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Thompson fights the good fight and wins

Quadriplegic lover to come home
after seven years of forced exile

by David Stout
Q-Notes staff

ST. PAUL, Minnesota—"There aren't words to express the hell the system has put us through," declared Karen Thompson after she was named legal guardian to her disabled lover Sharon Kowalski. "Today's decision is not a victory. It is a right decision, a just decision that should have been made eight years ago."

In 1983 physical education teacher Kowalski suffered extensive brain damage in an automobile accident that resulted in the total paralysis of her limbs. In the ensuing months, Kowalski's parents filed for custody of their daughter in an attempt to wrest her from her lesbian lover of many years.

That attempt proved successful when a judge ordered that Kowalski be remanded to her parents' care, even though she was able to communicate her desire to stay with her partner.

The Kowalskis' first act as guardians was to deny Thompson, a professor at St. Cloud State University, any type of visitation or communication with her lover. The couple had maintained during the hearing that their child was not a lesbian and was being influenced by Thompson. Being awarded custody

of Kowalski gave them the power to finally remove her from a relationship which disturbed them.

Fighting back, Thompson then began an appeal process which would dominate her life for the next several years.

She hit the lecture circuit of colleges, universities, and organizations gathering support (emotional, but more importantly financial for her mounting legal fees) and sounding the alarm to other homosexual couples that unless they drafted a legal statement naming their partner as their desired caregiver, they could be placed in the same situation.

Enlarging her burgeoning media profile even more, Thompson wrote a national bestseller entitled, "Who is Sharon Kowalski, and Why Can't She Come Home?" that she promoted through radio, television, and print interviews.

More and more mainstream organizations gave their support to Thompson and her struggle, putting a great amount of pressure on the judicial system to right its wrong.

However, the breakthrough, or so it seemed at the time, came when Kowalski's parents notified the courts that due to their own medical circumstances, they could no longer give their daughter adequate care. Thompson filed to regain custody and waited for the hearing to take place.

When the judge finally made his decision it was too incredible to believe - he ruled that

Kowalski should be placed in the care of her friend and former high school track coach, Karen Tomberlin.

Thompson was outraged and filed an immediate appeal with the Minnesota State Appeals Court which on Tuesday, December

17, gave her permanent, sole custody of her lover.

Thompson's attorney, Sue Wilson, declared the victory, "A significant affirmation that moves gays and lesbians and the way the law treats them...into the 20th century."

Competing for the crown



The Miss NC, USA 1992 Pageant took place Thanksgiving weekend in Hickory at Club Cabaret. Thirty-eight contestants from every part of the state competed for the title. Pictured l-r: Mahogany, Miss NC, USA 1991; Akasha Pharrows, 4th runner-up; Kristina Foxx, 3rd runner-up; Paris LeBon, Miss NC, USA 1992; Farrah McRae, 2nd runner-up; Candace Corday, 1st runner-up; Sable Chanel, Miss Gay USA 1991. See story on page 9.

United Family Services comes to you Project Outreach helps cope with HIV/AIDS

by Frank Dalrymple
Q-Notes Staff

CHARLOTTE — For years, Charlotte's United Family Services has been providing quality counseling to individuals and families (traditional and non-traditional) regarding a wide range of issues from anger to addiction to job-related stress.

UFS counseling is available to anyone in need, and fees are charged on a sliding scale according to one's income and ability to pay.

In August of 1990, when President Bush signed the Ryan White Compensation AIDS Resources Emergency Act into law, he released some \$4.4 billion in funds to be dispensed over the next five years for direct AIDS-related support services.

Specifically, \$875 million was allotted for fiscal 1991.

United Family Services became one of the many beneficiaries of this legislation.

This past September, with 60% additional funding from United Way, UFS launched its Project Outreach program, offering counseling services to HIV/AIDS patients as well as their partners, friends and family members.

Project Outreach is a confidential, non-judgmental program whose only criteria for services is that one member of the "family" unit is HIV positive.

A simple telephone call to Project Outreach 704/332-9034 from a friend is enough to activate services for someone.

Director of Communications, Charis Wilson, says the Project Outreach program is "under capacity" and is prepared to service clients immediately. (Non-HIV-related counseling through UFS requires about a 30-day waiting period for new clients.)

Besides the benefits of professional counseling by a dozen-plus skilled therapists, Project Outreach is designed, if necessary, to come to you. Meetings can be arranged in your home or at another location nearby. With some limitations, they are even prepared to make evening visits.

Staff counselor Sherry Lash spoke of her work with great enthusiasm and dedication. Lash, like the other therapists on staff, alternates her work day between Project Outreach cases (both on- and off-site), and United Family Services clients.

In asking Sherry to describe, anonymously, some of her current client issues, there seemed to be a frequent pattern in some of her cases.

Quite often the HIV diagnosis, and the subsequent counseling, unearthed other unresolved family issues. We discovered that, in some cases, HIV had become a "catalyst for healing."

UFS/Project Outreach often "networks" with other service/support agencies when a client's needs exceed the boundaries of counseling and venture into other issues such as financial assistance, meals and health care.

Two counselors are currently assigned to Union County, and plans are underway for a Cabarrus County office to open later this year.

If you, or someone you know is a candidate for either United Family Services or UFS/Project Outreach, they are waiting to hear from you. There's even an 800 number for those outside the local call area.

United Family Services/
Project Outreach
301 S. Brevard Street
Charlotte, NC 28202
(704) 332-9034 or 1-800-345-0441

Chapel Hill to host Gay elected leaders in 1992

by Michael Nelson & Joe Herzenberg
Special to Q-Notes

CHAPEL-HILL—Delegates at the 7th Annual Conference of Openly Gay and Lesbian Elected and Appointed Officials selected Chapel Hill as the site for next year's conference, to be held November 20 & 21, 1992.

Chapel Hill was selected by the delegates over Montreal and West Hollywood, California.

Over 100 elected and appointed officials attended this year's conference in Houston and 150 to 200 people are expected to attend next year. While most openly gay and lesbian elected and appointed officials are from the Northeast and Far West, the South and Midwest sent a number of representatives including Chapel Hill Town Council Member Joe Herzenberg and Orange County Human Relations Commissioner Michael Nelson.

NC organizers hope the conference will highlight our southern hospitality and serve as inspiration to our young but growing lesbian and gay community. "By bringing lesbian and gay elected officials to North Carolina, we will—I hope—encourage more lesbians and gay men to run for office in our State," said Nelson. "Asheville, Durham and Charlotte seem ripe for strong lesbian and gay candidacies," added Nelson, who ran for Carrboro Board of Alderman in 1989 losing by only 30 votes.

Several attendees of this year's conference are running for office this year. Tammy Baldwin, currently serving on the Dane County (Wisconsin) Board of Supervisors, is in a race for the Wisconsin State Legislature. Tom Nolan, president of the San Mateo County (California) Board of Supervisors, is running for an open seat in the US House of Representatives. Tim Cusick, a St. Louis activist, is running his second campaign for the Missouri legislature.

Fourteen states have at least one openly gay or lesbian elected official including North Carolina, Florida, and Texas in the South, every Northeastern state except New Hampshire, and California, Oregon, and Washington in the West.

In related news, this year the first openly lesbian African-American was elected to office. Sherri Harris, an engineer and community activist, was elected to the Seattle City Council in a landslide victory over an entrenched incumbent.

Harris joins Keith St. John of Albany, New York, as the only two openly gay and lesbian African-Americans elected to public office. Others elected this year include Glen Maxie (Texas State House) and Tom Duane (NYC City Council).

For information on the 1992 conference, contact Michael Nelson at 919/929-7514 or Joe Herzenberg at 919/929/4053.