

Marriage Equality Inquiry
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

25 August 2009

Dear Senators

I'm a foreign-born Australian citizen, 42 years old, a gay man, and I absolutely support the rights of all couples, regardless of their gender or sexuality, to civil marriage, with all the rights and obligations that come with that.

Over the past 42 years, I've had to put up with being treated as a political football by politicians keen to drive wedges, and pander to base instincts and prejudice. I've heard people raise fallacious and fact-free arguments conflating homosexuality and paedophilia. I've had to deal with discriminatory immigration policies, failing to recognize foreign same sex relationships, and I've had to put considerable resources into managing those.

I've heard a multitude of preachers put the fear of god into me for "choosing" to be gay, and tell me I'm going to die from AIDS. God's punishment on us sinners. Christianity is not my choice, yet many Christians now, too, accept that homosexuality is innate, and some even celebrate our lives' milestones.

I'm lucky to have the most profound relationships with friends, both gay and straight. I've also been fortunate in my significant long term, loving relationships. I've been a potential father, with two heterosexual friends. Sadly, while no barrier to marriage with a woman, I also happen to be infertile.

Even while public opinion has shifted to favour gay marriage, I've read opinions suggesting that discrimination on marriage is, in fact, equality. I'm free, like everyone else, to marry an opposite sex person of my choosing, even if we're not in love and we don't have a sexual relationship. And even if that means that a partner of my own free choosing couldn't visit me in hospital or live in a family home after I die.

Since I moved to [redacted] I've been fortunate to meet some of the people that, in 1978, courageously took a stand against illegality and discrimination in Sydney's first Mardi Gras only to be arrested and have their names published by the Sydney Morning Herald. Those same people, who lost jobs and housing as a result of such discrimination, with lifelong consequences, are now the first generation to suffer the loss of their pension entitlements. Their history shows how the literal and selective application of equality after a lifetime of inequality, without justice, deepens a wrong.

At this point in my life, I've come to several understandings.

The first is that leadership and vision is needed by the government to actively promote acceptance of human diversity. US World War II General George S. Patton said that: "If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking."

Diversity is a social and economic strength, and it's vital to the success of Australia that the government and people accept it - including diversity in human relationships, thought and belief. That means marriage for those who want it, de facto relationships for those who want them, and

respect for people who don't choose either of those options.

Underpinning respect for diversity has to be a principle of equality before the law. Time and time again, history has shown that "separate but equal" is anything but. Whether it's gender based, racially based, or based on sexual orientation or gender expression, separate does not mean equal. Until lesbians and gay men are fully equal before the law, we are not full citizens.

Make us full citizens, and go another step towards respecting the rights of all Australians to take our own paths through life.

Yours sincerely,

Morgan Carpenter