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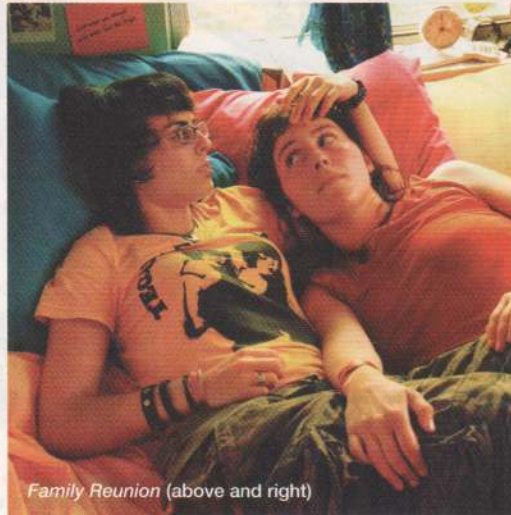


MEREDITH BAXTER ALERT!

It felt like like a *Family Ties* reunion recently when Meredith Baxter played an advice-wielding mom on the ratings-poor drama *What About Brian?* But Baxter (above) took the whole thing a little bit further than mere '80s nostalgia with her role as Deena's mom, Frankie, a lesbian who is rather outspoken about all things woman (she starts her first act by telling folks that her girlfriend still has the body of a 35-year-old). She shook up the show, already one of my favorites (because I like Rosanna Arquette, gay nannies and geeky boys) with her fiery feminist style and sexy banter and by making Deena and Dave learn sign language instead of dragging their feet and hoping for a kid who can hear. Baxter's scene with her on-screen daughter, done almost entirely in sign language, was one of the show's best. (*fox.com*) — Diane Anderson-Minshall

Family Matters

It's Mother's Day. Time to bond. | By Candace Moore



Family Reunion (above and right)



These hard-to-find indie releases are worth the hunt. All three intelligently convey issues that arise for our families, including coming out to folks back home, fighting court battles for equal rights under the law and creating alternative family structures that work.

Family Reunion (No 9 Productions)

This Sundance short by director Isold Uggadóttir brings a quirky, punky, Icelandic twist to the classic coming-out story. Katrín (Adalbjörg Arnadóttir) greets her sweetie in the streets of New York with her hands full of shopping bags, all gifts for her relatives back home. The two vintage-clad late-20-somethings cutely return to their pad all smiles — until Katrín's girlfriend interrupts the snuggle-fest. She wants to join Katrín on the flight to Iceland to finally meet the parents. Katrín responds with an uncomfortable no, and we soon see why.

Upon arrival in her homeland, Katrín's drunken ex-boyfriend slurs crude remarks; her mom dresses her all in virginal white; all the women in her family want to do at their gathering is point out hard-working and handsome Icelandic chaps, citing fears that Katrín is dating a man of a different ethnicity or nationality in America. After a trip to the bathroom to vomit from nervousness, however, Katrín learns that perhaps her family reunion is not quite what she's assumed or constructed, and that maybe there is a little room for open-mindedness in her homeland. (*no9productions.com*)

Freeheld (Cynthia Wade)

Winner of a Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, this Cynthia Wade documentary relies largely on handheld camerawork to give a carefully angled, close-up and personal approach to its look at Laurel Hester. A retired officer with swiftly spreading lung cancer, Hester earned her pension serv-

ing 25 years on the Ocean County police force. Among her former colleagues, she's considered courageous under pressure, a sharp shot and an absolute asset to the local community. Yet Hester's life partner, Stacy, may lose their family home after she passes away, since the party in control in their New Jersey county, the Freeholders, won't allow gays and lesbians to pass benefits on to their domestic partners. This no-holds-barred film provocatively documents the many official battles waged inside Freeholder meetings for Hester's right to leave her pension to whom she wishes, and touchingly looks bedside at the battles Hester must wage for her life. (*freeheld.com*)

Dear Gabe (Alexandra Juhasz)

Alexandra Juhasz's video letter to her son is a lyrical epistolary film mixing fly-on-the-wall footage, interviews, home movies and photographs to explore families created out of love. Gabe is 3 at the film's beginning and has a slightly older sister, Simone, and two mommies: one Jewish, Juhasz, and one African American, Cheryl Dunye (director of *The Watermelon Women*). Fashioning a family using their own rites, Juhasz and Dunye were inseminated by the same close friend. Though the two women shared lives and raised young children together, they've since separated. Through the film, Juhasz describes to her son and to viewers how families can be created through queer or straight partnerships, friendships and other alliances; can be of mixed racial, ethnic, and religious makeups; and although they may change over time, their bonds and ties remain. *Dear Gabe* centers on the differently structured families Juhasz's five female friends have created more than a decade after college, to show that what underlies them, love, is consistent. The film is intimate — we are let inside a mother's direct address to her son and a handful of women's homes and personal details — yet it universally resonates. (*pzacad.pitzer.edu/~ajuhasz*) ■