

LONDON CALLING

A Vermonter Registers Her Lesbian Partnership in England's Capital

BY NAT MICHAEL

I so clearly remember my pen hovering over that line on the exquisitely crisp white and red document – an official, officious looking sheet of paper on a polished wood surface. All the moments, days, years of ‘how long?’ crystallized into this one perfect timespan of one breath. One filling of lungs in my chest.

And I could not – not – remember how to spell my own name.

What was this?! A Partnership Registry. The Greater London Authority at Romney House in London. Gloria's signature was there already in neat, head-girl lettering on the line above where mine was to go. Above hers – Ken Livingstone's, Mayor of London, the Prog mayor who had just instituted this process four months before. I was acutely aware – on some removed plane – of Gloria on one side and the Registrar on the other. The room was filled with family, family of the heart, friends, co-workers. Not a sound.

How long had we waited for this one oh-so-perfect moment? It wasn't the realization of love. Not alone. Or doubts. None of those. I had decided I would marry this lovely Englishwomyn within hours of setting eyes on her. Poor thing. She never stood a chance. And our families – biological and of the heart – accepting-caring-making this all possible.

What else besides the surge of love was making my fingers tremble, my mind stand still? Years of fighting. No other way to put it. Fighting to be recognized as humans on the same earth. To be removed from medical files as a ‘disorder.’ To keep our homes, our families, our jobs, our babies, our lives. Marches, exposure, letters, conferences, risks, liaisons with police, who were never bastions of civil rights. Gay-straight alliances in schools, diversity weeks, safe spaces and ‘Ally’ stickers.

News from friends in Europe and elsewhere. Who's granting rights now? Sweden? Canada? Britain fights Thatcher's section 28.

Legislative hearings in Montpelier. Three years of waiting it out because three couples wanted what any serial killer on death row was entitled to – if he was straight – his right to marry! Watching as out-of-state license plates began appearing: a Florida plate declared ‘JESUS.’ He wasn't. The legislative hearings my son and I went to. The hearing where the front door swung open during the proceedings, bringing in gusts of cold and snow and the words of the bishop on the steps of the capitol. He wasn't Jesus, either.

My name was called to testify. To hold forth. How to put any of this into words they could under-

Two womyn. From two places on earth where we can be recognized as full humans.



Writer Nat Michael

stand. I sat before the beleaguered panel. ‘Please. Please do something.’

I clutched the official immigration pictures of my grandparents. Their government had declared them to be less-than-desirable humans. So I was born in NYC. My son, who fought alongside brave classmates to bring a GSA to their Jericho high school and diversity week for the students without a christian deprogrammer for the queer ones, is named for my grandfather – his great-grandparents. They were so proud to fly the American flag. Grandfather, who worked the Brooklyn Navy yards during the war. Grandma, who rescued her husband from a Russian prison and smuggled them out. How, I don't know. Even in NY – in her own kitchen – stirring a pot on the stove, she would not tell. No one had been left in grandfather's family. Out of her fourteen, 4 lived. Who knew if they would come again? And break down the door that the flag waved over? All of us at this hearing can stop it. ‘Please. Do something.’

And the fight went on. How goes your struggle? More news from abroad. Germany has granted rights? How is that little state of

Vermont doing? The votes. First vote. Then ... final vote. The speaker breaks his gavel. The first – the only – state in America. Rainbow flags everywhere. Stars and Stripes at the head of the Pride Day march leading off. A rainbow flag flies over the front door of Grandma and Grandfather's granddaughter and great grandson. How Amazing!

More news. London. Now the only place a queer couple in England can get ‘married.’ How Amazing!

And there we stood: Gloria, the love of my life – and me. Two womyn. From two places on earth where we can be recognized as full humans. And my fingers moved and I scribbled my name under Gloria's and Ken's and the sweet Registrar added her name beneath mine, pressed the official seal of London in the right hand corner of that exquisitely crisp red and white sheet of paper – and smiled at us.

Bloody Amazing! ▼

Nat Michael conducts her long-distance relationship from Underhill.

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