

Just news

Bring Sharon home

Karen Thompson has not seen Sharon Kowalski since August 1985.

BY KAMILA AL-NAJJAR

In November 1983, Sharon Kowalski's car was struck by a drunk driver. She received a serious brain-stem injury and remained in a coma for a long time.

Kowalski had been lovers with Karen Thompson for four years, had exchanged rings and had jointly purchased a house in St. Cloud, Minn.

She was pronounced by doctors to be a severely brain-damaged quadriplegic, but Thompson, a physical-education professor with a background in physical therapy, began working with her. Kowalski soon could use her hands to eat and wash, and could communicate and answer questions using a typewriter.

Kowalski's parents, however, did not understand Thompson's devotion to helping their daughter recover from the accident. When she told them of her relationship, they told her that she was sick and a liar, and they tried to prevent her from seeing and working with her lover.

In 1984, Thompson sued for guardianship. Ultimately, she agreed to allow Donald Kowalski to be named as Sharon Kowalski's guardian in return for provisions in the court order that allowed her unlimited visitation and that maintained the rehabilitative care. But she has not seen Sharon since August 1985. Donald

Kowalski went to court to revoke Thompson's privileges; upon winning, he barred her from visiting and moved Kowalski to a nursing home three hours away.

Donald Kowalski claims that Sharon Kowalski functions as a six-year-old and cannot answer questions or express wishes. He denies that she has asked for Thompson, although visitors from the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union have witnessed such requests.

Court orders stipulated that Kowalski's father must have her tested annually for competency and must abide by her expressed wishes. None of Thompson's appeals have succeeded in bringing enforcement to those orders. According to *Gay Community News*, the Minnesota courts have ruled that the state 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" (given decision-making power). The intent of the motion is to force Kowalski's parents to have her tested and to enter the results in the court record.

National Sharon Kowalski support groups, composed of activists in women's, gay and disability rights, have focused their efforts on fund-raising for the Karen Thompson Legal

Fund. Thompson's legal bills total nearly \$110,000. Through the success of Thompson's own nationwide fund-raising and the work of the national groups, her debt is now less than \$30,000. The fund has become one of the most successful legal efforts in women's and gay community history.

In addition to fund-raising, a priority for the groups has been to inform lesbian and gay

couples about protecting their relationships through durable powers of attorney documents, which assign legal decision-making authority. The groups have distributed informative materials, made presentations and sponsored workshops with attorneys.

For more information, or to donate money to the legal fund, call Gilah at 281-2980.

Sister to Sister City

The Ben Linder Construction Brigade is going to Corinto to reroof and rewire the only hospital in the town.

BY KAMILA AL-NAJJAR

Susan Leo, a member of the Portland community since 1972, is one of 15 members of the first Ben Linder Construction Brigade.

The group is going to Corinto, Nicaragua, in honor of Ben Linder, a Portland resident murdered in a contra ambush on April 28, 1987. Linder and six Nicaraguan co-workers had begun construction of a small dam when the contras attacked. Two Nicaraguans, Pablo Rosales and Sergio Hernandez, also were killed.

Contra spokesmen stated that they knew Linder was building a hydroelectric plant and considered him and his co-workers to be "legitimate targets."

The brigade will work for three weeks in January to help reroof and rewire the only

hospital in Corinto. Leo will contribute her carpentry and paramedic skills.

"Work on the hospital means a lot to me because I'm very much interested in medicine; that we are going to Corinto, Portland's sister city, is important to me as well," Leo said. "It's also very important that it is in the name of Ben that we are going, and because of the work he was doing in Nicaragua."

Leo said that she is not afraid to go to Nicaragua and that she hopes to make connections with our sister communities in Corinto.

"It is important for us to communicate that it is not the American people who are at odds with the people of Nicaragua, it is the American government," she stressed.

Her trip will cost \$1,200; she has raised half of that amount. For more information, or to make donations, call 233-9079.

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