

# Don't Leave your Friends Behind

**anarcha-feminism & supporting mothers and children**

Where is the supportive feminist community for this mother and her children?



**La Rivolta! - Anarcha-Feminist Festival**

**March 4, 2006 ♦ International Woman's Day ♦ Boston**

## **Don't Leave your Friends Behind: anarcha-feminism & supporting mothers and children**

*"it's about putting your politics into practice"*

Despite its rhetoric, the anarchist and radical movement expects mothers to be almost solely responsible for childrearing. When a radical woman becomes a mother she often finds herself a minority within her mostly childless peer group—left behind. The subculture mimics, to a degree, the greater society's unreasonable expectations of mothers and children. Anarcha-feminism challenges us to create personal and social change but often provides no support for mothers who try to do so.

The majority of visible activists and radicals do not have caretaking duties within their collective enterprises and thus might ignore their minority mother participant's concerns. When hetero couples have kids, the dads are still (usually) going out and doing activist work and applauded for being activists while mothers aren't given any props for doing childrearing and/or the childcare that allows activist dads to continue to be activists. And then the scene writes off mothers who aren't at meetings or actions failing to recognize that mothers need the support of their communities and activist groups if they are to continue contributing their experiences, insight and expertise without becoming overburdened.

Mothers need support to continue in the scene. Otherwise, as activists get older and start having kids, they drop out and it remains a movement of 20-somethings. We need to recognize that mothers have specific needs in order to continue participating (and that other people have needs too which get accommodated except that those needs aren't as pronounced and obvious as those of mothers). By valuing the involvement/work of radical mothers, we form a more vibrant culture of resistance; and we teach the young the vision we want to see of a more equitable future by including them in our activities now.

This will be a discussion between both parents and non-parents on the need for support and how childless allies can support mothers' continued participation in the movement. The discussion will include results from Vikki's anarchist mama survey that points out concrete ways in which women that were formerly very active in the scene got ostracized and how these types of scenarios could be prevented.

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**China Martens** is a single mother of an 18-year-old daughter and the editor of "The Future Generation: a zine for subculture parents, kids, friends & others". She is expecting to have a book out in May (an anthology of the last 15 years of her zine!) published by Atomic Books Company./ P.O. Box 4803 Baltimore MD 21211



## Audacious Enough Mama

Sitting in on a meeting yesterday discussing the creation of an emergency housing access center for the growing number of families in downtown LA—with staff members from the County and with the baby on my lap, I disagreed in mind while I remained silent feeling audacious and political just by taking my child into this “setting”.

That alone, had me quiet. Well there were other people in the room two people to be exact that I agreed with. Not County workers or mainstream social providers. Everyone talked over each other during the heated fundamental “bigger picture” moments—and upper management titles were around the fancy smancy wooden table. That alone was an intimidating sight. Cozy in the family friendly space in a conference room of professionals without children present and not asked to leave or somebody shooting a cold eye down my way every time the child cooed or even screeched I conformed to silence.

It is seeped the fear of “getting kicked out” thrown the uncomfortable speaks volumes dirty look, the whisper directed at me since a small child is on my lap. For the record, if she screams for more than a few seconds I leave any room.

But being a mom in public with a toddler is testing, especially the certain places I take my child to like the meetings, trainings, even conferences and events. I am super worried about getting that anti-child person, the disgusted look, that remark that will bother the hell out of me and have me thinking it through, making a next trip to an un-family friendly or child friendly setting an act that requires a certain I don't give a fuck personality that on occasion I might get, other than that leaving the house will be act reserved for child friendly places. (I am not even talking about theatres, bars, even parties)

I've been called out on it—the too worried that the child will disrupt something; affecting (which I've allowed) my presence, voice and input anywhere I'm at. My five senses are divided in staying attentive as a mother, a productive member of a meeting/training/event and staying on top of the two to never really mesh nor clash. This is exhausting and is keeping me nervous despite the fact that I'm going on one year of taking my daughter into those strictly adult places. This level of caretaker worried the hell of inconveniencing other folks has pretty much preoccupied me to the point where leaving a room is a constant thing. Even when I'm on the agenda in a meeting. I give priority to not inconveniencing the childfree people. Too much so—I've been called out that I'm not taking risks disagreeing, comfortably staying silent, contributing, and even resisting to leave a room while fabniña relaxes a bit. The confidence levels are showing. I will say something after a training, write my thoughts down to then share after a committee meeting, etc to then be asked why I didn't share with the rest.

Going through this has given me the awareness of the very real power dynamics between women with children and

individuals without children. The stigma associated with mothering, and risks of oppression acts of silence or not be seen that exist for caretakers with small children in public spaces.

After leaving the meeting with these County folks talking about getting families (women of color that are mothers and have one to three children with them) out of homelessness where not once the thought of creating affordable long term housing mentioned, or the possibility that “the need to be fixed and helped crowd” need to be sent someplace else but here— can and should remain in a invested community instead of pushed out. How about Work, Live & Play revitalization plans mean high-end lofts for young urban professionals without children who are able to pay \$2,500 of rent and single women, men and families that have been in “skid row” resorting to transitional shelters and emergency beds for months and years.

Not once were these radical ideas considered by those that want to alleviate homelessness and affordable housing dilemass thus I hated reform to the bone at that moment. But as I walked out of that room I'm daring someone to question children in public spaces “just let someone fuck with me” attitude in development.

It is time I begin advocating with my own very work in progress public confident mama on her hib presence with my child in the “activism” work I'm in—with the other very “progressive” feminist women without children with them there or women who are not mothers at all calling out the societal age-ism towards children when I see it and when it is directed home. It is time—and if it works—”the I don't give a fuck” thought to gain strength to proudly parent in public as I facilitate, disagree, give input in a heated discussion or committee even while as fabniña arches her back pushing her legs in the air screeching in protest to be released without me wanting to run out of the room from the sight and ears of the children-less crowd. - Fabmujer at [fabulosamujer.blogspot.com](http://fabulosamujer.blogspot.com)



**Comment:** good for you for hanging in there, fabi. i think people need to be desensitized to noisy kids, myself.

but i know it's difficult. i was a single mother of a VERY hyperactive toddler, trying to finish my college degree. people often encouraged me to attend various events and bring my son along, but they were clueless as to what that really involved.

until i was invited to a sierra club meeting, where a park ranger would be making a presentation that was based on my own field research. of course i wanted to be there, so i brought hercules along. he lasted less than 5 minutes. i spent the next 2 hours chasing him around outdoors in the dark, trying to

catch glimpses of the slideshow through the window. i couldn't leave because someone else had given me a ride. i wanted to cry. but i still had fun playing with my little hercules, at least.

after that, no one expected me to bring him along anymore.

**-Renee Maxwell - educatinghercules.blogspot.com**

Hey Renee that was a sad story. It is damn true people don't know, most atleast.

I have to say to folks not as an excuse over and over look I have my child and it is difficult to be the productive member I really want to be and you really wish I should be in this fill in the blank when I'm solely satisfying my child's desires in this public space to have her stay calm and not disrupt anything. So damn don't come down hard on me as it is staying confident mothering in public when at times I feel I shouldn't can and at times eats me alive.

I thought I'd share with you quickly two events I was part of of yesterday and today.

Yesterday—first off these communities are mostly Salvadoreans, Mexican, Guatemalen, Hondurenos and one or two families from S. America. There are children yes, and quite a number of them.

Both of these groups are working towards housing equity and tenant rights. Most of the folks that come out to the events, evals, convivios (get togethers) and leadership development are women that are mothers, specifically women of color that mother. They take their children everywhere.

There are the older folk the non-mothers or fathers that dislike the children around. There was a critique about the children being noisy, annoying, rambunctious wild—making it hard to

concentrate one or two folks were pissed.

Now part of the problem is that this woman/men didnt' want children around at all. The other problem was that women that were active in the whatever it is werent' paying attention to their children. Not once was there someone organized to sit with the children with colors, paints, paper etc in another room—because of the gendered and low value of that work.

The one event that I went to today there were even more women and the children were in a room with a woman playing, coloring, painting, drawing and reading with them. This last group it appeared to me that this general low valued "woman's work" was valued in this situation.

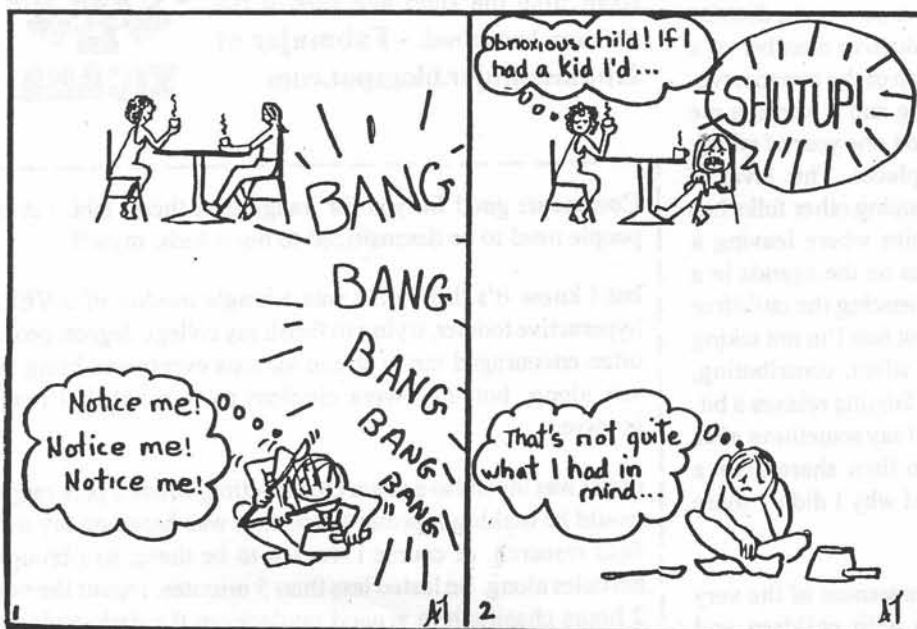
She was recognized and it rotated—these women have proven to be a force and are the most fierce active leaders in a gentrifying community—they are not dropped by the radar because they are mothers. They organize themselves with the help of structure to adapt to the phases of mothering young children.

Can I say—the victories that I have seen at a grassroots working class level have been from mothers from varying from the bus riders union, garment workers to major land/job agreements, securing a community from abolishing the history and constituency—and folks aren't against mothers with children or children. They adapt and it is a necessary part of justice because children are human too.

Mothers are a proven force in grassroots victory in our communities home and abroad. It is essential to any movement that in the name of justice is trying to create change.

Since when has it become a single without children movement?

**- Fabmujer**



# China:

Once, years ago, at a poetry reading, my daughter made the slightest sound & the reader said, "I can't read anymore. The child is disturbing me." And it really pissed me off and I never forgot it & had a grudge against him for years—because he made me feel unwelcome. And really my daughter made the smallest sound. She was well behaved for a child, around stuff like poetry readings—and very well-socialized—outgoing.

I was thinking how Ariel did it at hipmama readings, how she told the moms she is not afraid of the kids making noise, we can read louder over the kids, and that these words were written in chaos she wants you to hear the children yelling in them. WELL - we read to rooms FULL of moms and kids, at one point, at the Bookstore in Portland it really was packed with younger children and we had no microphone - and we did still make ourselves be heard.

I think the point is a little desensitizing to kid sounds is good for everyone - and that moms do leave the room with kids if they start screaming! It's a little peep, or babbling, or moments sound - and the fear of being expelled from the room that interrupts the thought processes to say anything publicly, the reason why one came.

# Vikki:

One afternoon, a mama and I were hanging out in one of the gardens with our kids. The kids were having a great time and running around and hugging and whatnot. There was a slideshow going on later that evening about political movements in Latin America. I wasn't planning to go because I was sure that Siu Loong wouldn't sit quietly through that and I would end up having to leave.

The other mama kept trying to get me to go. OH, it won't be so bad. Siu Loong really wanted to hang out with her friend and the girls seemed to be having such a good time and I kind of figured that we two mamas could tagteam dealing with them, so I reluctantly agreed to go.

We got there and there was virtually no one there for the talk and slideshow. The other mama, who knew the presenter, started talking to her and ignored me. Then when the slideshow started, Siu Loong started making noise. I think the other mama had her on her lap and was absent-mindedly bouncing her and Siu Loong started chanting, "Bouncy, bouncy, bouncy, bouncy!"

The presenter, who had a soft voice to begin with, stopped and said, "That's really distracting." So I took Siu Loong outside and she put up a fuss about leaving her friend who didn't want to come outside with us but wanted to stay in with her mom.

I hadn't grabbed any of our stuff, which the kids had scattered all over the bookstore. So we couldn't even go home. Instead, Siu Loong and I sat outside and I felt really shitty and ostracized and kicking myself for going to something that I KNEW would end like that. I also felt unsupported by both my mama friend, who had talked me into going even though I had told her I didn't think that Siu Loong would sit quietly through the event and I would end up having to leave and the other mother who couldn't figure out a way to deal with having a small boisterous child in the room.

Unfortunately, scenarios like these--in which mothers feel as if they must leave an event or meeting--happen all too frequently. To try and figure out how much support anarchist communities actually offer their mothers--and how much more they *\*could\** offer, I developed this survey:

## Anarchist Mamas!

a survey on mamahood and the movement

*Voltaire de Cleyre did not live with her own son. Emma Goldman declared that motherhood meant "years of absorption in one human being to the exclusion of the rest of humanity" and chose anarchism over motherhood.*

*Even in anarchist-controlled Spain during the 1930s, women with children remained, by and large, unsupported by their collectives. Because the responsibility for childcare still fell upon them, they were unable to attend union meetings, often leading to the neglect and dismissal of many of their concerns.*

*Over the last century, how has the anarchist movement grown to accommodate and support its mothers? Has it?*

- Ⓔ Do you—as a mother—in the movement feel supported?
- Ⓔ What was the extent of your involvement in anarchist projects/organizations **before** becoming a mother?
- Ⓔ Did that change during your pregnancy or after giving birth? If so, how so?
- Ⓔ Have there been times when you have been made to feel unwelcome in spaces/groups that had previously welcomed you?
  - Ⓔ How have you responded? (And how did you wish you had responded?)
- Ⓔ What support have you gotten from your fellow anarchists? (Be specific)
- Ⓔ Have there been times when you felt your needs have **not** been met? (Be specific)
- Ⓔ What city/town do you call home?

- Ⓔ Would you be willing to be contacted for a more prolonged interview (either by phone, e-mail or in person)? If so, leave your contact info at the bottom of this sheet.

Photo taken from the website for the *Radical History Review*  
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/rhr/features.htm#images>

For more information or to participate in this project, contact:  
[vikkiml@yahoo.com](mailto:vikkiml@yahoo.com)



What was the extent of your involvement in anarchist projects / organizations before becoming a mother?

I used to spend almost all of my free time (that is, time away from my paying work) engaged in activism, organizing, and politics.

I was involved daily, therefore very active, with Food Not Bombs and Free Radio Gainesville. I was doing daily food pickups for FNB and had initiated the Free Fridge at our community's Civic Media Center, in addition to regular organizational meetings and meeting other FNB members at a homeless shelter to cook and distribute meals at the park across the street to those who the shelter didn't have space for. FRG was a pirate radio station that was formed out of an affinity group and grew into a collective operation. I was a collective member, produced my own weekly show, authored public and press conference statements, housed the station and even had to "entertain" sexist and attempting-to-be-intimidating federal agents on my doorstep a few times. Housing the station had to stop when baby came along. I was also involved in the broader, coalition building micro power radio movement with the creation of SEAM, also before baby came along.

Very intense. Much direct action, usually doing various kinds of jail solidarity so most often in at least several days. Got a 2-month sentence for a Livermore Labs Shadowpainting action on Hiroshima Day, in 1993. In other words, IN THE MIDDLE OF THINGS, actually as an organizer, not only as an activist participating in actions others had planned.

- Squatting and squatters' rights/anti-eviction work
- Legal support for those arrested during evictions and direct actions
- Educational work around Mumia Abu-Jamal
- Educational work around political prisoner issues
- Food Not Bombs
- Infoshop work (book selling, information sharing, sort of like being the radical research person)
- Political prisoner support
- Books Through Bars (prisoner literacy and education)
- ABC No Rio: building a photo darkroom and coordinating free photo/filmmaking classes for kids
- Prisoner art exhibitions
- Childcare at a battered women's shelter
- Chiapas solidarity support work

I think there's more, but that's all I can recall right now.

Did that change during your pregnancy or after giving birth? If so, how so?

Oh, yeah. Pregnancy, especially when it's unplanned and is your first, can be pretty all-encompassing. I heard all sorts of comments put out like jokes, which were quite hurtful. People would say things like, "Well, now you're not going to be able to do anything." Talk about a set up!

But in just trying to get through daily life, I wasn't really feeling able to instigate anything. Stuff went on around me, and my ag kept doing our Global Peace Farmer actions at the Concord Naval Weapons Station. It was like no one thought to ask whether I wanted to be involved. I would have jumped (once I was past the first 3 months and nausea) but once not invited, I guess I just assumed, as did everyone else, that I wouldn't be involved.

No one said anything direct to leave me out; I just didn't feel welcomed at times, or needed at others. As is typical with pregnancy, I was probably reacting with great sensitivity in not feeling welcome when people would not have meant not to welcome me. I guess I needed to hear, "Hey, we miss you. When do you think you'll feel up to joining us," or something along those lines. I bet a lot of the feelings we go through at times like this might be like the feelings of those who are physically-disabled, or in other ways disabled, as they/ we get conveniently excluded.

New moms really need others to reach out to us. And it seems strange, really a western societal ill, that, when people become parents, often their lives completely change. Old friends with whom

we used to spend considerable time suddenly have none to spend with us. It is as though in their eyes we have become irrelevant. Nowhere is this more of a problem than within activist circles. People just don't envision families as PART of our organizing as well as actions, though at demonstrations we always get all this almost desperate thanks for being there.

Yes! While pregnant, I purposefully started pulling back and "passing the torch" because I was getting nervous about just "pencil in" the baby to wherever I had an hour or two free. I was that busy and needed to learn how to create actual uncommitted time. But I didn't expect to pull out completely, which is what happened by the time baby was a few months old. Learning how to take care of my baby overwhelmed me & it took me longer to figure out than I thought it would. Eventually, my partner took on a brand new project, one I thought very important, research and organizing for a Citizen's Review Board to oversee the local police department. In addition to doing some behind the scenes work at home, he and I both saw my contribution to that project as being "sidelined" to do more childcare to he could do more of the out and about, public and active organizing work that needed to be done. He definitely recognized my contribution, but others did not. Also, eventually, I was recruited into getting more involved with a local radical feminist group that was not specifically anarchist.



Do you—as a mother—in the movement feel supported?

this is mixed. I live in an anti-racist, anarchist collective household, and my housemates are committed to supporting me and my partner as parents, and they also have individual relationships with my 2 year old daughter, which in itself is incredibly helpful. Plus, at different times they all provide direct support (ie, childcare, etc). My primary political work is in a collective which made a conscious decision to approach my involvement, as a mom, as a political issue and as a big commitment. The group isn't always that supportive, out of, I think, not knowing what to do, but the will is there.

In the larger movement, however, I think the anti-breeders have more visibility and credibility than those of us with kids. Anti-mom/kid/baby rhetoric is usually only challenged by moms, and the necessary community support for moms to remain active is just not there. Most anarchist events are NOT even close to baby/child safe, never mind "friendly," and anarchists often belch out anti-breeding rhetoric which is damn close to rhetoric heard from the right wing about "welfare moms" (which is generally code for moms of color and poor moms). these things are the opposite of supportive.

Have there been times when you have been made to feel unwelcome in spaces / groups that had previously welcomed you?

I did not feel unwelcome, but me with baby in tow was. The aforementioned feminist group made conscious efforts to organize childcare, but the care was inadequate and unrealistic for an infant under the age of 18 months old. The non-parent women in the group just did not get why. Also, though I was never involved directly with Earth First as an active member, I would like to say that their well-known non-breeder stance is counter-productive, hostile and misguided. In the past, I have actually stayed away from large gatherings because of it. I blame it on youthful ignorance and indulgence in individualism. Lately though, especially among the local group, I have seen a shift away from that ignorance and exclusionary attitude. At their large gathering last year, I was actually invited to come lead a radical-parenting workshop and it was well attended with great discussion among the parents and non-parents.

Have there been times when you felt your needs have not been met? (Be specific)

Most events do not have reliable childcare. This is a hard question, though, most of my needs get into issues of time and money, really, and it's hard to feel like I can ask people to help with this kind of stuff, I guess due to an fucked up internalization of nuclear family weirdness. I also need people to be friendly to my kid, to offer me friendship and comradeship, to recognize and respect that i am a mom and that it's hard, amazing, and political work, and these needs are not often met by the larger anarchist community.

What support have you gotten from your fellow anarchists? (Be specific)

Little from child-less ones. Typically, they want to avoid and skirt issues, but, also interestingly, they fall into blaming-the-victims, you could say, trying to convince themselves that things would just be easier if kids weren't present. They fall into what I call the "progressive" "separate-but-equal" strategy of suggesting an institutional childcare model. Out of sight, out of mind.

Not much. While I was pregnant, folks at the community resource center were okay with moving meetings to the afternoons so me and the babe could participate. However, it was shut down about 1 month ago, so I never got to see if that was going to happen.

I feel like my daily caregiver responsibility needs have NEVER been met. I alone am solely responsible for her. There are very few

collective open free spaces like playgrounds and parks. The job world is not set up to accommodate parents.

There are NO radical solutions causing me to sometimes resort back to status quo solutions for support.

I put my daughter in kindergarten because we needed a break from each other badly and there was no support in my own subculture that I could actually healthily unschool her (which was my goal) where she could be with someone besides me 24-7 and participate in the larger society around here. The spheres of work, home, personal, family, were totally compartmentalized.

in order for her to learn in the bigger world, and have some autonomy between us - I felt forced to put her in the school system that I had been intensely opposed to, to the point of saying (when she was a baby) "What's the point of having a kid if you have to turn them over to the indoctrination system? I would rather not have a kid then put any kid of mine in school." I then got her vaccinated in order to go to school, another thing I intensely opposed - felt they were shooting my daughter up with threatening chemicals that could compromise her immune system or give her mental disabilities. I believed vaccinations were a scam of big medical business - but I did it. because I had no power. Because I could not parent on my own without support.

On a daily basis, I receive support from my fellow anarchists! I can't even express how fortunate I feel to be part of an amazing group of (so far?) childless people who nevertheless make community parenting and supporting parents a priority. There are so many examples...

\* The very first time I felt totally supported may be the best one! This was just a couple of months after we became part of the collective. After school one day, I was very tired, so I lay down in the sleeping room at the infoshop (my kids and I did not live at the house, but spent much of our time there) while my 6-year-old son played a board game with a group of folks who were there hanging out. I woke up to the sound of my son "having a meltdown". I came out to deal with it, which was already being attempted by the folks who were there. My son was raging and angry and shouting very ugly things at me. I was dealing with this while everyone looked on.



After he calmed down enough, I took him home and fixed him some dinner and got him settled down there. I left him at home with his older brother while I went back to the infoshop for a meeting that had been planned previously. When I walked in the door, everyone was sitting on the sofas talking. Every head turned to look at me. I felt immediately defensive, having experienced judgment and lack of support in other groups. Then someone said, "We want to know how we can best support you in a situation like that with Griffin. We are so

impressed with how calmly you handle him when he's out of control like that. Please help us help you." I cried. <smile>

\* At a street corner protest action a few months ago, the attendees took turns engaging Griffin to keep him from being bored, and one person who had driven a car had it parked nearby and had a pillow and blanket in the back, just for Griffin to lie down with when he got too cold and bored.

\* My 6-year-old is a very picky eater. We end up cooking communal meals most evenings, but it's totally informal...no planning ahead, just whoever feels like cooking does so, and calls folks to say "Dinner's at my place, if you want some." Without asking, folks have started to automatically make something they know he will eat, like plain steamed broccoli or cauliflower or plain brown rice or plain pasta.

\* I had the flu last week. I got a phone call from a couple of friends from the collective who said, "We want to come and make you some soup, and hang out with Griffin." No need for me to ask for help, because it was offered based on their knowledge of my having nobody else who could cook for me and care for my kids, their anticipation of my need.

On the peace march there was a school bus - that was full of books and art supplies, etc. that was a mobile school for the kids and took them interesting places to play and explore as well - that parents didn't have to be there.

(this is mostly from my housemates) financial support during maternity leave; baby-sitting; logistical support around the house. My primary political space is not expressly anarchist, tho many of us are anarchist, and within that space I've gotten lots of space to step up and step back at will, according to the needs of my kid; also, meetings and such are often held at my house for my convenience (so I can put my kid to bed, so I can attend the meetings at all, etc).

some anarchists gave me some cool t-shirts.

another anarchist who I used to do fnb with hangs out with my kid once a month.

Right after my kid was born, folks (some anarchist, some not) brought us food.

Also, my housemates have accommodated the daycare co-op my kid is in being at our house once a week and occasionally more, plus they have participated in making our house kid safe, and tolerated the toddler takeover of common space.

MikkiJustinJoeland Jorge

when I left California, I remembered they all had a house together here and checked them out and they were just super cool and active. always doing things. cooking, throwing parties, traveling, being witty. So the younger generation is better! I said. I lived down the street and wanted to live with them, and then moved in. It was like a family - safer to move and go places with them.

but I did feel stressed out as the only mom in the bunch, sometimes Clover would be bratty or something, draw on things, and I felt misunderstood, this pressure on me, like they were judging me even when they weren't. I had no other mother friends, they had no other mother or kid friends - so we didn't know what was "normal". STILL I thought they were a good household, I thought they tried. Later John lived with another house in Philly with radical folks and kids --- he apologized to me "I'm sorry we didn't help you out enough". but I was like, it was ok. you guys were good. they were better than most.

still Jorge would let Clover come help make home brew, and Miki and John would dance with her - they were more inclusive and less stressed about "kid chaos" because they were punks. Not all punks reacted like this. they were the good kind :)

Jorge carried Clover up the mountain when she was a heavy toddler, too heavy for me, on our group camping trip (of childless roommates, and me and two other mothers with babies) on the way back from going to a Kid Lib gathering in Canada.

It's just really hard when you are the only one like yourself, in the group.

Here, I'll speak about fellow anarchists who are not parents because when we're talking about fellow anarchist parents, we're not talking in terms of support; we're talking in terms of cooperation and easing each other's daily life. There's a difference! With that said, the anarchist community in Lake Worth, 45 minutes north of where I live, has by far shown the most shining example of support. They go out of their way to let me know about things going on and even think ahead of time about how/if I can be involved. They will take turns being with my daughter and any other kids present in another room or outside so I can listen / contribute in a meeting. They let me know about kid-specific and/or kid-friendly events, like volunteer days at the community garden. They are very involved in organizing in their community and that largely entails getting involved with the kids in their own community, in support of the kids' mostly immigrant, working poor parents. Where we used to live, we parents had organized a childcare co-op for ourselves and there were a couple non-parents who did rise to the occasion of getting involved, as a way to show support to the parents in their community. On a separate note, I have felt some divisiveness among anarchist parents who have a different parenting style / philosophy. For example, being made to feel lesser of a committed anarchist for not following the TCS philosophy.

I am a single mom living in a wonderful anarchist community! Members of our anarchist collective live in four, about to become five, co-op houses scattered through about a one-mile radius in our town, as well as some who live singly or in couples, etc., and some who are currently living abroad.

When I first began getting involved with these folks, I was nervous about bringing my younger son around. He's been diagnosed as "Strong-Willed Oppositional/Defiant", and while I don't think that's a 'disorder' it's certainly an accurate description. Everyone was totally accepting of our family being present for the weekly potluck meal, and then we started coming around more and more, hanging out at the infoshop, attending actions

and meetings and such. As we really began to feel like this was our family, we had lots of discussions-initiated by THEM, not me! - about how the collective could support me as a parent. I am the only full-time parent who is part of the 'core group' (by which I mean, the people who are part of pretty much everything that happens and who spend every day together like a family), and most of them are in their mid-20s or so.

There are both males and females who serve as family members to my kids. I think that kids need both men and women, in multiples, raising them.

Being here only 2 years i'm still meeting folks in the anarchist communities, but the ones i've met have worked pretty hard to make families feel welcome at events - so far it seems to generally be the women, queer and trans folks putting forth the work. But i definitely have to ask - it still seems to be an afterthought, and not instinctively factored into the planning yet.

i'm working with a group of predominantly white folks who are trying to bring more anti-racist politics to the forefront in a lot of the organizing here, and they/we are kid lovin folks who are trying to change that culture. The most support i've found is definitely in the parenting community here - it's pretty strong. lots of folks who don't necessarily identify as anarchists, yet live very closely to the same principles. the neighborhood i live in is built around a small park

and nobody really has a lot of yard space, so everyone convenes in the park, so i've met a lot of parents who are doing some really great stuff in the community. props to whoever had the vision of building a lot of these neighborhoods.

From "My Mama Wears Combat Boots" in *Maximum Rock n'Roll* #42, Dec 2003

I knew the FTAA Ministerial meetings were coming to a city near me, so I went to an anti-FTAA organizational event three months prior. While there, another mom and I chatted it up and one of the things we talked about was the need for organized child care during the anti-FTAA events.

We knew from our personal experience that since becoming mothers, there were several goings-on that we had not been able to get involved with or participate in due to the lack of child care available to us. And we knew from talking to several others that they felt like we did - that because of the demands of caring for kids, they felt forced out of the loop of being active in ways beyond actively parenting.

We were all too familiar with the reality that child care at large-scale events is not organized the way the medic, convergence space, media, and legal help spaces are. And we were all too familiar with attending meetings that felt disrupted because our kids were there and with not feeling like our kids were in a safe space with us demonstrating in the streets because overzealous cops were there.

Since I already had experience organizing cooperative child care and knew about the efforts of the ABC (Anti-Authoritarian Baby-sitting Club - whose collective voice was heard in this column in the May 2003 issue #240), I committed to getting on the ball with making it happen in Miami during the November 17-21 anti-FTAA events. Just driving home from that initial organizational event, my mind was snapped into organizer mode and as soon as I got home, I jumped on getting in touch with the ABC to find out if they were planning on bringing their already organized selves for the showdown like they had at five other large-scale events throughout 2002 and early 2003.

I soon found out from one of the ABC collective members that the project was on indefinite hold due to various reasons. Though disappointed, I wasn't discouraged that I could not facilitate a similar child care model, especially since one of the ABC collective members promised to be a resource for my efforts.

I attended the next big organizational meeting and announced my intentions of organizing child care. I let all in attendance know that every one of them could help by spreading the word that child care would be available and how majorly important just spreading the word would be because parents automatically assume that there will be no child care and therefore do not even plan on attending such events. I also let the paid organizers know that they could help in finding a child care space.

After that, I set to work to get the word out myself by asking several key informational and organizational web sites to post that child care was being organized and that interested persons should contact me to pre-register their kid(s) and/or to volunteer to do a shift at the child care space. Word did get out and kids were getting signed up, though slowly at first. I expected that though and not until the week before the events did the majority of parents wanting care for their kid(s) get in touch with me.

One of the aforementioned paid organizers did come through with a potential child care space, a nursery room at a local church. Jackpot! This was exactly what I was hoping for - an already set up room for kids so that I wouldn't have to create one from scratch. Only problem was that it was a 15 minute drive from where the actions would be. I ran the potential problem by all the parents who had been in touch with me up to that point and all of them said pretty much the same thing, that we'd take what we could

get and deal with it. I set to work to create the liability waiver that the church wanted all the parents and volunteers to sign, along with a medical release form and a general information/registration form.

Things were looking pretty tight and I was feeling excited instead of overwhelmed. There were volunteers coming out of the woodwork, I had all the forms faxed to my contact at the church and was just awaiting final confirmation on the times we could have the nursery room, and my ABC resource person was coming through with all the support and answers to my logistical questions as I needed them. The only two big things I still had to do was think out, type up and put together the required training for all non-parent volunteers and get an actual schedule put together so that all the volunteers could sign up for shifts.

I was calling my church contact every day to find out the exact times we could have the nursery room and after a week, I started getting nervous. My contact was out of town, back in town but sick and would call me back, and never called back so I'd call again only to find out that he still hadn't confirmed the times himself with his Board of Directors. I started making desperate calls to other organizers for leads about any other local churches opening their doors to the by now well publicized by the frenzied local media hype, coming from out-of-town demonstrators. When I finally got my answer from my church contact, I guess the hype about the potentially violent demonstrations had informed his final decision - that it sounded like too much trouble to have at the church and that he'd clean out his garage and put down a piece of carpet for us instead.

It was a mere three days before the child care effort was to begin that he gave me this news and at first, probably because of shock, I actually considered taking him up on his garage. But after a couple hours and several phone calls to the others involved in organizing the child care, I called him back to say thanks but no thanks and was left scrambling to pull this effort off in spite of having no space secured after all.

I'll spare you the details of the over anxious and uber stressed hours I spent on the phone desperately trying to find another space because the next thing that happened was also unforeseen and halted me in my tracks. I got word from two different parties, each of which that had been planning on bringing a group of four or five kids for child care, that they decided to not bring the kids after all. I had to stop to put it all into perspective.

Was I going to continue busting my ass to get a space for a now relatively small number of kids that I could easily accommodate at my own house located 25 minutes away from the actions? Would 10 more minutes between the space and the actions be an issue for the parents and volunteers? If people had been deciding at the last minute to not bring their kids then I could for sure count on others deciding at the last minute to bring their kids and then would there be enough space at my house?

Attempting to process all this in a relatively short amount of time and to try to figure out all the right answers to the questions that were too loaded with unknown variables got me feeling like a failure. All this hard work had crumbled too easily. Still burning with desire to make something, anything work out, I as calmly as I could called or emailed each parent, volunteer, and co-organizer to explain the latest developments. After talking to several of them, I stopped busting my ass and we turned to cooperative child care. After talking to one more, I took her idea to march with her kid in the big legal, permitted march and ran with it. I contacted everyone again to tell them that we should all march together as the Mom & Baby Bloc. Since I was no longer going to be

on duty at the child care space for three straight days, I was not just going to sit at home feeling like I had been dumped.

What wound up transpiring was equally, if not more so, inspiring and empowering than if the organized child care space had come through as planned.

Some of us marched together with our kids on the last leg of the Root Cause march (a three day, 34 mile march) all the way to the barricade that surrounded the hotel where the FTAA Ministerial meetings were being held and all the while flanked on both sides by bike cops, Robo cops, riot cops, cops on horses, cops in cars and from above by cops in helicopters.

We had a Mom and Baby Bloc meeting at the convergence space the next day.

Even more of us marched together as the Mom and Baby Bloc the next day in the big legal, permitted (AFL-CIO sponsored) march - including spontaneous chants and signs like "FTAA needs a spanking," "FTAA is full of poopy," and "Something stinks and it's not my diaper."

The day after that, we took kids to the really free, free market where they got to take whacks at a paper mache dollar sign pinata, eat yummy free food ala Food Not Bombs, learn how to fold origami cranes, paint, make music, run, play, and listen to stories by a guy with his old timey paper spindle "TV".

And when parents wanted to be involved in more than those events and needed care for their kid(s), it was done cooperatively either at my house or one of their hotel rooms.

The down side was that there did end up being several folks who wanted or needed care for their kid(s) that would up not participating with us because the child care space fell through. That really bothered me because in spite of my efforts, I couldn't make it happen. Once again, there were parents who could not get involved who wanted to or who could not participate in ways they wanted to.

What came out of the energy of spontaneity due to the space being canceled on us was, like I said before, exciting, inspirational and empowering. It was all that because when things fell through, we were able to group together collectively so quickly, many of us having never even met before, to strategically get ourselves off the sidelines with our kids. But like I said before too, there is a big need for child care to be a given, just like the convergence, medic, food, housing, media and legal spaces have become. If parents had the big issue of child care removed from the forefront of our brains then we could actually think about something else and participate in more ways!

So the work I cut out for myself didn't have the closure I thought it would have. I thought I'd close up the child care space after the week's last event and be moving on to see what work I could do next. Not so. This job isn't done until the Mom & Baby Bloc demand it into organizer's heads to make child care something to be expected.

After all, we're fighting for a better world here. Shouldn't part of the fight reflect what that better world would look like?

As always, punkparents get in touch. email - [yardwideyarns@hotmail.com](mailto:yardwideyarns@hotmail.com)

PS - For the low down on what went down in Miami, check out [www.stopftaa.org](http://www.stopftaa.org), [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org) and there are also some decent stories posted on [www.alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org). Search around for other independent news sites, too - the truth is out there.

--Jessica Mills



"I believe increasingly that only the willingness to share private and sometimes painful experience can enable women to create a collective description of the world which will truly be ours."

-Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 1976

## "in the (m)other tongue"

I had never held much interest in politics or feminism; the former seemed boring and of course the latter was comprised of angry man-haters. Yet having a baby as a single, twenty year old woman taught me a lot about both politics and feminism. All of a sudden it was clear that although I had been criticized in the past for choosing to have an abortion, now I was being criticized for choosing to *have* a baby. I realized that I was up against a hegemonic social structure that told me I was too young, too single, too poor, too selfish, uneducated, and immature. People like me just didn't have babies, and couldn't possibly be good parents. I had quite obviously ruined my life. Moreover, I couldn't understand why everyone, social workers, friends, family, and society in general, was trying to keep me down instead of helping me. These subtle realizations about gendered oppression began to build my interest in feminism. As Susan Griffin wrote in her 1974 essay "Feminism and Motherhood":

We have only pieces of an analysis and the barest fragments for any vision of the way things could be. That the experience of mothering changes one; that it is learned; that men, in our culture, do not learn this; that women are not in power; that some children are called bastards; that the children of fathers who will feed them and who can are well fed; that those without fathers are more often not well fed; that a mother is asked to give up her life for her children; that mothers are idealized; that mothers are hated; that children are unhappy...that women go mad; that the order of life as we live it now is dangerous.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Susan Griffin, "Feminism and Motherhood"

I increasingly realized how and why motherhood is political—because there are barriers to not only contraception and abortion, but also prenatal care and adequate, affordable childcare. Motherhood is political because kids are taken away from their mom because she sleeps with other women. Motherhood is political

because public policy is more concerned with punishing poor women for their reproductive choices than making sure their kids have healthcare or enough to eat. Motherhood is political because although motherhood is seen as the natural, biological destiny for women, society tells certain women that they should not become mothers.

In the network of radical mamas, I discovered empowering ideas and a lot of other women who were a lot like me: living in their dad's basement, afraid of their baby's dad, trying to get back in school, fighting daily to dispel stereotypes and fiercely loving their children. Although it was my own personal little revolution, I knew that I was part of a larger group of women who used their experiences of motherhood to clarify and construct their political goals. Though I had always considered myself pro-choice, I began to realize that this statement meant a lot more than just the right to choose abortion. I came to understand pro-choice as supporting *all* of women's reproductive choices, including the right to have a child and be supported in doing so, regardless of a woman's individual circumstances. I became involved in activism, whether it was writing to my pro-life New Hampshire senator or marching against the Iraq war with a baby on my back. When a local pool kicked out a woman for breastfeeding her baby, I accompanied a small group of women to hold a "nurse-in" at the pool in protest. Ultimately, though, I've realized that my activism often takes the small shape of simply being who I am, voicing my opinion and fighting the everyday fight to be unapologetic about my small family. Refusing to be silent is often the first step.

- Christie Barcelos,

excerpted from her zine  
"in the (m)other tongue" #1  
(mamas in college)  
129 Landmark Hill Dr. G-3  
Brattleboro, VT 05031

## Fathering the World

Of all the pictures of the devastation that hurricane Katrina wrought, there was one that stopped me cold, that had me mesmerized, overwhelmed, that just seemed to contain all that I wanted to believe about fathers, no, not even fathers, just simply the men in our lives. The picture transcended all the racist media spin, it eased the pain of the decimated street scenes, the moments of panic. One man. One child. Not his even. He was wading through water; he was holding that child like it was the most important thing he could do, like not just that child's life but his life depended on their safe arrival. He asked no questions about whose child it was, no need to ascertain ownership or ask permission. No pathetic excuses about needing to wait and see, to assess things, like we kept hearing from the "men" in charge. He just knew: I help this child, I help myself. I help all of us get by. There was such humanity embodied in his arms, in the determination in his eyes. It spoke to me as the epitome of "fathering," of caring for not just our immediate family but all our relations. I just stared, and it reminded me of how much of an impact we can have on the children in our lives, how easy it is to overlook, to forget, to deprioritize others as we take care of our own. A few weeks ago a young boy who has been in my life for years now, a boy whose father has not been around, a father whom I can not find a way to forgive nor can I understand his willingness to abandon, like something disposable, his offspring. Well, this boy was with his mother and was looking at one of those mirrors that elongates and distorts its reflection; he stared at himself, made a muscle, and said 'look, it's almost as big as Tom's.' When I heard this story, I again realized, as with the picture, how fathering is something all men do whether we want to or not, whether we are prepared for it or not. So it is incumbent upon us to think through who we are and how we affect others, especially the children in our lives. And this is true, whether we are parents or not. I had this argument a few weeks ago about this with a male non-parent who said it's not his responsibility to know how to be around kids. He believes this because of the silence around parenting, around the public's perceptions of children being seen not heard, of good behavior equaling good kids, of ownership (if it ain't my kid, why should I care). I have friends who take diversity training courses to be prepared to work with people of color, enroll in permaculture classes for the coming demise of civilization, but seem unconcerned about working with parents or kids, outreaching to parents or kids, creating ways to make actions, spaces, conferences, whatever, parent and child friendly. This silence and inaction is a failure. It's unforgivable.

And us men, are particularly at fault. There is a silence among men about fathering. I experienced this as I've talked with men about it; they are excited yet scared, nervous about making mistakes, most are dying to parent in ways that many of us weren't fathered. But there are very few role models, and the society we live in disempowers men to break from the prescribed role of the "male" parent, the role that supports

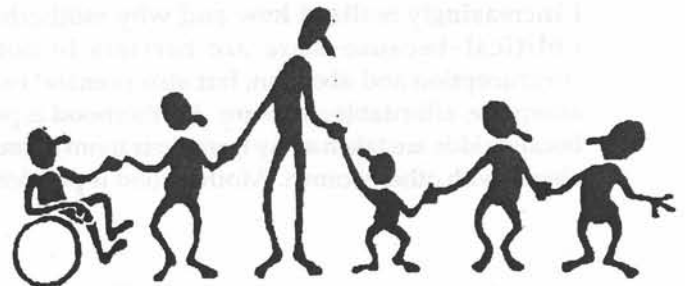
patriarchy, capitalism, hierarchy and authoritarianism. And unfortunately, many women collude in this process of disempowering male experiences. It seems that women have the ability to speak about parenting because somehow they are better with kids, more sensitive, more nurturing, because they are women. Men can speak to being proud, being happy and supportive. Or even worse, they can speak to issues of discipline. I have found that it has been incredibly difficult to get men to commit to writing something about their ideas, their approach, their fears or experiences. They feel shamed or silenced or not knowledgeable enough. This must end. Because the diversity of fathering is multitude while the prescribed role singular: what can we learn from a gay father about discussing sexuality with our daughters? I want to hear it. What can a working class father share with us about fighting patriarchy in the household while still having to struggle with a 9-5 job. We need to hear it. How does a white father discuss race with his white son or his biracial daughter. Every single one of us can benefit from hearing that story.

For the last few months I have been going to some zine fairs and trying to get the word out about rad dad and I am puzzled by the responses when I say it's a zine on fathering, on how men impact the world and the children about them, most people smile and say I ain't a dad, or I don't know anyone who is. When I ask if there are children in their lives or are they uncles or are they thinking about being a parent most just smile and say something like well I'll deal with that later, those things don't relate to me now. Tell that to the man who picked up the child, held her close to his chest and waded out in the waters which were destroying the very place he lived. How we relate to our own children, how we connect with the kids and teenagers on our blocks and in our communities is analogous to how we envision a better world, a more compassionate, loving, creative world. If we curtail that relationship, as we are doing, we will continue to live our lives surrounded by levees that cannot hold...

- Tomas, from the zine "Rad Dad" #2

available for \$2

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## Getting Ready for School at the Punk Rock House

by Vikki

I wake when the alarm begins beeping at ten. I stretch my arm over the still-slumbering Siu Loong, who had stayed up with the punks in the living room long after I had gone to bed, and hit "Snooze." I lay still for a moment, then climb over her and pull on my pants.

There is half a pot of warm coffee in the kitchen, courtesy of one of the punks who actually needed to be up earlier than me. I pour myself a cup, then remember that I hit snooze, but did not turn off the alarm clock. I hurry back, past the dreadlocked, open-mouthed couch creature in the living room and Gnat, who has given up his bed for us twice a week to sleep on the guest futon in the silkscreen room.

The alarm has not gone off again. I switch it to "Off" with a few short clicks, grab my plastic purple writing folder from my backpack and hurry to grab some revising time before Siu Loong or the other housemates awake and demand my attention.

I cross out one line and replace it with another. I scan an old zine for interesting tidbits to add color to my article. Then Lizxnn pads down the stairs and Gnat emerges from his cocoon of blankets. My quiet time is gone. They tell me that Siu Loong learned all of the neighbors' names, bidding them good night individually as each drifted homeward. She played the guitar and told Lizxnn that she wants to join her band, but that she won't be metal. I nod, with less understanding about what that means than Siu Loong has.

I sip my coffee and listen to more of what Siu Loong did after I had gone to sleep. At 10:40, I hear the shriek of an awake-and-alone Siu Loong. As I start to walk toward the room, I hear the door thud open and her feet slapping against the floor.

"Mommy!" she yells, running through the door. "I'm all by myself."

I pick her up and kiss her tear-stained cheek. "Should we go into the kitchen?" Then I realize that her diaper is heavy and squishy and do an about-face.

I set her down on a clear patch of floor amidst Gnat's dirty clothes, record covers and random belongings. I hold the package of diapers towards her.

"You choose," I offer, knowing that if I just pull the first one out, she will erupt into a tantrum and scream, "I choose! I choose!"

She pulls one out and examines the pictures on the waistband. "A little house," she observes aloud. She hands it back to me. "I don't want this one."

She pulls out another and deems it satisfactory. She lies on the edge of the bed and lets me change her. She stands and breathes on me.

"Dragon breath!" I exclaim. "C'mon. Let's go brush our teeth."

I pull out our toothbrushes, which she insists on holding. We brush our teeth. She places her chin on the edge of the porcelain sink and imitates the sound of me spitting toothpaste. Another housemate passes the open doorway and laughs at the sight of Siu Loong, who is not yet taller than the sink, saying, "Tuh, tuh."

I pull the milk crate of dumpstered bagels off the top of the fridge. Siu Loong chooses what looks like a whole wheat bagel. I cut it in half and ask if she wants it toasted.

"Not toasted," she replies.

"Are you sure?" I ask. I hand her a half. "Feel it. It's kind of tough."

She fingers the edge and changes her mind. I stick it in the toaster oven and grab my now-lukewarm coffee. Lizxnn has claimed the chair in the kitchen and is reading my zine.

"What are you doing all this research and writing for?" she asks.

"I pitched the idea of a five hundred to thousand word history of No Rio to *Clamor!* So I need to condense twenty-three years into a couple of pages. I mean, it's not a new angle, but I figured that people who know about No Rio often don't know all the history behind it."

I ramble until the bagel pops from the toaster. I spread margarine on it and cut it into quarters.

Siu Loong stands wordlessly at the counter, then begins to whine.

"Siu Loong, you know Mama can't understand you when you whine," I say in a half-whiney tone myself as I place the margarine back in the fridge.

"I need a chair," she whines.

"Well, Mama can't do anything about that," I snap.

"Siu Loong, do you want to sit in this chair?" Lizxnn asks. "Then you have to ask."

"I want a chair," Siu Loong states. And so Lizxnn gets up, picks the fallen phone book off the floor, places it on the seat and pushes it toward the counter. Siu Loong climbs on and begins to eat.

"Sippy cup," she demands.

"How do you ask nicely?" Lizzxn asks.

"I want my sippy cup."

"What about the P word?"

"Please."

As she places the red cup in front of Siu Loong, Lizzxn says, "Y'know, people are more than happy to accommodate you when you use the P word. I always use the P word when asking for things."

"Like peas," Siu Loong adds before returning to her bagel.

I look at the clock, which reads 11:40. I fly into a frenzy, grabbing Siu Loong's shoes and socks from the bedroom while stuffing my feet into sneakers. As I gather the diaper bag, I hear Siu Loong start to cry, "Mommy do! Mommy do!"

"What's the matter Siu Loong?" I yell from the next room.

I rush in to find her refusing to let Gnat and Lizzxn help her with her jacket. "Mommy do, Mommy do!" she yells, bunching the dirty purple silk into a ball and throwing it onto the floor. I pick it up and help her put her arms through. I put her socks and shoes on as Gnat and Lizzxn wheel the stroller towards the front door and unlock it for us.

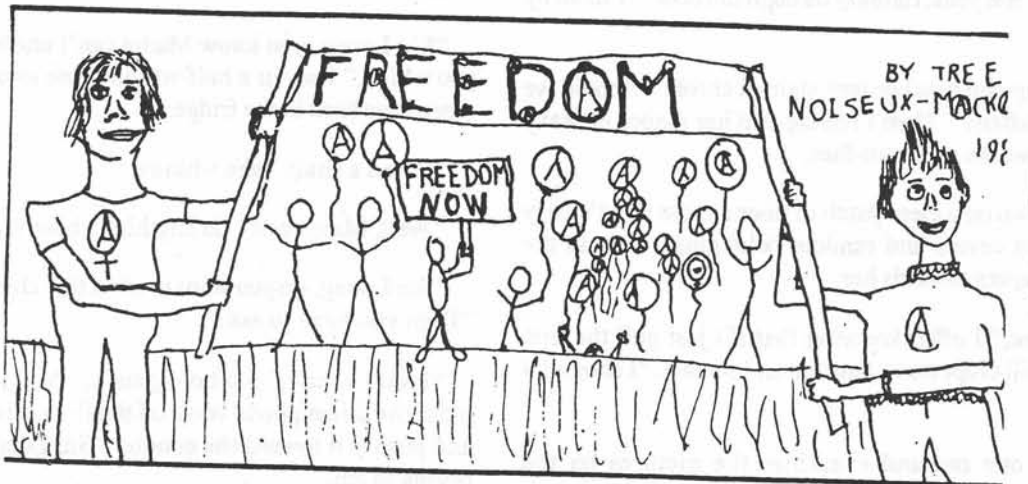
"Bye! Have a good day at school!" they shout as Siu Loong walks down the steps.

On the sidewalk, I look up to see Gnat's face in the small square window on the door. I point him out to Siu Loong. He waves as I buckle her into the stroller. She waves back.

Then we head off to the train station to go to school.



(over worked  
child care provider)



## Leaving Places, Going Places

- by China

I've been left behind, left others behind. Sometimes I've just left. And sometimes I've been taken along.

I left the father when I was three months pregnant. I went in a car with some kids and I met up with my best friend at the anarchist gathering in Minneapolis – and then I took the train to Upper State New York to meet up with my other best friend and I stayed in a small town with her at her parents house. But she didn't want to go to Canada like we planned so I got on the bus by myself to Montreal, but I got turned away from the border because I didn't have enough money. So I went back. And I got on the bus for NYC and I found my old friends in Thompskin Square Park; and stayed in their squat in avenue A or B for a while. Somebody said, "why don't you have your baby here?" But I didn't want to have a baby in New York City.

So I got on a train, my belly much bigger this time and it was hard to get comfortable, to Boulder Colorado – where both my best friends were now living; and where there are midwives. So I lived with them; and in a cabin in the Rocky Mountains; and then back down in town with them. When my daughter was one month old, they were ready to go, so I left with them. Back to Florida, where they were raised, and stopping in New Orleans along the way.

In New Orleans, I couldn't keep up sight-seeing with my friends, I had a pain in my womb the way the baby kicked me in her snuggly - I hate that claustrophobic strap on contraption with her kicking me like that. (So I carried her on my hip after that) So I got in a cab to go back to the house I was staying in and my baby daughter started crying all colicky and she cried so loud I couldn't think, couldn't remember where the house was, had the cab drive in circles until he said "get out. I can't take your crying baby anymore". So I sat on the curb and cried. Then I looked up and realized I was a block away and it was ok.

When they were in Florida it was ok, but it was time for me to leave and go somewhere, so I flew home. Where else did I have to go? Then I went up to Canada with my young DC anarcho punk friends in a van – to an anarchist gathering there. And I was noticing how I couldn't keep up. How I would lag a few blocks behind before they would notice. Once Jorge noticed and held the door open for baby and me. So when I got to the daycare room at the event, I was like to the others "do you find yourself getting left behind?" And they all did. And I felt good to be there, in that safe space with other parents like myself.

Then I went to California to look for a better place to raise a child, to settle down; find a commune or something. I stayed with my old best friend from the peace march by the ocean in a fruit pickers shack until her boyfriend came back and said "that crying baby must go". So welfare put me up in a hotel in Santa Cruz as I looked for a place to live but no one wanted to rent to a woman with a child.

A few years later I left California, when my boyfriend who I broke up with wouldn't come back to me and broke my heart. Then I went on a camping trip with that very same bunch of friends I'd gone to the anarchist gathering in Canada before. I borrowed a backpack but it turned out my toddler was too heavy for me to carry up the mountain so Jorge carried her a lot on his back, and made the trip possible. We went up high, and explored a waterfall and made a fire and slept in tents. Later we were walking and I realized the two mothers with babies were blocks behind us. OH NO! How easy it is – to leave someone behind! To be talking and not realize it! Even me, who knows what it feels like, I get my newfound freedom of a toddler who is running along and then I've left the mama and babies behind.

I lived with those friends, in Baltimore, for a while. But then I got my own place. Eventually they all migrated out to Minneapolis. Justin was driving out to Minneapolis and he said, "Want to come?" He tried to bribe me and clover by telling us there was cafes, parks, and co-opts; alternative schools, anarchist daycare, and punk-parents every where. So we packed up to go, my little daughter Clover urging me on and doing most of the packing cuz it was the middle of the night (which seemed when that group of people always started their trips which was hard for a mother who needs her sleep so she doesn't snap).

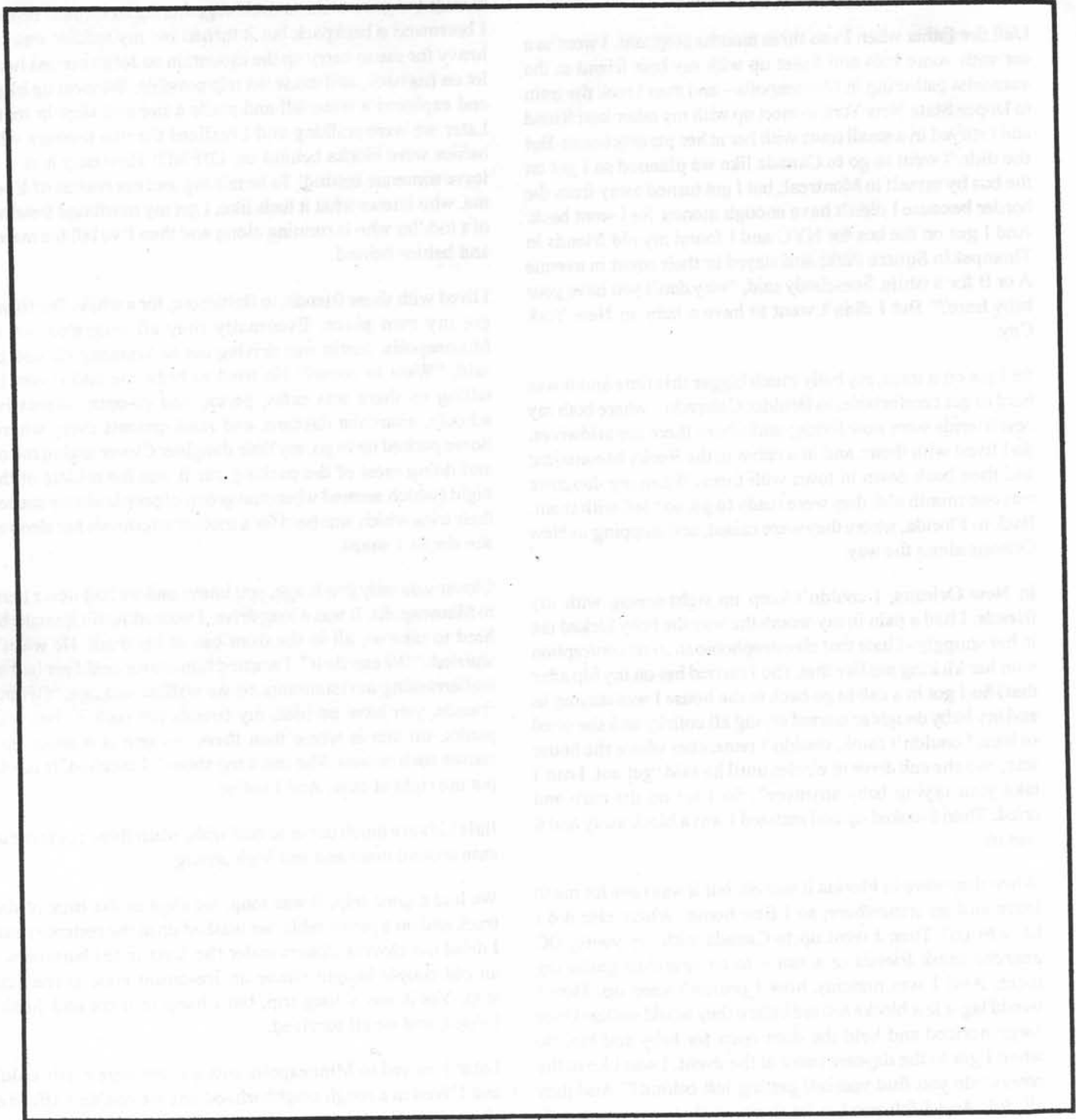
Clover was only pre-K age, you know, and we had never been to Minneapolis. It was a long drive. I warned Justin it might be hard to take us, all in the front cab of his truck. He wasn't worried. "We can do it". I warned him clover could act bad or embarrassing in restaurants, as we walked into one. "OH my friends, you have no idea, my friends are such ill-behaved punks, no one is worse than them, no one is messier and causes such scenes. She can't top them." I laughed. It really put me right at ease. And I notice

little kids are much easier to deal with, when those are more at ease around them and less high strung.

We had a good trip, it was long, we slept in the back of the truck and on a picnic table, we washed up in the restroom and I dried out clovers clothes under the dryer in the bathroom - an old couple bought clover an ice-cream cone at the rest stop. Yes it was a long trip, but i hung in there and Justin helped, and we all survived.

Later I moved to Minneapolis and winters were really cold, and I lived in a rough neighborhood and we couldn't afford a phone. We didn't have much to eat. One day I got stung by a bee on my foot and it really hurt, I know that seems a stupid thing to complain about – but it swelled up so bad I couldn't walk. I didn't want my boyfriend to leave me home alone with my pent up child and no food—I didn't want him to go out drinking with his friends. But he said: "What stay home and we all be miserable? I'm leaving." A lot of bad things happened there and so eventually I left and moved in with my grandmother. Its hard to keep up when you are a mother but staying home by yourself is the worst thing ever.

# Concrete things you can do to support mothers and children in your scene



“A mother should never have to feel that she has imposed on her group or her child because she brings a child to a meeting. She has a right to be at the meeting, and if it is scheduled for a time she has no one to care for her child, that is a problem that the group should willingly find a way to solve—and it is as important that the solution be satisfactory to the child as it be satisfactory to the mother and the rest of the group.”

- Children And Feminism - The Lesbian and Feminist Mothers Political Action Group, Vancouver 1982

(all comics are from that book)

