

About the Front Cover

The front cover is a photograph of Rosamund Elwin and her daughter, Aziza Elwin Carrington. Rosamund is co-author, with Michele Paulse, of *Asha's Mums* (Women's Press, 1990), one of three books banned in 1997 by a local school board in British Columbia.

In April, 1997 the Surrey School Board refused to approve the use of resources from gay and lesbian groups and banned the use of three children's books from use in all Surrey schools. The books were *Asha's Mums*, in which a girl named Asha runs into resistance from her teacher when she brings in a field trip permission note signed by her two moms; *One Dad Two Dads Brown Dad Blue Dads* by Johnny Valentine, a Suesstyle exploration of difference; and *Belinda's Bouquet* by Leslea Newman, a story about a child who is labeled fat by an adult but regains self-esteem thanks to a friend with two moms.

In August, 1997 a group of parents, students, teachers, and authors, including Rosamund Elwin, filed a lawsuit in B.C. Supreme Court arguing that the Board's actions violated free expression and equality rights. The action was supported by the B.C. Civil Liberties Association and EGALÉ (Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere). On December 16, 1998 the Supreme Court granted the petitioner's request, arguing that the decision to ban the three books could not be justified. In her decision Justice Mary Sanders found that an accurate description of the books was that they portray or describe same sex families "which ought to be valued in the same way as other family models, that they are peopled by caring, thoughtful, intelligent, loving people who do give the same warmth and love and respect that other families do."

The Surrey School Board has gone to the B.C. Appeal Court to have the lower court decision overturned. The case is expected to be heard in Spring, 2000.

Many of those leading the battle on behalf of the school board are affiliated with far right, anti-abortion religious groups. Robert Pickering, former chair of the Board, was once arrested for blockading the entrance of a Vancouver abortion clinic, has banned condom machines from washrooms in Surrey high schools, and barred Planned Parenthood materials from classrooms. He and Heather Stilwell, current chair, have been active in the Campaign Life Coalition, whose position is that "to have become a homosexual is to have acquired a moral disorder." Pickering has also been a director of the Citizen's Research Institute, which has declared itself against schools teaching that homosexuality is "normal, acceptable and must be tolerated." Stilwell is a

founder and former leader of the provincially registered Christian Heritage party, which advocates recriminalizing sexual deviancy and abolishing the Charter of Rights. To date the Board has spent \$714,000 fighting the case.

The fight against the Board's anti-gay moves is supported by many Surrey parents concerned with the conservative stance being taken by public officials. Some have formed a group called Heterosexuals Exposing Paranoia to counter what they see as sexual hysteria being whipped up by the trustees. The argument of those opposing the Board has always been that "prejudice, hatred, and discrimination against gay and lesbian people is a serious problem, especially for homosexual students. It is therefore crucial to ensure that homosexual students and children with same gender parents see themselves reflected in the school curriculum, so as to combat homophobia in our schools and in society at large."

ASHA'S MUMS



by Rosamund Elwin & Michele Paulse
Illustrated by Dawn Lee