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Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

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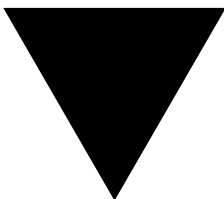
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 Office 603-528-6175 ▼ email: admin@pflagnh.org ▼ Helpline 800-750-2524



**To PFLAG NH Members
 and to all who receive
 the PFLAG NH newsletter:**

PFLAG NH is undergoing restructuring at this time. Producing a print newsletter will not be undertaken until we have been able to complete this process. If you have ideas for topics which you would like to have the print newsletter cover, please let us know. We are considering print advertising again in order to cover our expenses for printing and distribution. Should you be interested in helping out with an ad, also let us know. In the meantime, we are still visible via our web site on a regular basis. Please send us short articles of information which will help to enhance communication throughout our GLBT supportive community. E-News deadlines are: Jan. 5, Apr. 5, July 5, Oct. 5. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me personally, and I'll be happy to discuss them with you.

Roberta Barry, President PFLAG NH
 bbarry29@mac.com
 or 603-352-6854



SUSAN AGER

**A saddened mom's letter
 to her church**

October 14, 2004

BY SUSAN AGER
 FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Near midnight, as her husband slept, lifelong Catholic Joanne Polisano sat down at the computer in her home office in Wixom and pounded out a letter to her pastor. She began: "Perhaps in some small way I can understand what a mother must have felt like, 2,000 years ago, when a group of people of her own religion decided to persecute her son."

Joanne is 67 years old, a former Sunday school teacher and a conservative Republican. She has never voted for a Democrat for president. She never misses weekend mass.

But her youngest child, 38 years old, is a lesbian and finally happy after years of self-doubt as she struggled to desire a man. Now she shares a home with a woman she has loved for 5 years. They talk about bearing a child.

And Joanne is angry, hurt and ashamed that her church is working so hard to support Proposal 2, which would etch into Michigan's constitution a ban against gay marriage, civil union and equal rights.

(AGER, Continued on pages 3)

HOW IT FEELS

To Be Legally Married

by Sara

My mom asked: "Do you feel different?". It gave me pause because I did feel different, but it was so subtle and elusive that I didn't know how to describe or quantify it. And I knew that would be the next question, and it was. My explanation pulled together pieces I had not been consciously aware of.

From the moment I realized I wanted to spend the rest of my life with Rhonda I knew that I wanted to formalize the commitment I was prepared to make. When we had been together two and a half years we had a commitment ceremony with our family and friends. It was a wonderful, beautiful ceremony celebrating our love and commitment to each other. It was an event that was recognized by all the people who are meaningful in our lives, and that was the extent of it. It was not a marriage.

We had known it would not be a marriage because Rhonda and I are both female and at that time in the United States it was not possible for same gender couples to get married. I really hadn't spent a lot of time

(MARRIED, Continued on page 2)

(MARRIED, Continued from page 1)

thinking about it because I knew I couldn't have it. Then it became legal in certain provinces in Canada and we began talking. Suddenly the unattainable was within reach. With a whole slew of strings and restrictions, but moving in the direction we wanted. I knew at this time that I wanted to be married. But marriage in Canada while nice would not be recognized in the US even though the law says the US recognizes Canadian marriages. So we waited.

Then Massachusetts had its ruling and this was much more interesting. This at least had the prospect of being recognized in some states, although California, the state I live in, is not one of them. Rhonda and I began to talk about traveling to Massachusetts for our anniversary to get married.

The next thing we know the Mayor of San Francisco has said that he feels the law limiting marriage to one man and one woman is discriminatory and that he is having the appropriate people make appropriate changes to accommodate gay and lesbian marriages. Well now that really got our attention! The first I heard of this the impression I had was that it was going to take a week to get the necessary changes put in place. However the next day I heard that the first gay and lesbian marriages had taken place and more couples were showing up. When I got home Rhonda and I were going to head right down there but found out we couldn't get an appointment for a ceremony that day but could for the next day, Friday. So we made the appointment and called our family.

But back to the question: How does being married feel different?

In our society we hold the institution of marriage in a very powerful position. Marriage is a sacred union. Marriage is the ultimate commitment. Marriage is the accepted foundation for a family. Marriage is something that reasonable, responsible people participate

in, and for that they receive certain benefits and take on certain responsibilities. But most importantly, marriage is a public declaration of all the things described above. This is what I learned about marriage growing up in this society. I also learned that marriage was something to aspire to. Everyone was supposed to aspire to marriage and children and a house and a job. I was supposed to want this for



Sarah and Rhonda

myself. From the time I was in, what was then called nursery school, all my friends were playing 'house.' You simply had to have a mommy and a daddy and at that time, they only came in the married variety. As I got older, friends wanted to talk about what they wanted their futures to be: what their husbands would be like, and how many kids. I'll be the first to admit that I wasn't thinking the same things my friends were, but it was clear to me that I was supposed to be.

So while I was never very certain that I wanted to be married, at the same time I was always very clear that marriage was my destination, and frankly it scared me. After all, my image of marriage was one woman and one man, and that was not going to work for me; for a long time I felt like one woman/one man marriage was a destiny I could only postpone but never escape.

(MARRIED, Continued on page 5)

(AGER, Continued from page 1)

Joanne's daughter and her partner already have left the Catholic Church. Joanne is ready to, despite years of loyalty. "How can I support a church that would discriminate against my child?" she asked me. "Maybe I should give my money to the Triangle Foundation" -- a metro Detroit gay advocacy group -- "someplace that would help my child instead of hurt her."

Joanne wrote her letter Friday, the day after she read that Michigan's bishops sent letters to more than 800 parishes urging priests to sermonize in support of the proposal.

Despite the hour, the letter "just flowed out of me," she said. "I hardly had to change a word." She woke up her husband, a retired banker, and read it to him. He called it excellent. In the morning, she called her daughter, who cried to hear her mother's convictions and love.

Then Joanne hit "send" and e-mailed it to her pastor, the Rev. John Budde of Holy Family Catholic Church in November, where she and her husband have been members for 15 years. That night, she went to mass to give to her pastor a paper copy of the letter -- just six paragraphs -- including photos of her daughter and the woman she loves.

Budde is in Rome. But the letter he'll see when he

returns says that although Joanne's daughter isn't perfect like Jesus, she, too, is perceived as different.

"Many feel threatened by her. Not enough to kill her, but enough to make sure that she is set apart from the rest of society. Enough to make sure that she cannot fully participate in the advantages that 'they,' the normal people, fully avail themselves of."

Although a state law already prohibits same-gender marriage, it continues, the church feels compelled to change the constitution to make sure gays and lesbians "will stop trying to live the same kind of lives we live."

"Let's make sure they not only can't marry," it says, "but they also can't obtain any type of civil union. Let's stop them from collecting benefits from their partner's insurance. Let's make sure they have no say in their partner's health decisions even if they've lived together for 20 years.

"Like Mary, the mother of Jesus, I look at my beautiful adult child ... and I ask my church, 'What has she ever done or would she ever do to make you (like the Jews of 2,000 years ago) feel so threatened by her and others like her?' "

Joanne can find no answer to her question. She has no hope her letter will make a difference. But she couldn't stay silent, not this time.

'DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL' DOCUMENTARY

"When Air Force physician Monica Hill's partner of 14 years, Terry, was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer, Monica requested a leave of absence to care for her. Sadly, two months later, Terry died on September 11, 2001. While still coping with the tragic loss of her partner, Monica was discharged from the military because she had violated the military's "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy when she asked to be at her dying partner's side."

Dr. Hill is just one of tens of thousands of service members targeted under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the military's ban on lesbian, gay and bisexual personnel. Since 1993, the Department of Defense has fired nearly ten thousand men and women simply because of their sexual orientation. At a time when our nation struggles to fill its ranks with qualified soldiers who are willing to protect and defend our country, the ban against gays in the military deters the enlistment and retention of capable men and women who would gladly and proudly serve America.

In a new film from Dream Out Loud Productions, documentary filmmaker Louise Hogarth examines the impact of the gay ban, interviewing dozens of military members and delving into the prejudices behind the law known as "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." "The public needs to know the effect of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,' not only on the personal lives of those persecuted by the policy but on our country, economically and militarily," says Hogarth.

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network is proud to partner with Dream Out Loud and Louise Hogarth on this exciting feature film project, scheduled to premiere in 2005. You can view the film's trailer and learn more about the project online at <http://www.dolfilms.org/current.html>.

Marriage in Cherokee Culture Changed by Christian Missionaries

by PFLAG Mom Joyce Rock,
Special Writer for the Washington Blade

THE CHEROKEE NATION is in a quandary right now over the issue of same-sex marriage. Under a compact with the state of Oklahoma, marriages recorded by the Cherokee Nation will be recognized by the state. Cherokee law is very vague on gender issues in its marriage laws. The Cherokee terms used in the marriage ceremony translate as "provider" and "cooker," not "husband" and "wife."

Last May, a lesbian couple used these definitions in applying for and receiving a marriage license from the Cherokee Nation. After their marriage ceremony, the couple asked the Cherokee Nation to file their certificate of marriage with the state. The Cherokee Nation court refused to accept the marriage certificate, claiming tribal authorities did not know when they granted the license that it was for a same-sex couple.

In the midst of a court battle over the issue, the Cherokee Tribal Council passed a new law defining a marriage as "between a man and a women," but the laws cannot be made retroactive. As a result, there is one single same-sex marriage certificate waiting to be filed.

WHY IS THIS such a hot-button issue for the Cherokees, as it would be for any other Native American tribe? When our son came out, one of the first places I went to ask questions was "the stomp grounds." This is where the traditional Cherokee worship, and I wanted to know what the elders and leaders there said about someone being gay. What I learned was that these wise elders said nothing.

Homosexuality was not important to the definition of an individual, they said. Certainly opposite-gender sexual relationships were the most common form, but same-sex couples were not unknown. These gay couples existed, were recognized, and were an accepted part of society. In tribal history, being gay was not viewed as something bad. In truth, many Native American societies viewed these individuals with respect and considered them a third gender.

As the Cherokee people were infiltrated by other cultures and removed from their native lands in the Southeast U.S., many of their customs began to be eroded. Cherokee marriage and family structure has been changed drastically by this acculturation. Traditionally, the most important rules regulating marriage dealt with exogamy, or marriage within or outside the clan. Sexual relationships between people of the same clan were strictly forbidden. Clan lineage was through the mother, not the father, and the clan was an extended family.

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES PLAYED the most influential role in changing Cherokee family life. Children were removed from their families and put in boarding schools, where they could not speak their native languages or practice their cultural religions.

After the Trail of Tears that removed the Cherokee from their native lands, their society was repressed for many years. This made them susceptible to outside influences.

Today's Cherokee Nation is much different from that encountered by Europeans years ago. While there are still traditionalists who practice the religions of their ancestors, they are in the minority.

Most political Cherokees today identify as Christian and the faith that has had the most influence on the tribe is Southern Baptist.

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So remember - every time you fly on American Airlines, reference PFLAG Business ExtrAA account 527590.

Louisiana Judge Overturns Gay Marriage Ban

by Adam Nossiter The Associated Press
Posted: October 5, 2004 5:03 pm ET

(Baton Rouge, LA) A state judge Tuesday threw out a Louisiana constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, less than three weeks after it was overwhelmingly approved by the voters.

District Judge William Morvant said the amendment was flawed as drawn up by the Legislature because it had more than one purpose: banning not only gay marriage but also civil unions. The courts had rejected a similar argument before the Sept. 18 election, saying it was premature. Michael Johnson, an attorney for supporters of the amendment, said he will appeal the ruling.

Some 78 percent of those voting favored the amendment. The vote was part of a national backlash against gay marriage, which followed last year's Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling allowing gay couples to wed.

The Louisiana Legislature pushed through the proposed ban in its session this spring. Louisiana already had a law against gay marriage, but conservatives warned that unless it was put in the state constitution, a Louisiana court could, in theory, one day follow the Massachusetts example.

Christian conservatives launched a vigorous grassroots campaign to secure passage.

A gay rights group challenged the amendment on several grounds, arguing among other things, that combining the question of gay marriage and the issue of civil unions in one ballot question violated state law.

(MARRIED, Continued from page 2)

Then I found love.

My perspective changed. I realized one woman/one man marriage was not a part of my future and never would be, but that marriage with the woman I loved would also not be apart of my future. And I felt angry. I felt lied to. I felt betrayed. I felt slapped. When I was little the powers that be said marriage was for everyone! They didn't say you had to love in one way only! They didn't say anything about the quantity or quality of love! They said marriage for everyone regardless of race, creed, or color! I believed what they said, I was young. I hadn't learned to read between the lines. I didn't know that there were groups of people that they hadn't mentioned that weren't allowed to marry. I wish I had known! It would have saved me years of terror of contemplating marriage to some man because 'marriage is for everyone.' After all, since I'm part of that group who's not 'allowed' to marry, I could have put my mind at rest. But I didn't know. I believed what they said and not what they meant.

So, now as an adult who finally knows who she is, I want what I was promised. I want to be married. For those who say I was promised a husband and not a wife, I say I was promised love, happiness, and a home and gender is irrelevant. I am aware that there is no specific individual who made these promises; these are the things I learned from living in OUR society. A society that, in part, says I may not marry the woman I love. But that is not sufficient. The part of society against my marriage also says if I were to marry, my marriage would in some manner devalue heterosexual marriages. They also say that my even aspiring to 'holy matrimony' denigrates and sullies the institution of marriage, as if I and my love for Rhonda were a creeping disease. It makes me feel as though I am viewed as sub-human.

I think that like Pride Day, one of the things about 'Gay/Lesbian Marriage' that upsets some people so much is that we are standing tall and proud. We aren't hiding in the dark in shame pretending we don't exist just so others can pretend the world is the way they think they want it to be. We are trying to lead normal non-secretive lives. We have jobs, parents, siblings, children, home payments, problems, good days, and bad days. We are members of our communities, the PTA, the church choir, and tax payers. This is just one step but a very personal, meaningful, important step to us. We are human. Our love is as divine as any others. Our love and commitment is out of the closet!

