

First name: Dave

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Do you wish for your name to be withheld from publication?: No

Do you wish for this submission to be confidential?: No

Your submission:

I write to express my support for the Marriage Equality Amendment Bill 2009.

We have been a couple for almost 19 years. We grew up in a country full of discrimination and prejudice - South Africa. Thankfully, Apartheid was dismantled 15 years ago, but it did teach me a great deal about how people generally only worry about matters that affect themselves.

I was a "young English-speaking white male" with the world at my feet - having been raised in a privileged society. The irony was that I never knew how poorly others lived and it never worried me too much as to how unfair the South African system was. I suppose I fell into that category that most people do - as long as it doesn't affect me, I need not concern myself.

That all changed in 1984 when I had my first same-sex experience. I went from being in a privileged position to literally being classified as a criminal overnight - all because I had sex with men.

As part of the machine to keep the Afrikaners in power, I was forced to serve 2 years conscription followed by many "camps" in the military and even had to lie about my "homosexual tendencies" to protect myself from experimentation or "behavioural correction".

The army did however open my eyes as to how black people lived in often-unbearable conditions in townships - during my many "township duty camps" - and this changed my perspective on life completely.

I tried to fight my sexual feelings, and even became engaged to a woman. Thankfully I did not ruin her life and broke up before we tied the knot. A year later I met my wonderful life partner and we migrated to Australia in Jan 1995.

Why do I tell you this? Today in South Africa, you can become married as same-sex partners, adopt children and enjoy 100% of the privileges also enjoyed and demanded by straight couples. What an incredible advancement compared to circumstances under the Afrikaner regime! Needless to say, there was, and still is, much opposition to this development amongst the population. However, the world did not implode!

What is impressive about the South African situation, is that the politicians assumed leadership of the issue, and introduced measures without majority support amongst the population. This was no doubt under the watchful gaze of Nelson Mandela. True leadership is often ahead of public opinion, such as that displayed by Abraham Lincoln with the abolition of slavery.

Here in Australia in 1995 - the year we arrived - there was much optimism. The country was a leader in human rights - I recall how active they were in the 80's against Apartheid!

Sadly, Australia lost their way under Howard in my opinion, and until a few years ago, the country appeared to be losing its soul as a nation, as it clamored for a more materialistic way of life. We seemed to become a nation entrenched in fear of anyone different from us. Thankfully, this has started to abate.

A Galaxy Poll in June 09 showed that 60% of Australians support same-sex marriage. This displays how far behind Australian politicians have fallen on this issue. It is time for our leaders to display the "fair go" qualities that made Australia a world leader in human rights in the 1980s and remove the remaining discriminatory legislation affecting the lives of same-sex couples still in place.

Regards  
Dave