

Topic: Fighting H8

Abstract: The fear campaign staged against marriage equality in California during 2008 was bursting with money. The very character of the state had been hijacked by a religious agenda, apathetic to the cause of equality for all, especially the LGBT community. Proposition 8 had passed due to the very successful brainwashing of the public by the members heading this fight to exclude certain individuals from the right to marry their betrothal. An utter slap in the face, really. Never in the history of time has a group of peoples' rights been voted on by the general public in a true democracy. In a communist state maybe, but not in a democracy. This assault on our democracy is what brought me into this fight for marriage equality; before my very eyes I was seeing the deterioration of our democracy, crumbling at its core. Regardless of the fact that I am a gay Californian, thus my personal freedoms were under attack, my inducement into this struggle was broader than anything personal. An entire community's rights were at stake and being threatened by a tyrant that was utilizing their religious beliefs as a scapegoat for all the hatred and absolute lies being spewed like a relentless, dogmatic geyser. The truth was enough for me, and the passing of prop H8 motivated me to take action. I was to be apart of, and submit my full devotion to the new civil rights movement of the 21st century.

Key Words: San Francisco, Prop 8, LGBT Community, California, marriage equality, ballot box, discriminatory, hate, hope.

It was a beautiful, cloudless morning in early November 2008. The unseasonably warm weather in the city felt contrary to the undaunted spirit of the crowd and the energetic aura of the protest that I was about to be a part of. I was in San Francisco, taking part in a movement that was rippling across the country after the news of Proposition 8 being passed in California a week earlier. The news of the discriminatory bill passing was a shock to all in the LGBT community and their straight allies; the passage of a bill confirming that LGBT Californians were indeed considered second-class citizens. It was a shock in large part because during this time in age, in California nonetheless, we thought it to be unfathomable to see the day that our equality would be

denied to us by our own neighbors. We thought of California to be the leader in everything progressive in the country. We thought we were going to take a leap forward, but instead we were shoved a step back. We had run a passionate campaign promoting the importance of equality and fairness for all Californians, our brothers, sisters, parents, friends, and fellow citizens. But the opposition had the ability to throw so much money into its fear campaign, that we lost the hearts and rationale of our fellow Californians (about 52% of the vote supported Prop. 8, hardly a substantial margin). On this day in San Francisco amidst the steps of city hall, I felt that due to this verdict we were finally on the cusp of something grand, something uprising. A group of people had their very rights voted on by their fellow citizens. It captivated people all over the world. The passing of Prop 8 had summoned attention to an issue that was very important and dear to all of us rallying this morning... marriage equality. This was the first time in California's history that an issue as fundamentally important as marriage equality was put in the ballot box and voted on by the general population, stigmatizing a group of people in the process. This bigoted bill that is completely contradictory to democracy and undermining to the U.S. constitution was to become law. How on earth could this be? It was now an affirmation, at least in my mind, that this movement and the causes thereof would ignite a debate like never before, this defeat would rally the community and give birth to a civil fighting force that would inevitably lead us to victory.

People from all walks of life attended the protest. Gay parents with their children, older gay couples that had been with each other for many years with the hope to one day be legally married. There were heterosexual people, family members of LGBT citizens and committed community members all believing in the same cause, which was equality

for all. There were prominent gay and straight speakers from the area and organizers in the movement rallying the crowd, and people everywhere with signs and banners displaying outrage over the passing of Prop 8. Signs and banners reading “Did you cast a ballot, or a stone?” and “Prop 8 is embarrassing, shame on you California!” There was a little blonde toddler holding a sign reading “I love my two daddies.” There was also a lesbian couple holding hands, each of them wearing a full-bodied vagina costume complete with wedding rings and veils, amongst other clever costumes in the crowd. There were many dressed in formal wedding attire, gender-benders if you will. Men wearing wedding dresses and women wearing tuxedos. There were thousands of people at city hall, and the overall feel of the atmosphere here and now was betrayal. A betrayal by the state government and also a betrayal by fellow Californians. I attended the rally with my uncle, a San Francisco native, each of us carrying signs and wearing buttons in support of marriage equality. My sign read “Religion has no place in law.” My uncle’s sign playing on the preamble to the U.S. constitution “We ARE the people...”

There were many that were agitated by the religious backing of Prop 8, the signs and banners thereof were evident, however I saw a good number of people who noted in their signs and banners that they’re part of a church congregation that is standing up for marriage equality. There were even good portions of entire church congregations from all over the state that came to support the cause for equality, signifying that this was not simply a black and white fight. It was much more grey than the opposition would like to believe, assuming that people of religious denomination would automatically fall in line with the “h8ters.” Wrong. This was the first organized demonstration after Prop 8 had been passed. And with an issue as important as marriage, something as personal as

marriage, you could feel the unwavering passion in the crowd. An energy with a ton of momentum behind it. We will be fighting until the very end, until LGBT rights and marriage equality have been sanctioned and solidified into the law books.

There were many protests that month in response to the passing of Prop 8. I had also been apart of a march that began at city hall, and ended in the Castro one chilly Friday evening a couple weeks after the initial protest at city hall. This time the mood of the crowd was more egregious. We'd been so riled up from the speakers at city hall, that we took to the streets. We marched right onto Market Street, blocking rush hour traffic and halting buses and streetcars, shouting in unison "What do we want? Equality! When do we want it? Now!" Protesters had foghorns and whistles, drums and other musical instruments. Making as much noise as possible, so much noise that would even drown out the traffic honking angrily at us. We didn't care. We were angry too, and figured a little traffic jam is nothing compared to having your rights stripped away from you. And this was the general attitude of the crowd. We would not be oppressed and kept silent. We marched up Market Street, and the energy in the air felt almost combustible. I had never taken part in a protest that took to the streets and had riot police following behind along with multiple police helicopters flying overhead. It was in a way very exciting. Fellow Californians and the rest of the world would surely see our outcry now, and they will continue to see it with the undying momentum from these people in the movement. We marched past Octavia Street, blocking the on-off ramps to the freeway. From here, several blocks down looking to the west you could see the enormous rainbow flag located at the intersection of Castro and Market flailing in the wind. I remember staring at it from a far, and feeling a great deal of pride and honor. That image of the many protesters out

ahead of me, marching toward that colorful flag flying in the distance silhouetted against Twin Peaks during an orange and burgundy dusk in early winter. It was during that moment I realized that I myself was making history; we all were making history together. We knew we were going to be on the right side of history, it was a fight for and about the people. History always depicts social movements for human rights in a favorable manner.

We pressed on until we hit the intersection of Castro and Market, forming a big blob in the center and spilling onto the surrounding streets continuing to block traffic. The police tried to keep us moving so as to clear the streets for traffic, but we resisted. We all sat down on the street, knowing full well the police couldn't touch us. We were far too grand in numbers for them to even make a dent in the crowd. I sat in a crosswalk along with many others, happily blocking traffic, anxious to get our message across. As I looked around at all the different, determined faces, I knew that this would only be the beginning of a long, strenuous fight. But I felt so privileged that I was able to be a part of this movement in San Francisco, home of the gay rights movement (excluding Stonewall in NYC during the summer of 69') and this was happening in my time. Not to mention it pertained directly to me. I wasn't reading about this in a history book, I was actually apart of it.

It had seemed to me in that moment that I personally understood the civil rights movements of the past in this country, such as the African-American civil rights movements and the Women's Suffrage movement. Except this particular civil rights movement that I was now apart of carried a different context. It wasn't about sex or skin color, this time it was about something as private and personal as sexual orientation and the freedom to marry whomever you chose regardless of the sex. The energy was

different, yet familiar to all other civil rights movements of the past. In speaking with others sitting with me in the crosswalk, we all concurred that it was so outrageous to think that we would still be having a battle over civil rights in the year 2008. We occupied the intersection for several hours into the late night, determined as ever to get our message out. This is our hope.