



NATIONAL CENTER FOR LESBIAN RIGHTS

JEWELLE GOMEZ & DIANE SABIN
Petitioners, In re Marriage Cases

We have been together for 16 years now. When we met, it was absolutely love at first sight. But life and professions intervened. However, eight years later I moved across the country to start a life with Diane and neither of us has once regretted the decision. We consider ourselves to be engaged, a term that represents an active state of connection, reflecting the complete commitment and love that we both feel. Now in our 50's, the age of many grandparents, we face similar challenges as the rest of the aging population, with the added obstacles of being denied the right to marry thrown in our emotional and economic paths. Going through the issues of family and friends aging, planning for retirement and growing old are challenging enough, but navigating them without the rights and privileges afforded to other married couples makes the situation even more complicated and frustrating.

Aside from the emotional and social benefits of marriage, there are countless tangible rights that marriage grants to couples—more than 1,000 according to legal experts. As we prepare for retirement, neither of us can designate the other to receive social security survivor benefits in the event of one of our deaths. Will that mean one of us will lose such significant income she has to leave our home? Even after A.B. 205, the California Domestic Partnership Act went into effect in 2003, we still had anxiety. Like many people in our middle years, we have both have had to undergo serious surgeries recently and we paid considerable attorney's fees to draft durable power of attorney paperwork in the event of an emergency. But what level of anxiety should we have to withstand in that situation—worried that we might encounter a particularly biased staff person who can't find it within themselves to honor our document? It may be just a piece of paper to some individuals; one with much less weight than a marriage license.

The fears are compounded by the documented stories of women we knew who were denied access to their own homes, or even the funerals of their long-time lesbian partners by biological families. We are constantly worried about making sure we can take care of each other in times of distress and we are tired. We're tired of being discounted and diminished. The emotional toll of not being able to get married is insidious; it's like every time we come home someone has changed the lock to our front door. We're doing all the things that look like what everyone else who's married is doing—but still the door won't open. Marriage equality would end this level of emotional abuse.

We are asking that the rights on which the US was founded—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—be extended to us.

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DAVE CHANDLER & JEFF CHANDLER
Petitioners, In re Marriage Cases

Jeff Chandler:

When friends and family ask why we are part of this case, we tell them that we want to stand up for fairness and equality. We persevere on this journey for the sake of our children and their children. We are honored and humbled to be a part of this historic battle for marriage justice for all Californians.

Dave Chandler:

Standing here today, I am reminded of my Dad, who, as a middle school football coach, taught me to stand up for equality and to never forfeit the game.

I learned by my Dad's example—I will not forfeit. My family remains steadfast amid the scourge of injustice and discrimination advocated by sincere, but misguided people who are motivated only by fear and ignorance. In the months and years to come when the history books of California are written about marriage equality, we want to be on the side where justice and equality prevailed over fear and ignorance. I want my children to look up to me as I looked up to my Dad.

Jeff Chandler:

We dream for the day when our children will inevitably ask “What was the big deal about Daddy and Papa marrying each other?” In my dream, we answer with “Some people were afraid of Daddy and Papa getting married; they feared what they did not know. But justice prevailed in 2008 because those fears were unfounded, the institution of marriage remains strong, and the world is a better place where our love is welcomed, affirmed, and legally recognized by law.”

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JEANNE RIZZO & PALI COOPER
Petitioners, In re Marriage Cases

Jeanne Rizzo:

My partner Pali, my son Christopher and I have lived and loved together as family in a home full of warmth and caring for almost 19 years, without the benefit of being able to explain our family relationship in the same terms that other families can. It is very difficult for a young boy growing into his manhood to reconcile that he, as a straight man has the right to marry while the women who have loved, nurtured, and supported him through his graduate school education do not enjoy the same privileges and that we are not quite safe as a family. It was made all the more painful when we stood together on March 11, 2004 and were literally denied our marriage license as we waited on line to finally validate our commitment and celebrate our love. Most heartbreaking for me was to see the horror and sadness on Christopher's face as he witnessed this official rejection of our family but it was most heartwarming to hear this soft spoken young man, so fully and vigorously express his condemnation of the discrimination and the pride in our family that we all share.

Pali Cooper:

Jeanne and I met when Christopher was 9 yrs old and I was finishing chiropractic school. Throughout the 19 years now that we have been together, we have combined our resources to provide for him and his education and the changing needs of our family. We have close family ties to each of our families and have shared holidays, family reunions, and the sadness of the loss of loved ones. We have been through career changes, illness, and all the richness and joy the sustained relationship over years has brought. The day we went to City Hall to get married brought clarity to the desire to not only celebrate our relationship with our friends and family, but to formally recognize our commitment to each other. As we get older, it is clear that nothing comes close to the benefits and protections a couple has when they are married. The day we were denied that privilege was a sad day.

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MYRA BEALS & IDA MATSON
Petitioners, In re Marriage Cases

We are Myra and Ida and we have been in love for 31 years. Since 1977, when we first committed to each other, we have done everything in our power to show the world that we are a family. Our relationship was finally recognized in 2000 when California began issuing “registration forms” for domestic partners, but the distinction was made crystal clear to us: this is not a “real” marriage. In February of 2004, when San Francisco began issuing marriage licenses to couples, we set a date for our wedding! We bought rings, new clothes, and booked a restaurant for the post wedding celebration. Myra’s 92 year-old Mother was going to finally see her daughter and her “friend” get married. All of our friends and family were coming to attend the ceremony. The date of our wedding was the day after the Supreme Court ordered the city to stop issuing licenses. It was absolutely devastating to have this opportunity taken away from us.

We are now retired and facing the issues that others face as we age. Healthcare decisions, long term care decisions, end of life decisions, are being complicated by not knowing how we will be protected and treated by the law. We are unable to receive each other’s retirement benefits in the same way that married spouses would benefit and we have struggled to come up with sufficient coverage for both of us. These are our difficulties and they are made worse by the simple fact that our relationship is not recognized as legitimate. On a daily basis, every time we meet new people, we have to figure out how to explain and describe our relationship. Frequently, over other’s objections, we have to explain to people that we are partners, not twins, or sisters or just friends. When either of us sees a new physician, for instance, we again face not knowing if the doctor will respect our relationship. Incidents like these are a constant reminder that the world does not recognize us as a family, and that our relationship is not respected the way a married couple’s relationship is respected.

It’s our turn, it’s our right.

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