

Father battles Witnesses over child's death

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CALGARY, Alberta—A grieving father said he would continue his crusade against Jehovah's Witnesses and their prohibition against blood transfusions, after a court decision partially cleared the way for an \$800,000 (euro669,200) wrongful death lawsuit.

Lawrence Hughes filed the claim on behalf of his 17-year-old daughter, Bethany, who died from acute myeloid leukemia in 2002. She repeatedly refused conventional treatment for her leukemia because of her religious beliefs.

Hughes, as executor of her estate, blames the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, the religious order that governs the faith, for influencing his daughter to believe that the Bible forbids blood transfusions.

"This is a great day for justice. This is a great day for children," Hughes told a news conference Tuesday, after a judge ruled he could proceed with part of his case.

"The court is saying that a religious sect or cult can be held responsible for the injury they inflict on others, whether it relates to deliberately giving out misleading medical information or using institutional coercion which results in the death of a child," Hughes said.

The tightly disciplined religious sect believes the Bible forbids transfusions, though specifics have gradually been eased over the years.

Hughes' civil suit filed in 2004 had stalled in the courts as defendants tried to have it thrown out. However, Court of Queen's Bench Justice Patricia Rowbotham ruled last Friday that a scaled-

down version of the claim could move forward.

Though Hughes cannot proceed with his claim against the Watch Tower Society, he can move head with a suit against two lawyers, Shane Heath Brady and David Miles Gnam, who acted for both Bethany and her mother, Arliss, when they fought the transfusions in court and also represent the society. Both lawyers are Jehovah's Witnesses.

Rowbotham dismissed the claim against the Society because, she said, the lawsuit did not question the sincerity of Bethany's belief, rather it attacked religious doctrine of the faith. She ruled the court could not be arbiters of religious dogma.

Hughes said he had not ruled out an appeal to allow him to proceed against the Watch Tower Society, but con-

siders his case against the lawyers a coup.

Rowbotham wrote in her ruling that because of their own beliefs, the lawyers were not in a position to advise Bethany in an objective manner that would enable her to make a free, informed decision on whether to have blood transfusions.

Brady dismisses that notion.

"It's just silly and irrelevant to the action," he told The Associated Press from his Ontario office. "That's akin to saying that the NAACP can't represent people with certain religious or ethnic beliefs," he said, referring to the U.S. civil rights organization National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Bethany's illness garnered nationwide attention and renewed public debate over how to determine when a

child should be able to choose medical care.

Canada's Charter of Rights allows those 18 and older to decide, but medical ethics dictate that mature children should be allowed to decide unless their competence has been compromised. Several doctors found Bethany to be mature enough to choose her treatment.

However, her father left the

church and petitioned the court to enforce the transfusions. The court ruled she was pressured by her religion and didn't have a free, informed will. The Alberta government won temporary custody of Bethany and she was given almost 40 transfusions against her will—though she succumbed to leukemia in the end.

Rights group questions outreach to gay teens

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MIAMI—A national gay and lesbian group is accusing several religious organizations of harming homosexual teens by offering parents what they say are bogus therapies to keep children from becoming gay.

In a report released Thursday in Miami Beach, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute questioned whether the therapies are ethical or effective and said state and federal authorities should provide greater oversight when these programs are aimed at youth.

The report said some Christian-based gay prevention and treatment groups have used the First Amendment

protection of religion to avoid sanctions by state health officials seeking to enforce regulations on counselors who offer therapy without a license.

Task Force Executive Director Matt Foreman said officials need to ensure that those offering such therapies are licensed—as opposed to simply being clergy—and that clients and their parents should be informed about the programs' long-term success rates.

"Many of these programs are crossing the line as to what is approved under freedom of expression," Foreman said in an interview with reporters. "This deserves attention. It deserves to be

regulated."

The report was released in Florida because it is home to Exodus International, the umbrella organization for Christian ministries nationwide that seek to convert gays to heterosexuals.

Alan Chambers, President of Exodus International, said he had not seen the report but maintained that the ministries are successful. He said Exodus' 130 affiliated ministries use clinically trained professionals, though he added that only 30 percent have onsite professionals.

Religious leaders lead support groups, as they might in the case of an Alcoholics Anonymous groups, he said.

"The truth is that there are

hundreds of thousands of men and women like me who have found that change is possible," said Chambers, who counts himself among the ex-gay.

The report maintains that, increasingly, those attending seminars on homosexuality prevention and treatment are parents who have gay or lesbian children.

Foreman called the programs frightening, saying they play into stereotypes, cautioning parents to worry if their sons are "too feminine" and often blame parents for their children's sexual orientation.

Foreman said he would like to see more long-term studies on the success of the treatment.

Religious images means much to Miss. man

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JACKSON, Miss.—The tattoos covering much of Curtis Wright's body reveal what he loves most: Batman, music and Jesus.

"I tell people when they come in, 'Pick something that's never going to change,'" said the 29-year-old Jackson tattoo artist. "It has to come from the heart."

Religious imagery within the tattoo world has endured through such trends as mermaids on World War II sailors and tribal designs on rock stars. And as body art continues to gain popularity, an increasing number of people are inking their bodies with such sacred images as crucifixes, angels and praying hands.

"I've done a whole bunch of Scripture on people," said Rusty Pyron, owner of Eternal Body Art in Jackson. "They just find a passage that makes them feel good and I just put it on them."

A tattoo artist for 15 years, Pyron, 39, said religious tat-

toos "go hand in hand" with the surge in tattooing.

The introduction of two tattoo parlor reality TV shows last year—Miami Ink on The Learning Channel and Inked on A&E—has fueled the tattoo trend.

Though Christian images dominate the religious tattoo trend, body art enthusiasts also sport pictures of the Buddha, Hindu gods and goddesses and the Chinese cosmological sign for yin and yang.

Monique Davis, a 28-year-old Jackson nursing home worker, sat hunched over on a stool recently as Pyron permanently etched a 5-inch-high crucifix into the small of her back.

Within the borders of the cross, Davis had Pyron ink the initials of her four children.

"I just like the cross and thought it would be real nice," Davis said.

She said the crucifix will remind her of the moral lessons she learned from her preacher father-in-law, now

deceased.

"It's to help stick with the things he taught me," she said.

Wright, who works at Squench's Tattoos in Jackson, said Christian tattoos can help spread the Gospel.

"I've seen tattoos and tattoos I've done that witness to people and lead them into a relationship with Christ," he said.

Wright's love for body art started before he became a Christian. So mixed among the images of Jesus, crucifixes and the sacred heart that adorn his limbs are tattoos that pay homage to Led Zepelin, Elvis Presley and his American Indian ancestors.

He's altered some of his more "worldly" tattoos to make them fit with a Christian message.

Once such fix included adding the text, "Was blind now I see," to an image of an eyeball with stitches.

"Tattooing is a means of the soul coming to the surface," he said.

Wright estimates 75 to 80

percent of his customers get religious tattoos.

"I have a clientele," he said. "They know what I do and what I'm about."

BLUMENTHAL PRESENTS

SOWETO GOSPEL CHOIR

A non-stop pageant of inspirational music!



March 20 • Belk Theater

ALVIN AILEY

AMERICAN DANCE THEATER

JUDITH JAMISON ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
Masazumi Chaya ASSOCIATE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

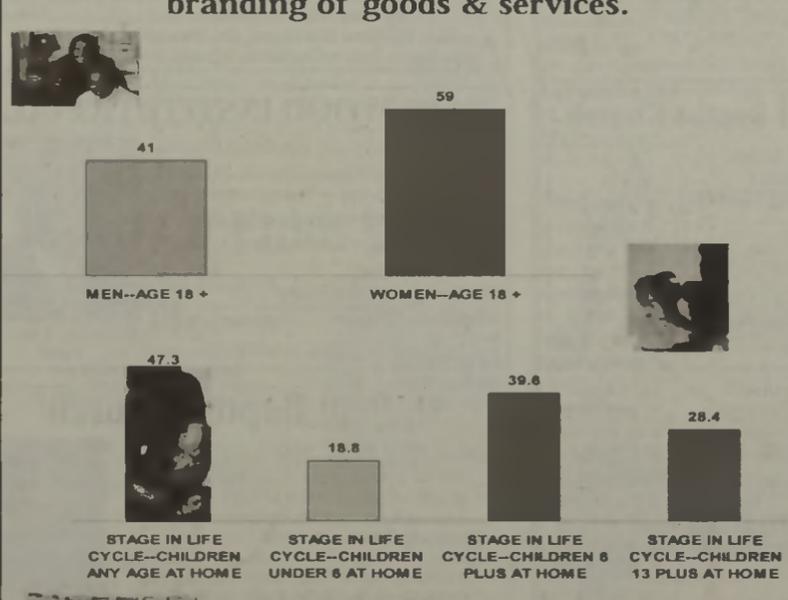


APRIL 4 - 5
Belk Theater

Morgan Stanley

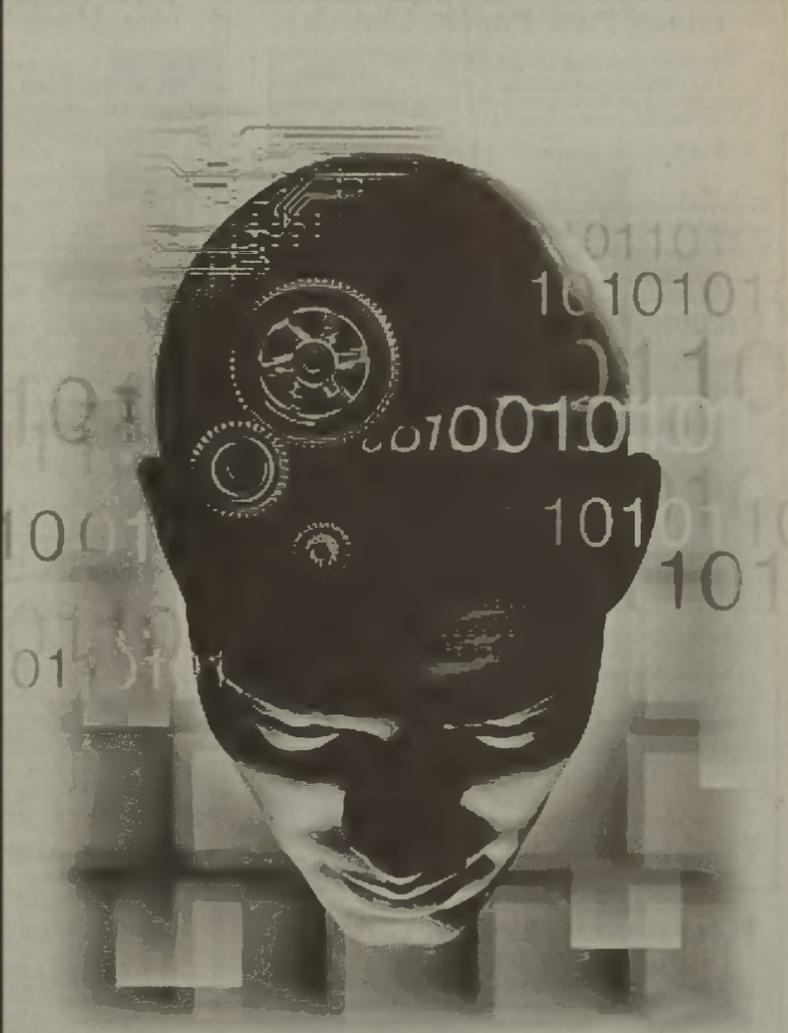
704.372.1000 • BlumenthalCenter.org
Group Discounts: 704.379.1380

When using Black-targeted Newspapers, marketers reach the number one spender in the household—Women; Women with Children at home. The opportunity for long term growth and branding of goods & services.



MEN--AGE 18 +	41	WOMEN--AGE 18 +	59
STAGE IN LIFE CYCLE--CHILDREN ANY AGE AT HOME	47.3	STAGE IN LIFE CYCLE--CHILDREN UNDER 6 AT HOME	18.8
STAGE IN LIFE CYCLE--CHILDREN 6 PLUS AT HOME	39.8	STAGE IN LIFE CYCLE--CHILDREN 13 PLUS AT HOME	28.4

Source: The Media Audit National Black-targeted newspaper report 2003



Information that is always on line, 24 hours a day

www.thecharlottepost.com

The Charlotte Post