

Bridal Advocacy

BY MOLLY MCKAY



Molly McKay

I have 14 wedding dresses hanging in my closet. They're all different styles and, let's face it, in slightly larger sizes than when I first started wearing them on a weekly basis 15 years ago. Why so many? It is hard to keep the dresses in bridal-fresh condition while standing at a booth talking with people all day long at the Gilroy Garlic festival or passing out flyers in the Oakland bus station.

One day my dry cleaner finally asked me why I had been bringing in two to three wedding gowns every month for so many years. I took the opportunity to explain that just as I wear my business suit when I address the court as a commercial litigator, I wear a wedding dress when addressing the court of public opinion about marriage equality.

Some of my dresses are short, like the one I bought to survive the scorching heat of the Central Valley's gay pride festival. (The bottoms of my matching white pumps melted from standing on the hot pavement for hours while handing out information and engaging curious pedestrians in conversation.) Some are white business suits that I wear when debating opponents at various law schools and community symposiums. I've even received a few wedding dresses from as far away as Michigan, sent to me by heterosexual couples who had watched interviews with me and wanted to support the cause.

Without fail, wearing a wedding dress in public opens positive conversations with total strangers. Instead of avoiding me (the usual response to an activist in a T-shirt holding a

clipboard), people come up to me, usually with a hearty "Congratulations! Are you getting married today?" I usually respond by saying, "Thank you so much. I want so badly to get married today, but right now the government doesn't allow me to marry the person I love. It would be wonderful to have your support."


When I met and fell in love with Davina 15 years ago, we knew we wanted to marry and spend the rest of our lives together. We decided to join Marriage Equality USA, an all-volunteer grassroots organization devoted to securing civil marriage for same-sex couples. We also started investigating the 1,138 federal rights and hundreds of state rights that come with marriage but were denied to gay people. Then she and I began traveling around the country, speaking at LGBT centers, universities, and LGBT festivals to educate our community about the harms and dangers our families suffer because we lack marriage protections.

I heard horror stories of gay soldiers not being able to ask for a small delay in deployment to be with their dying partners; parents who were not allowed to see the children they had raised after they broke up with the biological parent; distant family members excluding survivors from a long-term partner's funeral and taking all the couple's joint assets; and partners being barred from their loved ones' hospital rooms.

I believe that if everyone heard the same stories and met the real

people who have suffered without the legal rights and government-sanctioned status of being married to their long-time beloveds, no one would continue to stand in the way of giving marriage rights to same-sex couples. Everyone would see our common humanity, apply the Golden Rule, and get back to minding their own families.

I am so happy to finally be officially married to Davina. I call her my first, second, and third wife because that's how many times we've had to get married until our union was finally valid and recognized for good in California. But our marriage is still not recognized in most other states or by the federal government.

I was heartbroken when Proposition 8 passed and the rest of our gay and lesbian friends were barred from following us into wedded bliss. But I remain hopeful about the federal lawsuit brought by Ted Olson and David Boies, challenging the amendment's constitutionality, and about the potential for another ballot measure in 2012 to repeal it. I also remain hopeful that President Obama will fulfill his campaign promise to seek repeal of the federal Defense of Marriage Act and ensure liberty and justice for same-sex couples once and for all. I know we will see this change in our lifetime, and I am honored to be a part of the generation making this history. 

Molly McKay is senior counsel at Gordon & Rees in San Francisco and the media director for Marriage Equality USA.

Rick Gerberter