

THE OUTRAGE OF MY APATHY

BY ALAN ILAGAN

There are a lot of articles out now concerning the marriage rights of gays and lesbians – many from gay writers who claim that marriage is not even something in which they themselves are interested. A few years ago I wrote one of those articles, opining the outdated, antiquated nature of marriage, and stating that I would never want to get married. At the time I thought it was clever ~ going against the grain, taking the opposite stance of what people expected a rebellious thinker like myself to take. I wondered why people would fight to get married when marriage was clearly not the answer to societal problems or relationship issues. I viewed the fight for gay marriage with a weary and apathetic eye. It didn't concern me directly, and I skipped over the growing number of stories and articles dealing with the topic. Having had little interest in politics and social activism, it was easier that way.

Even when Massachusetts announced they would legalize marriage for gay people, I felt an uneasy apathy. At first I was apprehensive, expecting the backlash and the fight against it, which soon followed, but since then something has been growing in me. Maybe it was watching Britney Spears fly to Las Vegas to get married for 55 hours, only to have the marriage annulled in one carefree weekend. Maybe it was President Bush's State of the Union Address decrying the rights of gay people to get married, and calling for our country to "defend the sanctity of marriage." Maybe it's the simple realization that I was being denied rights given to every other person in our country based solely on my sexual orientation.

Today I am appalled at my apathy. For the longest time I have professed to not wanting to get married, but I believe I should be given that choice. I maintain that I do not need a piece of paper or anyone else's approval to legitimize my love for Andy. Our relationship has stood strong without the bonds of holy matrimony. Yet such thinking is rather selfishly apathetic. I am beginning to understand that people like me are exactly what is keeping gay marriage from happening – people who believe in it but who are not willing to stand up and fight for it. In our apathy there is acquiescence – by allowing such injustice, we are condoning it. In that silence there is far greater danger than in any public disagreement or political grand-standing. And so I enter the ensuing war.

This will not be an easy battle, but I'm no longer going to sit back and let it unfold without putting up a fight. The time of apathy is over. The moment for action is at hand. It's going to take all our power ~ a joint effort from everyone who believes in our rights as Americans and human beings ~ to make this change. It's easier to sit back and watch it all unfold on television and in the papers (believe me, I know), but there is glory in fighting for what's right. A new revolution, an awakening of sorts, is about to be borne on the shoulders of those who are willing to stand up for our rights.

Our nation's constitution has stated that we are all created equal, that one person is as valid as another – so how can we deny one person the right to marry another, man or woman? I am not asking to marry more than one person, I am not asking to marry a child, I am not asking to marry an animal ~ and it's disgusting that I even have to defend such charges. The idea of amending the constitution specifically to deny rights to one group of people is rather appalling as well.

Marriage used to be a celebration of love ~ a bond honoring the life-long commitment of two people. Why should I be hated for my love? Why should Andy and I be banned from celebrating our love and our life together? In a country that honors freedom, how can we be denied the freedom to love and cherish another person, simply because we're of the same gender? We send our troops off to other countries to battle and die for freedom ~ what about the freedom and rights we have been denying our own citizens?

How does my marrying a man denigrate or even affect anyone else's marriage, or the institution itself? Will people be less faithful because I am getting married? Will other marriages be tainted or corroded by mine in any way? It seems that divorce and separation are more damaging to the institution of marriage than anything else. Quickie Las Vegas weddings and reality television shows bargaining off brides and grooms are doing more to destroy the institution of marriage than anything I could ever do. If people truly care about preserving the sanctity of marriage, let us ensure that those who get married truly love one another, and care enough to fight for that right.