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LONG WAY HOME: The Odyssey of a Lesbian Mother and Her Children

By Jeanne Jullion

Cleis Press, P.O. Box 14684, San Francisco 94114; 262 pages; \$8.95

REVIEWED BY SHEILA KOREN

If a single week could be used to encapsulate Bay Area gay history, the last week in May would be the one. First, it commemorates the birthdate of slain gay Supervisor Harvey Milk and that of the lenient sentencing of his homophobic assassin, Dan White. Second, it recalls a fateful day in May, 1977 (just after the defeat of the gay rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida), when Judge Gordon Minder of Oakland removed Jeanne Jullion's children from her custody for "undisclosed" reasons relating to her lesbianism.

Eight years later, Jullion's story emerges as "Long Way Home," a lucid and dramatic re-creation of a personal struggle in a turbulent and momentous period ("the headiest times," she calls them) of gay political history.

The book begins with Jullion's foreign studies in Italy, where she met and married the man who was later to say of her first lesbian relationship: "My right hand wants to hit you but my left understands," and eventually to sue for custody of their two children if she intended "to live with THAT woman in THIS neighborhood" (Oakland). It continues through changes in lifestyle, court sessions, tender moments with children, lovers, friends, defense committee gatherings and gay community activities. From adventurous border crossings and grueling cross-examinations, Jullion's story is full of humor, sex and exotic locale.

It is a riveting narrative. The book's crystal-clear writing is wonderfully evocative of time and place, whether the author is describing the foggy seaside town of Ravenna, Italy, "where dreams were washed down with espresso in the central piazza" or "Sally Gearhart atop a platform on Castro Street at what was to have been the long-planned commemorative 49th birthday celebration for Harvey Milk, saying, quite bluntly, of the fury of the night before, 'We have no apologies to make.'"

Unfortunately, there are so many interesting characters involved in Jullion's life that some are lost in the course of the story — sometimes unsettlingly so. Mostly, however, her story is a chronicle of poignancy, camaraderie, intelligence and rage. It is painful to read here that her husband's attorney asked Jeanne's ex-lover Shana about the number of occasions they engaged in sexual activity during the nearly a year they lived together. Armin Horowitz is quoted in his extensive interrogations as saying, "More than 10 times?" "More than 20?" "More than 100?"

"Long Way Home" will be of particular value to anyone still concerned about the possible stigma for a child raised in a homosexual household. "Kids are teased about many things," testifies Dr. Richard Green, prominent researcher on human sexual and social development — "their race, about wearing glasses, about being skinny or fat, having a big nose, something. What you have to look at is how the parent helps the child deal with it . . . In fact, it can be an opportunity for the child to learn valuable lessons about coping with life." ■

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