



JUST FOR US

FOCUS ON MARRIAGE

Vol. 16 #1
2004

FOR PEOPLE WITH LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PARENTS



ON MARRIAGE & DISCRIMINATION by Cleopatra Bezis

Red, White, and Blue.

Many people say that these colors don't run.

Then why am I running from them?

Do you not see, what hatred they possess?

Love is now blind

It is invisible.

but love has the power to be exuberating,
exhilarating, exciting, expressive, and
empowering.

How can colors demolish that?

What do they stand for?

To me, they stand for hate, power,
discrimination, racism, greed, anger, and
control.

What do they mean to you?

For colors are just colors,
that's what you think.

Then why do you respect them, worship
them, believe in them, and trust them to
make us a better nation?

People have rights and our anger will not
subside until those colors run.

For the true colors, which stand for love,
respect, dignity, and equality will not run,
And this hatred that we have embodied will
subside

Those being discriminated against will

Finally be able to show

Their true colors

FREELY

Cleopatra Bezis is 15 years old and from a biracial lesbian family. She attends the Cambridge School in Weston, MA and actively speaks out about her family through COLAGE whenever possible.

PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE SENATE

by Michael Cooper

In March, I had what was quite possibly the most interesting and exciting day of my whole life, I had been offered the opportunity to speak at a Senate hearing. I didn't end speaking at the actual hearing, but I got to speak at a press conference before hand which was still absolutely exciting. Also I got to sit in at the hearing and listen to all of the politicians and law professors argue about precedent and they cited many parts of the Constitution and its amendments, which I didn't know all about. Despite all of the confusion and the bombastic language that I didn't understand, I still saw that as one of the most important learning experiences that I could ever hope to receive.



My day began as many do, I awoke, lazily hauled myself from my bed. It wasn't until I had gotten out of the shower that I remembered that I wasn't going to school

that day. Once I remembered that I was going to my press conference, there was an immediate increase in the pace of my step. My mother and I, wearing our "Sundays best"

headed off towards the metro station, and I, all the while was trying to memorize my statement and of course eventually realized that it was a futile attempt because the butterflies in my stomach were making it totally impossible for me to retain a single word on the page. We eventually got to the city and as a matter of course, we got turned around on

the way to the building that we were going to. When we got there I was as usual stopped at the security gate because my belt had metal studs on it and set the alarm off. We arrived and did a brief pep talk and then sat around and waited for the conference to begin. When it did I wasn't really nervous at first. While the first woman was *continued on page 4*

GAY MARRIAGES

by Elizabeth Hunt

I'm listening to the radio, and once again I'm hearing that the President of my country is "troubled" by same-sex marriage. The President of the United States doesn't approve of my family. I've always wondered how citizens could sit by while people were denied their civil rights - what were they thinking?

Now I know - they were not just thinking but screaming, hollering, writing letters, carrying signs, arguing with co-workers, and generally telling their fellow citizens "Hey, this isn't someone "out there" - this is about ME! ME! I'm your neighbor, I'm the person you see everyday, I'm the one who helped you pick up your trash when it spilled, I'm the one your kids see at school, I'm the person who contributes to our community - it's me who is being hurt by this."

I suspect my co-workers have mostly ignored the whole issue, at least until I came to work there. Now they hear plenty about it (sometimes from me yelling at the radio commentators), and they ask me questions that give me the opportunity to explain about my family. *continued on page 7*



INSIDE SPECIAL FEATURES

<i>That's So Gay</i> on CD	3
Marriage Timeline	8-12
Marriage Map	9
COLAGE Talking Points	10

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



"Hurray for Gay"

This is the way Ember Cook joyfully announced her arrival on Feb. 2, the first day of her COLAGE internship.

No less than 10 days later, "Hurray for Gay" became the cheer COLAGE staff sang while handing out kettle popcorn and congratulating same-sex couples and their children who waited in line to be married at San Francisco City Hall. As I write this, same-sex couples are getting married in Massachusetts and these words have returned as our happy mantra.

As you are well aware, this is a huge time for COLAGE and for COLAGers and our families. It is an exciting and overwhelming time, filled with celebration as well as questions and concerns. The marriage issue has placed our families in the middle of public attention and debate.

Around the country, the struggle for full recognition and equality for LGBT families has blossomed. While remarkable progress has been made, we are also seeing hostile attacks on the LGBT community. An onslaught of legislative activity, legal challenges, and media campaigns are underway that promote persistent discrimination and seek to further institutionalize the denial of legal, financial, cultural and civil rights to children with LGBT parents at every level. Currently, Congress is considering amending the U.S. Constitution to bar same-sex couples from marriage and 19 states are considering similar amendments to

their state constitutions. In response, national and state based LGBT community leaders and activists, including COLAGE and you, our members around the country, have propelled grassroots marriage equality campaigns into high gear. The articles in this issue of Just For Us explore the history, complexity, and current campaigns around marriage equality for same-sex couples.

All the attention makes this an especially powerful and difficult time for COLAGers. Marriage, after all, is as much personal as it is public and political. Marriage changes people's lives; as a social institution it is recognized as a major milestone in life, yet it also raises many questions. How do each of us really feel about marriage—for ourselves, in our families, and in society overall? If our parents don't want to marry, or still can't marry, how do we measure up as a family? Will marriage equality mean non-married queer relationships are even further marginalized? How do transgender parents fit into the picture? How can our activism around marriage equality address the broad conservative agenda in which anti-gay marriage is just one part? How do we give attention to marriage without ignoring some of the other ongoing issues that COLAGers face? How can we be honest about the difficulties we have with our parents without risking someone blaming our problems on our parents' sexuality or gender or using it as an argument against marriage equality? The diverse voices of children, youth and adults with LGBT parents featured in Just For Us provide just a few of the many perspectives we have on marriage for our families, ourselves, and society overall.

Within this charged atmosphere, our

perspectives are more important than ever. COLAGE has worked extensively with every type of major media outlet to counter negative stereotypes and misinformation with honest and accurate images of children in LGBT families. COLAGers are also educating the public and political decision-makers by speaking out at school, at press conferences and by writing letters to the editors in dozens of community newspapers. Our voices provide a personal perspective to debates about marriage and LGBT families. To get involved and use your own voice to participate in marriage equality and social justice work, use the talking points on page 10 and the suggestions for action on page 11. In addition to carrying out our usual support, advocacy, and outreach work, COLAGE has hired a Membership Organizer, Jill Shenker, to coordinate our involvement in local, state and national marriage equality campaigns.

In this historic moment we have a special opportunity to educate with the truths of our lives and families, to educate ourselves, and recognize the power we have to make change. COLAGE will continue to help you ask and answer the difficult questions while affirming and advocating around all issues important to COLAGers. Together we will continue to put a very real face on equality and social justice for all families. This is an exciting time; I congratulate you for your activism and bravery and say, "Hurray for Gay!"

In peace, justice and equality,

Beth Teper

COLAGE

MISSION

COLAGE ENGAGES, CONNECTS, AND EMPOWERS PEOPLE TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE FOR CHILDREN OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER PARENTS AND FAMILIES.

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EXCITING NEWS!

That's So Gay: Portraits of Youth with LGBT Parents Now Available on CD

That's So Gay: Portraits of Youth with LGBT Parents is the first exhibit created by youth with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender parents to promote visibility and raise awareness about their experiences and families. This photo-text exhibit features 24 youth with LGBT parents from all around the country. COLAGE has made the exhibit available on CD so that it can be easily printed and displayed in community centers, libraries, and schools everywhere. On each CD is a file of printable images to make the exhibit and a complete Resource Guide to walk you through using the exhibit to have a powerful impact in your community. With all the talk about our families circulating in school and in the media and from the courthouse to the statehouse now is the perfect time and *That's So Gay* is the perfect tool to elevate and bring our voices to the forefront of the movement for social justice.

To PREVIEW *That's So Gay: Portraits of Youth with LGBT Parents*, and check out additional resources and tools for raising awareness about people with LGBT parents, visit www.colage.org/ylap.

CD'S ARE:

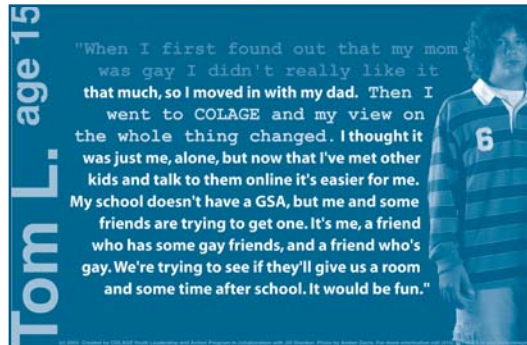
FREE for COLAGE chapters, members, and youth groups

\$15-99 sliding scale suggested donation for non-members, schools and non-profit organizations

\$100 - \$200 sliding scale suggested donation for corporations and businesses

COLAGE has a limited supply of pre-printed copies of the exhibit for sale. For more details, get in touch.

To order a CD or for more information: email thatssogay@colage.org or call 415-861-5437 x102.



WHAT DOES MARRIAGE MEAN TO A CHILD?

As we sat cold and huddled together under blankets and sleeping bags at 5:30 a.m. on the steps of San Francisco City Hall, we were excited, scared and in disbelief. My moms and I, were the first LGBT family in line on Friday February 13th, 2004 waiting to be LEGALLY married, on only the 2nd day San Francisco began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Only two days earlier, I had gone with my two moms to San Mateo County's City Clerk to try to get a marriage license, and we were denied. Late the next afternoon, we heard that San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom had ordered city hall to begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples, and my moms vowed that we would be first in line the following day... and we were!! I stood in line looking out at so many other couples and families, many of which had children, just like me. There were faces of happiness and joy, but also sadness, as everyone's mind was on the impending injunction that was to be filed that morning, possibly stopping further marriages. All wondered whether they would be married before this could happen? So many families feared losing the chance for something that they had waited so very long for.

At 8:00 a.m. the doors opened, and I went in with my moms as they filled out their paperwork and then walked up the stairs, under the rotunda of city hall to be married; in this same building that holds so much history for the LGBT community. Just some months earlier, I received a proclamation from then Mayor, Willie Brown, as I was honored as the youngest Grand Marshal in the history of San

Francisco's LGBT Pride Parade. This building, where the first openly gay politician, Harvey Milk, once held office, and where fifteen years ago he was assassinated. History was continuing to be made here!

As my two moms recited their vows, the three of us each began to cry. I don't think that it hit any of us until that very moment, how much this truly meant. The legal acceptance of my parents, of our family, of

Marriage and the rights it gives, is especially important to my family. Without it, my family will eventually be torn apart, and I will lose one of my moms because my parents are a bi-national couple.

how important, special and monumental this was! It's hard to explain to others how much something means, how much you value it, unless it's something that you've always been denied, and that you've never had a right to have. It was one of the most wonderful, unforgettable, and joyous moments of my life as I stood alongside my two mothers as they were LEGALLY married. Marriage and the rights it gives, is especially important to my family. Without it, my family will eventually be torn apart, and I will lose one of my moms because my parents are a bi-national couple. I often wonder how many children in this world realize the extraordinary difficulty and challenges that families like mine have to face, simply to stay together?

Mayor Gavin Newsom changed the world the day that he followed his heart and the constitution, in recognizing and in deciding that he would not allow discrimination to continue on in his city! That day, he gave a gift to millions of LGBT people, families, and children nationwide. He gave us dignity, hope, and the value that our families have long deserved. The fight for marriage, and for our rights is not over. However, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, popular, or political; but because it is right." With the example of Mayor Newsom's courage, and true leadership, and with justice and righteousness on our side, equality can and eventually will be won. Thank you Mayor Newsom, from those that marriage means the very most to, from the children of the LGBT community!



Marina (center) with her moms Ramona (L) and Arzu (R) who were legally married at S.F. City Hall, 2/13/04

Marina Gatto is a 15 year old LGBT rights activist and COLAGER who lives in San Carlos, CA with her moms, Ramona and Arzu. She has spoken all over the country about LGBT family rights and her experiences as the daughter of lesbians.

CHAPTER UPDATE



COLAGE New Hampshire Seacoast
Halloween Party 2003

For the past three years my family has gone to Family Week in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Two years ago I started participating in the COLAGE events for youth. Now I am helping COLAGE grow with the COLAGE New Hampshire Seacoast chapter.

Two years ago, I was finally old enough to register for the COLAGE events. After I registered I was worried about what it would be like. As it turned out, that year's Family Week was one of the most awesome times of my life! Before it started, I was feeling both nervous and excited about meeting new people who had families like mine. But after the first COLAGE activity, I realized I had nothing to worry about, and those nervous feelings quickly ran away as we jumped into fun activities where I met new friends. When my mom came to pick me up I told her all about it and how glad I was that I had gone and that I was no longer nervous.

After Family Week last year I decided that I wanted to start a chapter for my area. Since I live in an area with lots of small towns I decided to make the chapter a regional chapter, instead of just for my town. We have families who came all the way from Cape Cod and Maine for events. Also, even though our chapter activities are geared for COLAGErs 8-14 years old there is a wide range of people that join us for our activities.

Our first "official" event was a Halloween Party. We had about 15 COLAGErs for the party, plus their parents. We had the event at my house. We had a great time with the haunted trail that one of my Moms made for us in the woods near our house. Everyone also enjoyed a game of tag outside and a bonfire. After the Halloween Party we went roller-skating and ate pizza which we now try to do once a month.

Recently, our state has been trying to restrict marriage to only a man and woman. I went with my mother to the State House to hear

testimony and oppose the bill. I found it was educational to see our state in action on this issue. Unfortunately, it was recommended that the bill be passed despite testimony of the discrimination and effects this will have on our families.

My family has been interviewed by several local papers, including the Boston Globe about the same-sex marriage issue recently. When my family attended a rally for same-sex marriage, we were on television. I have also been on the local, regional, and national news stations when I attended the hearing at our state house on a bill related to same-sex marriage. At first I was nervous about everyone at my school knowing about my family, but since my close friends knew and were supportive, I decided to just talk about my family. It turned out to be a fun experience, plus I got to have my picture in the Boston Globe.

Last year my family started to camp a lot, I thought camping for a COLAGE event would be loads of fun. I have been planning a major COLAGE event, a camping trip June 4-6th for our chapter. For the camping trip I am planning to have arts & crafts projects, campfires and s'mores every night. If you live in New England, I hope you will join us for this fun COLAGE New Hampshire Seacoast camping event!

For more information about COLAGE NH Seacoast visit <http://home.comcast.net/~nhcolageseacoast>

Deanna Makinen coordinates the COLAGE New Hampshire Seacoast Chapter with the help of her mother, Debora. She is eleven years old and enjoys arts, drama, camping and sports.

Press conference at the Senate, from p1

felt totally calm. Then it was my turn to speak. While I walked up to the podium it seemed that the whole room began to spin. Then I realized what was going on and I instantly was able to gather my wits about me. While I don't think that it was the most rousing speech I've ever delivered, I feel that I did fairly well considering the circumstances. After the rest of the panel gave their statements, it was time for questions. First the pediatrician on the panel was asked a question. Then I was asked a question about the connections being made between the civil rights movement of the sixties and the fight for gay rights in our society today. I was expecting this question before hand and was well prepared to answer. I said something along the lines of, they are not the same, however they are similar situations in which a group of American citizens are being denied certain rights. She then proceeded to say something about slavery and how gay people weren't ever enslaved or considered as a fraction of a

person and I responded the same way I had before. She continued pressing, trying to get me to say whatever it was that she wanted me to say but she couldn't get me to so she just gave up.

Later, at the hearing, we were greeted by one committee member who at first seemed to be nice, but as his speech continued, I began to realize that he was another ignorant homophobe. Then I realized why. At first I thought that I heard a little southern drawl and as time progressed I recognized it, he had the same Texan drawl as our President-select Bush. This confirmed in my mind that I never want to go to Texas. The other senator on the panel who was a proponent of the amendment was a man from Alabama. All of the supporters of the amendment were consistently harping on the so called "activist judges" and saying that to support marriage rights for all people was equivalent to destroying traditional marriage. Some of the best comments during the whole hearing were

made by one Barney Frank who, after that experience is my new hero. Everything he said was so powerful and painfully logical that none of the pro- amendment people could do anything but continue to harp on their "activist judges" and try to avoid the point by citing a lot of random clauses in the amendment that meant absolutely nothing with reference to the situation at hand. After the hearing, I got a chance to shake hands with Barney Frank which was so cool, I felt honored. So that was a great learning experience and I am so glad that I had the opportunity to take part in such an important issue.

Michael Cooper is 15 years old and lives in Springfield, MD with his lesbian mother. A sophomore at West Springfield High School, he is president of his school's Gay/Straight Alliance (called SAGE for Straight and Gay Equality). Michael says he "became active in SAGE and in COLAGE because I saw something I believed in and I wanted to get involved in it. I wanted to add my voice to the debate about an issue I care about and that affects me directly everyday."



SPEAK OUT

COLAGE staff asked members: "Is same-sex marriage an important issue to you? Why or why not? How would it affect your family or other kids with LGBT parents?" Here are 10 different responses.



To me same-sex marriage is an important thing because gays and lesbians love each other just as much if not more than straight people. I think that if my dad and his partner got married then we would feel like a family and not just a bunch of people living together. I wouldn't feel like an outsider. I would feel like my family was included in society not just people that are different and living around people that are "society". Gays and lesbians are just as much citizens of the United States as straights and should have the exact same rights. If America can't separate African-Americans from whites then how come they can separate gay from straight?

Brenna, Vicksburg, MI, age 12

I think Gay & Lesbian marriage is like "You are entitled to your own opinion." Some people don't agree because they think



it is wrong. But children with Gay or Lesbian parents probably agree with me that it is right because they have learned to live with this 'way of life'.

Rebecca, Age 11, Nashville TN

In the Constitution, it says that all people are created equal. At first the US had a problem with accepting African Americans and Japanese Americans and some people have not gotten over it. The government is just denying gay and lesbian couples basic marriage rights. Property rights, tax rights, child rights, etc. It's just not fair.

Ariel, age 13, Oakland, CA

My mother is a lesbian and in a long term beautiful relationship. I honor her relationship and her civil rights and I feel the government should too. The Constitution starts with "We the people..." not "We the straight people..." and our pledge of allegiance concludes "with liberty and justice for ALL." so the justice for LGBT people needs to be honored and protected in our country as is done for all others. [Marriage for same-sex couples] would finally give our families the security in knowing that our parents are civilly protected under the laws of our country and could gain from the benefits and rights protected therein. My mother could file her taxes with her partner and save significantly. They could share health and life insurance plans. They could be assured that they

could visit one another in the intensive care unit in the hospital should that tragedy arise. They could rest assured that their jobs or housing couldn't be compromised by their sexual orientation. I would love to call my mother's partner her wife and no one think twice about it, look at me or them funny or ask what that's all about. I would love to know that my country and state acknowledge her civil rights and acknowledge our family.

Karma, age 28, Louisville, KY

I care about gay marriage, not for the fact that all LGBT couples should get married, but for the simple reason that I believe they must have the option. Why should we breed discrimination when we should be fighting against it? My mothers are not currently planning to get married, but they also do believe that they should have the option or the right.

Cleo, age 15, Weston, MA

I am somewhat suspicious of Mayor Newsom's motives [in San Francisco]- he won an election in which he faced a significant challenge from a Green Party candidate, and may be trying to court more liberal voters into his fold- but the idea is right on: there is no reason why two loving partners, regardless of sexual orientation should be prohibited from marriage and all the rights that come with it. I am happy for my dads [who got married in S.F.] but nothing much will change. I have always thought of my biological dad's partner as my step dad and always will.

Quinn, age 19, Boston, MA

Same-sex marriage should not be as big of an issue as it is today. It is on the news, the television and pop-up banners all over the internet. "Do you believe same-sex marriages should be legal?" Of course I do! How is the United States government going to decide for us who we can and cannot marry? Deeming something illegal because some find it morally incorrect is unjust and unfair. Obviously, there are going to be LGBT couples no matter what the "law" states...why not let them prove to the disbelieving community how much they are in love with and willing to commit to their partners.

Kirsten, Age 25, Raeford, NC

Same-sex marriage is an important issue to me. And the reason is that my mom and her partner deserve the right to marry and receive the equal benefits as hetero couples. I don't believe they are

asking for special rights just equality. We live as a family, with

both of them providing for my future as well as my younger brother's. They put us first and foremost in their lives. And I believe that even though they provide stability in our lives, I think their lives would be more fulfilled if only they were able to marry.

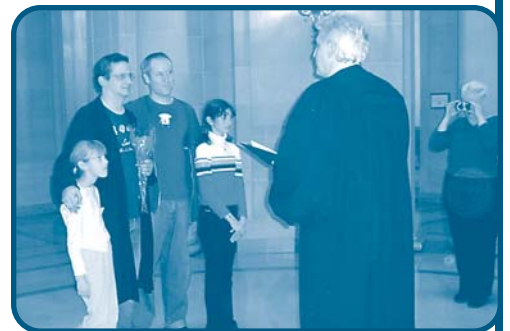
Scott, Age 18, Courtland, VA

The issue of same-sex marriage in America is very important to me because I feel that marriage is the right of every individual irregardless of age, race, gender, and sexual orientation. If same-sex marriage was legalized throughout the entire United States, my family would no longer feel like second class-citizens. We would be able to share and enjoy the same benefits and "perks" that most heterosexual married couples do.

LaToya, Age 19, Beech Island, SC

The legal recognition of same-sex partnerships is a very important issue for me, the daughter of two gay men who were together 26 years. The responsibility of being a parent doesn't discriminate, a parent is responsible for a child. The legal recognition of couples who commit to raising a child, who commit to investing in the future together is beyond important it is necessary. Legal recognition is necessary for very practical reasons, such as health care, emergency situations, and, not to be morbid, but it is necessary at the end of the union whether that be death or divorce; legal recognition of partnerships is necessary. Note that I didn't use the term Marriage, I am all for celebration, but I think that the use of the term marriage evokes religious issues which are a whole other battlefield.

Chelsea, Brooklyn, NY





SPAWN TALK

by Abigail Garner

Mixed messages in the marriage debate

My father and his partner have been together for twenty-six years. Their relationship provides me with the magic words for any debate about gay people being deviant or immoral. "Twenty-six years" gives pause to even the most ignorant homophobes.

When I lean on these magic words, however, I suppress my concern about the danger of attempting to use marriage equality as the key to queer liberation. By boasting about my parents' long-term relationship, I am implicitly communicating a value that doesn't sit well with me: that queer people are worthy of equality only if they have a life partner to whom they are willing to commit.

In heterosexual society, "marital status" is exactly that: status. Single heterosexual men and woman are viewed as unfinished projects in need of a spouse to "complete" them. As a single 32-year-old woman, I am

regularly asked, "Why aren't you married?," as if I should provide a simple explanation to enlighten the world about some major defect

that makes it impossible for me to snag a husband. It has only been in the past few years that words like "singleton" or "quirkyalone" have emerged to offer alternatives to the stereotypes of the bitter spinster or the unkempt bachelor.

I would like to believe that queer liberation could shake the rest of the world out of the mentality of validating individuals through marriage. Yet the current gay-rights-via-marriage rhetoric continues to ignore so many people in LGBT communities who do not have equal rights but are not part of a couple. It's disappointing to see queer activists fall into this heterosexist trap.

When I pull out the magic words, questions nag at me about how society will view the "worthiness" of queer people who are single, divorced, or widowed. Not all COLAGers can say their parents are in long-term relationships. Some people's parents are single by choice. Others have seen their

two moms or two dads split up, and other COLAGers have a mom or dad who dates a lot, but without one significant person who would warrant acknowledging an anniversary of any kind.

Marriage should be a right and a choice for all Americans regardless of gender. And it is indeed important to shatter stereotypes about gay people by showing mainstream America that many of them have life partners.

"Twenty-six years" is something easy for otherwise unaffected voters to remember when they hear about That One Daughter With The Gay Dads. If that is something that helps homophobes see gay people as human beings, I will continue to rely on those magic words. In the process, however, I don't want queer communities to buy into the straight world's assumption that marriage should be the preferred "status" for everyone, or that there is something "wrong" with people - of any sexual orientation - who choose not to marry.

Abigail Garner is the author of Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is (Harper Collins 2004). Her website is www.FamiliesLikeMine.com.

WHERE WILL MARRIAGE TAKE GAY RELATIONSHIPS?

Marriage has been a highly debated topic within the straight community due to its faults and shortcomings and ultimately fifty percent failure rate. How will this play out in the gay community? Are we moving in the right direction? Is it possible that straight relationships have more to learn from how gay unions have functioned up to this point than vice versa? As a child of a lesbian mother who recently ended a fifteen-year partnership, I was curious about how my mother viewed the beginning of legal marriage in the gay community.

For her, the issue is about opportunity and freedom of choice as well as moving past exclusion from the greater community. The equal rights we claim to have in the U.S. demand that the GLBT community enjoy the same benefits and legal protection of their relationships as the rest of the country. But is marriage, with all its failings and red tape the ultimate answer for partnership? Many conversations I have initiated with friends in their twenties and thirties reveal views of marriage as outdated and restrictive. When looking forward they see long-term commitment without legal trappings as more desirable.

During our conversation, my mother shared a statistic she read recently that stated that

70% of those surveyed would support their children marrying interracially. She took heart that an issue that was just as charged twenty-five years ago is now integrated into the culture to the extent it is, even if it is not universally respected as well as we might wish for. This gave my mother hope that in future decades gay marriage could be as integrated as interracial marriage is. Despite the reservations she has expressed about getting married herself, my mom would rather be odd man out as a partner in an unmarried couple in the gay community than part of the crowd because of an absence of other options. Marriage should be a conscious, thought out choice, rather than a forced one.

Do I want my mother to have the opportunity to marry if she chooses? Absolutely. In this country that touts freedom for the oppressed as its message, we cannot continue the hypocrisy of oppressing our own citizens who wish to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The issue remains, however, that part of honoring the GLBT community as we include them in marriage is not to forget what they have learned about relationship in the past. It is not freedom if we disrespect those who choose to continue to be in

relationship without marriage or if we see those relationships that were denied access to marriage vows as less legitimate. We are not sharing freedom if the previously straight paradigm becomes the only respectable way to partner long-term. This may be an opportunity for a union originally about men possessing women to go to another level of meaning. Let's take this opportunity to learn from each other and not just wipe out the history of gay relationships. It has been our pattern in this country to forget our terrible treatment of communities once discrimination ceases legally. Let's leave the dialogue open, even as we apologize for not recognizing love and long-term commitment in all the varied forms it takes and has always taken. It is the only way to honor not only the future of GLBT relationships, but also their past.

Caroline Donahue is a 26-year-old daughter of a lesbian mom. She has lived in San Francisco for four years and is currently making the switch from psychotherapist to writer. In her spare time, she enjoys knitting, sushi, film and breaking down the walls of prejudice.



GIVING MARRIAGE A BAD NAME

by Deborah Marcuse

It's funny how much of the rhetoric of those who would deny gay people the right to civil marriage has focused on the welfare of children. Funny to me, anyway, because I am one of those children for whom the opponents of gay marriage claim to speak. At age 28, however, I can speak for myself, and perhaps also for some children of gay parents who may be too young or too fearful to make their voices heard in the present debate.

The primary argument put forward by those who claim to oppose gay civil marriage for the sake of children is that allowing gay people to enjoy the legal benefits of marriage would deal a death-blow to the already crumbling institution of marriage in American society. Destroy marriage, they say, and you undermine the stability of families, and thus threaten the welfare of children.

My father came out to me when I was eight years old, and I think even at that tender age I would have questioned how anyone could claim to be promoting "family values" by denying some families the basic legal rights provided by civil marriage, rights that other families take for granted. From an early age I found it impossible to make sense of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and I was haunted by the knowledge that my father was so inexplicably denied the full protection of the law. It is the denial of basic civil rights to gay people, not the acceptance of gay civil marriage, which truly threatens the stability of families and the welfare of children. Prominent conservatives like David Brooks and William Safire are

among those who have recognized that they must support civil marriage for gay couples as part and parcel of their "family values" agenda. I don't agree with Brooks or Safire on much, politically speaking, but I admire their consistency on this point.

From where I stand, it's the anti-gay-marriage folks who give the institution of marriage a bad name, forcing many members of my generation to question whether we want anything to do with it. Though as a straight woman I have the right to marry, I am not sure that I could stomach taking advantage of that right while it is still denied to my father and his partner and to so many others.

When you realize that denying gay people the right to civil marriage threatens the welfare of children and tarnishes the very name of marriage, it starts to look like a pretty strange way of defending America's families. But then, maybe defending America's families isn't what the opponents of gay civil marriage are trying to do at all.

Deborah Marcuse (pictured here with her father Michael) was born and raised in Washington DC, where she marched with both of her parents in the 1987 March on Washington for Gay Rights. Presently working on her dissertation as a Ph.D. candidate in Religion at Duke University, Deborah will enter Duke Law school in Fall 2004 as a Mordecai Scholar to pursue a career working for LGBT civil rights.

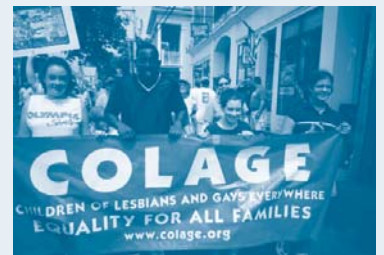


GET IN ON THE FUN WITH COLAGE THIS SUMMER!

Once again, COLAGE will provide exciting youth programming during Family Pride Coalition's two Family Week events.

**July 17 to 24, 2004 in Saugatuck, Michigan and
July 31 to Aug 6, 2004 in Provincetown, Massachusetts.**

Family Weeks provide an amazing opportunity for youth and parents alike to meet others who know what its like to have an LGBT family. For youth ages 9 and up, COLAGE offers a diverse array of social, recreational and educational programming that is fun and supportive for youth with LGBT parents. Including workshops on school and coming out to bonfires and dances, Family Week is one of the highlights of the year.



For more information or to register visit the Family Pride Coalition website at www.familypride.org.

See you at Family Week this summer!

Gay Marriages, from p1

How my dad and his partner have been together - but not married - for 18 years. How unfair it is that they had to spend hundreds of dollars drawing up legal contracts that protect each of them in the event of something awful happening - contracts that are part and parcel of getting married, the license for which costs about \$70 in Minnesota. How I watch my dad fight back tears as he hears how "gays have the same rights as we do - they just need to follow the

rules and marry someone of the opposite gender."

I want to do something, but what? My state is facing a potential constitutional amendment that would define marriage as between one man and one woman. I've written the governor, my congresswoman, and my state senator. My dad's written the paper, and I've emailed the local NPR station. What else can I do? I can live. I can talk with everyone I encounter about how

hurtful this has been for my family. I make sure that my taekwon-do students, kids and adults, meet my dad and his partner. I do everything I can to ensure that when other people - folks with straight, married parents - hear about the gay marriage debate, they don't just ignore it. They know it hurts real live people. They know it hurts me.

Elisabeth is the daughter of a gay dad and bisexual mom. She lives in Minneapolis, MN, and has recently been named as an alternate delegate to the state Democratic caucus.

(UN)TYING THE KNOTS:

Marriage Equality and the Struggle for Civil Rights

While conservatives are united in their assault on queers, people of color, women, low-income people, and immigrants, those of us under attack are divided. Many of us have learned and internalized the prejudice, mistrust, and hatred that the right wing preaches. Though it is tempting to rally for access to certain rights and privileges in the fight for marriage equality, we will fall into the trap of wedge issue politics if we do not understand the ways the institution of marriage is used to further marginalize already oppressed communities. We need to wage our struggle with a long-term vision that ensures healthcare, economic stability, and social recognition are available for everyone, regardless of nationality, economic status, sexual identity, or marital status.

IMMIGRATION, FAMILIES, AND MARRIAGE

Throughout U.S. history, immigration policy has reflected racism, sexism, and homophobia in our society. (See A History of Marriage in the United States in this issue.) With restrictive marriage and immigration legislation passed in 1996 and the upsurge in anti-immigrant sentiment after 9/11, it has become increasingly difficult for immigrants to gain legal status in the U.S. If someone who does not have lawful status in the U.S. wants to marry or be with a family member who is a citizen, they must leave the country for three to ten years before being eligible for a green card visa that recognizes their marriage.

For queer immigrants the situation is even worse. Current immigration policy only recognizes heterosexual spouses while other committed partnerships go unrecognized—and delegitimized. Transsexual immigrants often face challenges in obtaining documents from their home country that reflect their gender identity, resulting in enormous, sometimes insurmountable, difficulties with U.S.

immigration. These policies have devastating effects: families are separated and forced to break up, people endure emotional distress and depression, and queers who are forced to return to homophobic countries may face harassment, torture, or even death. The refusal to recognize marriages with undocumented immigrants and discrimination against queers and same-sex couples stem from a fear of difference and a desire to keep certain privileges for some while denying them to others.

WOMEN, WELFARE, AND MARRIAGE

While our government fights *against* marriage rights for same-sex couples, they are campaigning for welfare reform programs that coerce low-income women on welfare *into* marriage. The Bush Administration's latest round of welfare reform proposals recommend spending \$300 million per year on "marriage promotion programs" such as marriage education classes for adults and in schools; financial incentives for single mothers on welfare to get married; abstinence-until-marriage education; and covenant marriage programs, which have been developed by the Christian fundamentalist movement and which make it more difficult for those in troubled marriages to divorce. Many states have already implemented some of these measures. Queer women on welfare who live in states with cash incentives for those who marry are placed in a difficult situation: either deny their sexuality and marry a man, or be open about their sexuality and forgo needed welfare bonuses that are only given to women who participate in marriage programs.

Both the ban on marriage of LGBT couples and the promotion of marriage as a way out of poverty for

poor women reinforce the myth that the only valid family is one with a powerful man and a dependent wife and children. To emphasize this ideology, the radical right has changed the language in welfare policy from "single-parent families" to "father-absent households" and "never-formed families," phrases also used to denigrate LGBT families. We should not reinforce the widespread but problematic belief that state-sanctioned marriage makes a relationship more worthy of recognition and rights than other intimate or familial relationships.

Our struggle for civil rights is about more than the right to marry. All families that are about love, respect, and caring, are valid no matter what the configuration. Fighting poverty isn't about "getting a man," but instead about living wages, access to education, and affordable childcare and healthcare. Our country is built on the hard work of immigrants and the strength of diverse communities. As the LGBT movement works for marriage equality, we must fight for the rights of immigrants to build families and, at the same time, understand that marriage is being used as a weapon against low-income women and their children. Don't let the right wing succeed in dividing us with a coordinated attack. We can build a more equitable, diverse, and caring society if we make connections and work together across dividing lines.

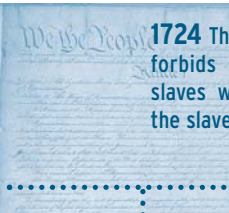
Resources to learn more:

- National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights: www.nnirr.org
- Legal Momentum: <http://legalmomentum.org/issues/wel/marriagepromotion.shtml> (formerly the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund)

Jill Shenker is an organizer, arts activist, and political educator with COLAGE and the San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women's Collective of La Raza Centro Legal.

A HISTORY OF MARRIAGE IN THE UNITED STATES

We will make social change most effectively when we are grounded in history. This timeline offers some context for the current historical moment—a time when the right wing is powerful and defining an anti-gay, anti-poor, anti-immigrant, and anti-woman agenda. Because marriage is so interconnected with other parts of life, it is impossible to offer a complete picture of the history of marriage. In this timeline we look at the development of marriage with specific attention to race, class, gender, immigration, and sexuality.



1724 The Louisiana Black Code forbids marriages between slaves without the consent of the slave master.


1691 Virginia enacts a law stating that if a white person (bond or free) marries a person of color (Negro, mulatto, or Indian), the couple will be banished from the colony. Banishment means almost certain death in the woods.

1839 The first state (MS) grants women the right to hold property in their own name, with their husbands' permission.

1769 American colonies based their laws on the English common law, which said, "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in the law. The very being and legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated into that of her husband under whose wing and protection she performs everything."

1917 The Immigration Act of 1917 bans all Asian immigration and bans "Psychopaths, Inferiors, and people with abnormal sexual instincts" from coming to the U.S. Under this law

lesbian and gay immigrants were officially excluded from coming to the U.S. until 1990.



By **1900** all states had legislation granting women some control over their property and earnings.

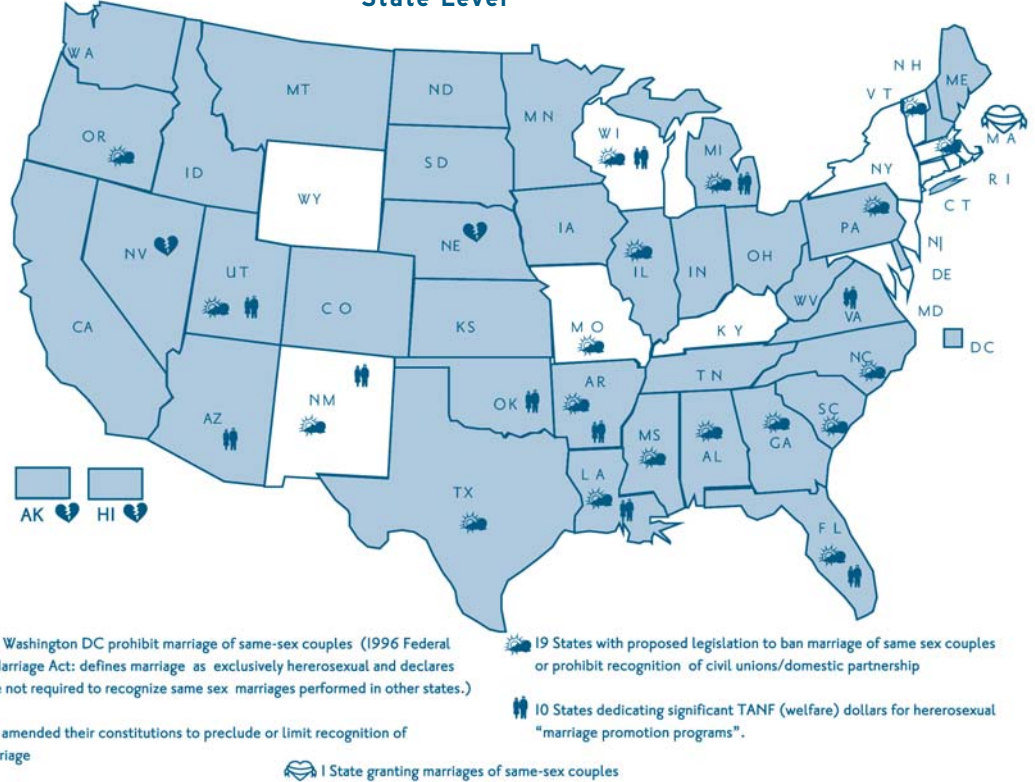
U.S. MARRIAGE LAWS & PROGRAMS

Federal Level

Throughout the country marriage is being heavily policed by the state—banned for some and coercively encouraged for others. On a Federal level Congress is considering a constitutional amendment to ban marriage of same-sex couples. To change the U.S. constitution, three fourths of state legislatures, or 38 states, must approve the proposed Federal Marriage amendment after it passes in the federal house and senate.

Conservatives are pushing anti-gay marriage legislation throughout the country and also implementing programs that divert government funds from economic assistance programs that promote (heterosexual) marriage through welfare legislation. These policies endanger the lives of women while reinforcing patriarchal and heterosexist family values.

State Level



MARRIAGE DEFINITIONS

MARRIAGE is a unique legal status conferred by and recognized by governments the world over. It is also a cultural and religious practice that has changed over time. The word itself is powerful, conveying that two life partners love each other, are interdependent and committed to each other for life. It is a valued and validated form of relationship in our society.

CIVIL MARRIAGE is a legal status that confers obligations, rights, and protections at both the state and federal level. There are 1,138 federal benefits that are contingent on marriage and many others that are specific to each state. As of May 2004, Massachusetts is the only state granting civil marriage to lesbian and gay couples. However, because of DOMA, same-sex couples married in Massachusetts will not receive the federal rights and benefits of civil marriage.

CIVIL UNION is a legal status created by the state of Vermont in 2000 which gives same-sex couples the same rights, privileges and responsibility as married spouses under state law, such as the ability to obtain dependent and partner coverage under health insurance plans and the legal right to make medical decisions for a family member/ partner who is sick. However, civil unions offer no federal rights and generally have not been recognized in states outside of Vermont.

RELIGIOUS MARRIAGE usually happens at a place of worship and is performed by a religious leader. Religions have complete control in deciding which marriages they will consecrate. Legalization of civil marriage would not force religious institutions to conduct marriage for lesbian and gay couples. Religious marriages do not convey legal rights or responsibilities.

DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP There is no universal definition of domestic partnership—each local or state government, business, organization, or school must develop its own definition. Domestic partner benefits are benefits given to unmarried couples (same-sex and different-sex). The goal of domestic partnership benefits is to allow the concept of family to include a diversity of relationships, including those that are not formally recognized through marriage. The scope of benefits varies widely, but is always far less extensive than those granted through marriage.

COMMITMENT CEREMONY is a public affirmation of a couple's love and commitment to one another. It is most common in the LGBT community because we are generally unable to marry under the law. There are no legal benefits to having a commitment ceremony.

1918 *New York v. Sanger*, allows doctors to advise their married patients about birth control for health purposes. It wasn't until 1965 that all state laws prohibiting the prescription or use of contraceptives by married couples were overturned.



1981 *Kirchberg v. Feenstra*, overturns state laws designating a husband "head and master" with unilateral control of property owned jointly with his wife.

1990 Congress repeals ban on gay and lesbian immigration by removing homosexuality as a reason to disqualify foreigners from immigrating, or even visiting the U.S.

1948 *Perez v. Sharp*, CA Supreme Court becomes first state high court to declare a ban on interracial marriage unconstitutional. In 1967 the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Loving vs. Virginia*, overturns all state bans on interracial marriage, declaring that the "freedom to marry" belongs to all Americans.

1993 Hawaii Supreme Court rules that prohibiting same-sex couples from marrying may violate HI Constitution's ban on sex discrimination and can only be upheld if prohibition is justified by a compelling reason— in 1996 no compelling reason is found. In 1998, before the HI Supreme Court can issue a final ruling, the voters amend the state Constitution to allow state legislature to restrict marriage to men and women only.

WHAT YOU CAN SAY: COLAGE Talking Points



When talking with the media, doing public speaking, or lobbying it is important to focus on positive messages and speak from your personal experience.

Talk about your family and about how the issue impacts you as a child of LGBT parents.

Personal stories are powerful and people are sympathetic to the needs and rights of children. In the current situation, it is important to distinguish between fighting against a federal constitutional amendment and supporting marriage equality. For example, when talking about the constitutional amendment focus on the dangers of writing discrimination into the Constitution rather than convincing people that marriage for same-sex couples is a good idea.

Talking points against state and federal constitutional amendments to ban marriage of same-sex couples:

- This amendment is divisive and discriminatory and seeks to treat one group of citizens differently than everyone else. I thought the U.S. Constitution was about equal protection.
- Such a hateful amendment illustrates a cruel irony about groups that call themselves "pro-family." What about my family? I have (gay dads/lesbian moms), and they want to deny my family fundamental protections like hospital visitation rights, inheritance rights and health care benefits. At the same time they want to coerce low-income women on welfare into marriage and don't support family (reunification) for immigrants. There is nothing pro-family about that.
- Lately I have experienced increased homophobia and harassment because current efforts to ban marriage equality seem to justify societal attacks on me and my family.
- People who support this discriminatory amendment think it will only affect LGBT people. But this amendment would affect millions of children, like myself who are a part of LGBT families and who deserve the same protections as other kids.

Talking points for marriage equality:

- In my eyes, I have a great family because we love, care, and respect each other. Marriage would offer legal recognition of my family and end the legal discrimination against us.
- My parents are already married in my eyes, but the government is denying our family equality.
- It's really hard on me and my family that my parents can't get married. Our family should have equal rights. There are 1,138 federal protections of marriage that my family can't have—which means, for example:
 - Access to second-parent adoption is not guaranteed.
 - If I get in an accident it's difficult to ensure that my non-biological/non-adoptive parent will be allowed to visit me in intensive care or make decisions about my care.
 - If something were to happen to my biological/adoptive parent I am vulnerable to being taken away from my non-biological/ non-adoptive parent.
 - If my non-biological/non-adoptive parent(s) were to pass away it is challenging for me or my other mom/dad to receive death benefits or social security. Our right to inherit money or property may be questioned or denied.
 - I may not be able to get health coverage on the insurance policy of my non-biological/non-adoptive parents' policy or my family may have to incur extra cost to get on the plan.
 - LGBT parents, like all parents, sometimes decide to split up and as children we need our parents to be legally responsible and accountable to care for us, even if our family structure changes.
- The religious right talks about saving kids from gay families. But I strongly feel that I do not need to be saved from my family—I have a great family.
- Separate but equal is not good enough for my education or my family!
- When the religious right talks about family values I feel so confused because MY family values are about equality and respect for all people.

1996 the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA/welfare to work) was the first federal law to explicitly promote marriage and encourage the formation of two-parent [heterosexual] families.

1998 Arizona passed Covenant Marriage legislation, under which heterosexual couples promise to stay married for life and renounce their legal right to a no-fault divorce. Florida became the first state to mandate high school seniors to take a marriage and relationship skills course before graduation through the Florida Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act.

2000 Arizona passed a Marriage Initiative that allocates one million Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF/welfare) dollars for [heterosexual] marriage skills courses provided by community-based organizations (often churches).



1994 Gays and lesbians qualify as a particular social group for purposes of US asylum law, meaning lesbian and gay people can apply for legal status in the US based on homophobic persecution in their home countries.

1996 Federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) (see map, p9 for definition)

1998 In May, Alaska trial court rules that choosing a marital partner is a fundamental right and can't be interfered with by the State absent a compelling reason. In November of that same year, voters amend Alaska Constitution to require that all marriages be between a man and a woman.

1999 Vermont Supreme Court rules that same-sex couples are entitled, under the Vermont Constitution, to all of the protections and benefits provided through marriage. In 2000, Vermont legislature creates civil unions for same-sex couples, giving these couples all the rights and benefits of marriage under Vermont law but not marriage licenses.

TAKE ACTION

Stand up for justice for LGBT families!

1 BRING THE MESSAGE HOME.

Meet the people who will be voting on our families. Make an appointment at the district office of your Congressperson or state legislator or ask COLAGE if there are other people or groups planning a visit in your region and join them. If you aren't able to make a personal visit to your representatives, a letter/e-mail and phone call are the next best actions to take. You can find out who your representatives are and how to contact them at www.house.gov/ and www.senate.gov/. Representatives want to hear from you and your story could make the difference in how they vote!

2 EXHIBIT *That's So Gay: Portraits of Youth with LGBT Parents.*

Use this photo-text exhibit created by COLAGERS to make change in your community. It is available

on CD and is very easy to print out and show in your school, place of worship, or community center. Teaching people about our families will go a long way towards changing public opinion. Preview at www.colage.org/ylap.

3 WRITE A LETTER OR OPINION PIECE FOR YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER.

In your letter be sure to introduce yourself and tell readers about your life in an LGBT family. You can usually find out how to reach the newspaper editor on the second page of a newspaper. Write your letter, get feedback from friends and family, send it in, and then call the editor to make sure they received it and encourage them to print it.

4 SPEAK OUT.

COLAGE has trained hundreds of COLAGERS of all ages on media and public speaking advocacy—all COLAGERS can help raise the visibility and

understanding of our families. Make arrangements to be a speaker at a school event, at services at your congregation, on the radio, or at a community event. Contact us to join our Speaker's Bureau. Your voice needs to be heard!

5 BE OUT.

This is the #1 prevention tool against homophobia and transphobia and bad legislation because people who know other people who are out about being queer or being part of a LGBT family are less likely to vote against us.

Contact COLAGE for more ideas or support on any of these action opportunities. We are here to help!

However you choose to get involved with fighting for LGBT civil rights, COLAGE wants to know! Send us a description of what you did or a copy of your work and we'll post it on our website or publish it in the next *Just For Us*. Together we make a difference.

MORE MARRIAGE RESOURCES

The **Alternatives to Marriage Project (AtMP)** is a national nonprofit organization advocating for equality and fairness for unmarried people, including people who choose not to marry, cannot marry, or live together before marriage. www.unmarried.org

Bring the Message Home Resource Kit can be downloaded from PFLAG's website. www.pflag.org

Freedom to Marry is the gay and non-gay partnership working to win marriage equality nationwide. www.freedomtomarry.org

HRC Family Net has comprehensive resources on LGBT families and marriage equality. www.hrc.org

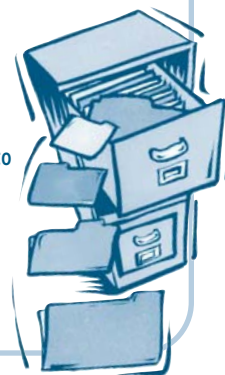
Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. The **Marriage Project** section of their website is full of resources. www.lambdalegal.org

LLEGÓ, the National Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Organization offers resources in Spanish. www.llego.org

The **National Black Justice Coalition's** goals in 2004 are to build black support for marriage equality and to educate the community on the dangers of the proposal to amend the U.S. Constitution to discriminate against gays and lesbians. www.nbjcoalition.org

The **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Marriage Center** is a resource for those who are grappling with the issue of marriage equality for same-sex couples. www.taskforce.org/marriagecenter/index.cfm

NCLR, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, has documents to protect you and your family and information about domestic partnerships, civil unions and marriage for same-sex couples. www.nclrights.org



1990-96 A series of articles by gay white men were published advocating for marriage of same-sex couples to become a national priority in LGBT organizing with the hope of making the LGBT community "more respectable."

March 2000, Oklahoma Governor announces \$10 million plan to encourage marriage and reduce divorce. Other states follow this example.



April 2001 Since 2001 undocumented immigrants must leave the U.S. for 3-10 years to be eligible to get permanent residency or citizenship even though they may have a spouse or close relative who is a permanent resident or citizen in the U.S.

Nov. 18, 2003 in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, the Massachusetts Supreme Court holds that barring an individual from the protections, benefits, and obligations of civil marriage solely because that person would marry a person of the same-sex violates the Massachusetts Constitution. Marriage licenses to LGBT couples issued starting May 17, 2004.



2003-2004 The Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA) is a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would deny marriage rights for same-sex couples. Congress will vote on whether or not to include "marriage promotion programs" in welfare reform nationally.

2004
COLAGE's
take action—
You decide what
the future will
look like!





Friday was gorgeous as we pulled into Los Angeles, a mystic and unfamiliar land for this Midwest native—the sun was shining, and the morning's wind had blown the smog to the east side of the city. Saturday would be spent preparing for Sunday's conference and displaying COLAGE's *That's So Gay: Portraits of Youth with LGBT Parents* exhibit. Sunday we would entertain the youth attending the L.A. G&L Center's Family Services Program LGBT Family One-Day Conference. Good as done.

And over all too soon. Saturday flew by in a breeze of easels, Mexican food, and sunshine. Sunday was really the bulk of the experience for me. On Sunday I spent a good deal of time with a young man who had been raised by a gay dad while attending a conservative Catholic high school as part of his parents' divorce agreement. He was at the conference as part of an agreement with his dad: He attends the conference, his dad allows him to move in with the pastor of his

school. Despite this obvious tension and the son's homophobic school environment, there was love in this two-man family, which was obvious when they were together. My progressive compass told me to influence the young man with my own liberal doctrine, my intuition said that his interest in Catholicism was a phase that he would outgrow, and a deeper part of me whispered that it's okay. He'll find his own path; it's not mine to choose.

As children of queer parents, we are part of an anomalous demographic—a percentage of the population that a good portion of America would like to ignore. We are a population that is larger and more diverse than most imagine. We have been shaped by our experiences, as have the rest of America's children. And we are all children, prone to wonder as well as terror. As the Greyhound made its way across the bay, carrying me away from San Francisco, a dazzling rainbow spread across the clear California sky. I tapped on the hazy bus window and felt myself drift in and out of Minnesota, California, and Oregon, as the wheels beneath me beat a steady time.

Martin Brown is from Northfield, Minnesota- the city of Cows, Colleges, and Contentment. At 12 his parents divorced and the word "lesbian" entered his vocabulary. He attends Antioch College and last spring interned with Love Makes A Family.

2nd Generation Wedding

I had long since ceased to think that I would ever vow to love and to cherish, to have and to hold, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and health, as long as we both shall live. At age 11, I discovered I had a gay dad. With that knowledge and experience eventually came the understanding that there simply isn't enough love in the world to declare that any of it is wrong; that I could choose both who and how I wanted to love; and perhaps most importantly, that true love can, not only exist outside of, but help defy and redefine social conventions.

Under the good influence of this understanding, ten years ago, I fell into friendship at first sight, followed by head over heels love, with my fabulous girlfriend, Kelly. Our life together was so different than what we had imagined for ourselves growing up. Traditional "marriage" seemed neither desirable nor possible. We had twice considered having a commitment ceremony only to call both of them off, disgusted by the abominably sexist and commercial wedding industry and unwilling to give up our special relationship for what seemed like a limited and inferior model

Deluge, Part One: And then on February 11, 2004, there it was, all of two inches high on my computer screen - the photo of Phyllis and Del. I called Kelly at her work and she squealed with surprise and delight into my ear. I printed out the tiny rectangle and its caption for posterity.

When we realized what was happening, we had a talk. Weighing the fragility of our bond and the prospect of doing such a thing without our families present, we decided, maturely and rationally, not to get married at this time.

The photographs and articles started trickling, then flooding in. All the straight people, families and co-workers, waved their newspapers at us: "Did you

see? Did you see?" One described, in an awed tone, an entire busload of stunned commuters struck silent at the sight of the couples lined up around the block outside City Hall waiting for licenses. And then the personal "we did it!" emails, direct to my inbox - Stuart and John, Jude and Carolyn.

We had the talk again. In the counselor's office. My proposal consisted of "I'd like to revisit our decision not to get married." Immaturely, irrationally, we cried and argued and debated and finally got beyond our families, politics, and the patriarchy to unearth our own love story. The one we had taken for granted for so long that had landed us here, in the counselor's office, remembering what we had loved in each other in the first place. And we decided that for better or worse, we were going to do it, if not to ensure the future, but to at least celebrate eight years of dedication to each other.

Deluge, Part Two: Sobbing with joy, my dad told me over the phone that according to Greek folklore, rain on one's wedding day is a sign of great prosperity. We awoke at 3 am to a violent thunderstorm that filled us with dread. The only parent that could make it to our ceremony on such short notice, Kell's mom, is deathly afraid of driving in the rain. But she braved it to be there for us, for which I will forever be impressed and grateful; later, in several proud letters to editors she wrote as mother of the brides, she would use the storm as a metaphor for the struggle for equal marriage rights.

At City Hall, we giddily sprinted with our flowers from clerk to clerk. Suddenly it was our turn. A gentle voice belonging to a distinguished older gentleman wearing rainbow rosary beads asked, "Are you ready to be married?" His name was Donald Bird; he and his partner of 37 years were married on Valentine's Day and he would be here at

City Hall, marrying couples, he told us, "for the duration." He reminded me of

my father. Minutes later, at the top of the Rotunda stairs, surrounded by queer couples marrying in every corner, I held the hands of the most beautiful woman in the world and said those timeless and surprisingly powerful words. I cried, Kelly cried, and Donald Bird cried, too. For those few moments, nothing existed in the world outside of our little triangle of love and commitment.

Deluge, Part Three: Then the flashbulbs started popping. I had truly never imagined that our wedding would be a media circus. We did two interviews within the first ten minutes of our married life. It was beyond surreal; as we spelled our names and places of employment for the reporters, another happy couple draped us with mardi gras necklaces on their way out. That afternoon we fulfilled my one real wedding fantasy by picking out our wedding rings.

"Don't freak out, but turn to page 12," Kelly cautioned. "What does she mean, 'her face glowed like a newlywed's?'" I growled. "I am a freakin' newlywed!" We made the AP wire, too, in what I must admit was a strikingly composed image, as an anonymous "same-sex couple." We informed our counselor that it was now "marriage counseling." I joked that this was the most pleasurable form of civil disobedience I had ever engaged in. Too bad they didn't print that in the paper.

Rosanne spent many years as the editor of COLAGE Just For Us and now is the grantwriter for the Chabot Space and Science Museum.



FUNPAGE

for kids with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents



Meet COLAGERs whose parents have been married!

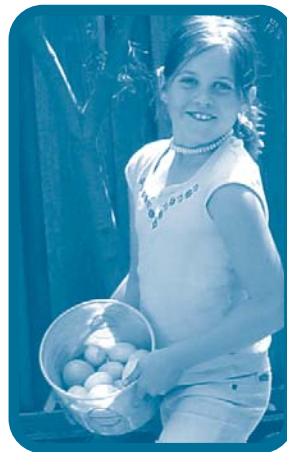
Alex, Age 11, San Francisco, CA

This is something I always wanted. I've always been around people saying, 'Oh my parent's anniversary is this week. It's always been something I'd probably never experience. But now, politically and officially, everybody knows its true- they're together. Its something I felt I needed to experience. I think people who think it's terrible have no heart whatsoever. I was smiling the whole time at City Hall, watching my mothers wed, along with hundreds of other couples. I just didn't believe after all my years going to rallies with my parents, hearing, 'We're here, we're queer, we should have been married last year,' all this stuff, that finally it happened.



Serena, Age 8, San Jose, CA

I thought it was fun because we were standing up for what we think is fair. It was my first time going to a gay wedding. I enjoyed it a lot because I wouldn't have been able to have this experience if my moms didn't get married. Plus we are making history! Even though we got turned away on Sunday morning, I still thought it was fun to go back Sunday night and camp in the car in the rain with my DVD player, walkie-talkie and Cheerios. While we were waiting Sunday night, we met some friends, William and Eddie and a few others.



Even though some people just a few steps from getting into City Hall to get married were turned away, they still tried

and stood up for what they believed in.

I thought it was really cool because most people don't have two moms, but I have two moms and they live together and they both love me.

COLAGE NOTES



COLAGE BOARD RESOLUTION SUPPORTS THE FREEDOM TO MARRY

Adopted by COLAGE Board of Directors, March 2004.

RESOLUTION Urging the people of the United States to end discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender people and their families by stopping the push to create Constitutional amendments barring marriage of same-sex couples and repealing discriminatory marriage laws that currently exist in many states.

WHEREAS, we are COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), the children who have parent(s) who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender, and

WHEREAS, all families deserve the same rights and legal protections as heterosexual two parent families under the law and all children, regardless of their parents' relationship, deserve the protection of their economic and emotional interests and access to the resources of their parents, and

WHEREAS, there is no legal definition of the words or concepts of "male," "female," "man," or "woman," and

WHEREAS, marriage is a unique civil contract, separate and distinct from any religious, ethnic, or other traditions, and

WHEREAS, civil marriage bestows thousands of state and federal rights, protections, and responsibilities that are otherwise unavailable to our families, and

WHEREAS, the inability to access these legal protections results in significant harms to us and our families, including financial insecurity; lack of health and death benefits, lack of access to family courts for resolutions regarding child custody and child support payments and other full faith and credits available with marriage, and

WHEREAS, discriminatory marriage laws result in major tribulations to lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender people and their families by perpetuating homophobia, and

WHEREAS, marriage is recognized as one of the fundamental elements of individual liberty, and

WHEREAS, the denial of marriage to same-sex

couples is a denial of fundamental civil rights,

Now THEREFORE, be it RESOLVED that COLAGE strongly urges the people of the United States to end discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender people and their families by opening the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples, stopping the push to create Constitutional amendments barring marriage of same-sex couples and repealing discriminatory marriage laws that currently exist in many states.

COLAGE YOUTH EMAIL DISCUSSION COMMUNITY

Join the COLAGE Youth email list, the new and improved online community to connect with youth ages 14-22 with lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender parents.

If you are currently subscribed to KOG 14, you must re-subscribe to the new and improved COLAGE Youth list. To join COLAGE Youth send an email to COLAGEYouth-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. For more information about the list see <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/COLAGEYouth/>

The COLAGE Youth list is a closed, moderated list. This is the place to connect with others your age who also have LGBT parents, to discuss the challenges and blessings of having an LGBT family, share questions and advice, and meet some fabulous new people.

The list has a new moderator- Mary Schafer who is the adult daughter of a lesbian mom and a straight father. She formerly ran the COLAGE Boulder Chapter and now lives in NYC where she goes to Columbia University Business School.

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to get in touch with COLAGE staff at 415-861-5437 or colage@colage.org. Thanks and we'll see you online!



Mary Schafer

Meredith Fenton, COLAGE Program Coordinator & Mary Schafer, COLAGE Youth Listserv Moderator

COLAGERS IN THE MEDIA

The following are highlights from recent media outlets featuring COLAGE and COLAGERS:

New York Times • San Jose Mercury News
Boston Globe • Connect For Kids
Pacific Sun • USA Today
And Baby Magazine • Hartford Courant
San Mateo Times • Daily Journal
San Francisco Chronicle
San Francisco Bay Guardian
MTV.com • YM • Cosmo Girl
Parent Guide Magazine
Los Angeles Times • Salt Lake Tribune
Minneapolis Star Tribune
Financial Times • London Telegraph
Gay World • Teenwire
US News & World Report

MEET SPRING INTERN EMBER COOK

Ember Cook was born in the potato growing land of Pocatello, Idaho. Her father, Dwight, and mother, Janet, brought her to Murray, Utah in order to bring Danna, her sister, kicking and screaming into the

world. After living in a number of different places, the Cook family landed in Phoenix, Arizona, trading potatoes for cacti. Ember was 10 when her father "came out of the closet" and her parents got a divorce. A

few years later, Ember's big mouth got the whole family involved in a PBS documentary called "Our House". Thinking the stage was where she was meant to be, Ember went to Stephens College in Columbia, MO and graduated in May of 2003 with a BFA in Theatre. Ember is currently in San Francisco, trying her hand as the Spring COLAGE Intern. "The road here was bumpy but worth it," says Ember. "Through the COLAGE internship I am not only able to learn and grow as a person but can also attempt to give back a fraction of what COLAGE has given me."





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Chapters are autonomous local groups that affiliate with COLAGE and are self-run. We strive to keep updated on local contact information. If you have difficulty reaching the contact listed please let us know. Thank you.

Want to start a chapter in your community? Have questions? Please contact COLAGE at 415-861-KIDS or email colage@colage.org.