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NORTHWEST news

MATERNAL INSTINCTS

Tess Fields fights for abortion rights knowing that her mother is on the other end of the battlefield by Kathy Belge

As Tess Fields is fighting for abortion rights, her mother is doing everything she can to stop her. Fields, a lesbian pregnant with her first child, is field director for the Oregon affiliate of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League. Her mother is the chairwoman of the Georgia Christian Coalition.

Growing up in a fundamentalist Christian environment solidified Fields' commitment to pro-choice causes. As a young adult, she was subjected to nightly prayer meetings and watching her twin brother get preferential treatment because he was a boy. Fields would sneak out of the house to attend pro-choice rallies and read Gloria Steinem books in her closet.

"A woman's right to choose has always been a real push-button issue for me, since I was a teenager," she says. "I think I was a feminist from early on, and I equated a woman's right to control her own body with a woman's right to control her destiny."

Fields ran away from home and ended up spending a year and a half in a group home. Although it wasn't all positive, she said it was good to get away from her mother during those formative years.

When Fields came out as a lesbian at age 24, her mother did not talk to her for five years. She and her girlfriend at the time moved from Georgia to Portland because they heard it had the highest per capita lesbian population.

"We had no clue about Portland," she says. "We pulled over and asked some guy walking his dog where the lesbians lived."



As field director for Oregon NARAL, Tess Fields is busy preparing to oppose an anti-choice ballot measure next year

Fields has worked in her current job for the past nine months but has been active in the pro-choice movement for years. During the 2000 U.S. Senate race she spent time in St. Louis organizing to defeat John Ashcroft. Little did she know that he soon would be appointed as attorney general.

She sees the issues of abortion rights and queer rights as closely connected. "In my opinion, it's the same battle," she says. "It's about controlling sexuality. It's about trying to impose one's moral and religious views on another person."

Fields and the Oregon pro-choice movement are fighting an anti-choice ballot measure that will appear on the ballot in 2004. It would



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