

STILL FIGHTING FOR KOWALSKI

Karen Thompson has filed a new motion in the District Court in Duluth, Minnesota, in a renewed effort to obtain the release of her lover, Sharon Kowalski, from her parents.

A Minnesota court in July 1985 gave unlimited guardianship of Kowalski to her father. Kowalski had been severely injured in an accident in September 1985. Since then she has been kept in a nursing home and has been allowed no rehabilitation or visits from Thompson and other friends.

Although court orders have stipulated that the father must annually have Kowalski tested for competency and must abide by her expressed wishes, none of Thompson's appeals have succeeded in bringing enforcement of those orders.

The Minnesota courts have ruled that the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union may not participate in the case and that the Patients' Bill of Rights may not be invoked to influence the behavior of a guardian.

Thompson has filed a new motion in District Court in Duluth asking that Kowalski be legally "restored to capacity," which would give her some decision-making power. The intent of the motion is to force the parents to have Kowalski tested and to have the results entered in the court record. In addition, with a motion pending in court, Thompson and her attorney hope the court will appoint an attorney for Kowalski to replace the one who recently resigned.

To date, the national Sharon Kowalski groups, composed of activists in women's, gay, and disabled rights, have focused their efforts on fundraising for the Karen Thompson Legal Fund. They have been extremely successful, raising more than \$80,000 to cover legal bills of more than \$110,000.

In addition to fundraising, a high priority for the groups has been to inform lesbian and gay couples about protecting their relationships through durable powers of attorney--documents assigning legal decision-making authority. They have distributed

informative materials, made presentations, and sponsored workshops with attorneys.

A high priority for the near future is to develop an approach to the press and broadcast media that will focus national attention on the case. Following an aggressive letter-writing campaign last winter, "60 Minutes" agreed to cover the story and asked that the letters stop; then the story was cut from the list of projects. Recently, The Village Voice published an article about the case, which has led to inquiries by CBS and National Public Radio for longer pieces to be aired nationally.

Future ideas for direct action include encouraging all gay pride organizers to name Kowalski "grand marshal in absentia" in 1988; coordinating a national action on Kowalski's 32nd birthday next August; making long-range plans for civil disobedience at the nursing home; and considering a coordinated campaign of telephone calls to Kowalski. The group has also agreed to promote a holiday card campaign this December. To participate in this campaign, mail holiday cards between December 1 and December 8 to:

Sharon Kowalski
Leisure Hills Nursing Home
1500 3rd Avenue E.
Hibbing MN 55746

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