Opinion: Taking pride in the court’s decision

By Susan Wood

California Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, who confirmed with *Lake Tahoe News* on Friday that he plans to run for governor of the state, is one of a few people I sought to connect with after the U.S. Supreme Court’s epic decision that paves the way for federal recognition of gay marriage.

The long struggle has commanded undaunted dedication amid adversity from certain brave activists.



Gavin Newsom – a crusader to recognize gay marriage before it was politically correct. Photo/Kathryn Reed

As San Francisco mayor, Newsom bucked his party and his own father when he decided in February 2004 to defiantly go against state statutes in issuing marriage licenses through the county clerk’s office to gay and lesbian couples. More than 4,000 licenses were issued. Newsom was chastised by the right and the left.

What motivated him?

It was when President George W. Bush vowed to seek a constitutional amendment to bar same sex marriages in the United States at his State of the Union address.

“I was there listening to this message,” Newsom told *Lake Tahoe News* on June 26.

We spoke as I was driving to the Bay Area to attend LGBT night at AT&T Park. Newsom had a sense of vigilance to his tone. This was no ordinary chat. I pulled over, and he got personal.

He said he heard a Bush supporter talk about “the homosexual” with such a grimaced venom that it was too much to sit idly by.

“It made me sick,” he said. “It was literally that moment that triggered me to do something about this.”

It was what the Jesuits taught him: “We have many parts and one body. When one part suffers, it all suffers.”

Newsom attended Santa Clara University, a Jesuit college.

“We believe in social justice. You are who you are the way God created you,” he said.

Take those convictions and blend them with Newsom’s father’s influence and you have the modern-day California activist. His father, William Newsom, is a retired state appeals court judge.

For years the younger statesman could not get his father on board to support his pivotal exercise in the gay rights movement.

It was when the Newsoms attended an Auburn Democratic Club fundraiser that the father publicly stated he “finally came around to my point of view.”

“He never told me,” Newsom said.

Activism often comes with surprises.

Although Newsom cautioned the opposition is motivated to fight back because “we’re not going to stop homophobia, we’re not going to stop discrimination,” Friday’s landmark ruling was poignant for the state official as what he deems “a historic footnote.”

“I never thought I’d be alive to see this day, and not that I expected to die young,” Newsom said.

I had thought the same thing.

Newsom especially didn’t expect it in 2004 when he pushed open the floodgates, declaring four years later: “It’s inevitable. It’s going to happen whether you like it or not.”

The statement became a rallying cry for the opposition.

“I’m someone who’s willing to take a risk,” he said.

It paid off. Today he should be one of the most celebrated dignitaries in San Francisco’s Gay Pride Parade.

I’ve attended many of these parades over the years. Some decades more than others. At no other time has one become more important to me.



Susan Wood never thought in her lifetime that gay

marriage would be legal in the United States. Photo/Kathryn Reed

I volunteered to defeat the Briggs Initiative that would have fired teachers for coming out. I marched for equality in Sacramento. I assisted the Municipal Elections Committee in Los Angeles as a political activist group. I wrote story after story about the beginning of the AIDS crisis when I lived in Palm Springs and Los Angeles. I watched friends die of the disease. Then, I watched their names unfolding in a quilt large enough to take up the entire UCLA auditorium.

I think of these people now. How they would have loved to see this progress in humanity. Many didn't see it from their own families before they died. They still held their heads high with dignity. In particular, I remember my friend Vince caring for Chris as his health diminished. Then, Vince succumbed not even considering that he could have lived out his last years having fun instead of being a caregiver.

Now that's love. And love will always prevail.

As I ponder the argument against gay marriage being over as states are now mandated by the federal government to get on the right side of history, I wonder how my love hinders another.

I am in no position to marry at this state of my life. But that's not the point. The point is the option is there. And I have loved someone enough to call it a marriage. For all my gay friends who are married, they can go to any state and have their union be legitimate, just as it always has been for my heterosexual friends.

If any marriage serves as an obstacle to yours, you have a bigger problem in the relationship than normal insecurity.

Marriage – gay or straight – it's finally all the same.