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Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

May 2001

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video

Maternally Yours

Movie mothers run the gamut from angel to witch.

BY CANDACE MOORE

Moms can be gentle cuddlers, possessive demons, or just plain hard to replace, lovelies. Three rainy day rentals pay tribute to the natural-disaster magnitude of the perennially moody matriarch. *Mommie Dearest*, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, *First Wives Club*, and *Wildflowers* depict ol' ladies that love so hard they're not to be trifled with.

Mommie Dearest

(Paramount Pictures, 1981)

Director Frank Perry's campy take on Christina Crawford's 1978 tell-all memoir, *Mommie Dearest*, relishes the obsessive-compulsive abuse that actress Joan Crawford lavished on her daughter. The outwardly smooth, upstanding Hollywood belle—played to Jekyll-and-Hyde perfection by diva Faye Dunaway—is inwardly a boozy, selfish hag. Over the course of this slanted bio's 30 years, Crawford's pristinely penciled eyebrows darken into thick purveyors of anguish. The real-life horror story brings behind-the-scenes chuckles to Crawford's portrayal of a nearly-driven-to-murder mom in the noir classic, *Mildred Pierce* (1945). Cherub-faced infant Tina, adopted as a PR stunt, endures wire-hanger beatings and a stint in a nunnery to become an autonomous soap starlet. Mara Hobel as young Christina is so preppy princess that when she's down on her hands and knees covered in floor cleanser and cursing, we see what an axe-fearing rearing can do to a girl. Diana Scarwid's teenage version wears 1950s hipster regalia and acts a lot tougher. Grade: **A**

Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit

(BBC Video, 1990)

Adapted from the same-named coming-out novel by Brit lit star Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* is a heart-tugging tale of a young adoptee (Emily Aston/Charlotte Coleman) torn between the adoration of god's flock and the desire she feels for girls she picks up to convert. Her harsh mother (the superbly dour Geraldine McEwan) is the spitty-mouthed preacher's right-hand disciple. When Jess finds she can't expel her inner demon—no matter how much the ministry trusses her like a stuck pig and shouts aspersions—she leaves home and church to pay the bills by driving an ice cream truck and painting corpses in a funeral home. Beban Kidron's film is a vivacious reminder that some of us need to fight inconceivably hard to be happy. Grade: **A+**

First Wives Club

(Paramount Pictures, 1996)

Goldie Hawn, Bette Midler, and Diane Keaton star in this unromantic comedy about three old school friends who band together to eviscerate

(figuratively) their exploitative ex-husbands. When the stuck-on-vengeance wives pile into a local girl bar, supportive mom Keaton enlists her dyke daughter Chris's (Jennifer Dundas) help, and Goldie boogies part of the night away with Lea Delaria. Bette separates them by butchering up her tone: "She's with me, babe. Come on, honey, my place." The female bonding feels fresh in context, the film's heart is in the right place, and the divas deliver laughs. *Sex in the City's* Sarah Jessica Parker, as a social-climbing bimbo, gives one of the funnier cameos. And to see the blood draining from Keaton's ex's face as their daughter peeps, "Oh Daddy, I'm a lesbian. A big one," is priceless. Grade: **B**



Hannah and DuVall's incestuous flirt

Wildflowers

(Monarch Home Video, 1999)

Even Electra couldn't foresee what happens when a pained teen sees Darryl Hannah (who's aged well since *Splash*) dancing erotically to "Blues Traveler" and turns to mush. Low budget in a bad way (the sound quality stinks), Melissa Painter's narrowly averted Greek tragedy redeems itself with some genuine, considered performances. A willful Cally (Clea DuVall, of *But I'm a Cheerleader* fame)—born during the Summer of Love and reared in Marin County by a soft-hearted, weed-smoking, screw-up dad (Tomas Arana)—longs to fathom the whims of the long-lost mother who high-tailed it to sunny Mexico. Cally is shakily wide-eyed in the presence of Sabine (Hannah), softly stroking her hair or whipping up breakfast with the fearful delight of the crush-stricken. Attempting to get closer to that flesh, the smitten girl even beds Sabine's throwaway boyfriend (Eric Roberts). Before Sabine is revealed to be Cally's mom, *Wildflowers* features some not-so-subtle flirting between the two, which, in retrospect, verges on the creepy. Grade: **B+**

Candace Moore, coeditor of the small press *Runcible Spoon*, lives in Los Angeles.

GIRLFRIENDS



Me, Mom, and San Francisco PFLAG cochair Julia Thoron

Erin to Heather: We've come a long way, Baby.

When I founded *Girlfriends* in 1994, my mother donated so much of her time and money that we put her on the masthead. When we opened our offices a year later, Erin became a regular member of the team. Not only did Mom not reject me for my choice of lifestyle, she commutes an hour each way, every day, to run my gay business with me. Right on, Mom!

So the *Girlfriends* office is intrinsically mom-friendly. Younger staffers regularly bring their out-of-town parents by to meet coworkers. What a difference a generation makes.

Activist Harry Hay, who founded the pioneering gay group the Mattachine Society in 1950, had a theory: queers are notoriously hard to organize into lasting groups because we're still so angry at our parents for rejecting us. Hay thought that the near-universal queer experience of being abandoned by one's family made gays and lesbians suspicious, fiercely independent, and quick to flee.

Hay's theory was amazingly perceptive, taking seriously the scary reality that, especially in the days before Stonewall, parents would love and support a child no matter what—unless the child turned out to be a “pervert.” Today, his theory sounds completely archaic.

We've made so much progress since the days of the Mattachine Society and its sister group, the Daughters of Bilitis. (Note how the name of this early lesbian group identified us as daughters—not to our real parents, but to an institution.) In my circle of friends, I know of only one dyke who isn't accepted by her family. She fears telling them who she really is because they are first-generation Palestinian immigrants and very religious. About a week ago, she came out when her mother asked if she were “that way.” Her mom reacted with shock and denial, but didn't disinherit her, as my friend had feared.

We have our moms and dads to thank for this turn of events. But we also owe a lot to activists like Julia Thoron, cochair of the San Francisco branch of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. Julia got involved with PFLAG after her daughter came out to her on New Year's Eve, 1990. “We needed to learn,” she says. “We didn't know anybody who had come forward.” Since then, she's been battling what may be the most painful kind of homophobia: parents' rejection of their own children.

In celebration of Mother's Day, *Girlfriends* has assembled a lot of great stories about moms and motherhood. Be sure to read Lauren Dockett's unveiling of the mystery of life behind the lesbian baby boom. Although growing numbers of doctors, sperm banks, and researchers are specializing in getting us pregnant, sometimes low-tech methods prove the most reliable. K Kaufmann's “Life After Abortion” takes stock—in light of the current administration's anti-abortion stance—of women's right to choose when and if to be pregnant. Last but not least, Lucy Lawless is on our cover because of her role in the lesbian cult classic *Xena: Warrior Princess*, but it just so happens Lawless recently became a mom. And as Julia Thoron's example proves ...

Being a supportive mom is an Amazonian achievement.

Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief

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