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MSOP Newsletter

Fall 2001

Executive Director's Report

I write this report almost a month after the terrible attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. I feel humbled and chastened by the enormity of the suffering, the incredible bravery of the firemen, the police, and the ordinary citizens who were caught up in the attack, and sad that many of us are now feeling afraid and insecure.

Rev. Falwell's idiotic statement in the wake of the Sept. 11th attacks blaming gays, the ACLU, and abortion rights activists for provoking the wrath of God exposes him as a complete moral moron, should anyone have needed further proof. Thank God (sorry, Jerry) that the prospect of our own fundamentalists establishing a home-grown Taliban regime in America is a nightmare that we need not fear.

While it is not the goal of Speakout to try to convert the "Holy Mishuganahs," neither can we forget that they're out there trying to impede our quest for tolerance, safe communities and equality. We cannot forget that Maine is the only New England state to have seen its civil rights amendment prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination twice repealed by popular vote in campaigns led by anti-gay Christian organizations.

So we will continue to reach out to the majority of Mainers "in the middle," many of whom have not met an openly gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered person before — or parents willing to talk about their son or daughter — to share our personal experiences in a spirit of respectful give-and-take. And we are focusing our efforts on securing speaking invitations in the towns in which a majority voted against the civil rights bill in the last election.

While many of us were very discouraged by losing these votes, we need to bounce back in the face of these setbacks. We are making progress and we can accelerate this progress if enough of you will come forward, get trained as speakers, and help us find speaking opportunities in your community, at your workplace, church, synagogue or civic group. The time to speak out is (still) now!

In this issue...

▼ **Special Insert: Evan Wolfson on Marriage**

▼ Walk with the Ones You Love ▼ America Speaks Out

▼ Speaking Out for Safe Schools ▼ Volunteer Diaries



Walking With The Ones You Love: Bringing Gay & Nongay Together

On June 17, 2001, MSOP sponsored gay-and-straight-together *Walks with the Ones You Love* in ten Maine towns: Augusta, Bangor-Brewer, Brunswick, Dover-Foxcroft, Ellsworth, Farmington, Kennebunk, Lewiston-Auburn, Portland, and Rockland. Special kudos to Jayne Lello (Dover-Foxcroft), Rev. Mac Bigelow (Northeast Harbor) and Marie Paschke (Farmington) for organizing first-time Walks in their communities. It is heartening to see non-gay Mainers like the three of them coming forward to galvanize these Walks for safety and equality for everyone.

Also deserving of special recognition is Martha Palmer of Lisbon Falls for her effective leadership of the Lewiston-Auburn Walk. She is another one of our Speakout "Shrinking Violets" who has broken that mold and become a recognized leader in her community and at L.L. Bean, where she was the featured volunteer in their June newsletter for her "speaking out" and Walk organizing. I want to thank the organizers of the other Walks, for without their efforts, these Walks would not have happened: in Augusta: Rabbi Susan Carvuto; Bangor-Brewer: Fern & Bill Stearns and Dan Williams; Brunswick: Sid & Les Hodgdon, Rev. Bill Imes, and Jane Newhall; Kennebunk: Rosemary Guptill; Portland: David Aaron Swander; and Rockland: Lucie Bauer and Annie Kiermaier.

It meant a lot to us that Gov. King and Mary Herman walked in Brunswick and Attorney General Rowe and his wife and Majority Leader Saxl and his partner walked in Portland (and despite the pouring rain, they did the entire walk, too.) We also were encouraged that again this year, the Maine legislature passed a Joint Resolution declaring June 17th "Walk with the Ones You Love Day in Maine."

Special thanks to the United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministry in Cleveland (and to Conference Minister Jean Alexander of North Yarmouth) for contributing \$3,000 to help seed Walks outside of Maine.

MSOP County Contacts

Please consider being our contact in your county if no one appears below in that capacity. Call the office for more information.

Androscoggin

Martha Palmer, 353-6847

Aroostook

Cathy Bohls, 473-0062

Cumberland

Steve Farrand, MSOP office

Franklin

Marie Paschke, 778-8550

Hancock

Tamara Duff, 667-5621

Knox

Lucie Bauer, 925-1034

Penobscot

Fern Stearns, 827-3609

York

Rosemary Guptill, 985-2748

WALK WITH THE ONES YOU
LOVE



NATIONAL COUNCIL: Bruce Bawer • Robert Calley • Kevin Cathcart • James Dale • Michael Denny
• E.J. Graff • Dr. Mathilde Krim • Norma Marin • Ned Rorem • Robert Taylor • Alan Wolfe • Philip
Yenawine • Bob Zellner

America Speaks Out National Institute - July 26-29

For the second year in a row, we held our America Speaks Out national training at Southern Maine Technical College in South Portland. Twenty-two people attended the three-day institute. They came from Phoenix, Arizona; Sutton, Massachusetts; Hampstead, Maryland; Daytona Beach, Florida; Alexandria, Virginia; Greencastle, Indiana; St. Cloud, Minnesota; Monroe, New York; Peekskill, NY; Providence, Rhode Island; Williston, Vermont; and Bridgton, Cape Elizabeth, and Brunswick, Maine.

It was an interesting mix of people and hopefully they found the training a spur to focused action back home. A majority of attendees were interested in organizing *Walks with the Ones You Love* in their communities in 2002. We stand at the ready to help them in any way we can.

Of special interest this year was our keynote speaker at the Thursday evening reception and dinner, Bob Zellner. Bob was the first white field secretary to serve with the Student Non-Violent Organizing Committee (SNCC) in Mississippi in the early 60s. Having grown up in Alabama, son and grandson of Klan members and named after the Rev. Bob Jones, who officiated at his parents' wedding, Bob's story of becoming a civil rights activist in the non-violent tradition was fascinating and inspiring. Bob is a wonderful storyteller, a great mimic, and these attributes plus the twinkle in his eyes made him the absolute hit of the institute. (If you are ever lucky enough to meet him, ask him to tell you the story of the Yankee and the Southern women discussing the question "Do you believe in Science/Signs?" Depending on which region of the country you hail from, the question becomes a very different question!)

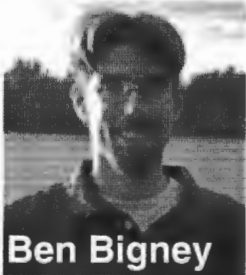
An exceptional moment of the institute occurred during a session on "Speaking Out for Safe Schools" when a newly trained speaker from Maine told a riveting story of her (ongoing) journey as a male-to-female transgendered person. Her story was so compelling and so movingly told, it could have held our attention for an hour. On the spot, we decided that next summer's institute will have a session devoted to Transgender experiences and issues to respond to the great interest we saw expressed that day.

I was also struck by the intensity of feeling and variety of experiences that surfaced in the session on "Talking to People of Faith." One participant related an almost mystical experience of coming to terms with her faith and her ineradicable identity as a lesbian; another expressed his gratitude for the loving attention offered him by particular nuns and priests and parochial school teachers even as he delivered an impassioned tirade against the Pope and what he sees as the hubris of organized religion. The sparks flew and the contrasting experiences and strong emotions were fascinating to observe. On one point there was no disagreement: that the anti-gay positions embodied in various church doctrines and practices have deeply hurt a lot of people.

New Board Members, New Staff

We want to thank Chuck Rimmel and Doug Malcolm, former board members, for their hours of devotion to Speakout and wish them well as they move on to new pursuits.

And we want to welcome with appropriate fanfare three new board members who have the distinction of being Speakout's first board members under the age of twenty-five. Ben Bigney, the senior member of this youthful cohort, is a recent graduate of USM and a talented jazz pianist. Lindsay Keller and Sara Webber are both students at Deering High School where, among other things, they are active in the Rainbow Alliance.



I joined Speakout because I was interested in volunteering in the greater Portland GLBT community. As a gay man who has been blessed with understanding family and friends, I've found that through Speakout I can share my story with folks who might be struggling with how to support GLBT loved ones. In addition to speaking, serving on the Speakout board of directors has enabled me to be more involved, and is helping me learn how a non-profit, grass roots movement is organized and operates.



I joined Speakout because I want others to realize that being gay isn't a disease, isn't radical, isn't immoral, but rather just normal (to us). You love who you love, it isn't a chosen lifestyle or trend. I just want to see a change. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, any discrimination actually, really upsets me, it's unjust and ridiculous. If a woman wants to love another woman, why does it matter that they are of the same gender? This ignorance bothers me, and I want people to see that we aren't threatening or wrong because we love the same sex; I want to normalize homosexuality and stop discrimination. We are the same as everyone else, so we should have the same rights, protections, and privileges as every other person. I felt that Speakout could help me contribute to this change; it won't happen if no action is taken and people just sit back and watch. Plus, it'll look really good on college applications!

Sara Webber - For me Speakout was a chance to give something back to the community. I wanted people to become aware that adults aren't the only ones fighting for these issues, teenagers care too.



Hanna Sanders is our half-time Office Manager.

AND MEET OUR NEW STAFF !!



Steve Farrand is our half-time Speaking Booker.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Chris Chenard & Elliott Cherry on your civil union in Vermont. While the Portland Press Herald still does not consider your union "news that's fit to print," we do! Mazel tov, l'haim, may you live long and prosper!

Chris Chenard & Elliott Cherry were the inspiration for the Walk with the Ones You Love when they began walking around Portland's back cove hand-in-hand four years ago after an epiphany in Provincetown. They braved the catcalls and the stares and found that there were plenty of supportive people out there, too. The next thing we knew, we were walking together, gay and non-gay, with the ones we loved.



THANK YOU DR. MATHILDE KRIM!

A very special thanks to Dr. Mathilde Krim, a member of our America Speaks Out National Council, for hosting a fundraising reception at her New York City home a mere two weeks after the September 11th attacks. Special guests James Dale, also a member of the ASO National Council, and Evan Wolfson were eloquent, as was MSOP speaker extraordinaire Gerry Clement. We appreciate the support of all of our sponsors and guests at this difficult time.

Upcoming Events

October 13 Saturday, 9-5 pm
Speaker training, University of Maine/Orono.

October 21 Sunday, 4-6 pm
House Concert at John Manzo's residence in Kennebunk featuring new works by Elliott Cherry and American Standards played by Ben Bigney and sung by Peter Allen. Tickets are \$25 and can be reserved by calling the Speakout office, 207-879-0480.

October 27 Saturday, 9-5 pm
Speaker training at the United Church of Christ, Farmington. To register, contact Franklin County coordinator Marie Paschke, 207-778-8550 or the MSOP office.

November 17 Saturday, 8:30-4:30 pm
Strategic Planning Retreat for MSOP Board facilitated by Pamela Plumb.

November 18 Sunday, 6 - 9 pm
Charity Night at the Maine Mall. Special prizes, discounts at many stores, roving entertainers and desserts galore. Tickets are \$5 (includes raffle) and proceeds go to Speakout. Help us go mainstream: come to the Mall! Call 879-0480 for more information.

June 9, 2002 Sunday, 4:00 pm
Walk With the Ones You Love!

July 25-28, 2002 Thursday-Sunday
America Speaks Out National Institute, South Portland

We'd Appreciate your Appreciated Stock!

If you sell appreciated securities you may be hit with tax liabilities on the value of the stock that exceeds your initial purchase price.

Donating these same stocks to MSOP {a 501(c)(3) nonprofit} provides you an opportunity to:

- Make a larger donation at a significantly reduced cost to you;
- Eliminate Federal and State taxes on the appreciated value (if you transfer instead of sell the stocks); and
- Secure a significant tax deduction.

Please consider the donation of stocks...it would be greatly appreciated! Contact: A.G. Edwards Brokerage Gift Account at 1-800-424-4452 (Account # 210-260064).

Thank you!

We can win the freedom to marry. Possibly within five years. This bold declaration, which I hope becomes a rallying cry, raises many questions—not the least of which are: Why marriage and why now? Who's "we"? How do we do it? And, five years?

Before I tackle those questions, though, let's savor the possibilities: We can seize the terms of the debate, tell our diverse stories, engage the nongay persuadable public, enlist allies, work the courts and the legislatures in several states, and achieve a legal breakthrough within five years. I'm talking about not just any legal breakthrough but an actual change in the law of at least one state, ending discrimination in civil marriage and permitting same-sex couples to lawfully wed. This won't just be a change in the law either; it will be a change in society. For if we do it right, the struggle to win the freedom to marry will bring much more along the way. It is not just the attainment but the engagement that will move us furthest and fastest.

But first, let me tackle those questions.

Why marriage and why now?

Marriage is many things in our society. It is an important choice that belongs to couples in love. In fact, many people consider their choice of partner the most important choice they ever make. Civil marriage is also a legal gateway to a vast array of protections, responsibilities, and benefits (most of which cannot be replicated in any other way). These include access to health care and medical decision making for your partner and your children; parenting and immigration rights; inheritance, taxation, Social Security, and other government benefits; rules for ending a relationship while protecting both parties; and the simple ability to pool resources to buy or transfer property without adverse tax treatment.

After passing the federal antimarriage law marketed as the "Defense

of Marriage Act" in 1996, the government cataloged more than 1,049 ways in which married people are accorded special status under law. Add in the state-level protections and the intangible and tangible privileges marriage brings in private life, and that makes more than 1,049 ways in which lesbians and gay couples are ripped off.

Marriage is a known commodity, permitting couples to travel without playing "now you're legally next of kin; now you're legally not." It is a social statement, describing and defining one's relationships and place in

support, nor the only family form worthy of respect, the vast majority of lesbians and gay men want the freedom to marry for the same mix of reasons as nongay people.

In the past several years we have turned an idea virtually no one talked about into a reality waiting to happen. A 1999 NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll reported that two thirds of all Americans have come to believe that gay people will win the freedom to marry. And we know that if they believe it will happen, on some level they are learning to live with it—the positive precondition to our achiev-

C O M M E N T A R Y

All together now

Just as the far right is launching another attack against the freedom to marry—this time in the form of a proposed constitutional amendment—marriage-rights expert **EVAN WOLFSON** outlines the blueprint for a new campaign to secure equal marriage rights for all lesbians and gay men

society. It is also a personal statement of commitment that receives public support and can help achieve common aspirations for stability and structure in life. It has spiritual significance for many of us and familial significance for nearly all of us.

Finally, marriage is the vocabulary in which nongay people talk of love, family, dedication, self-sacrifice, and stages of life. It is the vocabulary of love, equality, and inclusion. While recognizing that marriage should not be the sole criterion for benefits and

ing it. This extraordinary new receptivity comes only eight years after the Hawaii supreme court first launched this national discussion.

We can call the first chapter of our ongoing freedom to marry movement the "Hawaii/Vermont" chapter. Its successes were enormous. Through court cases in both states we showed that there is no good reason for sex discrimination in civil marriage, just as there was no good reason for race discrimination in civil marriage a generation ago.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds

We also redefined the national debate over lesbian and gay inclusion, fostering recognition that marriage is central to any discussion about lesbian and gay equality. This was dramatically demonstrated by last year's vice presidential debate between Dick Cheney and Joe Lieberman, both of whom answered a question about gay love by talking about their evolving (and increasingly supportive) positions on marriage.

The Hawaii/Vermont chapter moved the center of our country to the "all but marriage" position. Whereas before the marriage debate,

shows college freshmen strongly supporting our freedom to marry as well. My latest favorite poll, however, came in *New York* magazine early this year. It reported that 58% of non-gay New Yorkers support civil marriage for gay people, and that 92% (!) of gay people agree.

All of this is occurring, of course, against a backdrop of international advances. It has been only 12 years since Denmark became the first country to create "gay marriage" (not marriage itself but a parallel marital status for same-sex couples). This year the Netherlands became the first

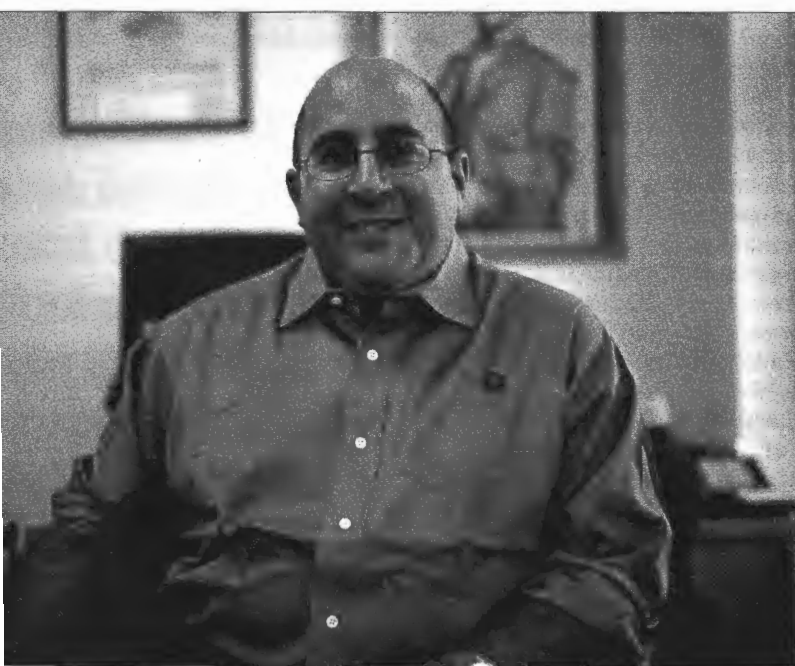
though not yet marriage itself—here at home. With the passage of the civil union law, Vermont created a parallel nonmarriage marital status for same-sex couples, upon which we can build.

It is worth remembering that we didn't get civil unions by asking for civil unions. We got this separate and unequal status by pressing for the freedom to marry. In Vermont local activists, New England's Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, and our allies mounted a campaign of public outreach, enlisting clergy, speaking at county fairs, and then folding in litigation—groundwork that led to victory through sustained engagement. With these successes as our new starting point, it's time for us to open the next chapter in our movement.

What about asking for less?

Civil unions are a tremendous step forward, but they are not good enough. They do not provide equal benefits and they leave couples and those who deal with them exposed to legal uncertainty. What we want is not separate and unequal "gay marriage" but marriage itself, the full range of choice and protections available to our nongay sisters and brothers. We do ourselves no favor when we enter this civil rights discussion bargaining against ourselves.

The attempt not to talk about marriage, to have a discussion without using the *m* word, increasingly fails. The fierce (and ongoing) right-wing backlash against civil unions in Vermont (and the right wing's use of marriage and civil unions as a club against us in campaigns in other states) shows that we do not gain much ground by calling it something else or running away from the debate. Our opponents are against us no matter what we seek. When we fight merely not to be beaten up in the streets, they are against us. If we were asking for oxygen, they would be against us. Our opponents will redefine everything we seek as "a slippery slope to gay marriage" and ►



RICHARD RENALDI FOR THE ADVOCATE

The nongay majority did not support any kind of partner recognition for same-sex couples, now we see majority support for health benefits, inheritance, and other kinds of recognition for our family relationships. That is a product of talking about our lives in the vocabulary of full equality and a happy consequence of asking nongay people to hear our stories.

In June 2000 an Associated Press poll put opposition to our freedom to marry at only 51%; the latest Gallup poll puts it at 52%. A recent survey

to dispense with separate and unequal formulas and allow same-sex couples to lawfully wed. Other European nations, and possibly the European Union as a whole, will certainly follow suit in the years to come. Meanwhile, Canada—which already has recognized same-sex couples' legal entitlement to "all but marriage"—is also in the midst of a campaign aimed at securing the freedom to marry.

Finally, the Hawaii/Vermont chapter brought us "gay marriage"—

s admit impediments. —William Shakespeare

attack us with equal ferocity, no matter what.

If we are going to have to face opposition and work to engage the middle no matter what we strive for, why not ask for all we deserve? Remember, it is no coincidence that the two states in which we have the most expansive protections and recognition for gay people are the two in which we framed the discussion in terms of full equality.

Who's "we," and what is the new approach?

It is time for a peacetime campaign to win the freedom to marry. We cannot win equality by focusing just on one court case or the next legislative battle—or by lurching from crisis to crisis. Rather, like every other successful civil rights movement, we must see our struggle as long-term and must set affirmative goals, marshal sustained strategies and concerted efforts, and enlist new allies and new resources.

More than ever, then, "we" means key organizations in key battleground states working in partnership; a national resource center doing what is best done centrally; talented and dedicated individuals who bring new resources and new focus to the table; existing and new national groups prioritizing real work on marriage; and most critically, nongay allies.

Clearly we can—and must—motivate nongay allies to become vocal advocates. Fortunately, we have good models for doing so. For instance, we can examine and replicate how the parents of students creating gay-straight alliances—or the parents, funders, and others who have taken action against Boy Scouts discrimination—have defined their relation to our civil rights and created a public responsibility and role for themselves.

Since there is no marriage without engagement, we must make enhanced efforts to have our allies speak out in a variety of forums—everything from advertorials to interfaith dialogues to TV talk shows such as *Oprah* and *Larry King Live*—describing to other nongay Americans why it's important for them to support the freedom to marry for gay and lesbian couples.

We also can enlist diverse allies among other constituencies (religious, labor, child welfare, youth, seniors, business, etc.) and seek ways to work together with overlapping communities such as women and people of color. For example, we can find common ground through joint projects to deal with problems we all face with immigration discrimination or access to health care.

Imagine, for example, a collaboration between the National Center for Lesbian Rights and La Raza or the Japanese American Citizens League, in which each group agreed to send collective information on immigration concerns to its mailing lists and then cohost a program that included gay concerns, spokespeople, and stories.

The good news here is that nongay people live in the world of marriage, and in many cases they will be more responsive to our call to join this work. As the growing list of signatories on the Marriage Resolution (www.lamdalegal.org) attests, many of them have already. We must give nongay opinion leaders at the national level as well as local clergy or organizations the impetus and framework for engaging the public on our freedom to marry.

How do we do it?

Our opponents have announced yet another antigay campaign—an effort to promote a federal constitutional amendment to permanently exclude lesbians and gay men from all family protections, including marriage. Outrageous as this latest assault is, there are lessons we can learn from them: the power of a campaign over time, the importance of framing the terms of the debate, the need to present diverse and compelling stories and allies, the ability to make attainable what at one time seemed radical. The good news here is that their attack offers us an occasion to take our case to the people. We should not shy away.

I envision a sustained effort to win the freedom to marry, centering on focused work to attain a legal breakthrough in one or more states, together with sophisticated national work to create a climate of receptivi-

ty. The elements of this sustained effort would be

- serious multimethodology, multi-year freedom-to-marry efforts under way in the most promising breakthrough states. The partners in these efforts would strategically mount litigation or legislative measures to end discrimination in civil marriage, but the specific vehicles would take place within the context of our undertaking enhanced public education and outreach work.
- development of a clear and sophisticated understanding of what demographics we need to reach in order to firm up our 30%–35% base and soften up and move the 15%–20% of the public who are movable.

“Let’s convey the strong vibrancy of many gay and lesbian families, such as my friends Jamie and I, who have gathered friends and family from all over the country to celebrate the wedding. Let’s also make sure that the voices of Jamie’s father, who has seen growth in acceptance and acceptance in society could now do t

- deployment of resources, trainings, messages, messengers, and vehicles to help nongay and gay partners in different states and constituencies communicate transformative information and enlist additional nongay support.

For example, we need to communicate resonant portrayals that show how the exclusion of gay people from marriage has a real and detrimental impact on children, families, and society; how withholding marriage does injustice and cruel harm to lesbian and gay seniors; how the United States is lagging behind other countries; how separate and unequal treatment is wrong; and why the government should not interfere with same-sex couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in

the rights, responsibilities, and commitment of civil marriage.

Let's relate the stories of seniors and how they are denied the social safety net that comes with marriage. Let's talk about the California schoolteacher who died after 30 wonderful years teaching kids, leaving her partner unable to share her pension or Social Security death benefits—or even remain in the home they shared. Or we can discuss now, if the teacher had survived and sought to move with her partner into an assisted-living facility, they might have found themselves forbidden to live together.

Marriage discrimination wreaks real harms—kids teased because

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they don't have a "real family," a non-biological parent told he or she cannot pick up an ailing child at the school because of not being legally related, couples unable to transfer income or property between them.

Let's trace the experiences—good and bad—of the 2,000-plus couples that have joined in civil union in Vermont. Let's pick up on reports such as the 1999 Stanford University study that showed how denying marriage to same-sex couples hurts kids. Let's describe the cruel sundering of binational couples, the partners turned away at hospitals, the callous dismissal of a lifetime of love in cases such as Sharon Smith's claim for wrongful death when her partner was killed in a horrible dog mauling.

Let's also convey the strengths and vibrancy of many gay and lesbian couples such as my former clients Richard and Ron, who just celebrated their 31st anniversary, or my friends Jamie and Mark, who gathered friends and family from around the country to celebrate their wedding in a lovely church ceremony. Let's make sure that America hears the voice of Jamie's father, describing his growth in acceptance and wish that society could now do the same. Our job is to develop and deploy a strategic mix of messages that tell the diverse and real stories of our lives and love in a vocabulary of equality that reaches the middle.

Why five years?

Obviously no one can promise this breakthrough on any specific timetable, so of course I mean that this is doable within five years, but the victory may happen later...or sooner. We had victory within our reach in Hawaii years ago, only to see it blocked there because of our failure to act swiftly and strongly enough. But our opponents know the importance of sticking with the fight, and so must we. We must be prepared to ride the ups and downs. Our leaders and national organizations need to understand the lessons of the previous marriage battles as well as the lessons we should have learned from the battles over the military, federal civil rights legislation, and the Boy Scouts. Among those lessons: We cannot expect to win equality in one short burst of attention or one wartime campaign alone. Rather, we must lay the groundwork and not just try to cherry-pick the easy wins or "flavor of the month" issues.

Another lesson is that it is a mistake to define our cultural engagement and the work of our civil rights movement by what seems currently realistic or attainable in the legislatures (or the courts). For one thing, our ability to predict is often limited. I have seen us win battle after battle in state legislatures, even when our lobbyists and some of our groups said it couldn't be done; likewise, courts sometimes surprise us. More broadly, the larger work we must do

(the multimethodology peacetime campaign) should not be reduced to the bills. We do the groundwork in order to build up ammo and allies for eventual legislative battles, and in order to create the climate of receptivity to prepare and embolden the courts. Our job, of course, is not to make it easy for politicians or judges (even friendly ones) to do what they want; rather, it is to make it easier for politicians to do what we want—to do justice. We should not dumb-down our demand for equality, for possibilities open up not in some linear, tidy way but in spurts of creeping and leaping. Through our work and by aiming high, we make room for luck.

What do we want to build now?

Last year marked the end of an extraordinarily successful chapter in the history of our civil rights movement, from the attainment of "gay marriage" to the nongay response against the Boy Scouts' discrimination. Now, in this next chapter, each of us must ask what we want to create for the young gay and nongay people watching our work and finding their voice.

To me the answer is clear: Let us build not a building or a halfway house or a better ghetto but rather a movement unafraid to seek what we and all others deserve, unafraid to reach beyond itself to talk with our nongay fellow Americans. Shimmering within our reach is a legal structure of respect, inclusion, equality, and enlarged possibilities, including the freedom to marry. Let us build the new approach, partnership, tools, and entities that can reach the middle and bring it all home. ■

Formerly the marriage project director for Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund and cocounsel in the Hawaii marriage case, Wolfson has been awarded a grant to explore the next steps for winning the freedom to marry. Citing his national leadership on marriage and his appearance before the U.S. Supreme Court in Boy Scouts of America v. James Dale, the National Law Journal named Wolfson one of the 100 most influential lawyers in America.

Volunteer Diaries

"You Go, Girl!"

Kathy Wilson

I did love that speak out...and I keep that little girl's drawing on my wall by my desk at work...and it does serve to remind me that our hope is in education and the young folks...but they are taught by older folks...so the work must go on...we must keep speaking...we must keep coming out of the closet so people know we are good, contributing and regular members of society and that we should be equal. It is fear that keeps their mind's closed. Unfortunately, fear also keeps so many of us in the closet...and without speakout...we would still be peeping back at each other from behind the wall of fear...so...when she wrote, "you go girl"...she knew what she was talking about. I will always speak out...and every speaking engagement I go to proves to me that we should and need to keep going. I know one little girl who will grow up "speaking" for us"...

"Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage"

- Anais Nin

"Diversity is about difference well beyond sexuality"

Madonna Savage

Last May I had the honor of being asked to represent MSOP as a speaker at the Mt. Ararat Middle School. I had recently completed the MSOP training in April and the school's Diversity Day marked my first opportunity to speak. I was a bit nervous but later upon entering the school, I felt inspired by the positive energy. Admittedly, I went in that morning, focused on my personal perspective as a Lesbian, but in fact was reminded diversity is about differences well beyond Sexuality.

My fellow speakers and I participated in two separate sessions to one group of 7th graders followed by a group of 8th graders. We told our stories to these attentive groups and proceeded to answer their quite appropriate questions.

What impacted me the most that day, was the re-connection I felt to my time as a teenager. If only there had been a similar kind of support system and discussion about these issues when I was growing up. Maybe my personal struggle could have been easier. The peers, I eventually sought advice from, might also have been able to offer better insight.

I would like to thank MSOP for giving me a forum to share my very personal story. And I'd like to thank the students, administrators, and faculty for opening up their school to the celebration of Diversity. My involvement that day solidified for me the hope that despite all our differences, there is power in the acknowledgement of them. I drove off the school property with a renewed sense of pride in our common community, diverse as it is.

"It's up to the straight community to lead."

Jayne Lello

Why Bother? Our days are so full and our time so tight, why should anyone take the time to 'speak out' or 'walk with the one you love' in hopes of changing a negative attitude to a positive about gays? I'm straight. I work in the public school system, and I am reminded daily of the cruel and casual discrimination that is randomly thrown at invisible targets.

Mean words that are tossed around like hard balls — these are wild balls, thrown at whoever will giggle or squirm or strike or duck — words like fag, gay, queer, lesbian. These names are called out as an offense and they bounce around the room touching kids and rebounding off. The fact is, the percentages have been proven, that somewhere in the room or hall or cafeteria there is a gay, transgender or bisexual child who is cringing inside, turning inside out to not be noticed when these words come at them.

We, as a society, have asked our gay community members to disappear. We'll accept them if we don't have to 'see' them. We ask that of the adults in our society, and we ask that of the kids in our schools. We talk about health issues in schools, but the issue of sexual orientation is tainted, gray, and unclear. For a kid who hasn't figured out who they are or why they feel so different there is no place to question or talk or learn — they learn early to 'blend in' and stay out of sight. How ridiculous. I want to be one voice that sounds loud and clear whenever the name calling starts. I make it a point to catch those words as they start flying out over the room — I catch them, crumple them, and throw them in the trash where they can't hurt anyone. I speak openly saying that being gay is being strong and brave in who you are — finding yourself and being true to that self is never easy in this life — especially if you're gay. I sometimes wonder about the strength of my message when I 'speak out'. I'm straight and sometimes that isn't who an audience is expecting to see. My message to groups is simple — it's up to the straight community to speak loudly against discrimination on this issue. It's up to the straight community to lead the walks in our communities, clear the debris from the sidewalk, be on guard for the bigots in the crowd and set an example of tolerance and acceptance. It's up to us to make the playgrounds and the offices safe enough for the gay kids and adults in our communities to 'become visible'. Fighting discrimination is a community responsibility, and it's one that I take very seriously.

"I talk about the family I lost." Dan Williams

My fondest experience during a speakout session was just recently. I was moved when I saw people with tears in their eyes and others drying tears during my talk. Most of the times I have an idea of what I will be talking about and most times other I go off track when I feel the need to do so to help bring home the message. I have enjoyed all my co-partners on these assignments and the experience has shown that they have always been a good match. I strongly feel the need that these speakouts need to continue because I find them to be a healing experience for me since I talk about the family I lost after being out for nearly twenty years and now it is an issue with them. Being a speakout member has really made an impact on my life and I look forward to many more sessions. I thank MSOP for allowing me to do this so I may help others understand the real hurt and put a face on the issue.

SPEAKING OUT FOR SAFE SCHOOLS

On July 17, 2001, about 40 safe schools advocates, including 6 legislators, attended a meeting called by Rep. Ben Dudley to talk with Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD) Attorney Jennifer Levi about the possibility of developing a safe schools law for Maine. Attendees included the director of the AG's Civil Rights Team Project, a representative of the Dept. of Education, and reps from GLSEN, PFLAG, Outright, MLGPA, and Speakout. The meeting was ably facilitated by Lucky Hollander of Youth Alternatives.

Attorney Levi outlined what she saw as basic components of a Safe Schools law worth fighting for:

- includes a prohibition against discrimination and harassment
- has a "cause of action" component
- requires that schools adopt specific policies
- includes training for staff
- has some curricular stipulations

Presently there are 7 states that have enacted Safe Schools laws that address sexual orientation: VT, CA, CT, MA, MN, NJ, WI, D.C. Some of these states did so by amending anti-discrimination laws already on the books of the kind that has been twice repealed here in Maine.

While there was a consensus at this meeting that the AG's Civil Rights Teams Project is doing some great work, there was concern that it is a voluntary program in which only 150 of the state's 450 schools are participating. And for those schools not participating, what happens to the students being targeted because of their perceived sexual orientation? Don't they too deserve equal protection?

Rep. Dudley has proposed the possibility of creating a Select Legislative Committee on GLBT Youth to investigate through public hearings the situation facing sexual minority youth in schools and to come up with recommendations that could include a law. This idea is currently being discussed amongst a number of interested legislators and safe schools advocates. Let us know what you think?

WHY IS CIVIL MARRIAGE STILL A "SPECIAL RIGHT" ?

We share with you this impassioned brief by Evan Wolfson, director of the Freedom to Marry Project and one of our country's leading gay rights lawyers, that appeared in a recent issue of *The Advocate*. He makes a strong case for fighting for the freedom to marry as *the* central issue that we need to win to establish ourselves as equal citizens and he argues that we can win it in five years if we get our act together.

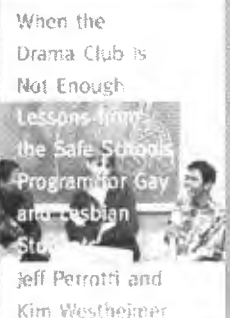
While we at Speakout have never determined what our volunteers talk about when they share personal experiences in their speakouts, we do believe it is our responsibility to support honest talk about the "whole picture," not censoring ourselves for political expediency, i.e., "if we talk about marriage, we'll never win freedom from job discrimination." Our lives are not lived in this kind of segmented, sequential manner. The current treatment of civil marriage as a "special right" of the non-gay majority is a gross denial of a basic human right accorded even to convicted murderers, but not to us. The more we talk about this, the sooner we will win this freedom for ourselves.

Another consideration: in state after state, study after study, glbt teens are found to consider, attempt, and commit suicide at twice the numbers of their non-gay peers. Harassment from their peers and isolation from their own families — "if I tell my parents, they'll reject me." — can be a crushing burden. Imagine what a difference it could make to these young people — to all young people, in fact — if they saw gay and lesbian couples marrying legally throughout this country. Nothing could lift the stigma more effectively than this and communicate powerfully that there is a future for me and my love, a future that does not require me to hide or be treated as "separate and unequal."

A MUST READ!

We highly recommend *When the Drama Club Is Not Enough: Lessons from the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students* by Jeff Perrotti and Kim Westheimer, Beacon Press. Jeff and Kim are leaders in the Safe Schools work in Massachusetts and have made a terrific contribution with this book.

You can get the book from Speakout for \$24.00 (includes shipping).



Maine Speakout Project

P.O. Box 15303

Portland, Maine 04112-5303

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WALK WITH THE ONES YOU
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Safe Schools ♥ Safe Streets
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