

**Brief to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights  
Regarding Marriage and Legal Recognition of Same-Sex Unions**

*Submitted March 6, 2003, by  
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**1) Introduction**

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to hear our views on this issue. This brief was written in the voice of Robin Roberts but represents both of our perspectives. In it, we will tell you of our lives, of what it's like to be a loving and committed lesbian couple raising four children and being one of the couples taking part in the B.C. marriage challenge. We will also comment on the options set out in the Department of Justice Discussion Paper on Same-sex Marriage.

I value everyone's openness: both those brave enough to share their experiences and views openly, and those strong enough to read this with open minds and hearts. I so want to be able to convey to you the incredible beauty, value and equal worth of my commitment to my lover, and I am worried about being able to paint an adequate enough picture for you all.

**2) Our Backgrounds**

This will be the twentieth year that my partner, Diana Denny, and I have been living in a committed, loving, monogamous relationship.

Getting together was really scary, although a little easier for me than for Diana. I had grown up in West Vancouver, with homosexuals being a small but natural part of the very eclectic group of realtors, actors, artists, musicians and athletes who formed my parents' friends. However, it was a totally different thing for me to realize that I had homosexual feelings for Diana, when all along I had assumed I was heterosexual.

I had never questioned my sexual orientation, just dreamed the fantasy that all little girls were fed in the 1950's: that I would grow up and get married and have children, and the easiest way to do that was to be heterosexual. So to have my body suddenly tell me in no uncertain terms that I was sexually attracted to a woman was startling. Although on the one hand I felt like a flower just beginning to open, on the other hand, I was in my mid-thirties with a child, just leaving an unhappy marriage.

Diana had grown up on an apple and cherry orchard in B.C.'s Okanagan Valley, without ever hearing the word 'homosexual', or understanding the concept of homosexuality. The first time she knowingly saw a lesbian was in her mid-30's in a counselling group, when a woman stood up and declared her sexual orientation. Diana cringed and felt the blood drain from her head to her toes. At one all-day counselling workshop, she tried to arrange to be the babysitter for other parents, so she didn't have to see or hear the lesbians in the group. However, the group gently but firmly insisted that everyone take equal turns child-minding. As Diana came to know all the people in her group, she realized that there was nothing scary or creepy or negative about them. She saw that the lesbians were just as human as she was, equally capable of the full range of feelings that she had, with the same hopes and dreams, the same needs to be fulfilled, the same desires for long-term committed relationships.

### **3) Getting Together**

We made contact originally in 1972, through the mail. Diana and her husband were seeking yacht designs to build a sailboat, and I managed my husband's yacht design business. Over the years, as my ex and I wrote many articles for the boating magazines internationally, we had many people telling us that we should meet the other couple, that we'd really get along. Funnily enough, it took ten years before we actually did meet face to face.

That was the beginning of a whole series of connections that we discovered we had in common. When we met as friends face-to-face, it was difficult to ignore what our bodies were saying. For both of us, the power, energy and support of our love was contagious.

However, our inner terror of facing our sexuality meant that it took a full year before we could begin, even hesitantly, to say the word 'lesbian' and apply it to ourselves. Before declaring our love, we'd meet as friends on the street with a hug and a kiss, but now we swivelled our heads to see who was looking, and gave a furtive peck, a tentative touch, if at all, in case we'd offend anyone. Thus we have an understanding of what it may be like for you Committee members to deal with this issue.

We united our families in August of 1983. My son, Joshua, was 4 years old at the time, and Diana's three children, Clio, Angus, and Alex were 5, 13 and 16 respectively. As the children lived with us 90% to 100% of the time until they reached adulthood, we had a busy household. We also had a lot to learn: I had to learn about parenting teens, we both had to learn about step-parenting, all six of us had to learn about how to deal with everyone's homophobia, we mothers had to learn how to be supportive of the absent fathers and of the children, especially the two younger ones, as they adjusted both to going to and returning from visits with their fathers.

### **4) Facing Our Initial Fears**

Remember, this was twenty years ago, when the world was not as friendly as it is now on this issue. Sometimes it seemed safer to run and hide under a stone, to pretend that everything was back the way it used to be, whatever that was.

We were determined to break through the restrictive barriers of our own homophobia, to learn how best to support and raise our children. We sought to create a positive social environment at home and also to learn how to support our children around the difficult issues we knew they would be facing with their peers, at school and in society, being raised by lesbian mothers.

One fear we kept hearing was "you lesbians are going to create children who will grow up to be homosexuals". One of the professional counsellors with whom we discussed this fear said, "What you two women are modelling is a relationship based on love. The children are not picking up lessons on how to be homosexuals, but lessons in how to have loving relationships." For those who may question this answer, I can only say that all four of our children – who are now 24, 25, 33 and almost 36 – have entered into only heterosexual relationships. All four are gentle, compassionate, loving, respectful, hard-working adults.

With regard to the question of "influencing someone to become homosexual", all we can say is "Who, given the gay bashing and the stigma and fear that exist both in society at large and in each of us individually, would *choose of their own volition* to 'become' homosexual?"

## 5) What The Children Faced

Each of our children reacted to our lesbian relationship differently. Most of what they had to face revolved around peer pressure.

### Alex

Alex, at 16, didn't express a lot of concern over our sexuality, feeling mostly that it was a private matter. He did, however, express his fear that the break-up of his parents' marriage was his fault. We learned this is an almost-universal fear of children whose parents separate, no matter the age of the child. We assured him that this was not the case, and made sure he knew how much we valued him. He responded by bringing his many friends home, having them consult with me over matters of business ideas, natural health cures and driving.

When he borrowed my Volkswagen squareback one slippery, rainy day and drove it up a tree, he ended up buying the crumpled remains from me, fixing it up and selling it for a little profit. This was the beginning of significant spare pocket money for him over the next three years, as he bought and fixed up another 18 cars before moving on to a career as a carpenter.

However, earlier on, when two of his friends wrote "Lesbian" in the dust on the right rear side of our Volvo station wagon, Diana and I had to confront the friends over our resulting, significant embarrassment at having driven the car with its "sign" into town and back before seeing it. When the friends next sauntered in for a visit, we explained how much we'd like to welcome them into our home, but how we really didn't want to be labelled publicly in that more homophobic era, any more than they would like to be labelled and judged for say, one of them being a French-Canadian "frog" as some of their peers might call them. We told them they were welcome to seek answers from us to any questions they might have about homosexuality in future, and that we would keep both the doors of our house and the doors of communication open. They remained good, talkative friends for years.

### Angus

Angus, at 13, was very expressive of his feelings. I arrived on his scene at a time in his youth when he was trying to separate from one mum, and there he was, suddenly saddled with two mums. His dad didn't pay a lot of attention to him, didn't ask him to come out for visits or phone him, so the whole change in family structure might have seemed like an overburdening trap to Angus. With counselling, we learned that Angus loved me as a friend, but didn't want me to parent him. So we learned an important step-parenting lesson: that Diana had to be the only one to give directions to him, and that I was to remain in the role of friend only.

Over the years, through contact with PFLAG (*Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays*), we have learned just how excruciatingly difficult it is for gay teens at school. Even though Angus dated girls, as the son of lesbians, he felt the impact of the tip of this iceberg crashing into him. As background, I encourage you to consider the following few facts, quoted from PFLAG's education bulletin: "*GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered) youth face unspeakable harassment and abuse in schools. What's more, young people are learning in schools that it's acceptable to hate GLBT people. The average high school student hears 25 anti-gay slurs daily; 97 percent of high school students regularly hear homophobic remarks. This harassment takes its toll: Gay students are far more likely to skip classes, drop out of school and/or commit suicide. ... Studies on youth suicide consistently find that lesbian and gay youth are 2 - 6 times more likely to attempt suicide than other youth and may account for 30% of all completed suicides among teens. ... Service providers estimate that gay, lesbian and bisexual youth make up 20-40% of homeless youth in urban areas.*"

(<http://www.pflag.org/education/schools.html>). The situation was heavier 19 years ago than this much more recent report.

Angus is a very sociable, outgoing guy. His friends loved congregating here, smelling the home-made bread as they entered our kitchen, wolfing down warm slice after warm slice. They formed a band, with Angus as the drummer, with most practices lifting the roof of the loft over our garage. The fact that his mum and I were lovers was obvious, and word ran around Angus's secondary school. One day, Angus came home from school absolutely furious. He had been taunted yet again for having a lesbian mum. He picked up a piece of PVC pipe and whacked it against the wooden workbench in our garage. It broke into shards that flew about while he cried, "Why do you and Mum have to be in love?"

"Oh Angus," I responded, "I'm sorry you're getting teased at school. That's just not fair. One day, this won't happen, but right now it is. It reminds me of your Uncle John's comments, which your mum told me happened ten years or so ago. He thought the fact that your mum grew alfalfa sprouts at home, that she not only made her own yoghurt, but that you all ate it, was just outrageous and he ridiculed her for it. Now he thinks eating sprouts and yoghurt is just fine, so things do and will change. Your mum and I are not going to separate. We're in love, and we are committed. But the world will change, just as Uncle John's opinion of sprouts and yoghurt changed."

### **Clio and Josh**

Clio, at 5, and Josh, at 4, were so much younger than the boys when we got together that in some ways it was easier. I have a little story about how they absorbed lessons on the different kinds of love relationships. One day, after Diana and I had been together about a year and a half, I was driving them to elementary school, where I was also substitute-teaching. I told Josh that his friend Beau's parents had recently separated. "Why?" Josh asked.

"Because Beau's dad fell in love with another man, so his mum wasn't Number One any more," I responded.

There was a moment of silence, then a little voice piped up from the back seat. "But I thought a man could only fall in love with a woman, and a woman could only fall in love with a man," he said.

"No," I answered. "A man can fall in love with a man, or a woman can fall in love with a woman, too."

"Oh, I see," came the reply. And this was all the information they needed.

### **Clio**

We always read books aloud to the younger children, especially every evening before tucking them into bed. A TV series that they both loved was *Anne of Avonlea*. Clio was at that time a traditionalist who could have happily fashioned herself after the era of Anne and life as it was romantically portrayed on Prince Edward Island through L.M. Montgomery's stories. When she began Grade 9 at a private school in Victoria, she didn't tell any of her classmates about having two mums at home, nor did she invite anybody home for a long time. When we questioned her on it, we realized she was very shy about revealing her mothers' sexuality, for fear of being herself judged.

After a year, Clio began bringing friends home, and to her great comfort and relief, realized that her friends loved us without judgment. We are still friends with many of them to this day. During

an email chat recently, one of her old friends who is now 25 and doing exchange teaching in Japan, told us we are like “second mums” to her.

### **Josh**

Josh was the child who wore us like a badge. When he was only 6 or 7, he constantly asked questions that got us thinking about gender and language. For example, “Why aren’t there snow-women, Mummy? Why do they say only mail-men and not mail-women?”

Josh was more “out” than we were. On his first day at a new school in Grade 7, he wore a pink jogging suit; by the end of the first week he danced into the kitchen and said, “Guess what, Diana? I told the whole class that my mums are lesbians!” He seemed to love pushing people’s buttons, and although he’s always had a gentle, quiet, sensitive sort of personality, he knew what he was proud of, and spoke up solidly in support of it.

As we experienced more and more of his quiet, strong, loving support, we knew by the time he was 15 that a pink pin we found at the Vancouver Music Festival one summer week-end would suit him as a present. The words on the pin read “My Mum’s A Lesbian”, with a little heart drawn underneath them. The kids hadn’t come with us on that trip, so when we returned with other gifts for them, including music tapes and T-shirts, it was the pin that had Josh grinning so happily. “Wow! Thanks, Mum,” he exclaimed, immediately taking off his skateboarding cap, attaching the pin firmly, and promptly securing the cap back on his head. There it stayed for the next three years.

## **6) Facing Our Fears as Lesbian Parents**

### **Josh's Father**

When Josh was 8, he returned home from one visit to his father quite scared, because his father had shown him a TV movie of parents who kidnapped their children, and he threatened to rip up Josh’s plane ticket home. We were scared, too, as his father had made threatening innuendoes about seeking custody if he found out we were lesbians. Of course, I never clarified the matter for him for the first several years, as I didn’t want to subject Josh to lengthy court trials or to having him feel ripped apart by his parents. Nor did I want to lose him.

For eight months Josh had nightmares about being kidnapped by his father, so we set it up that he could knock on our shared bedroom wall and I would come into his room to help soothe him back to sleep. We sought the help of a psychiatrist at that point, but Josh’s fear went deeper, causing an ulcer. Eventually, a psychologist was more helpful, and with her talents in art therapy, and even a counselling session with his father during a rare visit from the east coast, the problems were drawn out.

### **School**

It took us a lot of courage to go to our children’s teachers’ meetings as her two mums. We feared that the teachers might judge us, and that that would get in the way of the discussions of our children. As it turned out, the teachers at the older boys’ high schools, as well as later, at the younger children’s high schools, were accepting of us, respectful of our input and supportive in discussions.

We homeschooled Josh and Clio for seven years. When the children were 10 and 11, we rented our house and travelled for a year on a small budget, backpacking through a dozen different countries together. Six months of our time was in Greece, where we fell in love with the passion of

the culture, the grandeur of the geography, the loud, expressive, complex language and the abundance of history at every footstep.

## **7) Facing Our Families**

My parents had always stressed the importance of looking at the human qualities of everyone equally, and welcomed people of different nationalities, races and sexual persuasions into our home. So naturally, my family loved and welcomed Diana as my partner, too.

In the first few weeks after Diana and I got together, my mother phoned to tell me that my sister was in crisis. Although she hadn't yet met Diana, she had heard of Diana's counselling skills and hoped that Diana would be willing to help out by coming immediately. Of course, we hopped on the ferry and right away made the 6-hour drive with Angus, Clio & Josh. As it turned out, Diana was immensely helpful and that was a doubly-marvellous introduction for her to two of my immediate family members.

My father was unfortunately very ill so was never really well enough to know what was going on before he died three years after we got together. I've always been sorry that we couldn't have any intellectual or deep conversation about this major aspect of my life, for it would have made his eyes sparkle. I know he would have celebrated happily with us. However, he enjoyed Diana's tender caring, and having Diana as a geriatric nurse helped us all understand the process of accepting and supporting the confused elderly.

It was much more difficult trying to deal with Diana's family. The greatest difficulty has been with her older brother. After seeing Diana and meeting me after her divorce, he commented that he was really happy that she seemed like her previously enthusiastic self. However, soon after, he refused to speak to her for 8 years because he couldn't tolerate homosexuality. This was a source of great grief for Diana, because she had idolized him while she was growing up.

After 8 years, his son came to visit us with their first new baby. Upon returning home to Calgary nephew David said, "You're crazy, Dad. Robin and Diana are the best ones in the family!" So brother John opened the doors for a while, and then while enthusing over our emails from another trip around the world in 1996-7, some little comment we made about having difficulty finding a double bed set him off. Despite very thoughtful, delicate, supportive emails with him, he went another 2 years without speaking to us. He and his wife were unable to accept other forms of difference as well, such as one niece marrying a First Nations husband and a sister marrying a man much older than she. However, thankfully they made a conscious decision to expand their hearts and welcome change. Now we do talk and email, but we must admit to being quite wary and censoring what we say, staying on the surface in our communications so as never to promote another upset. Although it feels better, it still feels sadly empty for Diana, especially.

Her sister has been somewhat indifferent on the issue, but makes it obvious she prefers to talk about other things. Initially, except for nephew Dave, none of Diana's family talked to us about our struggles to gain equal access to marriage, despite seeing us on TV, in the paper, and hearing us on the radio. As publicity increased over the past couple of years, Diana's younger brother finally began asking Diana questions a few months ago about why she's seeking marriage. He seemed to understand her answers, and they are starting to return to the closeness they used to have.

Diana's father, whom she adored for his wit, intellectual delight in history and theology, and general passion for life, unfortunately died 15 years before we got together. Back in 1983, Diana's mother learned of the existence of our relationship from Diana's former father-in-law. He phoned Diana's mum long-distance, at one of the highest-stress times in her life, while her second and much

beloved husband was in the last three weeks of life, dying of Alzheimer's. Diana had wanted to wait to tell her mother in person, but her ex's father called beforehand, with his version: "Your daughter is sick," he said, "and should be committed to a mental hospital."

At first, all Diana's mother could say was "Oh Diana, why can't you just go and marry a rich doctor (meaning a *male* doctor)?" If we, as two women, had been able to be legally married right then, her mother and siblings might have welcomed our relationship. However, unable to deal with it, Diana's mother called Diana's younger brother to find out what was going on. He made a big effort to come over to Victoria, and ended up acting as an informal but clear mediator during a crucial moment in Diana's separation from her husband, which felt touchingly supportive. However, although he originally claimed our relationship was a non-issue for him, by saying to me, "I can see you don't have horns growing out of your forehead", there was a period of years when he too never responded to simple overtures like birthday cards his sister sent him. Although he was polite during occasional phone calls, the distancing was obvious. However, as he has at last started asking questions about his perplexity over his sister's homosexual relationship and desire for marriage, Diana happily answers them, and as a result, feels their relationship warming.

Despite her devastating introduction to our relationship, Diana's mother has always been polite to me, and over the years she has grown to the point where she now, at the age of 90, expresses her love for me individually and welcomes me into her home, giving us a bedroom to share when we go for visits of up to a week at a time. However, she still prefers that we not talk about our partnership, and told Diana, "For heaven's sake, don't introduce Robin to my friends as your partner". We feel sad, but we understand her fear.

Our experience with Diana's family shows that with time, as people cut through the ice of their ignorance or assumptions about just how human we are, as they see more and more of us being just as productive, loving and caring in the world as heterosexuals, and as they have the opportunity to have their questions answered, they become more and more accepting. When the law is changed, this will be a wonderful step to show that the government really does consider us equal, thus making it much easier for society at large to relax into acceptance, too. Knowing that we're protected by law will likewise make it much easier for us to relax as fully equal citizens.

## **8) The Working World**

Diana was fearful re-entering the nursing profession, after an absence of seventeen years. Some of her staff-mates at the geriatric home were strong Baptists. She knew they would frown on our relationship, so chose not to be out with them, because they had to work as a team. However, when staff-mates are all sharing what they did for the week-end, referring to their husbands or wives, what they gave their spouses for Valentine's Day, or even saying something small like "*we* didn't get to bed until midnight", Diana was aware that she had to think before she slipped up and said "*we*". Of course, she wouldn't mention anything romantic in her life. It was energy-draining for Diana constantly to censor what she said in order not to upset people, while at the same time, trying to be open, loving, honest and caring in a profession that demands these qualities in order to improve the quality of life of the patient.

As for my experience working as an ESL teacher at the University of Victoria, although I was open with my staff, I was not open with the students. When early on in my career at UVic, one of my co-teachers revealed my sexual orientation to one of our mutual students, immediately five of those students boycotted my classes. The co-teacher didn't reveal to me what she'd said for nine months. When I suddenly received disgusting evaluations from one-third of the students in our class, I was put on probation, and nearly dismissed. For nine months, I endured heavy scrutiny from a new director who was anxious to show that he was on top of any new difficulties. Fortunately a new teacher co-

ordinator, who was assigned to inspect my classes weekly, reported that my teaching was excellent and questioned the emphasis placed on student evaluation as a result of her observations.

I continued to have diarrhea every working day for eighteen months as a result of this pressure. I had to educate our staff about the importance of not outing homosexuals to anybody, unless it is first cleared with the homosexual him/herself....until our society is fully accepting of us, and treats us equally in all respects. It is my belief that Canada is coming closer, has made a lot of improvements, and that equal access to marriage will go a long way to lessening the stigma of being lesbian or gay. Canadians look to the law for guidance, and permitting us to marry will send a strong signal of acceptance, inclusion and respect.

### **9) What it's like for us to attend weddings**

Last summer, Diana and I attended two opposite-sex weddings. Beauty, anticipation, love, excitement and a sense of rightness glowed from each of the couples. The small crowd that had gathered to honour each commitment beamed back. Both couples balanced each other. Both had spent enough time together and were mature and communicatively skilled enough to know what they were doing by choosing to make these lifelong commitments.

We attended the first celebration in June, in the front garden of my brother's family home. The flower girl and youngest bridesmaid scattered yellow rose petals in front of the glowing bride who followed on the arm of her father. This eldest daughter radiated at the side of her equally smitten beloved. Cellist and violist friends serenaded these two professional cellist partners into matrimonial partnership. Everything seemed perfect. Even the three young motorcyclists who came roaring and crashing out of the woods and down the dirt road in front of the garden, drowning out the ceremony until everybody laughed and vows had to be repeated, provided the perfectly safe "thing to go wrong". It was all just right, that is until the justice of the peace proclaimed solemnly that "marriage was between one man and one woman exclusive of all others". Then that sense of rightness ran down our veins and dropped like lead on our toes.

My niece never intended that we feel this way. As mentioned, my brother's entire family has been our staunchest cheering squad from the moment Diana and I got together. My niece's thank-you card for her wedding gift included a note saying that our relationship had "always been a model of love" for her.

As I reacted to her compliment, the visible side of my smile was truly glad that we'd inspired her to a great love, while the other, rueful side wondered about Judge Pittfield's ruling in the B.C. marriage case in which we are plaintiffs fighting for equal marriage. How could he declare that excluding us from marriage was discrimination, but that it was justified and therefore okay to discriminate against our love? Why could the government of B.C., though it wanted to, not be allowed to give us a marriage licence, when giving one to my niece was just fine?

The second wedding, in early September, of some middle-aged friends, involved similar beauty, thoughtfulness, joy, love, celebration...and included the same exclusionary words. Those words stabbed like ice daggers through the warm summer air. Others in the congregation caught them, too, turned to us and asked, "Why?"

### **10) Why Marriage is the Only Option that achieves Equality**

Why Marriage? After all, a legal piece of paper can't produce or even enforce that feeling of loving commitment between two people. There is nothing deeply romantic about the certificate per se. So why do people choose to get married?

Major life changes deserve, and often flourish by having, ceremonies. The decision to cohabit, in love and support, forever and ever, is obviously one of those worthy moments to herald at large. Societies around the world have constructed a multitude of ways to commemorate and to try to support the longevity of a couple's monogamous commitment. Regardless of what some current pessimists may think of the institution, all major international governments recognize and accept a marriage licence as the best representation that such commitment exists.

Throughout our nineteen years together, Diana and I have been and continue to be absolutely delighted to wake up every morning and look into each other's adoring eyes. We are as in love and fully committed as any happily married couple could possibly be, wishing only equal joy for everyone else. Our four children are loving, supportive, healthy, contributing adult members of society. We all laugh, cry, cheer, hug and support each other as equally as any other caring family. A mere piece of paper can't create what we have.

That specific piece of paper could, however, honour it. Our government could give us its blessing just as equally as it gives every other citizen or immigrant couple, if heterosexual, throughout our vast country. We shouldn't have to prove anything, even though we already have, by continuing to wave our flag of love.

Against great odds, our love has not only survived but flourished. The longevity of gay relationships is renowned to be low: small wonder, when there have been so many threats cascading upon gay and lesbian love, when so many of us have had to hide the facts of our existence instead of celebrate them. We have all had to endure the heterosexual world flaunting the events of their week-ends of dancing or movie-going or traveling together after returning to work on a Monday morning, while many of us have shrivelled in the closet, wondering how we'll be judged for wanting to share our version of something so simple. Worrying about our safety while holding hands in the park clouds the joy, depletes the energy, impacts the health. Taking these hurts home after a hard day's slog just augments the recipe for failure.

Although facing none of these difficulties, common-law straight couples also face lower odds: according to the 1995 General Social Survey, women whose first conjugal union was a common-law relationship were almost twice as likely to separate as women who married first," (Victoria Times-Colonist, August 20, 2002, "Life" section, page one). It seems that that legal piece of paper carries more weight in terms of survival than the generally declining marriage rate indicates. If this is so, why should anyone be denied access?

The fact is, if Diana and I had been legally able, we know for sure that we would have married as soon as we could have, after realizing how committed we were to each other, and knowing how clear and reassuring it would have been for the children and for our extended families. Knowing what we know now about the legal benefits of marriage would simply have added to that resolve. Having the choice is one thing. Being denied such a simple, seemingly innocent right which most citizens take for granted, is another.

However, the matter of marriage goes beyond the personal. Two and a half years ago we became one of the eight B.C. couples challenging in court the exclusion of same-sex couples from civil marriage. "How easy!" we thought, "At last, here's something we can do to help the fight for equality. Others, much braver than we, have done so much to pave the way for us. Now we can return the favour for future generations."

The most important thing to understand about all of this is that it's not so much about marriage, as about equality. We personally feel that having our government's recognition will help move society towards greater acceptance of lesbian and gay people.

That recognition matters on a global scale; especially when we still hear comments like "those homosexuals are worse than pigs or dogs" (President Mugawbe of Zimbabwe, in a BBC news report September 11th, 2002, commenting about a lesbian judge in South Africa granting adoption rights to gays and lesbians while also indicating that an equal marriage case is coming up for consideration as well.) It matters that some countries, like Iran, still maintain the death penalty for homosexuality. It matters that in Egypt last year, over 50 men were arrested just for being on a gay boat cruise.

Whether pessimistic or optimistic about the future of marriage, it is a fact that a large percentage of the Canadian population believes in the honour of the institution. Not only denying homosexuals access to it, but using our tax money as well as theirs to fight against us, slaps us soundly in the face. Those of us who wish to honour our commitments will only serve to strengthen the institution of marriage.

### **11) Ending Civil Marriage Hurts Everyone**

Having the government stop recognizing anyone's marriage would be a shameful tragedy. Instead of reaching out to create a more inclusive society, it would have the opposite effect. It would mean excluding not only same-sex couples, but all couples who do not wish or are not able to have a religious marriage. I fear that society would misinterpret this as a message from our government to mean lesbian and gay couples are so threatening or immoral that it is better to deny marriage to a large group of Canadians than to include homosexuals in it. In my worst fears, I worry that this option would produce a resultant backlash of anger and resentment so huge that gays and lesbians would be plunged into states of renewed persecution.

### **12) Civil Union is Segregation**

Trying to offer us the panacea of registered domestic partnership or civil union instead of marriage is like saying "Get down. Go to the back of the bus. You can be equal to us by having a school, but you have to go to a different one." We've heard all those arguments before and we know they don't work. That's why Diana and I are prepared to fight for as long as it takes to pave the way for the government to embrace us fully enough to acknowledge our right to have completely equal choice in the matter of marriage. We will not settle for the segregation and second-class status of RDP or civil union.

### **13) Conclusion**

Once the government grants us the freedom to marry, then we will be fully, completely and justly recognized. Having gained such respect, logical spin-offs for families consequently comfortable with their homosexual relatives will be improvements in our health and a reduction in the rate of teenage gay suicide. A lot of ordinary Canadian citizens will, we think, realize that if the government honours all of us, then it would only be natural for them to fully respect their homosexual daughters and sons, their brothers and sisters, their uncles, aunts, mothers, fathers, their cousins and the guys next door, as well as us women down the street. We hope you will agree that it's a small gift to ask after 19 years of soul-wedded bliss.