HUMAN RIGHTS

SK court rules for gays

Nathaniel Christopher

SASKATCHEWAN'S JUSTICE MINISTER, Don Morgan, told the province's marriage commissioners on Jan 18 that they must conduct same-sex marriages, resign or be fired.

Morgan issued the directive a week after the province's highest court unanimously ruled that proposed legislation allowing commissioners to refuse to marry gay couples for religious reasons is unconstitutional.

"I don't have a reason on earth to resign," says Larry Bjerland of Rose Valley, one of three marriage commissioners listed as intervenors in the case. He refuses to marry same-sex couples on religious grounds.

"There's only one judge that I'm concerned with, and that's the Almighty," he says.

Marriage commissioners cannot pick and choose duties to conform to their religious beliefs, Saskatchewan's Court of Appeal ruled.

The matter stems back to 2005 when Regina marriage commissioner Orville Nichols refused to marry a same-sex couple because to do so would conflict with his religious beliefs. The couple filed a complaint to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Tribunal, which ruled in their favour in 2008. Nichols appealed, but in 2009 the Court of Queen's Bench upheld the tribunal's ruling.

For the full story, check out **xtra.ca**

MOURN AND MOVE ON

Lessons from a brief affair

Ask the Expert
Dr Pega Ren

Dear Dr Ren,

I seem to be stuck in a well of despair and hope you can help me find some peace.

I am in my 40s, financially secure and healthy. My parents did me no favours growing up, but I've found a small and stable support system.

I don't label myself because I'm not much interested in sex, and I have never been in what you would call a relationship.

Several years ago, I met Marco. He was such a free spirit, and I admired his intelligence and commitment to greater goals. He liked staying with me, and, though he said he was straight, we occasionally played with each other sexually. I fell in love for the first time.

Marco had very high ideals and would get easily irritated when I was insensitive. I became a vegetarian and sold my car, but still he snapped at me over little things like prepackaged foods. I couldn't really argue, because I knew he was right. That was the only problem. Otherwise, I had never been happier.

Then Marco said he was compelled to go to Haiti after the earthquake. I couldn't go with him because of my job. I lent him the money and thought he'd be back in a month or two. I never heard from him again.

I tried and tried to find him but couldn't. Things in Haiti were chaos. I don't know what happened to him.

Have I been the biggest fool ever? Or should I be grieving the loss of the greatest love of my life? What do I do now?

Wondering

Small or Smart,

What a story! We've just observed the one–year anniversary of that terrible earthquake in Haiti. News clips show that poverty and destruction still rule.

Could Marco have been caught in an aftershock? Yes. Could he have fallen victim to disease or violence? Yes. Might he have taken your money and flown to Mexico or Hawaii? Yes again.

You don't know what happened to Marco and probably never will. That fact alone makes the resolution of your grief for his loss convoluted and protracted.

Regardless, though, you must get on with it. If Marco arrives at your door like a long lost cat some time in the future, you can rejoice and jovially retell your friends his interesting story. In the meantime, you have your own real life to tend.

I think you have a number of valuable lessons to learn from what appears to be a fairly brief affair with this man. Let's capitalize on those.

First, you got to your 40s before you allowed anyone into your heart. Perhaps your withholding (?) family taught you that trust and intimacy were dangerous. Perhaps you are paralyzed by shyness or anxiety in romantic situations. Regardless, something in you let go and welcomed Marco, a man who challenged your values and living habits.

This is an advantageous time to examine how and why you were ready to risk that involvement. You now know that you are sexually attracted to (at least) men and that you can sustain a relationship. Build on that experience and experiment in social situations with others. Trust this new knowledge to find friendships and romances with others that may be better suited to who you really are.

It is typical when we start to date that we adopt the traits of whomever we are smitten with (eg becoming vegetarian). That gets old quickly as we develop our own confidence. Take time now to determine who you are and what you want in a companion. Decide what you will compromise on and what you will not. And do not lend your lovers money!

There were a number of hints in your letter of your subservient position in your relationship with Marco. You mentioned that "he liked staying with me" and "I couldn't really argue, because I knew he was right." I wonder if the two of you were living together. Was that because you were paying the rent?

Also, it is not an equal relationship when one partner feels he cannot argue because his choices are not "right." Good relationships account for and even celebrate difference. Yours had one "right" (Marco's) and one "wrong" (yours) answer. This would have led to resentment eventually.

You ask if you've been a fool. Maybe. You also ask if you "should" be grieving his loss. How not? He awakened in you an awareness of caring, commitment and sexuality previously unknown to you. Regardless of who or what Marco was, this awareness was his priceless gift to you.

Mourn his loss, but do it quickly. Instead, spend your time revelling in the knowledge of yourself as someone capable of connection and caring. Pump up your self-esteem and take inventory of what is important to you. Explore your sexual potential along with your social possibilities.

Do *not* credit Marco with what is rightfully yours: a blossoming sense of willingness to risk, courage to trust and grow close, interest in sexual experimentation and identification.

Those are yours. You've earned them. Keep growing them!

Got a question for Dr Ren?
asktheexpert@xtra.ca

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