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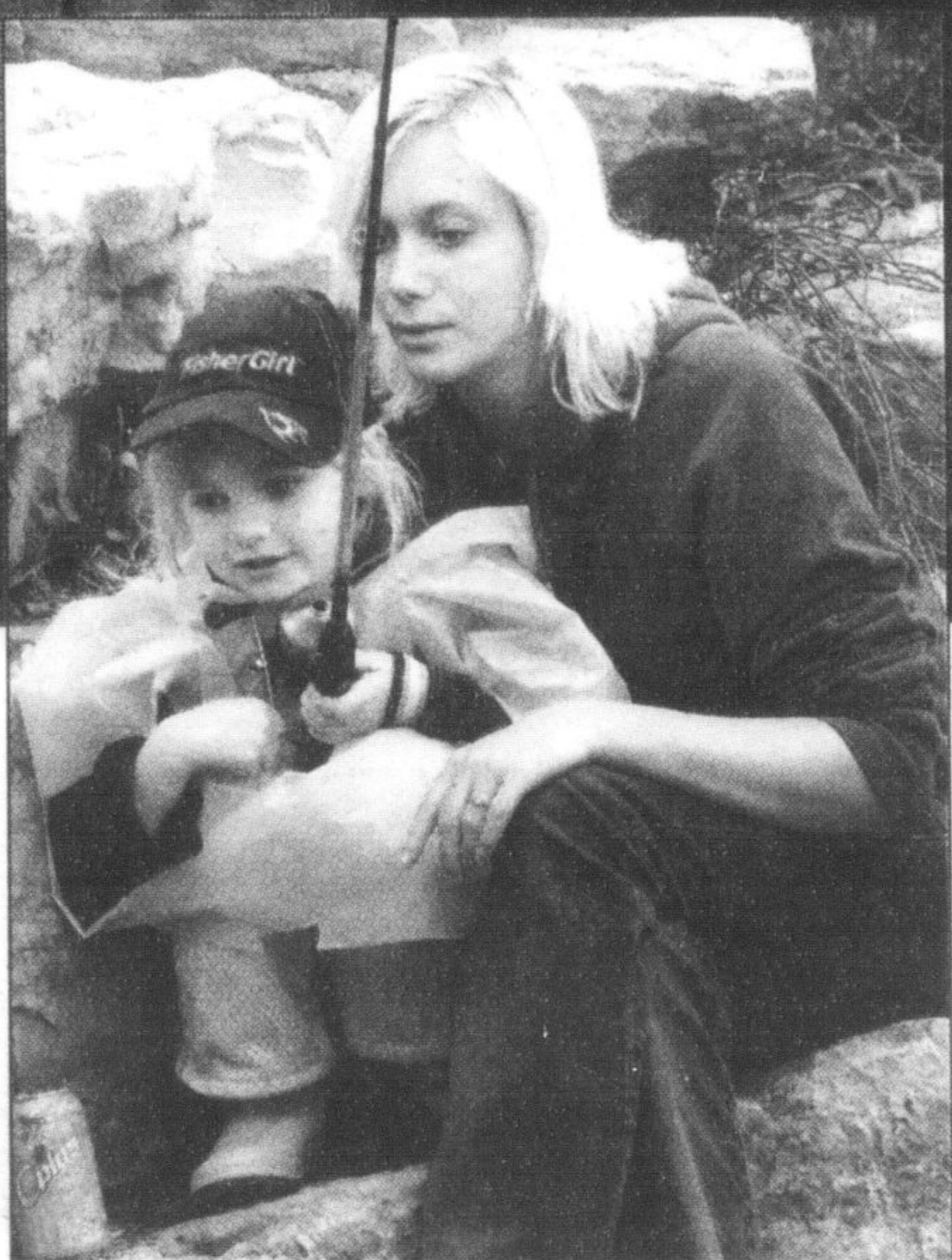
Tuesday, April 29, 2008

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CATCH OF THE DAY: Above, Arthur DeSousa shows the 20-inch Albino trout that his son Brayden, 3, reeled in as mom Christine looks on during Saturday's annual Halton Sportsman's Association Kids Fishing Derby at the Mill Pond. The event marked the youngster's first time fishing. At right, four-year-old Brooke Noyes eagerly awaits a nibble while taking in the festivities with mom Chrissy. As in previous years, hundreds of young anglers descended on the downtown pond for the derby.

GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION



Snobelen granted absolute discharge

Former cabinet minister ordered to pay \$1,500 but won't have criminal record in firearms case

By Melanie Hennessey
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Former Ontario cabinet minister John Snobelen has been granted an absolute discharge for the firearms charges he pleaded guilty to, meaning he'll have no criminal record.

The decision, rendered Friday morning in an Oakville court by Justice Stephen Brown, was welcomed by the former education and natural resources minister who looked visibly relieved as he left the courthouse for the last time.

"Obviously I'm pleased to have this over," he told the large crowd of reporters waiting outside for him. "It's been a long process, and obviously it's not pleasant to admit to the kind of mistake I made."

Snobelen pleaded guilty last year to careless storage of a firearm and possession of a restricted weapon. He was found not guilty of unauthorized possession of a firearm.

Although Justice Brown granted an absolute discharge, he also ordered Snobelen to pay a victim fine surcharge of \$1,500, which will go into a fund created to assist victims of crime. He's also been forbidden from possessing weapons for 10 years.

The 53-year-old's lawyer, James Dixon, had pushed for an absolute or conditional discharge. Meanwhile, Crown attorney Anthony McKinnon

asked that Snobelen receive a \$750 fine and a criminal conviction for each of the two charges, noting that firearms offences "aren't minor matters."

Before making his ruling, Justice Brown told the court he received 10 character reference letters for Snobelen that detailed the former MPP's charitable work and described him as a "community leader."

But balanced against the glowing praise is the seriousness of the offence, Justice Brown said.

"What he did do is make a serious error in judgment," he said. "Knowledge of this foolish mistake will continue to follow him."

Justice Brown said it's apparent that Snobelen is deeply embarrassed by the proceedings.

He also said he believes Snobelen is at no risk of committing a similar offence in the future.

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