

# Dad foiled in bid to nix adoption of 'hidden' son

By AL GUART

An upstate judge has rebuffed a Manhattan man's bid to overturn the adoption of the son he didn't know he had because his ex-girlfriend hid the birth from him.

Dutchess County Family Court Judge Peter Forman issued a six-page ruling faulting Juan Campoverde for not knowing about his 16-month-old son, Shiloh.

"In this case, the court finds there was no fraud perpetrated on the court and it would not be in the best interest of this child to set aside the final order of adoption," Forman concluded in a Dec. 11 opinion.

The Post reported Campoverde's case earlier this month when he challenged Shiloh's adoption on grounds the boy's mother, Sabrina Morabito, and grandmother, Roberta Casale, deliberately kept the boy a secret from him.

Shiloh was born in July 1999 and was adopted by a Poughkeepsie couple last October, shortly after Campoverde learned of his existence from an apparently distraught Casale.

In the ruling, Forman blamed Campoverde for not asking if Morabito was pregnant — even though she refused to take his calls after their November 1998 break-up.

Forman also chided him



**SHILOH**

Placed with upstate family.

for not offering child support or paying medical expenses for the baby, and for not starting paternity proceedings quickly.

The judge faulted Campoverde for failing to notify the state's Putative Father Registry by last September — a month after learning about Shiloh's birth.

Forman also ruled that Morabito, who claimed she was harassed and threatened by Campoverde during their 10 months together, was not legally bound to reveal his identity.

In any event, Campoverde's efforts were too late, the judge wrote.

"The biological father's efforts to establish his parental interest must be timely, and that timeliness is guided by the lifetime of the child, not by the onset of the father's awareness," Forman wrote.

Campoverde, a flight attendant who is studying for a pilot's license, vowed to appeal the decision.

"You just don't know how hurt I am," he said.

"I know it's expensive to appeal, but he's my son," he said. "There's no price that will prevent me from doing everything I can for him."

Campoverde's lawyer, Susan Chana Lask, insisted Morabito's harassment allegations were false.

"The decision to give up a child for adoption is one of the most difficult and private decisions a woman can make," said Morabito's lawyer, Denise Seidelman.



**FIGHTIN' MAD:** Juan Campoverde lost the first round in his fight for his son, but vows he'll appeal. Rick Dembow

## Cruel judge trashes family values

**H**APPY Father's Day, America's dads. Once again, your services to the needy little ones who bear your genetic makeup have been rendered unnecessary.

I am in mourning today for a young Manhattan father who is willing to risk everything — his career, his finances, his reputation — to satisfy his fervent wish to raise his baby son.

At a time when so many men blithely shirk responsibility to their flesh and blood, and so many children grow up fatherless and confused, it was heartening to see Juan Campoverde, at the age of 20, trying his best to do the right thing.

As Campoverde tells it — and his version has gone unchallenged — in July 1999 he became the father of a little boy, Shiloh, by an ex-girlfriend who conspired with her mother to keep the child's existence a secret.

It was only after the baby's mother, Sabrina Morabito, gave Shiloh to a Poughkeepsie couple for adoption that Campoverde learned he was a father. And so Campoverde, a flight attendant, began a painful and costly legal fight to gain access to his flesh and blood. It didn't work.



**ANDREA PEYSER**

An upstate judge told Campoverde to get lost. The Honorable Peter Forman of Poughkeepsie informed the young dad he is not entitled to know the son to whom he gave life.

So much for family values. So much for the value of a father's love.

This pathetic tale plays out in Harlem and Poughkeepsie. But it could happen anywhere. Especially in New York state, where, by law, fathers have effectively been rendered superfluous.

As Campoverde tells it, his girlfriend broke up with him because he was six years younger than she. Then, with the help of her mother, she rebuffed his attempts to contact her at her Staten Island home.

Finally, Shiloh's grandmother, stricken with remorse over her deception, told Campoverde the secret:

He had a son.

Common sense might dictate that Campoverde's ignorance of his child — and the mother's active concealment of the boy's existence — would result in a tearful meeting of blood relatives. Not so fast.

According to New York law, an unwed mother who puts her child up for adoption is not compelled to name the father. There is no requirement that any attempt be made to inform the dad his kid is to be handed to strangers.

Legally, he is unnecessary.

Still, a judge has the discretion to determine whether a parent should be given the opportunity to contest an adoption. In fact, the first adoption agency Sabrina Morabito contacted about handling Shiloh's case refused to get involved unless the father was notified.

But in a particularly cruel ruling, Judge Forman decided Campoverde was at fault — for not thinking to ask his ex if she was pregnant!

Further, the judge said, Campoverde should have placed his name on something called the Putative Father Registry. Apparently, this is a list where men who believe they might be fathers sometimes put

their names.

Campoverde says he never heard of such a list. I haven't, either. Have you?

Little Shiloh is now more than 16 months old. He's spent the last eight months with his adoptive parents in Poughkeepsie. I have no reason to believe they aren't good people.

Forman insists Shiloh's continued placement with these folks is in the child's best interests. There is no examination of whether Campoverde would make a good parent. The judge made some vague reference to Shiloh's mother feeling "threatened" by his phone calls. No details are offered.

By drawing out this case — I would be shocked if Campoverde didn't appeal — the idiot judge has guaranteed a lengthy battle that is certain to threaten a growing boy's well-being.

Campoverde should be commended. Not branded a villain for his paternal feelings.

But when laws and judges demonize fathers, it's no wonder the family is in trouble.