

Mount Zion Members Speak About the Minnesota Marriage Amendment

During Shabbat services on Friday, February 17, 2012, three members of Mount Zion spoke about why they will vote "no" on the November ballot question "shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to say that "only a union of one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage."

Adele Brown

My name is Adele Brown. I have been a member of Mount Zion Since 1998 when we walked down Summit Avenue and came to Cantor Spilker's first Friday night Shabbat service in the small chapel. The service was magical and the congregation welcomed my family with open arms. Since then, I have been very involved with my temple community. I have had the pleasure to meet many Mount Zion members but there is something that many people don't know about me. I am first generation American. Both my parents were born in Germany. My mother left with her parents in 1936 at the age of 5 and my 10 year old father left in 1937. I often think that I am lucky to be here with you. Throughout my childhood I wondered how my grandparents knew to leave Germany when several million did not and perished. I often asked my grandmother and she would always say we felt uncomfortable. There were many laws restricting their lives and they wanted their children to grow up in a place where they are protected by the laws not singled out.

Sixteen years later my mother met my dad at a German Jewish dance in New York City, they fell in love and got married. Two decades after that I wore her white embroidered silk wedding dress and got married on a bema similar to this one under a chupah with our family and friends watching. For the past 29 years I have had a wonderful relationship with my husband, Curt, together we have raised three amazing children. I stand before you hoping that both my daughters will be able to wear the same wedding dress that my mother and I wore. My hope is that my daughter who is a lesbian will not feel uncomfortable and leave this state and this country so that she can live in a place where laws will protect her and her family.

Minnesotans in November have the ability to keep my dream stay alive by defeating the amendment that would ban same gender marriage.

I want to my daughter to be able to get married under a chupah and live a long healthy life, in a loving relationship being protected by the laws of our state instead of singled out.

Lisa Cohen

Hi, my name is Lisa Cohen and I have been a member at Mount Zion for 16 years. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the Marriage Amendment and why I will be voting no. I could discuss my opposition to the idea of legislating through constitutional amendment or I could raise questions about using the constitution to limit people's rights, but I think talking about my life will have more impact so I want to talk to you about how not having the right to marry affects my family and me.

I have been in a committed relationship with my partner Amy for 30 years. And our life together mirrors that of heterosexual couples in many ways. We own a house together; we have two children, our son Ned who is a sophomore in college and our daughter Ruth who is in 8th grade.

We have dealt with the same ups and downs that most families deal with and want nothing more than to provide a strong family for our children.

But in a very essential way we are unlike most families, it is in how the government and other institutions view us. I gave birth to our children so they are related to me. Then we went through a legal process so Amy could adopt first Ned and then Ruth. So the children are also legally related to Amy. But in the eyes of the law Amy and I are not related to each other. A friend recently refinanced his home and his experience reminded me starkly of how institutions see us, on one of the many documents after "The title to this residence is held by..." the box checked was "Two unrelated persons" –

So in our family, Amy and I would love to be married, but the law sees us as two unrelated persons. This is just one of many examples of how our relationship and our family are categorized as somehow "less than." And this categorization, besides being unfair causes legal challenges. We've plowed through the many legal documents needed to protect each other in case of illness or death. We've insured through a legal process that Amy is a full legal parent. But there are still many things that can't be addressed by legal means.

In raising our children, we have also seen great change in how the world views their family. When we first had Ned, we thought it would be important to let him hide his family background in some way. We didn't want the fact that he had two moms to be a problem for him. Now, it seems that neither of my children nor any of their friends cares a whole lot about this and that gives me hope. Though, Ruth did want us to go to Canada or Iowa to get married! We told her we weren't getting married unless we could do it in Minnesota.

As partners of 30 years we've loved and cared for one another. We've built a pretty good life. We've supported each other through the death of Amy's parents. We've been a source of love and support, as a couple, to many friends, family members, and most importantly to our children. We've contributed to the larger community in many ways. As near as I can tell, the family we've built is a pretty normal family in all the ways that count.

But, in the eyes of the law, we are merely "Two unrelated persons."

If the anti-gay marriage amendment to the Minnesota constitution fails, we still won't be able to marry. But if it passes, any chance of ever changing Minnesota law to recognize our relationship - and the relationships of countless other committed couples - is gone forever.

Because if it is defeated, then perhaps someday Amy and I will be seen by the law as something more than "Two unrelated persons".

A NOTE FROM LISA: Part of this talk was inspired by a recent experience of Tom Cytron-Hysom and a recent e-mail he sent to many in the community. While most of the words are mine, his email included language that so eloquently expressed my views that I adapted it for my experience.

Steve Warch

Shabbat Shalom. My name is Steve Warch. I along with my wife Alex and our daughters Helen and Zoe have been members here at Mount Zion for around 10 years. I'm honored to have a chance to speak with you tonight about why I'll vote NO on the Marriage Amendment. There is no one "moment" where I came to the decision to oppose the Marriage Amendment. I have frankly always felt that there is no reason to deny the rights of marriage to same sex couples. I have been lucky to work in a law firm that has a long-standing commitment to diversity, and two of my close colleagues at the firm are in long-standing, committed same sex relationships.

The need for marriage equality crystallized for me several years ago, when I attended my friends Brad and Peter's wedding. This wedding featured a service in a beautiful Episcopalian church, a fantastic reception, awkward toasts, and tears of joy from the couple and their families – things one would find at any wedding. Seeing the commitment these two friends made to each other was extremely moving, and showed me that same sex couples have the same hopes and dreams of finding someone to journey through life with as any "traditional" couple.

Amending the Minnesota State Constitution to define, as a constitutional tenet of our state, that marriage can never be between same sex couples is blatantly and undeniably discriminatory. Through our nation's history, we have seen this same scenario repeatedly play out. When our country was founded, our Constitution – a document politicians of all parties hold out as sacrosanct – guaranteed equal protection under the law. **EQUAL** protection. Since then, we have seen our Country grapple with what this concept means, and in the process, our Country's history has seen the abolition of slavery, significantly more rights for women, the desegregation movement of the 1950's, and passage of the Civil Rights Act.

There is no question that over the last 25 years, our society has been on a steady continuum toward recognizing the rights of gays and lesbians to be free of the same types of discrimination that has plagued our country in the past. Recently, Legislatures in the States of Washington and New Jersey have voted to legalize same sex marriage, and it is now the law in the State of New York. The United States Armed Forces have accepted gays and lesbians as equally qualified to serve our country through repealing "don't ask, don't tell."