

Charming Yet Challenged: A Chat with the Sisters LeMay



The Sisters LeMay explore new ways to act up at February's "Winter is a Drag" Ball, a fundraiser for Vermont CARES.

by Paul Olsen

Amber and Marguerite LeMay. The Lucy and Ethel (or Fred and Barney?) of Vermont drag queens. Two tall girls that make Attorney General Janet Reno look well-cute. Having performed at Gay Pride, the "Winter is a Drag" Ball, and 135 Pearl, they've developed a reputation for their well-rehearsed shtick, big hair, fabulous sense of fashion, and support for a variety of charitable causes.

In celebration of April Fools Day, Amber and Marguerite LeMay (a.k.a. Bob Bolyard and Michael Hayes) agreed to answer a series of questions for *Out in the Mountains*.

OITM: When did the Sisters LeMay first appear in public?

Amber: Appear or perform?

Marguerite: Don't mind her. The Sisters' LeMay debut occurred on New Year's Eve, 1992, at the Sheraton Burlington for the big VGSA party.

Amber: Did we get lucky that night?

Marguerite: No, Amber.

Amber: Everyone else did!

OITM: Are you transvestites, cross-dressers, or drag queens?

Amber: Are you a journalist, a gadfly, or hack writer?

Marguerite: Amber, behave. (An aside to the interviewer) Remember, I'm the nice one.

Amber: We are entertainers. No labels are needed. Besides, you forgot "female illooooooosionist."

Marguerite: And we're fun, dammitall!

OITM: How long does it take you to get in drag?

Marguerite: How much time do we have?

Amber: If it's a choice of looking beautiful or being on stage on time, I'm on stage.

OITM: You must be perpetually late.

Marguerite: Obviously. In one of our shows we applied our make-up and wigs in front of the audience while singing "Mascara" from "La Cage Aux Folles."

Amber: If the audience is focusing on your eye shadow, they ain't laughing at your jokes!

Marguerite: No. They're laughing at YOUR eye shadow!

Amber: Oh well, a cheap laugh is still a laugh.

Marguerite: No one knows that better than Amber.

OITM: At Pride Day you were criticized by some lesbians for referring to yourselves as "female impaired." How do you respond to this criticism?

Marguerite: Well, take a look at us!

Amber: Should we be considered vaginally challenged?

Marguerite: Oh Amber...

Amber: Attacked for our uteruslessness?

Marguerite: Amber!

Amber: Just more labels!

OITM: If Ben & Jerry's named an ice cream flavor after the Sisters LeMay, what would it be called?

Marguerite: Nutty LeMayple Fruitcake.

OITM: And what would be in it?

Amber: Cherie Tartt's tongue.

OITM: How do you respond to the rumors regarding the marriage of Cherie Tartt and Fred Tuttle?

Amber: Does the name Anna Nicole Smith ring a bell?

Marguerite: Let's face it, that media maniac knows how to get what she wants.

Amber: And she got a movie deal out of ol' Fred. And being the gracious person she is, she hired us to be extras in the movie.

Marguerite: Amber plays the younger Cherie Tartt.

Amber: And Marguerite was Cherie's body double during the sex scenes.

OITM: A bill prohibiting gay marriage (H.182) in Vermont has been introduced in the Vermont legislature. What are your thoughts on gay marriage?

Amber: Gay marriage? Sounds like an oxymoron to me.

Marguerite: As opposed to the regular morons you date, Amber?

Amber: While I understand some peoples' objection to gay marriages for religious reasons, society has to find a way to acknowledge and affirm commitments between two people - no matter what sex either of them is. Sex should have nothing to do with it.

Marguerite: Sounds like MY dates, now.

OITM: Do you have anything else, other than a song, you'd like to share with the readers of *OITM*?

Amber: Well, we do want to thank the support our many fans have given us over the years.

Marguerite: And we'll be appearing at the Pride celebration in Burlington this year on June 21.

Amber: And, you're reading it here first, the Sisters LeMay are negotiating with a local theater company to appear in a real stage musical - probably in late July or early August.

Marguerite: Stay tuned! ▼

Legal Briefs: "Unofficial" Parents Beware

by Susan Murray and Beth Robinson

On February 28 in the case of *Titchenal v. Dexter*, the Vermont Supreme Court issued a decision which affects a wide variety of Vermont families with children, including gay and lesbian families.

The Court decided that a parent who has lived with, cared for, and helped raise a child has *no legal right* to custody or visitation with that child (and the child has no right to continue to have contact with that parent) if the parent is not a biological parent or a legal adoptive parent. The case highlights the vulnerability of gay and lesbian families who lack the legal protections taken for granted by so many others.

The case: The allegations considered by the Supreme Court were as follows: Christine Titchenal and Diane Dexter began their relationship in 1985. A few years later, they decided to have a child. In July of 1991, Diane adopted a newborn baby girl, whom the women named Sarah Ruth Dexter-Titchenal. Chris did not seek to co-adopt Sarah because both parties believed that Vermont's adoption law at the time would not have allowed them to become adoptive parents together.

Christine and Diane held themselves out to the world as Sarah's parents, and Sarah called one of them "Mama Chris" and the other "Mama Di." For the first three and a half years of Sarah's life, Chris cared for the child approximately 65% of the time.

The couple's relationship eventually faltered, and in November of 1994, Diane moved out of their home, taking Sarah with her. For the first five months following this separation, Sarah stayed with Chris from Wednesday afternoons to Friday evenings.

In the spring of 1995, however, Diane severely curtailed Sarah's contact with "Mama Chris," and refused Christine's offer of financial (i.e. "child") support.

On the basis of these alleged facts, Chris asked the trial court to protect her relationship with Sarah by awarding her some visitation time with the girl. The trial court refused to even consider the request, concluding that it simply had no authority to award visitation to a party who is neither an adoptive nor a biological parent.

The decision: On appeal, the Vermont Supreme Court confirmed that Chris had no legal right to visit with Sarah, and that the trial court's decision not to consider her request for visitation was not "cruel or shocking to the average person's conception of justice." The Supreme Court pointed out that non-biological partners in same-sex relationships can protect their relationships with their children by legally adopting them. The court was not swayed by the argument that the parties did not realize that Chris could adopt under Vermont's adoption law because the Supreme Court had allowed such adoptions before Diane and Christine broke up.

What it means: For anyone co-parenting a child with a biological or adoptive parent, the lesson of the *Titchenal* case is clear: *Adopt the child as soon as possible.* That is the only sure-fire way to assure that each parent's relationship with the child will be respected by the courts if the parents break up and one tries to deny or undermine the other parent's relationship with the child.

If adoption is not an option, then there is no fail-safe way for the "non-legal" parent, gay or straight, to protect his or her relationship with the child. By marrying (if possible) or by signing a written joint parenting agreement, the non-legal parent might be able to shore up his or her position. However, based on the Court's reasoning in the *Titchenal* case, marrying or signing an agreement may not really change the situation.

In the end, if the law does not recognize, respect, and protect our families, the burden is on each of us to respect them ourselves, difficult as that may be, and to affirm the reality and significance of our own past, present, and future family relationships. ▼

Susan Murray and Beth Robinson are attorneys at Langrock Sperry & Wool in Middlebury and Burlington, whose practices include employment issues, family matters, estate planning, personal injury and worker's compensation cases, and general civil litigation. This column features timely information about legal issues of interest to our community. We hope to provide information about important laws and court cases that may affect our rights, as well as practical nuts and bolts advice for protecting ourselves and our families. If you'd like to see us cover a particular topic, please feel free to write OITM or call us at 388-6356.