

[Murray] really knows her stuff and she was determined to win." They have equally high praise for Judge Ketcham. Laura says, "He's essentially a very kind, fair, intelligent person. Sue Murray said too that it took a judge with a lot of confidence and a lot of legal knowledge to have the courage to do it."

Clearly though, a good deal of the credit belongs to Beth and Laura themselves. They made an ideal test case. They have been together for more than ten years and have an extremely stable relationship. Separate home studies found both of them to be excellent prospective mothers. Their first parenting experience came several years ago when they took in a foster child. The fact that they applied as a couple and were licensed as a foster family by SRS, which needed them to take care of a severely handicapped child, proved very helpful when Laura petitioned to adopt Hannah. They were very open about their relationship at every stage of the process and with every party to it, including the adoption agency that placed Hannah with them in the first place.

Although they have never hidden their relationship, they found it difficult come out to strangers in the beginning. Beth says, "I just got on the phone and called agencies. 'I want to adopt as a single parent. I'm in a gay relationship. Is that an obstacle?' And when I found one that said no, I said, 'OK. I'll see you.' Laura adds, "I don't think unless we were very desperate for a child we would have managed it. We just had a really driving need."

Beth and Laura sometimes think about adopting a second child and would be tempted to do it as a couple from the beginning, although they are aware of the risk. They might be willing to take that risk now because they are less desperate for a child. Part of the reason, they would consider it, too, is that their family unit is so strongly established it doesn't make sense to them to apply on any other basis. Although they acknowledge the reality of homophobia, they nevertheless express some wonderment that something that seems so natural to them should pose so many difficulties for other people.

The advice they give to other couples who would like to petition for a second parent adoption is to be open about the relationship from the beginning, to have a home study done before going to court, and not to be impatient. The process can seem a whole lot longer when you're counting the minutes.

Accidental activists though they may be, one of the things that means the most to Beth and Laura is the fact that they have won more than their own private happiness. Laura says, "One thing I would say about how it felt to be the first is that I've never really been an activist about gay rights because I've never really felt at a disadvantage for being gay. But this just made me really excited for everybody. It was just such an important big step, and that's why it was so exciting. I think I was as excited for the whole community as I was for myself." Beth adds, "It felt good [to be the first]. It made it more than just for us. It makes a difference to other people. It makes it easier for other people."

In its essence this first second parent adoption in Vermont is really very simple. Beth sums it up, "We were naive enough to go and try it and hope and believe that it was the right thing, and that people would actually be that open...We were just doing what was best for Hannah and for us as a family." ▼

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