



'I JUST WANT MY SECRET SON': DAD

By AL GUART

A Manhattan man is waging a heartbreaking court battle for the 16-month-old son he never knew he had — saying the boy's adoption should be voided because the mom kept their child a secret from him.

"I just want my son," says Juan Campoverde, a 20-year-old American Eagle airlines flight attendant who lives in Harlem.

"How can this adoption be legal if my son's birth was kept a secret from me?"

He filed suit last week in Family Court in Dutchess County — where the boy's adoptive parents live — to nix the adoption.

Campoverde's case is the first known challenge to an adoption on grounds that others deliberately hid a child's existence from the natural father, experts said.

In court documents, Campoverde claims his ex-girlfriend Sabrina Morabito, and her mother, Roberta Casale, kept him in the dark about Sabrina's pregnancy and the birth of their son, Shiloh, for 21 months.

The deception began in December 1998, a month after Morabito, now 26, ended her 10-month relationship with Campoverde, the court papers say.

Despite Campoverde's repeated efforts to maintain contact with Morabito — by phone, by mail and, on one occasion by visiting her Staten Island home — he was rebuffed, the records claim.

"Her mother always answered the phone and always had a reason why Sabrina was not available or didn't want to speak with me," Campoverde said. "I was always rushed off the line."

Morabito cited their age difference in breaking up with him — he was 18 and she was 24.

But Campoverde's life took an unexpected twist last Aug. 15, when he phoned Casale and she told him the shocking secret:

Sabrina had a baby boy on July 29, 1999 — and Camp-

Seeks to overturn adoption

overde was the dad.

But there was one catch — the child had already been adopted.

According to court documents, Casale told a stunned Campoverde:

■ Sabrina threatened to never talk to her mother again if she told Campoverde about the pregnancy or Shiloh.

■ Morabito, who had been living with her mom, raised Shiloh there for his first eight months.

■ While living with her mother, Sabrina allegedly tried to arrange for

Shiloh's adoption through an agency, but that fell through when the agency insisted on notifying the father.

■ Sabrina later was put in touch with a Poughkeepsie couple who began private adoption proceedings.

■ Sabrina abruptly left her mom's home with Shiloh last March, leaving Casale, who had grown attached to her grandson, distraught.

■ Casale regretted going along with her daughter's scheme and even visited the courthouse to find out if she had any rights as a grandparent.

Casale, a teacher, did not return repeated calls from The Post for comment.

Unwed fathers almost never are able to reverse adoptions because state law, which governs all adoption cases, does not require that



TUG-OF-WAR TOT: Little Shiloh was adopted without his dad's knowledge, the man claims.

N.Y. Post: Rick Dembow

they be informed of adoption proceedings.

"My client's case is different because he was calling for a year and never told of the pregnancy or the birth," said Campoverde's lawyer, Susan Chana Lask. "It was only after the child was given away that the grandmother developed a conscience and revealed the secret."

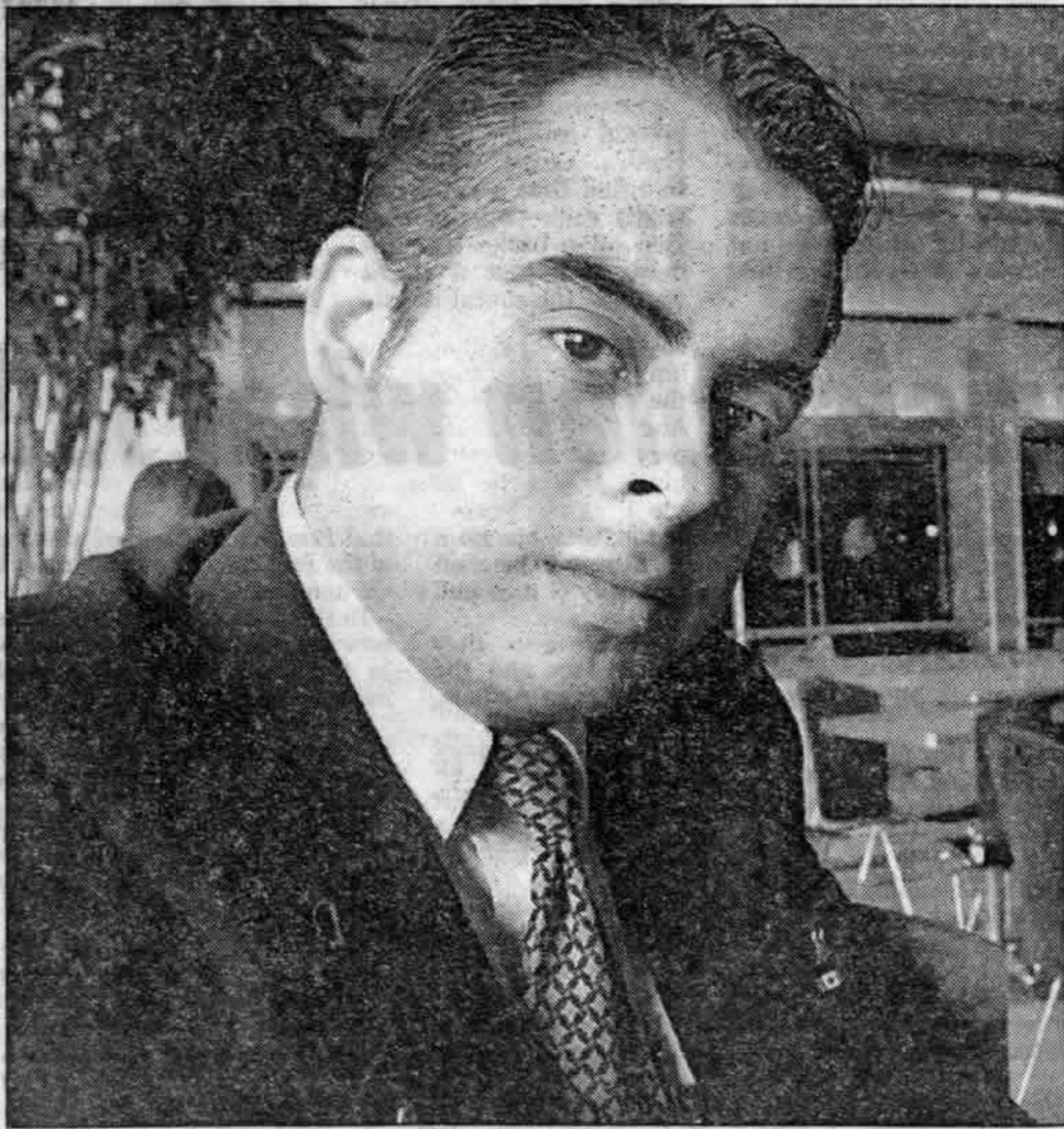
Sari Friedman, general counsel for the Fathers' Rights Association of New York State said:

"This is the first case of its kind in that it addresses a situation where a father came around, but the mother refused to tell him," Friedman said. "Fathers should be notified and given the first right of adoption."

Chana Messberg, the lawyer who handled the adoption, declined to discuss the case.

Sabrina Morabito's lawyer, Denise Seidelman, cited confidentiality laws, but said, "As an adoption attorney, I only do things on the up and up."

Sabrina could not be reached for comment.



BABY BATTLE: Shiloh's mom, Sabrina Morabito (top) kept secret the fact she was carrying his baby, claims Juan Campoverde (above). N.Y. Post: Rick Dembow

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