to discuss whatever Lyn wanted. She came to San Francisco, and mother and daughter met. "She was crying," Lyn remembers. "She said, 'I'm never going to send you back to Utah.' Then two cops and a private investigator showed up" — and Lyn and her mother were soon on a plane that would take her back to captivity.

Or at least that was the plan. But once again Lyn managed to sneak a phone call to McPherson when her mother wasn't watching, and the San Franciscan got busy. He called one of his press contacts, Elizabeth Fernandez of the *San Francisco Examiner*, and Fernandez called Rivenhell.

Apparently the call from Fernandez had the desired effect, because by the time Lyn and her mother got to Rivenhell, the people in charge were nervous. "We went into this meeting," Lyn recalls, joined through a telephone hookup by a representative from the L.A. County Department of Mental Health (see sidebar for more on their involvement). "Kim Delamar [the hospital's director] said, 'We've been getting a lot of interesting calls about your daughter.' My mom looked shocked. I don't think she thought anyone knew I was there."

Things quickly got con-

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A Look at 'Rivenhell'

by Bruce Mirken

As noted in the accompanying piece, officials at Rivendell Hospital deny they are in the business of attempting to "cure" youths of being gay or lesbian, saying it would be inappropriate to treat what the American Psychiatric Association long ago declared is not a disorder. Lyn Duff constantly found it difficult to get adults in positions of authority to believe her stories about the "treatment" to which she'd been subjected. Nevertheless, it appears that those adults have been deceived.

What makes this more than an academic discussion is that Californians' tax money paid to send Lyn to Rivendell. And each year hundreds of thousands of tax dollars — at least — is spent to send California kids there.

Lyn was placed in the Utah institution under what is known as an Individualized Education Placement (IEP), paid for jointly by the school district (South Pasadena in this case) and the county Department of Mental Health. IEPs exist, according to Judy Maizlish of the Los Angeles Unified School District's Division of Special Education, because federal law requires that all students, including those with special requirements, are "entitled to a free, appropriate education." If the school district doesn't have a suitable facility it is required to pick up the tab for sending the student to a non-public school. Rivendell, a residential treatment program with an educational component, is one of many facilities ("Let's not call them 'institutions,'" Maizlish insisted during our interview) to which LAUSD and other school districts send some of their troubled adolescents. Such out-of-state placements are apparently not uncommon, although local facilities are preferred. Lyn's mother reportedly pushed very hard to get her daughter's treatment at Rivendell paid for under an IEP.

Rivendell administrator Dr. Jared Balmer acknowledges that he sees a large number of Southern California kids. The numbers fluctuate constantly, but in September LAUSD had 13 youths at Rivendell, for each of which the facility billed about \$170 per day for education and counseling (the figure varies a bit for each student, depending on their treatment program). The County pays an additional \$103 per student per day for room and board costs. Obviously, the numbers add up quickly.

But are tax dollars paying to "treat" kids whose only "sickness" is that they happen to be gay or lesbian? "Absolutely not," says Balmer. "Sexuality or lifestyle is not a recognized mental disorder, therefore you cannot treat it." Balmer strongly denies Lyn's charges of heavy Mormon influence in the "treatment" offered. He also asserts that Rivendell is in fact not a locked facility, and that "if they choose to run away, they choose to run away."

"Then pigs fly!," laughs Lyn, who also scoffs at Balmer's claim that Rivendell doesn't attempt to treat homosexuality. But she isn't the only one disputing Rivendell's claims.

Montana native Paul Komiotis, 16, spent 45 days at Rivendell in the summer of 1990, when he was 14 — for "evaluation," he says, after his parents caught him in bed with another boy. His description is close to Lyn's, including visits by Mormon church representatives who would "tell us homosexuality was wrong and it could be changed through God."

Komiotis says that part of his evaluation included a session in which electronic sensors were attached to his wrists and testicles to measure his responses when shown pictures of naked men and women. His therapists, he adds, "taught us ways to look at women and be attracted to them." His release came because "they decided I was making progress" in overcoming his gayness. He returned home, only to be thrown out when his parents discovered that he was again in a relationship with another young man. He fled to San Francisco where he has lived — often on the streets — ever since.

In addition, Lyn has made available letters she has received from another friend (who has asked for anonymity) who remains in Rivendell and who is clearly deeply troubled. "They all make it sound like being gay is a problem," she wrote in September, "so as a result I can't express my true feelings." Two months later she described being confronted by the staff about her gayness, and the letter has a tone of desperation: "I hate myself for being gay! I don't feel right, I can't accept it. Why me? I never chose to be like this. I hate myself to death. I want to die. Why's everything so damn confusing?"

But Balmer raises a crucial point: "We are not necessarily dealing with healthy teenagers," he says. "They are emotionally disordered." In other words, who are you going to believe — a screwed-up adolescent or a licensed, professional clinician?

Both LAUSD and the county Department of Mental Health remain convinced that nothing is amiss at Rivendell. After inquiries from local gay activists last summer, Board of Ed member Jeff Horton asked Special Education to look into Lyn's charges. Maizlish moved up her regular visit to the facility (the district inspects institutions used for IEP placements annually), spending "eight or nine hours" there September 17.

Maizlish says she spent time looking around, talking to staff, and a great deal of time talking to the kids. "I'm a fairly experienced, skilled interviewer of kids who are in programs," she says, adding that the interviews are private, confidential, and "very free-form."

Maizlish asserts that although some students had second-hand reports of attempts to "treat" other kids' sexual orientation, no one gave her any first-hand reports of such efforts and she came away convinced that there is no substance to the charges. "I went prepared to believe Lyn because she was very persuasive over the telephone," she comments. "I came back feeling that it is a good facility." Horton, while acknowledging Lyn may have



Ken McPherson (left) and Lyn Duff.

(Photo: Judi Parks)

been placed in Rivendell by her mother with homophobic intent, accepts Maizlish's conclusion.

Maizlish adds, "I'm also going on the basis of the judgment of the people at the Department of Mental Health, who've come to the same conclusion." Paul McIver, program head of DMH's Children and Youth Bureau (to whom Balmer also refers reporters) says, "I know these people [at Rivendell] well and I think they're doing a fine job." His tone is confident to the point of sounding smug.

So who is right? To get our own answers, we enlisted the help of Stephanie Boggs, who called Rivendell posing as the mother of a 15-year-old boy, "Paul." Boggs was connected with a woman named Virginia Snider, an Assessment and Referral Specialist, who could explain Rivendell's program.

In a distraught tone, Boggs told Snider that she had lately discovered that Paul was in a sexual relationship with another boy. "He thinks he's a homosexual," she said. "He

thinks that that's alright." She specified that he wasn't on drugs, that there had been no other serious behavioral problems, that his grades in school were okay. The only "problem" presented was the boy's apparent gayness. "I don't think he'd be happy in this lifestyle," she added.

Snider didn't bat an eyelash, launching into a rundown of Rivendell's therapeutic and educational structure, without expressing the slightest qualms about treating Paul's "problem."

"What is your success rate?" Boggs asked.

"Approximately 75 percent," was the reply, with the caveat that, "We're dealing with different types of kids. Not everyone would come here with an issue that Paul would need to address."

"But you would address that specifically?" Boggs pressed.

"Oh yes, we do. We do have a therapist that works with sexual identity issues."

Although Snider did not explicitly say that treatment would "cure" homosexuality,

at no point in the conversation was any "problem" other than Paul's gayness discussed. And at no point did Snider acknowledge even a remote possibility that this "problem" might not be treatable.

Snider's referrals to two local therapists muddled the picture a bit. Neither seemed at all familiar with Rivendell, and both discouraged the idea of treating a person's sexual orientation. Meanwhile, another "sting" phone call arranged by Ken McPherson in San Francisco proved inconclusive. The caller ended up speaking to Kim Delamar, Rivendell's director, who kept steering the conversation to possible problems other than homosexuality and didn't say anything specific about gayness. He did, according to McPherson, continually refer to gayness as a "choice," which seems to jibe with a remark Delamar made last year, in reference to homosexuality, that Rivendell would not "affirm that kind of situation."

What does it all mean? McPherson theorizes that people in charge of Rivendell may genuinely not think of it as a place that "deprograms" young gays and lesbians, but where the anti-gay prejudices of the staff are so strong that in the end it doesn't matter. He also thinks that school districts have no business sending kids to institutions located so far away that meaningful oversight is nearly impossible. "It's hard to keep tabs from that far away," he says. "How can you do surprise inspections? How can you really know what's going on?" ▼



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California's Gay Teens

Gay Kid

(Continued from page 16)

tentious, Lyn continues. "They were all arguing. My mom was threatening lawsuits. Kim Delamar was saying, 'No, no get her off the property!'" Finally it was decided that she'd go back to California with her mom "until the Department of Mental Health decided what to do."

"My own two lesbian moms"

The stay with her mother in South Pasadena was short and unhappy, and at the first opportunity Lyn ran. She ended up at Angel's Flight, a shelter for runaway and abused kids in the Pico-Union area, where she stayed for about ten days. But the people at Angel's Flight, she says, "basically came to the conclusion: 'It's up to her mom what happens to her,'" so once again Lyn took off.

She ended up at Echo Park United Methodist Church and called McPherson from a pay phone. McPherson, meanwhile, had been busy harassing the people at the two San Francisco shelters for every piece of information he could get, and became increasingly convinced that Lyn's stories about Rivendell's attempts to "cure" her sexual orientation were indeed true. And he was becoming angrier and angrier that the system wasn't helping her.

So he called an old L.A. friend, Morris Kight. He asked Kight, a longtime gay activist who recently celebrated his 73rd birthday, "Couldn't we put her in hiding for a little while until I got a better handle on this?" Kight arranged for Sass Nielsen, a local lesbian activist (most recently involved in organizing a gay and lesbian support group for fellow employees at the Walt Disney Company), to put Lyn up for a while.

Nielsen drove out to the church to find her, and the first moments of their acquaintance were tense. "I asked, 'Are you Lyn?'" and she kind of backed off," Nielsen remembers. But she knew how to break the ice: "I said, 'I'm a lesbian, and when I was 16 my mom found out and sent me to a psychiatrist.'" The tension melted quickly.

Nielsen was immediately impressed with this child. "It only took me about 15 or 20 minutes to be absolutely taken with her," she says. "She was so bright, such a survivor. She had a way of reducing what seemed to be a major trauma down to the simplest terms. It was amazing, some of the insight she gave me." She quickly came to the same conclusion McPherson had: that what this kid needed wasn't institutionalization, but simply a home where she was loved and supported.

After almost three weeks underground in L.A. (during which I spoke with her several times and fended off another anxious call from her mother), Nielsen helped arrange a ride for Lyn back to San Francisco, where McPherson was now determined to get something done one way or another. He got in touch with the two agencies that finally made the difference: the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR), and Legal Services for Children (LSC), a group devoted to providing free legal representation for young people in need.

The way to solve Lyn's problem, the two agencies ad-

vised, was to find a suitable, sympathetic adult who could become Lyn's legal guardian, then file a court petition to have guardianship transferred from her mother to the chosen individual. Such legal determinations are not that unusual, says LSC assistant director Jeth Gold, despite recent breathless and inaccurate media reports about the "new" phenomenon of children "divorcing" their parents. "We've been doing it for years," he comments, in cases where it can be shown that the existing parental relationship is harmful to the child.

It was NCLR that found two suitable guardians: Attorney Ora Prochovnick, 35, and her life-partner of 9½ years, Rena Frantz, 30 who works for a local AIDS association. The couple already had one child, a two-year-old girl that Frantz had borne through artificial insemination.

A meeting was set up, but Prochovnick was concerned that Lyn might feel rejected if the women did not want to go forward, so the first get-together involved about a half-dozen attorneys, supposedly there to consider how to handle Lyn's case. "We met in a roomful of lawyers," Prochovnick recalls. "She didn't realize I was there for more personal reasons." She felt good about that first meeting and, after discussing the situation with Frantz and their two roommates, they decided to move forward.

The next step was for Lyn and the two women to spend a whole day together, going to the park, talking and just hanging out. After that — and once the San Francisco Department of Social Services had done the background check on the couple that would be required for eventual court approval — they decided on a one-week trial run. At the conclusion of the week they all felt comfortable enough to go to court and petition for a temporary guardianship, which was granted September 11, with no opposition from Lyn's mother.

The hearing for permanent guardianship was set for October 15, but her mother's attorney, Aleta Beaupied, obtained a two-week delay, causing everyone to worry that the hearing might prove to be a knock-down, drag-out fight. But her mother didn't show to contest the petition, and the attorney filed a 150-page document Gold characterizes as "a pseudo-opposition." He adds, "I believe the mother's attorney told her she didn't have a winning case." (Beaupied did not respond to repeated requests for comment.)

One of the reasons Gold felt confident was that Lyn's legal

team had in their hands a letter from psychiatrist Lynn Ponton, a professor at the UC San Francisco School of Medicine and vice president of the Northern California Psychiatric Society, who had examined Lyn in July. Ponton's letter was blunt: "I saw no serious psychiatric disorders which warrant treatment in a locked residential treatment facility," she wrote, adding that she was "distressed" to learn that Lyn had been placed in just such an institution. "Any future placement in such a facility," she went on, "would be harmful to Lyn's psychological well-being. It is my opinion that Lyn should be allowed to live in a supportive home-like setting."

It was no contest. On October 29, Commissioner Carol Yaggy of the San Francisco County Superior Court granted permanent guardianship of Lyn to Prochovnick and Frantz. "Unless there's a change of circumstances," Gold says, "it's permanent."

Everyone involved is ecstatic at the result. Says Nielsen, "I'm so happy she has the opportunity to live a normal life. She has such tenacity — I can't wait to see what she turns out like as a young woman. I can't wait." Prochovnick agrees. "What matters," she declares, "is that this was a kid who needed a stable, loving environment and we were able to provide it. I think we all feel good about the family we're creating with each other."

But McPherson, though "enormously gratified to have helped," is more somber, noting that it took an unlikely combination of luck, strength of will on Lyn's part and tenacious effort by a handful of sympathetic adults to bring about a happy ending — a fortunate confluence of circumstances that most misunderstood or mistreated gay and lesbian kids never experience. He is determined to make sure that what happened to Lyn doesn't keep happening to other kids. "This isn't the end of this," he declares grimly. "This is just the beginning."

And Lyn? She's making plans to go to Washington, D.C. for the gay and lesbian civil rights march set for April. She has lots of the usual teenage complaints. Prochovnick and Frantz, she grumps, are "very adultish. They make me clean my room and wash the dishes and come home on time and stuff." But is she happy? "How can I not be? I have my very own two lesbian moms! You should have some, too!"

[This article is dedicated to the memory of Rob Nemchik, who introduced me to Lyn and who died of AIDS complications July 25, 1992.] ▼



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