

### KOWALSKI VISITS THOMPSON

It was not Karen Thompson's face but the sound of her voice that jogged Sharon Kowalski's memory when the two women were allowed to see each other for the first time in more than three years.

Thompson, who has been fighting a nationally publicized legal battle to get proper care for her severely disabled lover, visited Kowalski in an open lounge at the Miller Dwan Medical Center in Duluth, accompanied by Kowalski's psychologist as her court-mandated escort. For the past three and a half years, Thompson has been legally barred from visiting Kowalski because of a court-order won by Kowalski's father, Donald, who denies his daughter is Lesbian.

"I walked up to her, I don't think she-I have curly hair now and it wasn't before, I had on glasses and I used to always wear contacts--but as soon as she heard my voice, her eyes, they really did light up."

Thompson said Kowalski's eyes filled with tears and she started moving her mouth. "I don't know if she was trying to made words or just getting ready to cry," Thompson recalled. "Nothing came out. She just kept watching me, then I cried."

The emotional reunion was a major victory for Thompson, who has changed not just physically but politically since 1983 when a drunk driver plowed into the car Kowalski was driving and left her severely disabled. Prior to the accident, Thompson and Kowalski bought a house together and lived as a "very closeted" couple, according to Thompson.

Since they have seen each other again, Thompson has told Kowalski that she has become a Lesbian activist, traveling the country and speaking about the need for Gay couples to secure some kind of legal protection for their relationships. She has not told Kowalski about her father preventing Thompson from visiting her in a nursing home these past three years.

After Sharon's accident, Donald Kowalski had her placed in a nursing home, which did not provide rehabilitation therapy, and forbade Thompson or any of Sharon's friends from visiting her there. Thompson's present caution in raising the subject comes from the knowledge that after 60 days in the rehabilitation unit of Miller Dwan, Kowalski will be re-evaluated to determine whether she can make decisions for herself about where

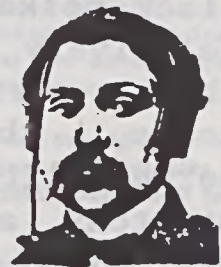
to live and who can visit her. "My goal is to bring Sharon home if that's what Sharon wants," said Thompson. In late December, a Minnesota court issued a temporary order to have Kowalski undergo therapy and be able to decide who can visit her.

Thompson said that Kowalski's short-term memory has been damaged and that each time she leaves Kowalski's side and returns, Kowalski takes a while to recognize her again. The lack of rehabilitation therapy, said Thompson, a physical education teacher at the state university, has taken a harsh physical toll on Kowalski. She said Kowalski's left leg was so badly contracted that she feels "there's no way she'll ever stand again."

Thompson says that she can currently visit Kowalski as much as she and Kowalski want. "She wants to hold my hand the entire time," Thompson said after several visits. Although visiting hours were over at 8:30 on the evening of her first visit, she stayed with Kowalski until 10 because "she wouldn't let me go--she got scared I wasn't coming back."

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