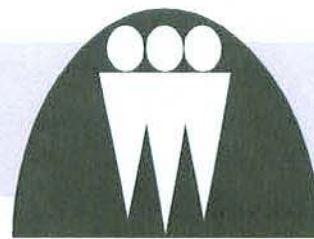


Reunion

Spring 2007

The Family Fellowship Newsletter

Issue 29



My Son Cameron

Reprinted from Newsweek, February 5, 2007 issue

Nadine Chaffee

My son Cameron is a model American citizen. He is a hardworking, tax-paying, law-abiding young man. An honor student, a National Merit Scholar, a dean's list mainstay. He is liked by his teachers, co-workers and bosses; he's kind to cats, dogs and little old ladies. He is an environmental engineer because he believes we need to save our planet. He is wildly in love with the first and only person he ever dated and their monogamous relationship is an example of what it means to be soulmates. Except for a brief interlude with hideous pink hair, he has led an exemplary life. My son will be an asset to his employer, his community and his country, but unfortunately for us, his country will not be the United States.

Cameron is moving to Canada. As soon as he graduates from school, he says, he is packing his bags and leaving.

Why is my son compelled to leave the only country he has ever known? Cameron is leaving because he is gay and because he wants what heterosexual American citizens take for granted. He wants to marry the one person in the world who makes him happier than anyone else. He wants to be able to go to the hospital when his partner, Aaron, is sick and have the same decision-making rights that heterosexual couples have as soon as they say "I do." He wants to be able to take advantage of family health-insurance rates that Aaron's company

offers to all its heterosexual married couples but not to domestic partnership couples. He wants the tax breaks that heterosexual married couples get and the ability to inherit shared assets without paying taxes. He simply wants what he cannot have in this country.

According to our federal government's General Accounting Office, there are more than 1,000 automatic federal and state protections, benefits and responsibilities that accompany civil marriage, and Cameron and Aaron are not eligible for any of them. This country that he loves so much is saying more and more loudly, in state after state, that he is not worthy of all the rights and privileges that heterosexual citizens assume. Because of that he has decided that he doesn't want to live in a country that makes him feel like a second-class citizen.

Not only are states denying gay and lesbian couples the right to marry, they are writing it into state constitution after state constitution. As of today, 26 states have passed constitutional amendments to deny my son his civil rights. Documents that were originally designed to protect citizens and guarantee them their rights are now being used to single out a small group of people and specifically deny them their rights. Passing these constitutional amendments precludes the courts from interpreting any federal or state laws to extend any recognition or



benefits to same-sex couples. Discrimination is being codified into our most important governmental documents and we are allowing it to happen.

In contrast to the United States, Canada has legalized same-sex marriage and has gay-friendly immigration laws. Though it breaks my heart to lose my son, I can't argue with his choice to move to a country where he will be able to enjoy the full rights of citizenship.

Sadly, I suspect that Cameron is not the only one thinking of leaving. Type "gay migration" and "Canada" into any search engine and you will find hundreds of articles and blogs by current and potential Canadian immigrants. Immigration lawyers and consultants host workshops in major U.S. cities, and encourage gay and lesbian couples to look into the Canadian immigration option. In an article from the San Francisco Chronicle, Mary Joseph, a Toronto immigration lawyer, said, "As long as the United States is continuing to be oppressive in their lack of sanctity of unions for gays and lesbians, then they're going to continue to lose really good citizens." She summed up the exodus succinctly, saying, "Your loss, our gain."

In a matter of years Cameron will be gone. He is moving to a country where he will have the same civil rights that heterosexual couples enjoy, a country that will benefit from his immense talent and skill, a country that does want him no matter whom he wants to marry. We are close, and we will find a way to stay close, but it will not be the same easy back and forth we have now. Distance and borders will make it harder. I will miss him terribly, but it is not just me who will suffer. We will all be the poorer for his moving and the reasons that drove him. ☹

Chaffee lives in Boise, Idaho.

We read this article in the February 5 issue of Newsweek and couldn't help but think about so many of our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered brothers and sisters who have left the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Ms. Chaffee's essay, which could just as well be entitled Hurting for My Country, resonates with Family Fellowship parents, not because of its advocacy for marriage equality or for its opposition to constitutional amendments codifying discrimination (although many agree), but because of the pride she has for her gay son and the hurt she feels for the circumstances that have compelled him to leave the country. Hurt for him, hurt for her family and hurt for her country. Like Ms. Chaffee, Family Fellowship parents are proud of their gay children and lament the fact that circumstances related to current church policy

have made it necessary for most of them to leave the church.

Some time ago, Frank Mensel, one of our Family Fellowship parents wrote an essay entitled, Hurting for My Church in which he talks not only about the hurt we share as parents for our gay kids, but the hurt we feel for our church. "We hurt because we see the Church suffering heavy losses from alienation. Alienation felt in varying degrees among the families and loyal friends of gays. Such alienation is enormously painful. . . Less obvious, but perhaps no less harmful to the Church, is the alienation by degree of the families who endure their dilemma more or less quietly, stretched between their love of a gay family member and their love of Church."

Why have so many felt compelled to leave the only church they have ever known? Most ultimately come to feel disenfranchised and

excluded. That fact should come as no surprise. The Proclamation on the Family offers no solace or recognition of their sexual orientation. Fellow church members give overwhelming support for constitutional amendments denying them their civil rights. Despite the fact that most gay Mormons and their parents prefer committed, monogamous same-sex relationships to a lonely life of celibacy or a life of promiscuity, church policy currently places no value on such relationships.

Mensel concludes his essay with this observation: "This is a question too momentous, and too amassed in hurt and alienation to rest on current solutions. If we build from the bottom line, which is Christ's unconditional love, then better answers will be found. I am sure of it."

— The Board of Directors and Reunion Staff

