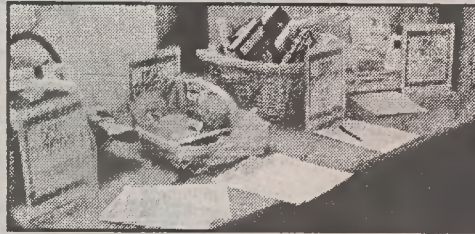


## Center

Continued from page 1

words. Shanghai, a card game, kept folks busy, while the GLBT community was given a new twist on Twister, a popular game from the 60s. Cranium was a real hit, with participants entertained by its players' antics. A Millionaire-styled gay trivia game challenged its participants to sweep out cobwebs of information to compete for a free massage or win other prizes.

To date, over 100 membership applications have been taken, along with monies in excess of \$20,000. New members received a box of Sweetheart candy when they signed up at the event held on January 6.



Baskets were full of goodies.

For more information, or to volunteer your time on the Project, call 704-569-9977 or send email to [communitycenter@gaycharlotte.com](mailto:communitycenter@gaycharlotte.com). Development progress and announcements of other events can be followed through the center's web site, [www.gaycharlotte.com/communitycenter](http://www.gaycharlotte.com/communitycenter). ▼

# Q Culture

## Lifetime TV airs movie on FL court custody battle

by Clay Ollis  
Q-Notes Staff

In the early 1980s, the gay community was incensed — along with most of America, but for opposite reasons — by the *Nielsen v. Catildi* court battle in the state of Florida. Janine Nielsen and Sandy Catildi, a lesbian couple, conceived a child through artificial insemination in 1979 and raised her together. Five years later, Sandy, who had carried their daughter Heather, died of lupus. Janine's unwavering resistance to acknowledging Sandy's impending death and her refusal to make contingency plans led to unforeseen consequences.

Grief-stricken, Janine failed to notice that neither the obituary nor the funeral service included her in Sandy's family. When Janine realized that Florida's custody laws would require her to petition the court for custody of her own daughter, she was shocked to find that Sandy's parents, who lived in a retirement community, had already filed a custody petition of their own. And the Florida State law gave blood relatives priority in custody cases, since Janine's and Sandy's relationship had no legal recognition. Janine was granted only the most limited of visitation rights and a weekly telephone call.

After losing Heather, Janine had a nervous breakdown and spent weeks in a psychiatric hospital, while a bewildered Heather lived in a retirement community and waited in vain to hear from her mother. Finally, Janine recovered and recognized that she had to fight for her daughter. Unfortunately, the appeal was heard by one of the most conservative judges in the state.

On Monday, January 22, co-executive producers Barbra Streisand and Whoopi Goldberg, along with Lifetime Television, give us the opportunity to become incensed all over again — and watch a moving made-for-television drama at the same time. *What Makes a Family?* directed by Maggy Greenwald, stars Brooke Shields and Cherry Jones as Janine and Sandy, respectively.

"We can't go by Ozzie and Harriet anymore," said Greenwald. "What makes a family in this country today is completely different from what it was 25 years ago. There are more single-parent families than ever before. There are surrogate mothers and families created from remarriage. The variations of parent and child have become infinite." Greenwald noted that she herself is the adoptive mother of a little girl born in China. "The story of this case is even more relevant now to us and our society, because the landscape of



(L-R) Cherry Jones and Brooke Shields, who play Sandy Cataldi and Janine Nielsen, respectively, share a moment of joy with baby Heather.

what we call a family has changed so much."

The essential point, Greenwald continued, is that "to have people denied the right to parent their child, regardless of how the child came into their lives, because of arbitrary legal exclusions based on sexuality is at best archaic."

Brooke Shields asserted "I don't believe blood makes a family. And I would never narrow it down to a mother and a father as the only definition of a family. Janine and Sandy share an honest, loving, supportive relationship and they are devoted to their child."

"The most important words to me are unconditional love," Cherry Jones added. "I am gay, and I have to admit I was uncertain about gay people having children for years because I was brought up to believe you have to have a mother and a father if you want everything to be right when you have a child. And now, as an adult, I realize that what you have to have most of all is a deep, deep desire to be a parent and the ability to give a child unconditional love."

Jones also was awestruck by Janine and Sandy's decision. "The bond that these two women had must have been extraordinary. They were unbelievably brave to have a child as a gay couple in 1979 because it took great courage to do it then."

Anne Meara, who plays Sandy Cataldi's mother, considered the story of Janine and Sandy in a broader context. "Janine is not accepted as the surviving spouse, whereas if she had been the husband, she would have been accepted. Even if the child were not the husband's, or if she had been adopted or was from a previous liaison, there would have been no question that he had the right to raise the child. Why should Janine and Sandy be put under the microscope when we don't have heterosexual couples who are parents under the microscope? Janine and Sandy are a family because they care about and love their child and they love each other."

The case clearly shows the importance for gay people of legally protecting their families.

Executive producer Whoopi Goldberg commented, "This movie is about basic human and civil rights which concern everyone." Goldberg also stars in a supporting role as Janine's attorney.

Co-Executive producer Barbra Streisand — whose gay son claims her biggest concern with his sexuality because she wants a grandchild — added, "Gay and lesbian adoption certainly is a controversial issue for our times. The movie deals in a very honest way with what really makes a family and how the courts sometimes attempt to tell us whom we may and may not love."

"What makes a family is people who are there for each other, no matter what, through thick and thin. They may not like each other very much sometimes, but they always know the love is deep and the love is there. That's the real answer to the question, 'What makes a family?'" Cherry concluded. ▼

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## BENEDICTIONS

by Judy Simpson Cook

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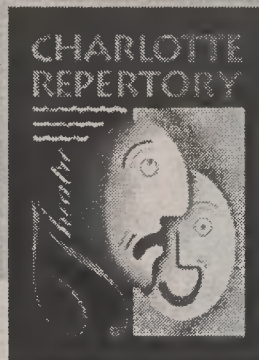
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