

To: Tim Fisher
fax (201) 783-6204

Fr: Stefan Lynch
voice (415) 206-1930
1040 Dolores St. #106
SF CA 94110

Here ya go Tim, a press release you requested. Just who is this going out to anyway? I made it fairly general 'cause I didn't know. I've moved to SF for awhile to pursue my dream of becoming a semi-professional tennis player. Take care and don't overwork yourself. Looks like you've got a lot on your plate with kids, and home and increasing GLPCI responsibilities.

Also, I wanted to ask that you put my name and number on the voice messaging system. I won't be working and would love to field calls. The system was a great idea, and will make COLAGE's life easier considering how we move and change faces a lot. Thanks for putting us on it.

Just For Us Changes Name to Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE).

After serving the needs of daughters and sons of lesbians and gay parents for four years, *Just For Us* has changed its name to *Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE)*.

"The old name was created at a time when kids with lesbian and gay parents weren't in the spotlight; the group's purpose was peer support," says co-director Stefan Lynch of Toronto, "As the media have focussed on us, and as our directions have expanded to include public advocacy for our members, we wanted a name that would describe exactly who we are, and still maintain the anonymity many kids need, 'COLAGE' can be as anonymous or out there as the situation calls for."

"As we say in our mission statement," says Emily Gmerek, co-director from Chicago, "we exist 'to foster the growth of daughters and sons of lesbian and gay parents by providing education, support and community on local and international levels, to advocate for our rights and those of our families and to promote acceptance and awareness in society that love makes a family.' Under our new name, COLAGE, we will continue to do so."

Many *Just For Us* Support groups exist around the U.S. and in Canada. As an umbrella organization, COLAGE will continue to provide assistance in starting and running these groups. COLAGE also stages an annual three-day conference, publishes a quarterly newsletter, provides media referrals and public speakers, and distributes information on children with lesbian and gay parents. COLAGE always respects privacy.

To contact COLAGE, write to:

COLAGE
Box 187, Station F
Toronto ON
CANADA M4Y 2L5

COLAGE
3023 North Clark
Box 121
Chicago IL
USA 60657

Or call (202) 583-8029

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COLAGE, Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere, is the only national organization run by and for the daughters and sons of lesbians and gay men. Our 600+ members represent only a tiny fraction of the 6 to 14 million Americans with lesbian and gay parents. We know first hand that the judgment in the Bottoms family case was inaccurate, prejudiced, and does not reflect the reality of growing up with a lesbian mother.

While studies and our own experiences show no bad effects of growing up with lesbian and gay parents, the secrecy many of us must maintain because of custody cases like the Bottoms' is a burden. The irony of this judgment "in the best interests of the child," is that cases like these cause the most problems for us.

Our hearts go out to <insert the name of the Bottoms kid here> Bottoms. We all have experienced some type of negative reaction to our families; custody rulings based on the sexuality of our parents are simply an extreme form. Fortunately this case does not reflect the positive trends in courts and other institutions towards our families, trends which COLAGE believes will continue as more and more Americans realize that children aren't raised by their parents' sexual orientation, they are raised by their parents' love.

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**Gay & Lesbian Parents
Coalition International**

P.O. Box 50360
Washington, DC 20091
(202) 583-8029

Celebrating our third decade of services to gay and lesbian parents through chapters around the world

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 14, 1993 -- Alexandria, Virginia.

Contact: Jim Fagelson, (301) 762-4828; or Tim Fisher, (201) 783-6204

Lesbian and Gay Parents and Their Families Condemn Legalized Discrimination in Virginia Custody Case

On September 7th, a Virginia judge declared Sharon Bottoms an "unfit" mother, because she was open and honest about her love for another woman, April Wade. Sharon's mother will retain custody of her two-year-old son, Tyler. This decision is a tragedy for Sharon, April and Tyler; for all Virginians, and indeed all Americans -- parents and children, gay and straight alike.

The case of Sharon Bottoms has received national attention in the media because it is believed to be the first decision by an appellate court where someone other than a parent successfully sues for custody of a child based on a parent's homosexuality.

But custody battles -- involving ex-spouses and even grandparents -- are nothing new in our community. The threat of losing custody of one's children in court has been and still is a danger for millions of gay and lesbian Americans. The American Bar Association estimates that there are over four million lesbian and gay parents in the United States, raising six to eight million children.¹ "Disputes over child custody and visitation," reports John Sheets, President of the Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International (GLPCI), "are the number one reason lesbian and gay Americans go to court."

While we were hopeful that a favorable decision for Sharon and her family would correct past injustices against gay and lesbian parents in Virginia, this decision is not

entirely unexpected. Historically, Virginia has been one of the slowest states to adapt to changing social patterns. In the 1960s, marriage outside one's race was grounds for imprisonment in the state.

Virginia still interferes in the lives of its citizens with one of the most repressive anti-sodomy laws in the nation. And Virginia is one of two states with the most unfavorable legal situations for lesbian and gay parents. Lesbian and gay parents in Virginia have always been hesitant to be open, because they know such unfavorable laws exist.

The decision in the Sharon Bottoms case is based on HOMOPHOBIA -- the irrational fear and hatred of lesbians and gays. Because of homophobia, judges ignore expert testimony on the overwhelming "fitness" of lesbian and gay parents and "normalcy" of our children. Instead, "they listen to the lies and perpetuate the MYTHS," says Vickie Harris, GLPCI's Executive Vice President, "myths that destroy families in the name of 'Family Values.' "

We must confront and destroy these myths!

Are our children unhealthy psychologically or vulnerable to mental breakdown? -- No, study after study shows that there are no significant differences between our children and the children of straight parents.

Are lesbians incapable of maternal feeling? -- No, America is in the midst of a "Gay Baby Boom" as more and more lesbians are making their dreams for children come true. And likewise, more and more gay men are acting on their desires to become fathers.

Do our children grow up confused about their gender identity and sexual feelings? -- No, they do not; but they often grow up more accepting of people who are different.

Do all of our children grow up to become lesbians or gay men? -- No, they do

not. They grow up to be exactly who they are meant to be. And our children are lucky to be born into families that love and accept them -- whatever their sexual orientation.

Do gay men and lesbians, including parents, molest children? -- No, the typical abuser of children is a straight, male family member.

Are gay and lesbian parents "unfit" to be parents? -- Absolutely not!, say the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, and the National Association of Social Workers, among others.

With the Sharon Bottoms custody decision, the Virginia courts took a giant step backwards -- while the rest of the nation is slowly moving forward. Twice as many states have appellate court rulings stating that homosexuality *per se* cannot be used against parents in custody decisions, as opposed to states where it can. An increasing number of jurisdictions have granted "second parent adoptions" -- allowing the partner of a lesbian or gay parent to become a second legal parent to the child.² More and more adoption agencies are realizing that the lesbian and gay community is a largely, untapped source of outstanding homes for children needing parents.

What can we do to fight for what is right in Virginia? The anti-sodomy statute must go! We can change hearts and minds by coming out to our families and friends, our neighbors and co-workers. We can write letters, speak out, volunteer and vote. We can Destroy the Myths!

Sharon, April, Tyler -- keep fighting! Our hearts are with you! Love makes a Family!

Notes:

1 "ABA Annual Meeting Provides Forum for Family Law Experts," 13 Fam. L. Rep. [Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., Washington, DC], pages 1512-1513 [August 25, 1987]

2 Second parent Adoptions have been granted in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Minnesota, the District of Columbia, Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Ohio and Texas.

Further Information

The Gay and Lesbian Parents Coalition International (GLPCI) is a worldwide advocacy and support group for lesbian mothers, gay fathers, co-parents, prospective parents and children. GLPCI does not provide legal services for parents involved in custody battles, but urges parents seeking legal resources to contact the following organizations:

National Center for Lesbian Rights
1663 Mission Street, Fifth Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-621-0674

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund
666 Broadway, 12th Floor
New York, NY 10012
212-995-8585

Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund
P.O. Box 21567
Seattle, WA 98111
206-325-2543

Contributions to the "Sharon Bottoms Custody Fund" may be sent to the Lesbian Mothers' National Defense Fund.

GLPCI publishes a 20-page "Bibliography on Gays and Lesbians and their Families" (\$5.00). It contains up-to-date listings of books, videos and articles in both popular magazines and scientific journals.

An annotated bibliography of "Books for Children with Gay and Lesbian Parents" has over 85 titles of picture books geared for kids from birth to age 10 (\$2.50).

GLPCI's quarterly newsletter, *Network*, is free with a \$15.00 annual membership contribution (complimentary issues are available upon request). *All mailing information is kept strictly confidential and will never be released to any organization.*

Just For Us, the newsletter of COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), is available for the daughters and sons of lesbian mothers and gay fathers (suggested annual donation \$5.00). COLAGE can be reached at: 3023 North Clark, Box 121, Chicago, IL 60657; Phone: (202) 583-8029.

Contact GLPCI for more information, including information on local chapters in your area. GLPCI can be reached at P.O. Box 50360, Washington, DC 20091, USA; Phone: (202) 583-8029. In Canada, write GLPCI, c/o Gay Fathers of Toronto, Box 187, Station F, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2L5.