

## Sharon Kowalski Finally Freed

By the time the January 1992 issue of *Out in the Mountains* went to press, the story on Karen Thompson's most recent efforts to bring Sharon Kowalski home were already out of date. On December 17, a Minnesota Appeals Court awarded guardianship of Sharon Kowalski to Karen Thompson, overturning a decision of the St. Louis County District Court in Duluth, which had awarded custody to Karen Tomberlin, Sharon's former high school coach and a friend of the Kowalski family. Unless Tomberlin appeals, this decision marks the end of a seven-year legal battle between Thompson and Sharon's parents, Donald and Della Kowalski. (As of January 11th, when *OITM* went to press, no appeal had been filed.)

According to Thompson's lawyer, M. Sue Wilson, in a story in the December 18 *New York Times*, this may be the first time in the United States that a court has recognized the rights of a partner in a lesbian or gay relationship as essentially equivalent to those of a spouse. According to the *Times*, the court stated that, "All the medical testimony established that Sharon has the capacity reliably to express a preference in this case, and she has clearly chosen to return home with Thompson if possible. This choice is further supported by the fact that Thompson and Sharon are a family of affinity, which ought to be accorded respect." According to Wilson, Thompson plans to bring Sharon home to live with her in St. Cloud.

Sharon Kowalski was injured in an automobile accident in November 1983, which left her almost completely paralyzed, with severe short-term memory loss and impaired ability to speak. Thompson has fought for guardianship since 1984, feeling that only as Sharon's guardian could she continue to be part of her life and ensure that she receive proper medical care. In retrospect, Karen Thompson's November 15 visit to Vermont assumes greater significance, as one of the last times she had to explain to an audience why Sharon can't come home. ▼

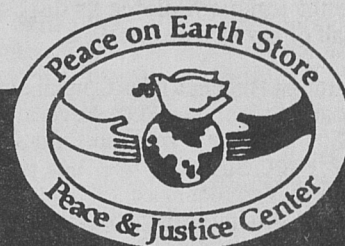
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This is the prom we have all wanted to attend but had to take the wrong dates to: February 22, 1992, at the Montpelier City Hall on Main Street. 8 p.m. till midnight. Admission is \$10 in advance or \$12 at the door. Proceeds benefit Vermont Pride.

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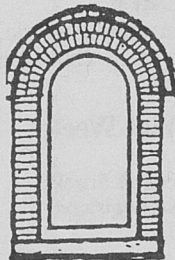
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