

Politics of the Heart / La politique du coeur

(68 minutes, © December 2005, available in French and English versions)

Short Description

Based in Quebec, Politics of the Heart is an moving portrait of lesbian and gay families as well as a powerful story of how they organized out of conditions of violence and discrimination to win recognition of their relationships, families and parenting rights. As a result of their work the Quebec National Assembly voted unanimously to extend the same parenting rights to homoparental families as heterosexual parents, in 2002. Woven into the story is also the landmark case in Quebec that broke the ban against same sex marriage, making Quebec the third province in Canada to recognize equal marriage.

Synopsis

In a great majority of societies, to give parenting recognition to a couple creates the possibility of this couple perpetuating itself. When you deny homosexuals filiation rights you deny their right to participate in human history. And what is unique is that in Quebec, we gained it before marriage.

Irène Demczuk, Politics of the Heart

Politics of the Heart is a moving portrait of lesbian and gay families who re-shaped the cultural and political landscape of Quebec by fighting for recognition of their relationships and their families. Anchoring this unique story is an eloquent and passionate account by long time activist, Irène Demczuk. (coordinator of the coalition for recognition of same sex couples / la coalition pour la reconnaissance des conjoints et conjointes de même sexe.)

By the early 1990's there was little recognition of lesbian and gay relationships in Quebec. A series of murders of gay men, 1200 deaths from AIDS, and shocking incidences of police violence against gays and lesbians, finally pushed the Quebec Human Rights Commission to do an enquiry into violence and discrimination against gays and lesbians. The resulting report, published in May 1994, made 41 recommendations ranging from stopping violence to recommendations for relationship

recognition and same sex marriage. Against this background of violence and discrimination, Politics of the Heart takes us into the lives of the key protagonists who challenged these conditions and won both same sex marriage and parenting rights for lesbian and gay families.

In 1998, Michael Hendricks & René Leboeuf, who had been active in a committee against violence and ACT-UP throughout the 1990's, launched a case for the right to marry, the first such legal challenge in Canada. That same year, Mona Greenbaum and Nicole Paquette founded the Lesbian Mothers Association and in 1999 they launched a case to have Nicole recognized as a parent of their children. By 2001, the Lesbian Mothers Association had grown to some 700 members.

In 2001, when Justice Minister Paul Bégin introduced a draft bill on Civil Union for same sex couples, the lesbian and gay community in Quebec responded by denouncing the failure of the bill to include parenting rights and the government's on-going opposition to same sex marriage. The result was an agreement from M. Bégin to hold a Parliamentary Commission to hear testimonials from members of the lesbian and gay community. And the rest is history. The moment of truth came when three teenagers, the children of lesbian and gay parents told the parliamentarians of their love for their parents and what it was like to be raised by a parent considered by society to be 'abnormal'. Their testimonials moved the legislators to tears.

When they finished (their testimony) and I knew that it is over, the first thing that happens is that the Chair says: Minister, do you have any questions? And for thirty seconds I'm thinking, what am I going to say? Am I going to be able to speak... just speak, physically? And, I look around... there's tears in the eyes of the representatives. Everyone's having a hard time. And I realize that everyone is completely turned inside out. An unforgettable moment of an unqualified beauty. Three beautiful, intelligent, young people, who came to tell us this. Even the most hard-nosed were affected, even those who were opposed.

Paul Bégin Politics of the Heart

In 2002, the Quebec National Assembly voted unanimously and without abstentions to re-write the Civil Code of Quebec to extend full parenting rights to lesbian and gay couples, while lesbian mothers and their children applauded and cheered from the balcony. Two years later, Michael and René won their landmark case, making Quebec the third province in Canada to recognize same sex marriage. They marked their thirtieth year together by getting married on April 1st, 2004.

Dedicated to Léo and Simon Paquette-Greenbaum and Georgia & Théo Barratt-Lamey and a future when all children of lesbian and gay parents have the same rights as other children.

Nancy Nicol, Producer / Director

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