

A reflection on equal marriage

As a lifelong reader of Canada's most established national daily newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, I sometimes find myself inspired to write a letter to the editor. Keeping in mind that thousands of people do this every day, to actually have your letter published is no small achievement. In my lifetime of writing about five letters a year, I have succeeded in having just one letter published, and that letter was about my personal experience of equal marriage.

For those who do not know, lawmakers have established equal marriage in all provinces and territories of Canada. By equal marriage I mean the ability for two persons of the same sex to marry and to have all the rights and obligations that accompany marriage. In Canada it is the real deal – *marriage*, not domestic partnerships or civil unions.

Equal marriage did not sweep the land all at once, because marriage is a matter of provincial jurisdiction, so some Canadian provinces implemented it before others. The province where I live made equal marriage possible in June 2003. I was married to my partner fifteen months later, and here is what I had to say to the *Globe and Mail* and to its readers all across Canada:

There has been much discussion about same sex marriage lately, from theoretical, legal, political and biblical viewpoints. What seems to be missing from this discussion is a personal dimension.

I am a lesbian with a same sex partner and we are raising three teenage children. Although we have had a civil union for some years, we decided to get our Canadian seal of approval. So recently, on a rainy Monday night we were married in a tacky wedding chapel in Niagara Falls, Ont, which in a former life had been a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet, in a transaction that took about two minutes. Afterwards, our family went out for a steak dinner.

I can hardly begin to express how different I now feel. I did not expect this change in me. But I have changed – my commitment to my partner and our children has deepened. I can tell you without hesitation that our family is stronger. If I had known for the first 45 years of my life what this felt like, I would have been a more vocal advocate for equal marriage than I ever was.

Same sex marriage threatens no families in this country, and strengthens many. This is my personal experience. I cannot believe that our lawmakers would want to cast a vote that would deny this experience to tens of thousands of loving Canadian couples and their families.

Five years later, I continue to love being married. For sure it is not for everyone, but it is a good thing for me. My partner and I could have gone on for years just as we had been doing, and not done the marriage thing, and maybe our lives would be no different today. Certainly the marriage ceremony itself was a non-event. But as I noted in my letter, I

would never have had this feeling that marriage gave me – this deep sense of calm, commitment and belonging.

Getting married was also good for me because I was doing the right thing at the right time and for the right principle. One thing that inspired us to get married was hearing a speaker who likened the equal marriage cause to the suffragette movement and then chastised those who chose not to marry, after winning the right to do so. In his words, it was no different than women earning the right to vote but then not bothering to show up at the polls!

That's a compelling line of thinking and once put into that perspective there was no turning back for us. I am aware that are LGBT people who do not see marriage, with all its heterosexual evils, as anything to which gay and lesbian people should aspire. To these people I would say – the issue is not whether marriage is a good or bad thing, the issue is that it is essential that we have the freedom to choose to marry (or not). Statistically, the vast majority of us have chosen *not* to marry, but by having that choice, we have advanced our legal cause immeasurably.

Marriage is so mainstream and so respectable, that my little incident at the tacky wedding chapel has had more impact on how I am perceived, accepted and integrated into my community than any other thing I have done in my life. This personal experience and perspective is what is often overlooked in all the discussion of this issue.

Rachel Corbett is a director of the Centre for Sport and Law and a consultant who works exclusively in the sport community. In addition to her work with provincial and national sport bodies and major games, Rachel also lectures in the sport management department at Brock University and is widely published in the sport law, risk management and organizational development fields. Rachel and her spouse live in Ontario, and have two children completing university and one just starting.