

**Letter to the Editor: Times Union – June 7, 2009**

**By Alan Bennett Ilagan**

This letter was supposed to be filled with facts and figures supporting gay marriage, arguments regarding religion, separation of church and state, citations of civil rights, and a long list of how many laws our citizens are currently being denied. It was supposed to proffer reasonable arguments for allowing gay marriage, condemning the “separate but equal” notion of civil unions, and dispelling the idea that it would denigrate anyone else’s marriage or the institution itself.

But after all the clinical analyses, it rang hollow. This has never been about laws or legal matters or civil rights or even equality. For me it comes down to one thing: Love. The battle against gay marriage is, at its cold core, an attack on love. It is this personal stance that has been largely forgotten amid all of our philosophical and religious differences.

Those opposed to gay marriage don’t seem to understand what they are doing by denying gay couples the right to marry. Aside from the legal benefits marriage affords, there is something intangible that goes much deeper than laws or civil rights – it’s the symbolic joining of two people. It may be a simple piece of paper, but it means something – and the history of its meaning stands behind it. The right to marry is a rite of passage – one that provides an emotional foundation for a relationship.

More than anything else, marriage is the binding union that creates a sense of stability and security. It is a benefit that many of us so desperately need – often the sole motivating force that keeps people together through difficult times, and something to fall back on when there are

disagreements or fights. How many married couples have had moments when they've had to look back on their wedding day, remember the love and support that they were given then, and rely on the strength of that bond and those vows to get them through a rough time?

I have been with my partner Andy for nine years. He is a retired police officer who was injured on duty, and I am a state worker. While far from perfect, we do our part as citizens – paying taxes, taking care of our home, and carving out a life as a couple. We would have liked to get married in our home state, surrounded by friends and family, celebrating our love and honoring the work and effort we have put into our relationship, yet we can't do that. Not yet. Not in New York.

Opponents of gay marriage can continue to deny us our rights, and for the time being they may succeed, but they will not be remembered for doing what's right and honorable, not even in the name of religion. They will be remembered for fostering hate. They will be remembered for separating two people who love each other, and for denying them their wish to be part of a recognized union that celebrates love and commitment. They will be remembered for taking away the stability and support that only marriage can provide.

If you don't believe in gay marriage, that's your right. I'm not asking you to change your beliefs. All I am asking is that you think about what you're doing when you actively seek to deny someone else that right. If we cannot get people to change their minds, perhaps we can get them to change their hearts.