

SAME_SEX MARRIAGE

VERSUS

FAMILY DIVISION

By: Gerard Veldhoven

Same-gender Marriage versus Family Division.

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October 16, 2004 and Amherst was abuzz with talk of two men getting married that day. Yes, it was a day filled with anticipation, as people drove around in their vehicles trying to get a glimpse of the huge tent with the pride flag on top. Folks were curious as to how this could possibly be done in a small conservative town, such as Amherst. If there were objections to this unusual happening, it was not in evidence. This is not to say we were oblivious to what could possibly take place, such as right wing Christian groups boycotting this wedding. Happily, the day proceeded without a hitch and we were joined as a legally married same-sex couple. One would expect some form of objection in this decidedly conservative area of the province. The fact CTV and CBC television crews were around to record the marriage, served as a reminder history was made in Nova Scotia and indeed Atlantic Canada. Nova Scotia was the first of the Atlantic Provinces to legalize same-sex marriage. This was the first marriage performed in a very public manner. There were, however, two letters in the Amherst Daily News bordering on hateful rhetoric. This was to be expected.

As replies to the invitations arrived, we were amazed at the number of guests intending to be present for this monumental occasion. 130 invitations were sent and 125 replied they would attend. However, I was not really prepared for one of the replies. It came from one of my brothers and his wife, who informed us they would attend, as their idea of marriage is very different from our view. He went on to say, "We hope this will not affect our family connectedness." At the end this statement: "We send our love and our door will always be open." A hit in the stomach would have been mild in comparison. I make this point because this happens all too often in our community. My reply was swift and to the point. In my response I made it known this may very well affect our close bond and family connectedness. Needless to say, this was the last contact my brother had with me. My other brothers and their spouses attended and were extremely supportive. All family members who could be there arrived with great smiles on their faces.

If one deems it necessary to turn away from equal rights, then one must also accept the consequences. I had to come to terms with the fact my brother no longer wished any communication with me, or my spouse. The feeling turned out to be mutual and I lost a brother, as did he. Actually, I came to

terms with this in a few days, as the choice was very clear. Of course, one would not purposely choose to exit a sibling from one's life. However, this incident was a definite indication he was not ready to embrace equal marriage. Therefore, my answer to him was send not in haste, but with great thought and determination. There is no space in our lives for those who choose to ignore our happiness and equal rights. My brother would immediately reject this as an equal, or human rights issue, so he was ready to destroy the "family connectedness". He could have made a choice, but I could not under any circumstance. It therefore, becomes his loss and I am truly convinced there will be no more contact in the future. One brother approached him to see if a change of mind is possible and he was told that is not possible. I am relieved my parents are no longer alive to have witnessed this family break-up. It would have been extremely upsetting for them, as they valued family ties. My mother consistently made an effort to heal, if and when unpleasant family situations arose. Looking back, I cannot determine if my parents would have attended our wedding, but deep down I feel they would not have missed it. It is unfortunate as all of us are now well into our sixties, this unpleasant situation exists.

This is a very personal account of what happened in my family in a response to same-sex marriage. The reason for this article is to illustrate the fact no one is immune from this judgmental and horrific form of discrimination. One must be prepared for this possibility. I believe this proves education is of paramount importance so we, who choose to marry, may do so without prejudice contained in this story. The day I married Norman Carter is a day to remember with fondness and pride.

Family members are important and if they support us, that is wonderful, but if the tide suddenly turns because of a disagreement regarding which couples should be allowed to marry, then if you are shunned by a brother, sister or parents, then you must let go. We, in the gay and lesbian community, should be proud of our circumstance and celebrate it to the fullest. Family members must not interfere with the great strides we have made. We deserve the same happiness and opportunities, including respect as a married couple. One lives in the hope siblings and parents will be proud and happy for the tremendous gains their gay or lesbian child has acquired. If this is unattainable, we must be willing to let go and live our lives with pride and dignity. Until recently, time has not been kind to gays and lesbians. Therefore, especially for the older members of our community, we must assure ourselves of happier and kinder times. It is attainable and certainly

should not be interfered with by those who refuse or deliberately avoid learning the reason for their child's sexual orientation. On the other hand, it matters not how we came to be gay or lesbian. We do know our sexual make-up is decided before we are born, as is the colour of our hair and so on.

Life is precious and so full of positive ideals. Along with my spouse I plan a long and fruitful life. We have children, grandchildren and a great grandson, as well as siblings who care deeply. Now we are seniors and even as we are not always certain about family members giving us what we need most. Mutual respect is what everyone is entitled to. Of course, of that is accomplished, generations after us shall have the richness of equal rights and opportunities. We are all the same somehow.

We came to Canada as a family of six in 1954. My mother passed away in 1990 of a massive heart attack. My father succumbed as a result of a bad infection. Consequently, four brothers survive and one chose to separate himself from me and decided to completely cut off all contact. My point being, one survives and life is great, in spite of the loss of a sibling. Same-sex marriage may possibly come between family members. Family divisions may be unavoidable. More importantly, I decided to let go and continue in life with those who support me and the one I love.

March 30, 2007