

Arthur Lubow: Getting to a Next Carnegie Hall Guy Trebay: Krumping Busts a Move

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## What's the Movement to Outlaw Gay Marriage *Really* About?

(Big Hint: It's Not Just About Marriage)

By **Russell Shorto**

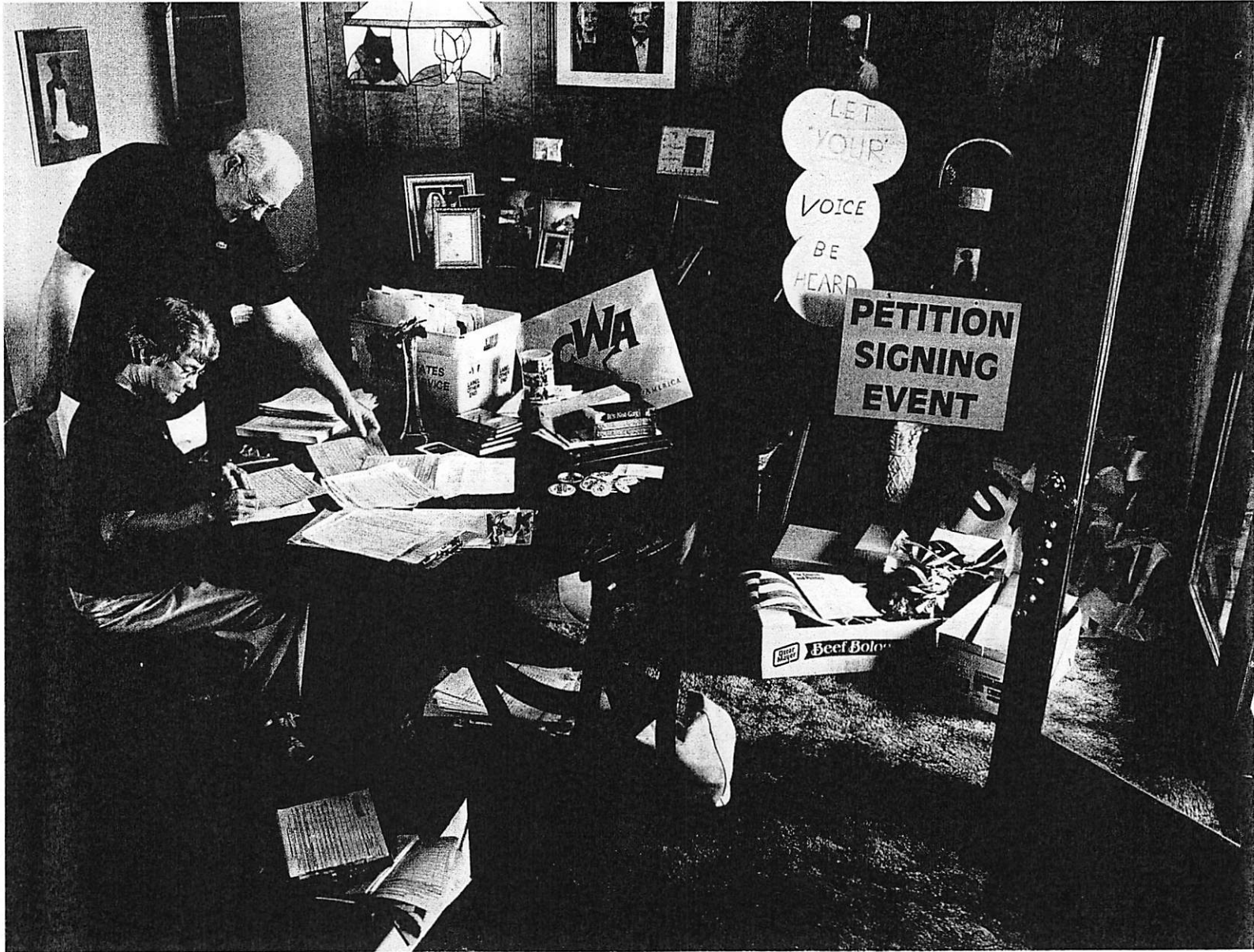
# What's Their Real Problem With Gay Marriage?

Maryland's anti-gay-marriage  
crusaders share this with organizers nationwide:  
They say they are fighting a disease.

**By Russell Shorto**  
Photographs by Ben Stechschulte

*It's the Gay Part*

One of two display cases enshrining traditional marriage at the Family Research Council. The other addresses the groom's side of the aisle.



### Grass-Roots Opposition

Jim and Evalena Gray have converted their basement into action central.

**T**he small but grandiose building at the corner of Eighth and G Streets NW in Washington, tucked directly behind the National Portrait Gallery, holds its own in a city packed with monumental architecture. You step into the lobby and automatically look around for a plaque, figuring that with its dark wood paneling and marble columns, this must be the onetime home of Rutherford B. Hayes or some other historical personage heavy with Victorian-era dignity. As it turns out, the structure, with its architectural signals of tradition and power, was built in 1996 for its tenant: the Family Research Council, the conservative public policy center.

In the gift shop just off the lobby — where you can buy research-council thermoses and paperweights and the latest titles by Peggy Noonan, Alan Keyes, John Ashcroft and Pat Buchanan — sits one of Washington's most unusual museum displays. Moms and dads who are planning to take the kids to the nation's capital this summer for an infusion of American history might want to add it to their itinerary, since it carries the lesson up to the present and right into their own living rooms. Beneath a large wall-mounted plaque emblazoned with the group's slogan — Defending Fam-

ily, Faith and Freedom — and flanking a rather ferocious-looking American eagle statue are two large, museum-quality glass cases. The one on the left contains a complete groom's outfit — tux, tie, fluffy shirt — and the one on the right holds a bridal gown and all the trimmings, right down to the dried bouquet. Color snapshots of happy wedding parties festoon both display cases, and the back wall of the bridal unit features verses from the book of Genesis, King James version:

*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. . . .*

*And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.*

*And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*

*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

This shrine to marriage as a heterosexual, Judeo-Christian institution is a totem of conservative Christianity's mighty political wing and a flag marking its territorial gains in what its leaders see as a decisive battle in the culture war. In May 2003 the heads of 26 conservative organizations, including the Family Research Council, formed an entity, which they called the Arlington Group, to pool resources and come up with a combined strategy for fighting the forces of secularism. They thought it would be an amorphous battle, with many fronts. But just a month later the United States Supreme Court struck down a Texas law that had declared consenting homosexual sex illegal. Gay rights groups saw the Lawrence v. Texas ruling as a watershed: an endorsement, at the federal level, of homosexuality itself. So did the conservative leaders. Then in November of that year came the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling that gave same-sex couples in the state the right to marry.

The effect of this one-two punch, which was heightened by the mayor of San Francisco's granting of same-sex marriage licenses the following February, was galvanizing for the Arlington Group members. The nebulous culture war instantly focused into a single issue. Since the ultimate goal of Arlington's member organizations is an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would define marriage as a heterosexual union, they formed another entity, the Marriage Amendment Project, to spearhead this mission. The Family Research Council offered space in its building for the project, and as an expression of the enthusiasm of the research-council staff for the initiative, the manager of the gift shop came up with the idea of the shrine to marriage, which comprises real-life wedding memorabilia donated by employees.

The exhibit itself could very likely serve as a cultural litmus test. Perhaps half the population would see the disembodied wedding outfits preserved in glass cases and guarded by a wooden eagle as bizarre, even lurid, while for the other half the display would trip different signifiers: sanctity, defiance, determination. On so many fronts that is where we are as a nation these days: divided, clearly and seemingly unbridgeably, in sensibility, values, foundations, even sense of humor.

As hot-button issues go, however, gay marriage probably isn't a classic divide. For one thing, the country is fairly decisively opposed to it. The vote last November — all 11 states that had anti-gay-marriage amendments to their state constitutions on the ballot saw those amendments pass — made clear that most people are not comfortable with the idea of extending the marriage franchise to same-sex pairings. And polls on the issue reinforce the point. Only about a quarter of voters surveyed in the national exit poll following the election favored same-sex marriage, and interestingly enough, only about half of gay and bisexual voters did.

People have given pollsters many different reasons for their opposition to gay marriage. Some base their feelings on what you might call linguistic grounds: a belief that the definition of the word "marriage" necessarily involves one person from each sex. Others say that it would be bad for children or that the purpose of marriage is to procreate or that they just don't agree with the idea. Then there is the compromise position. In April, Connecticut passed a law recognizing same-sex civil unions, which have been legal in Vermont for five years. The fact that civil unions, as well as efforts to extend specific rights and benefits to gay couples, receive significant support in polls suggests that many who object to gay marriage nevertheless see an underlying civil rights issue.

But as I learned spending time among the cultural conservatives who are leading the anti-gay-marriage charge, they have their own reasons for doing so, which are based on their reading of the Bible, their views about both homosexuality and the institution of marriage and the political force behind the issue. In the words of Gary Bauer, president of American Values — one of what is now a total of 61 organizations under the Arlington Group banner, with a combined membership of 60 million — gay mar-

riage is "the new abortion." He meant that, as with abortion, conservatives see gay marriage as a culture-altering change being implemented by judicial fiat. But gay marriage is also the new abortion in that it is for groups like Bauer's a base-energizing and fund-raising issue of tremendous power.

During last year's election campaign, at the same time that he was calling for a federal constitutional amendment to outlaw gay marriage, President Bush was giving a moderate sheen to the position of the conservative Christians with whom he is closely allied. As he said in his final debate with John Kerry, responding to a question about homosexuality: "I do know that we have a choice to make in America and that is to treat people with tolerance and respect and dignity. It's important that we do that. And I also know in a free society, consenting adults can live the way they want to live. And that's to be honored."

But for the anti-gay-marriage activists, homosexuality is something to be fought, not tolerated or respected. I found no one among the people on the ground who are leading the anti-gay-marriage cause who said in essence: "I have nothing against homosexuality. I just don't believe gays should be allowed to marry." Rather, their passion comes from their conviction that homosexuality is a sin, is immoral, harms children and spreads disease. Not only that, but they see homosexuality itself as a kind of disease, one that afflicts not only individuals but also society at large and that shares one of the prominent features of a disease: it seeks to spread itself.

'People feel liberated,'  
said Robert Knight  
of Concerned Women for  
America. 'They feel like  
we don't have to go along  
with this stuff anymore.'

YOU COULD MAKE an argument that the center of the opposition to gay marriage is not in Washington but 40 miles away, in a ranch house in Catonsville, Md., a suburb of Baltimore. Laura and Dave Clark live there with their four children. The house is tucked cozily into the back of a cul-de-sac in a 1970's housing development. Inside, it is wall-to-wall carpeting and hand-me-down furnishings.

Snapshots of the kids cover the refrigerator door. The couple's wedding album is prominently displayed on a table in the living room. Dave works for the federal government. Laura home-schools the 7-year-old twins, Grace and Cole, while also looking after 5-year-old Kayla and 3-year-old Jacob.

In mid-May, on one of the first really warm days of the year in the East, I sat on the screened-in back porch with the Clarks. The lawn we looked out on had plenty of room to play, but all four kids preferred to be on the porch, riding tricycles and training-wheeled bicycles in a tight circle around the adults, bashing into one another, performing for their parents and the visitor. Family trips, home-schooling, Bible school, gymnastics classes: the conversation was decidedly kid-centric. "At the stage of life we're in, it's all about family," Dave said.

It was because of Laura that I had first come to know the Clarks a couple of months earlier. She is 33 and was born and raised in the area. After high school she went to nearby Towson State to study accounting. She dropped out before getting her degree, but not before finding Christ through the college youth ministry. She met Dave at around that time, and they married when she was 20.

Laura tends to wear a plain and determined expression, eyes heavy-lidded but face wide, giving an effect that could be bewilderment, outrage or concentration. The more time I spent with her, the more apparent it became that her quiet matter-of-factness is rooted in the deep satisfaction she says she feels in her roles as mother and housewife and in the clarity of her worldview. She describes herself as an introvert, and while she has long held a well of Christian convictions, she said, "for most of my life, until about two years ago, I was wishy-washy, a people pleaser." Around that time, the pastor of her nondenominational evangelical church began a series of pulpit seminars, which had a profound impact on her. "One was the Kingdom Assignment," she said. "You volunteer to do it. The church gives each person who signs up \$100 to invest. The challenge is to

do something God-honoring with it. Then you come back and give a presentation in front of the church and tell people what you did and what you learned."

Laura chose to buy copies of the Christian inspirational book "Traveling Light for Mothers" and give them to mothers she met. "I never liked public speaking," she said, "so the whole thing was a challenge for me." The other event was a series of sermons based on the best-selling Christian book "The Purpose-Driven Life." "It really helped me to clarify things," she said. "I learned that God has a purpose for me. I used to see things as separate. But everything is connected: my life, my family, society. Before, I didn't want to rock the boat. Now I don't mind rocking the boat, as long as it's based on truth."

Not long after this period in which she came to feel a new sense of purpose, Laura read about the pro-gay-marriage action in Massachusetts, and she found herself e-mailing news articles about it to friends. She looked at the development not as an effort by members of a minority to win rights that others have long enjoyed but as an attack on society's most basic institution by forces bent on creating an amoral, anything-goes culture. "The gay activists are trying to redefine what marriage has been basically since the beginning of time and on every continent," she said. "My concern is for the children — for the future."

She believed that what happened in Massachusetts could happen in Maryland. "My first reaction was frustration," she said; "knowing that this is a legislative issue and the court in Massachusetts had overstepped their bounds." Laura had never been an activist before, but now she wanted to get involved, so she contacted the national headquarters of the Family Research Council, and they put her in touch with a local group called the Family Protection Lobby, which has monitored state legislation from a conservative Christian perspective since 1980. She talked with Doug Stiegler, a retired plumbing contractor turned Christian missionary, who has been head of the Family Protection Lobby since 1993. Stiegler began to initiate her into the ways of the state government.

"We had bills in our State Legislature last year to protect marriage," Laura said. "I didn't understand why they didn't go through, especially when polls show people in this state and in the country overwhelmingly support traditional marriage." With Stiegler's encouragement, Laura got in her car one day and drove to Annapolis, where there was a bill before the Legislature that would give domestic partners in Maryland the right to make medical decisions for each other. She saw it as a back-door attempt to get government authorization of gay unions, and with the help of an aide to a conservative state legislator, she found herself testifying against it. "I didn't realize you could testify as a citizen," she said. "I thought you had to be an expert. So I gave several reasons why I opposed this legislation: as a taxpayer, as a citizen, as a mom and as a person of faith."

A few months later, the whole matter became more immediate and pressing when she read that nine same-sex couples, assisted by the American Civil Liberties Union and a statewide gay rights group, Equality Maryland, had filed a lawsuit against the state, asking that a 1973 law defining marriage as between a man and a woman be declared unconstitutional. Laura told Stiegler she wanted to do more, and they worked out a volunteer position for her at the Family Protection Lobby that is an extension of the e-mail alerts she had sent to friends. Her job for the organization is to troll the Internet for news articles and developments, nationally and in the state, that have to do with same-sex marriage and other issues of

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*Russell Shorto, a contributing writer and the author of "The Island at the Center of the World," last wrote for the magazine about religion in the workplace.*

concern to the group, like abortion, and then compile them into a newsletter that is e-mailed to members. Her main sources include the Web sites of The Washington Times and the Family Research Council, as well as the Drudge Report. "It works out really great because I can do it from home, while I'm with the kids," she said.

I SAY THAT Laura Clark could be considered a power center for the opposition to gay marriage because the energy, zeal and legwork on that side come from people like her. The conservative leaders may have as an ultimate goal an amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but the fact that the Marriage Amendment Project in Washington has a staff of two shows that they don't put much stock in that coming to pass anytime soon. Instead, the game is being played out at the state level, so that it is actually a series of games, each with its own dynamic. The various conservative Christian groups leading the anti-gay-marriage charge cooperate in many ways. Local groups with ties to one of the big national organizations may meet as events are heating up in their state. "Sometimes we have coordinated attacks," said Michael Bowman, the director of state legislative relations for Concerned Women for America, a public policy organization based on biblical principles that was founded by Beverly LaHaye, who is married to the best-selling Christian writer Tim LaHaye. "Our local person will be in touch with the Catholic Conference person or with Focus on the Family. They'll create e-mail loops, decide when to hit the pavement." Gay marriage is providing unparalleled momentum for this kind of linkage, Bowman added: "The marriage issue is waking up alliances that never existed. Abortion was never like this."

On April 5, Kansas became the 18th state to vote to amend its constitution to forbid same-sex marriage. Texas will have the issue up for popular referendum this year, and it will be on the ballot in many other states in 2006, when Americans will go to the polls to vote in, among other things, the midterm Congressional elections. There are grassroots battles going on now in Pennsylvania, Maryland, California, Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, Florida, South Dakota, Arizona, Washington, Indiana, Iowa and Minnesota. In May, conservative groups in California and Arizona announced petition drives that would force a referendum in those states.

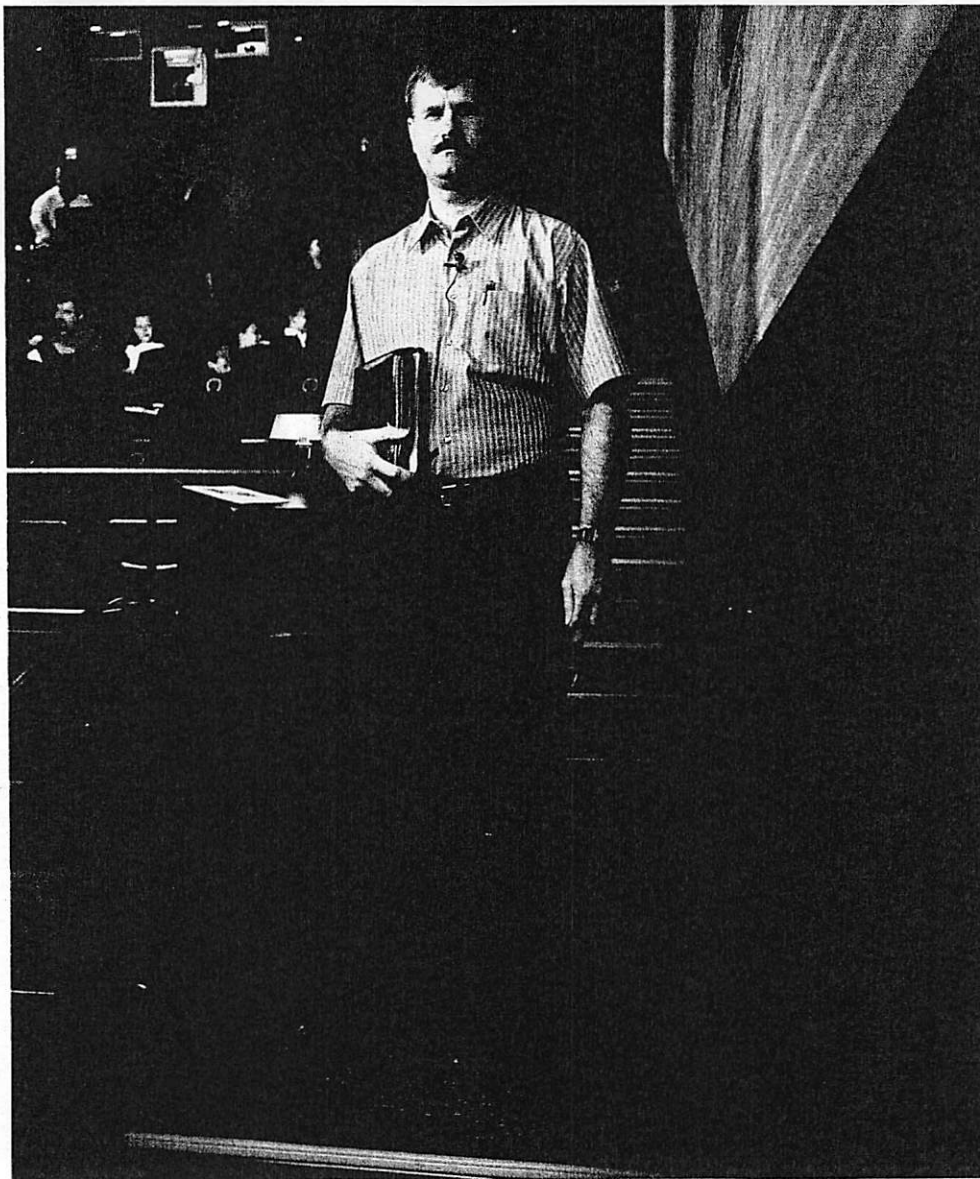
I could have gone to any of these places to learn how the people who are most deeply opposed to gay marriage think. But Maryland is an interesting combination: it is traditionally a blue state, but it has a strong core of social conservatism. There is a Republican governor and a Democratic-controlled State Legislature. And the A.C.L.U.-backed lawsuits filed by gay couples have fanned the flames of activism and outrage.

Those at the center of the opposition are, almost to a person, motivated by their brand of Christian beliefs. That was apparent in conversations I had with activists around Maryland and in several other states, and it was much in evidence at a dinner that Laura Clark arranged for my benefit, to which she had invited six friends who were active in the cause, all of whom were eager to explain what drives them. Most were born and raised in Maryland, and all but one — who is registered as an Independent — are Republicans. We made our way around the buffet Laura laid out on the dining-room table — sliced lunch meats, hamburger buns, tomato and onion slices, bowls of pretzels and chips, cookies and several two-quart plastic bottles of soda — then sat down to chat.

Meredith Fuller, who is 37 and works as a comptroller for her church, said that it was in talking with Laura that she came to realize the dimensions of the issue. "I used to feel that as a Christian my job was to deal with political issues from a prayerful standpoint," she said. "Now I think this is the defining issue of my generation, and I want to take a stand."

Bryan Simonaire works for a contractor that supports the U.S. Air Force. He and his wife, who was not present, have seven children. He is

'Look what has happened in the decades since the sexual revolution and acceptance of the gay lifestyle as normal,' said Pastor Brian Racer. 'Viruses have mutated. S.T.D.'s have spread.'



### **Multiplex Ministry**

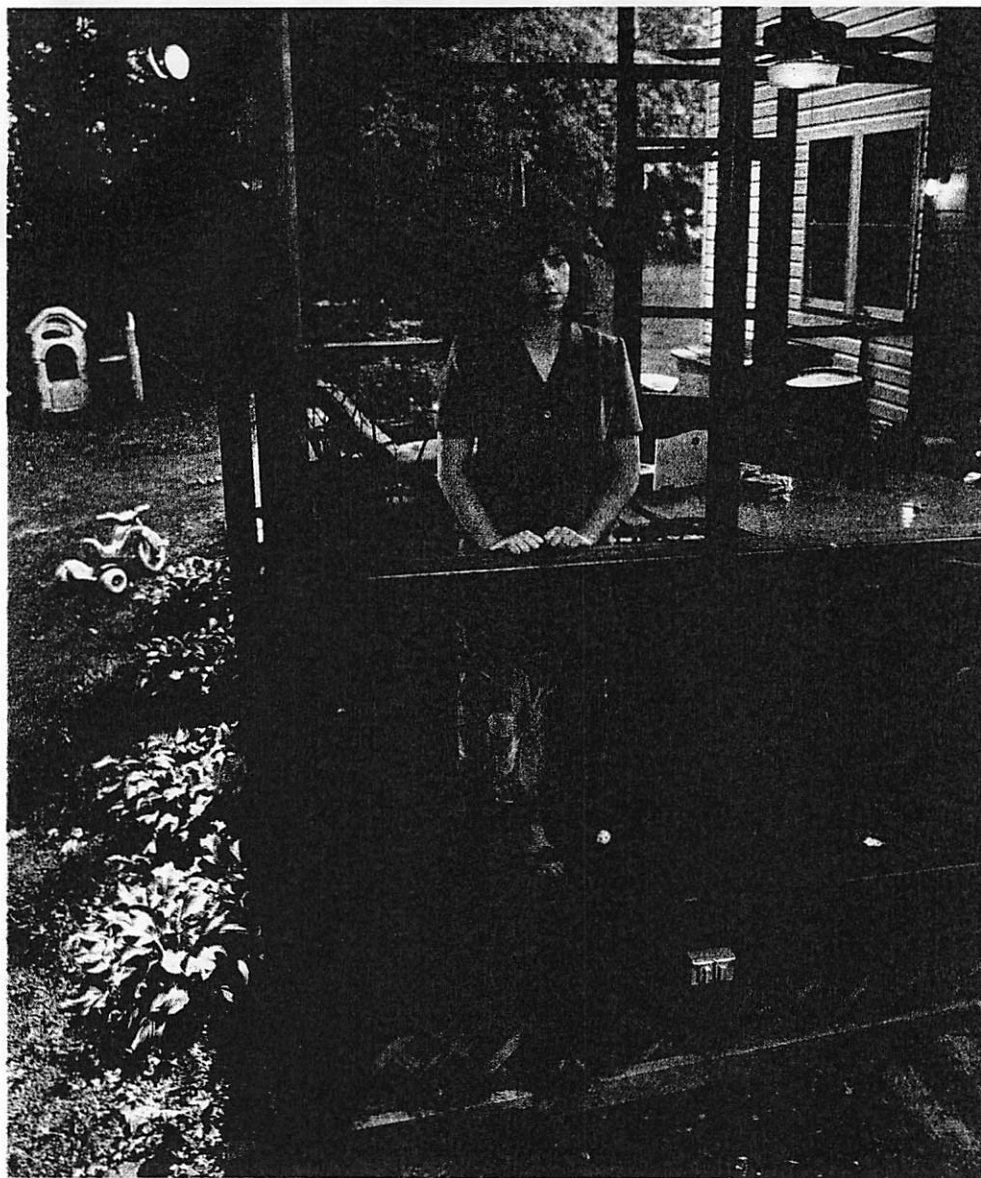
Brian Racer moved the Open Door Bible Church to a shopping-mall movie theater.

planning to run for the State Senate in 2006, and he said that the gay-marriage issue was one important reason. He put it in historical terms: "I remember talking to my parents about *Roe v. Wade*. And I asked them, 'Where were you while it was happening?' They didn't think they could do anything about it, and really they couldn't because it was done by the courts. I want to be able to tell my children that when people were battling this issue, I was on the front line."

Brian Racer is pastor to Laura and Dave Clark and a local opinion shaper on social issues. He is a tall, rangy 43-year-old man with a big mustache and a conversational style that is casual but enormously self-confident. Racer has a vigorous Christianity-in-society approach, which is illustrated by a recent move he made. When Mel Gibson's movie "The Passion of the Christ" came out in February 2004, he, like many ministers around the country, booked a whole theater in the local multiplex to accommodate the members of his church. But the venue itself — comfortable seats, good acoustics, convenient location — clicked for him. He worked out a rental arrangement with the manager of the theater. So now the Clarks and their fellow congregants worship at the Open Door Bible Church in Theater 24 in the Muvico multiplex at the Arundel Mills Mall. "The teens think it's pretty cool," he said. "After service they can go have lunch at the food court, then come back to the theater and see a movie."

I found what Racer had to say on the subject of homosexuality a clear and direct summation of the views of the others Laura had invited over that night and of the other anti-gay-marriage activists with whom I spoke. "The Hebrew words for male and female are actually the words for the male and female genital parts," he told me. "The male is the piercer; the female is the pierced. That is the way God designed it. It's unfortunate that homosexuals have taken the moniker 'gay,' because their lifestyle and its consequences are anything but. Look what has happened in the decades since the sexual revolution and acceptance of the gay lifestyle as normal. Viruses have mutated. S.T.D.'s have spread. It shows that when we try to change the natural course of things, what comes out of that is not joy or gayness."

The others in Laura Clark's living room, sitting with paper plates balanced on their laps, nodded and added supporting sentiments. Explaining how homosexuality resembles an insidious disease, Racer said, "If you have a same-gendered union, you have no natural, biological way to propagate your philosophy." So, he explained, it seeks to spread itself by other means, including popular culture. Bryan Simonaire added: "We have to recognize that they have a strategy to propagate their lifestyle. Think back 10 or 20 years ago, when you had the first openly homosexual person on TV. It was shocking to a lot of people. Now it's the norm on television, so you don't have the shock factor. Then they had two men with a passionate



### Unlikely Activist

The pro-gay-marriage activities in Massachusetts gave Laura Clark a new sense of purpose.

kiss on TV. That's the road they're heading down. They have a strategy."

The other main avenue by which homosexuality tries to propagate itself, in this view, is by indoctrinating children via the education system. Conservative Christian groups in many states — including, currently, Maryland — have protested efforts to introduce sexual orientation as a topic in school curriculums. A few days after the dinner at the Clarks' house, I spoke with Don Dwyer, a member of the Maryland House of Delegates and a leading anti-gay-rights figure in the state. "They are attempting through the public-school system to teach not only that homosexuality is O.K. but that it's normal," he said. "And now they are going as far as teaching children how to engage in the act. I find that appalling and absolutely unacceptable." State officials deny that the proposed changes would teach children how to engage in homosexual sex. The difference of opinion stems from the value-neutral approach that the state has proposed. To the conservative Christian activists, homosexuality is anything but value-neutral.

I asked Laura Clark if her feelings about homosexuality had evolved over time. "No," she said, "because basically I've been a Christian my whole adult life, and I've known that the Bible makes clear that it's wrong." Her pastor, however, opened up in answer to the same question and told me that his early encounters with homosexuality had actually influenced his approach to the ministry. When he was 14, he said, his father

worked as a route salesman for The Baltimore Sun, and he sometimes went with him on predawn deliveries. "In West Baltimore, I saw transvestites for the first time," he said. "It creeped me out. I had been taught in Bible school that there is an extended level of depravity, and this was it." Later, Racer was working for a greenhouse and got to know a lot of florists. "You'd be amazed how many people in the floral industry are homosexuals," he said. "And that's where I became curious. How do you put it together, that they've chosen to do something that I have such an aversion to, yet I'm finding I can see them as real people? As a Christian, that was a welcome development. Around the same time, a close friend told me he was struggling because he was attracted to men. Over the next two years, I had two other people confide the same thing to me. For some reason, God was putting it in my path. I took a psychology course, and ever since I've seen it as part of my ministry to counsel these people. I tell them that is part of God's challenge to them, and those temptations have to be fought off with spiritual weapons."

Of course, this view of homosexuality — seeing it as a disorder to be cured — is not new. It was cutting-edge thinking circa 1905. While most of society — including the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Education Association, the World Health Organization and many

other such groups — eventually came around to the idea that homosexuality is normal, some segments refused to go along. And what was once a fairly fringe portion of the population has swelled in recent years, as has its influence.

Gay rights leaders say that gay marriage has become useful for their counterparts on the religious right in part because it allows them to tap into an antipathy toward homosexuality. Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, said that the emergence of gay marriage last year was not the doing of groups like his. “We didn’t want this fight,” he said. “It is being driven by a certain brand of evangelicals and fundamentalists as part of their agenda and because they sense an opening. I don’t think their leaders care about gay people. And I don’t think people as a whole understand how deep-seated the loathing is.” In this calculation, gay marriage serves as a vessel for containing opinions that many social conservatives have but which in the past they might have felt were socially unacceptable to voice.

Robert Knight, the director of the Culture and Family Institute of Concerned Women for America, conceded as much. “People feel liberated,” he said. “They feel like we don’t have to go along with this stuff anymore, the idea that we’re repressed backwater religious zealots just for wanting a decent society in which our children can thrive. It’s O.K. today to say that marriage is between a man and a woman. Saying so does not make you a hater or bigot.”

Indeed, a constant refrain among the anti-gay-marriage forces is that they are motivated not by hate but by love. Most of the activists I spoke with say that they know gay people — several said they have relatives who are gay — and that they have approached them, with love, to try to get them to change. Rick Bowers, a pastor of a nondenominational church in Columbia, Md., is the head of Defend Maryland Marriage, another activist group, which works with Focus on the Family. “There are those extremists who say that if a gay person were on fire you would burn in hell if you spit on them to put out the fire,” he told me. “But we’re not like that. We love the human being. It’s the lifestyle we disagree with.”

“Lifestyle” is a buzzword in conservative Christian circles. It’s a signal of the belief, and the policy position, that homosexuality is not an innate condition but a hedonistic way of living, one devoted to partying, drugs and wanton sex that ends, often, in illness and early death. In 2004 the Family Research Council put out a book called “Getting It Straight: What the Research Shows About Homosexuality,” which purports to explode the myth that homosexuality is natural or genetic and puts forth an alternative theory that it springs from childhood abuse or other developmental factors. Chapter 4, “Is Homosexuality a Health Risk?” lines up studies and statistics to link homosexuality with cancer, alcoholism, mental illness, suicide and reduced life span, in addition to H.I.V./AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The activists opposing gay marriage echo these points. “My concern is the health issue,” said Evalena Gray, an activist in southern Maryland. “I want to get these people away from AIDS, out of that unhealthy lifestyle.”

The solution to the problem of the gay lifestyle in this view is, of course, Christ. The reparative therapy or “ex-gay” movement has been repudiated by major health and mental health organizations for its assumption that homosexuality is a defect to be repaired — indeed, in May members of the American Psychiatric Association recommended that the organization support gay marriage in the interest of promoting mental health. But for both the national leaders on the anti-gay-marriage front and Christian community activists, “ex-gay” and “gay marriage” are closely connected, the first being the antidote to the second. Shannon Royce, the executive director of the Marriage Amendment Project, advised me explicitly: “The

ex-gay movement is a very important part of the story.” Racer spelled it out clearly as well. “I’ve had quite a few opportunities to counsel people who were in a homosexual lifestyle,” he said. “They have generally found themselves in a desperate place. They know that Christ promises an abundant life, but that promise was made with some restrictions. These people have tried to find fulfillment in ways that are against God’s principles. So you don’t want to further the error by allowing gay marriage. Most of these folks have had an abusive situation that goes back to childhood. You want to heal that. You want to hold back the tide and not let such a high impact issue harm the whole society.”

IT MAY HAVE been March, but the Christmas lights were still up. “The grandchildren like them,” Evalena Gray said. She and her husband, Jim, both semiretired opticians, had invited me to their home in Charlotte Hall, a town in the region of southern Maryland that once made its money from tobacco and oysters but now relies on tourism and high-tech industry. The Grays have converted their basement — paneled, wall-to-wall-carpeted, decorated with Jim Gray’s Confederate memorabilia (a portrait of Jeb Stuart, framed currency) and the twinkling lights — into an office. They each have a desk here, stacked with brochures and books and buttons. Evalena is Maryland’s grass-roots director for Concerned Women for America; she

and her husband devote all of their spare hours to convincing fellow citizens of the danger that the institution of marriage is facing. As I visited, they were organizing buses to transport people to an anti-gay-marriage rally that was to be held in the state capital two days later. “The threat to traditional marriage will affect our society more than any other issue that’s come up,” Evalena said. “We’re just fighting with everything we have.”

As the Grays will tell you, “gay” is only one-half of the gay marriage issue. If homosexuality is a heavily laden notion for conservative Christians, so, too, is marriage. Evalena Gray handed me a copy of “Marriage Under Fire: Why We Must Win This Battle,” a small, pithy volume written by Dr. James Dobson, the influential leader of

Focus on the Family, whose radio commentaries are heard by 200 million people a day worldwide. “Marriage Under Fire” has been available at Focus on the Family events since it was published last year. Dobson begins his book by rooting marriage in the same biblical passage that graces the marriage shrine at the Family Research Council headquarters — “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” — and then goes on to add, “With those 22 words, God announced the ordination of the family, long before He established the two other great human institutions, the church and the government.”

To see marriage as in any way a secular or legal union of two individuals is to miss utterly the point and conviction of the Christian forces lined up against gay marriage. As Dobson states in his book: “To put it succinctly, the institution of marriage represents the very foundation of human social order. Everything of value sits on that base. Institutions, governments, religious fervor and the welfare of children are all dependent on its stability.” Every activist on the ground I spoke with said something similar. “Marriage was defined thousands of years ago and has served us well,” said Rebecca Denning, a retired secretary in southern Maryland who volunteers alongside Evalena Gray. “I think marriage is about procreation and families. And I think we’re getting into something that we don’t truly understand what the ramifications will be.”

Some on the other side of the issue — notably Andrew Sullivan — make the argument that extending the marriage franchise into the gay community will have positive results for everyone: it will encourage gays and lesbians to settle down into stable families, and given that about 40 percent of marriages end in divorce, it will bring new devotees to an ailing institution. The anti-gay-marriage people readily acknowledge that

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‘Once you start this, you could have a 45-year-old man wanting to marry a 9-year-old boy,’ said Bryan Simonaire, an anti-gay-marriage activist. ‘That could be O.K. in 20 years.’



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GAY MARRIAGE

Continued from Page 41

marriage is in a state of crisis, but they counter that the solution isn't to dilute the traditional meaning but to reinforce it. And that meaning, they say, is bound up in biology. "The homosexual community would have us believe that marriage is simply about loving one another," said Rick Bowers of Defend Maryland Marriage. "I say it's about two human beings who are wired completely differently, one with estrogen and one with testosterone, living together in love but with the purpose of procreation. It's a lot deeper than love. So I can't see how someone could look on a same-sex marriage as marriage at all."

At its essence, then, the Christian conservative thinking about gay marriage runs this way. Homosexuality is not an innate, biological condition but a disease in society. Marriage is the healthy root of society. To put the two together is thus willfully to introduce disease to that root. It is society willing self-destruction, which is itself a symptom of a wider societal disease, that of secularism.

WHAT WOULD BE the result of this experiment? The activists opposed to gay marriage feel they know. We have, they say, pools of data to study in order to see the effects. Denmark and Sweden legalized same-sex civil unions in 1989 and 1994, respectively, and the Netherlands allowed civil unions in 1998 and then, in 2001, gay marriage. Cindy Moles, a grandmother and homemaker in San Diego who is a Southern California area director for Concerned Women for America, gave me her analysis of the data from those countries: "Look at the Netherlands, where same-sex marriage is legal. Those marriages last an average of 1.5 years, and during that time there are an average of eight outside partners. That's not a solid foundation for our country."

Family.org, a Web site that is sponsored by Focus on the Family, cites these same figures in a Q-and-A section on gay marriage, but it glosses over the fact that the study on which they were based looked not at gay marriages but at gay relationships and had nothing to do with the legalization of gay marriage. Several anti-gay-marriage activists drew my attention to a study showing that since gay civil unions became legal in Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, the rate of out-of-wedlock births in those countries has increased. When I made the observation that, of all things to lay at the feet of homosexuals, the birth rate was surely not one of them, Laura Clark had an answer: "When marriage can mean anything, it means nothing. Why bother to get married at all?" And indeed, she is accurately reflecting the analysis of Stanley Kurtz, a research fellow at the Hoover Institution whose articles on the topic in The Weekly Standard make the rounds of the activists. Kurtz links rising rates of cohabitation and out-of-wedlock birth to the legalization of gay un-

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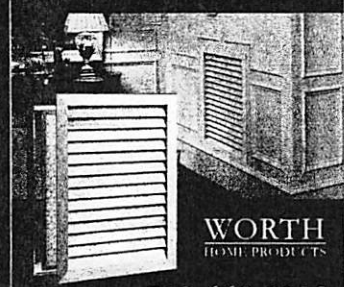
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ions. He follows a British demographer in studying cohabitation rates in three groups of European countries: the Nordics, those roughly in the geographic middle and the southern tier.

"The Nordic countries are the leaders in cohabitation and out-of-wedlock births," he writes. "In the early 90's, gay marriage came to the Nordic countries, where the out-of-wedlock birthrate was already high. Ten years later, out-of-wedlock birth rates have risen significantly in the middle group of nations. Not coincidentally, nearly every country in that middle group has recently either legalized some form of gay marriage or is seriously considering doing so. Only in the group with low out-of-wedlock birthrates has the gay marriage movement achieved relatively little success." (This was written before Spain's Parliament passed a bill legalizing gay marriage in April.) Kurtz's conclusion is that "instead of encouraging a society-wide return to marriage, Scandinavian gay marriage has driven home the message that marriage itself is outdated and that virtually any family form, including out-of-wedlock parenthood, is acceptable."

Kurtz's use of data from these countries has been disputed by the Log Cabin Republicans and countered by a study by Prof. M. V. Lee Badgett of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Badgett argues that marriage, divorce and out-of-wedlock birth rates in Scandinavia,

Europe as a whole and the United States have all changed in complex ways over the past three decades and "those changes have occurred in all countries, regardless of whether or not they adopted same-sex partnership laws, and these trends were under way well before the passage of laws that gave same-sex couples rights." There are also reports from the Netherlands that conclude that after the initial hoopla surrounding the legalization of gay marriage, it settled into a humdrum nonissue, without much effect on gays, straights or family life. The results from these countries, then, are debatable, but Kurtz's papers continue to get wide circulation among religious conservatives, and for many, his theses have become facts. "You know the family has disappeared in those Scandinavian countries," Evalena Gray, the southern Maryland activist, told me.

"Polyamory" is a word I learned from the anti-gay-marriage activists. It's a broad term that means having more than one sexual partner at a time, but the activists use it as a synonym for group marriage. Here again, they are following the lead of Stanley Kurtz; Laura Clark e-mailed me his article on the topic that appeared in The Weekly Standard. Kurtz writes of the rise of this "souped-up version of polygamy" that involves "a bewildering variety of sexual combinations. There are triads of one woman and two men; heterosexual group marriages; groups in which some or all members are bisexual; lesbian groups, and so forth." Kurtz maintains that "the modern polyamory movement took off in the mid-90's — partly because of the growth of the Internet (with its confidentiality) but also in parallel to, and inspired by, the rising gay-marriage movement."

It is the conviction of the grassroots activists that gay marriage will open the door to other novel unions. "I bet a dollar against a doughnut that if they get gay marriage, one day a bisexual is going to show up who says, 'I want to marry a man and a woman,'" Jim Gray, Evalena's husband, said. "It's going to open the door to polygamy."

Once the definition of marriage is altered, in this view, you will have this group of people declaring they want to marry that group; middle-aged men will exchange vows with children or with Doberman pinchers. As the landscape of fear fills

## ANSWERS TO PUZZLES OF JUNE 12, 2005

### NAME DROPPING

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H.L. MENCKEN, (A MENCKEN) CHRESTOMATHY —  
Man is the yokel par excellence, the booby unmatchable, the king dupe of the cosmos. He is ... unescapably deceived ... by his ... talent for searching out and embracing what is false, and for overlooking and denying what is true.

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|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| A. Hamartia    | H. Evidence    | P. Obfuscate    |
| B. Left wing   | I. Nonplussed  | Q. Misogyny     |
| C. Merit       | J. Charlatany  | R. Affable      |
| D. Epicurus    | K. Hobbes      | S. Thomas Paine |
| E. Nescient    | L. Rig-Veda    | T. Heterodox    |
| F. Cogency     | M. Enlightened | U. Yahoos       |
| G. Knucklehead | N. Shibboleth  |                 |
|                | O. Talk down   |                 |

in, the picture comes into view. It is Hieronymus Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights," a phantasmagoria of sin and a complete breakdown of the social order. As Bryan Simonaire, Laura Clark's friend, put it: "Once you start this, you could have a 45-year-old man wanting to marry a 9-year-old boy. That could be O.K. in 20 years. That's what you get with relative moral truth. Whereas with absolute moral truth, what was O.K. 50 years ago will still be O.K. 20 years from now."

PROTESTERS IN Maryland are lucky in that their state has one of the more elegant capitals in the nation. A cluster of nicely tended Victorian and Georgian houses occupies the center of Annapolis; steeples and masts and gulls crowd the skyline along the harbor. On a chilly day in early March, a few hundred people gathered before the state Capitol to

tending the rally, I stopped in at the Baltimore home of the lead plaintiffs, Lisa Polyak and Gita Deane, a lesbian couple who have been together for more than 20 years and have two daughters. (Polyak and Deane each became pregnant via artificial insemination, with sperm from a cryolab.) Their quaint house is white-painted brick with a picket fence. The hardwood floors are covered with Oriental rugs; the living-room bookshelf is crammed with kids' books and photo albums. Both women are in their early 40's. Deane works part time as a learning specialist at Goucher College, and Polyak is an environmental engineer for the U.S. Army. As with Laura and Dave Clark and their children, church is important in their family. If the Clarks are a picture-perfect suburban family, this one is, in many ways, the urban equivalent. The difference, of

simply a uniquely male-female enterprise — sitting in Polyak and Deane's living room might put that notion to the test. Watching their kids play, listening to stories of how, for their family, small things like taking a child to the pediatrician can become huge headaches, you might come around to thinking that this is, after all, a matter of giving a particular minority certain basic rights and along with them legitimacy and stability.

But, of course, the Christian activists aren't vague in their opposition. For them, the issue isn't one of civil rights, because the term implies something inherent in the individual — being black, say, or a woman — and they deny that homosexuality is inherent. It can't be, because that would mean God had created some people who are damned from birth, morally blackened. This really is the inescapable root of the whole issue,

lation seems to be just to silence those of us who oppose homosexuality," she said. As to the medical-decision-making bill, she added, "We know it's a back-door way for the homosexual activists to get gay marriage." She said that she was taking part in petition drives that would force referendums on both issues. "I'm collecting signatures from everyone I know," she said.

A few days later, the Republican governor, Bob Ehrlich, vetoed the medical-decision-making bill on the grounds that it created a new term — "life partner" — that "could lead to the erosion of the sanctity of traditional marriage." But some members of the Legislature said they had enough votes to override his veto in the future, and the governor declined to veto the hate-crime bill, so the conservatives' petition drives are going forward.

When I last spoke with Lisa Polyak, she said she was pleased that the Legislature had shown courage in addressing the civil rights of gay couples but sickened that conservative activists and the state's governor wanted to deny them those rights. Oddly enough, though, Polyak, who once thought of this whole issue as essentially about civil rights, says that she is now in it for something more profound: she doesn't want her children to grow up with a stigma. "I want to lift the psychic burden on my family," she said.

That means changing hearts. How difficult that will be is illustrated by a single vignette. When I met Polyak, she told me how, when she first testified before a legislative committee, an anti-gay-marriage activist, a woman, confronted her with bitter language, asking her why she was "doing this" to the woman's children and grandchildren. Polyak said the encounter left her shaken. A few days later, as I sat in Evalena Gray's Christmas-lighted-basement office, she told me a story of how during the same testimony she approached a blond lesbian and talked to her about the effect that gay marriage would have on her grandchildren. "Then I hugged her neck," she said. "and I said, 'We love you.' I was kind of consoling her to some extent, out of compassion."

I realized I was hearing about the same encounter from both sides. What was expressed as love was received as something close to hate. That's a hard gap to bridge. ■

## According to Stanley Kurtz, 'Scandinavian gay marriage has driven home the message that marriage itself is outdated and that virtually any family form ... is acceptable.'

urge their legislators to approve an anti-gay-marriage constitutional-amendment referendum. The Lawyers' Mall, with a statue of Thurgood Marshall as its centerpiece, is the logical place for such rallies, so you have to put it down to coincidence that the crowd was grouped around a figure of the Supreme Court justice most identified with the extension of rights to minorities. The national conservative evangelical leaders realize that the gay-marriage issue is an opportunity to peel off layers of the traditional Democratic coalition, and the lineup of speakers in Annapolis was prominent with Latinos and African-Americans, who asserted over and over that gay marriage has nothing to do with civil rights. "Because we live in a society today that is so sensitive, we use words like diversity and inclusion to hide behind, so that we can promote our own agenda," Bishop Larry Lee Thomas, president of the United Black Clergy of Anne Arundel County, told the crowd.

One spark for the rally — which also sparked Laura Clark's activism — was the lawsuit that the A.C.L.U. had filed against the state on behalf of gay couples. Before at-

course, is that Polyak and Deane are both women.

Polyak and Deane didn't set out to be activists anymore than Clark did. They have faced numerous difficulties as a nonstandard family, ranging from health insurance troubles to their children's growing awareness that they may be treated differently because they have two mothers. "We were never politically active," Polyak told me, "except that we belonged to a local support group, Families With Pride. They helped us get a physician." They never considered marriage until last year when, in the wake of gay-marriage rulings in Massachusetts and San Francisco, they were approached by Equality Maryland and asked to think about filing a lawsuit against the state. They balked at the public attention it would bring to their family, but then decided that as a relatively upscale, stable family, they could serve as a positive role model: a poster family for gay marriage.

If you are one of the many millions of people who are vaguely opposed to gay marriage — who perhaps have no problem with homosexuality but also think marriage is

the key to understanding those working against gay marriage as well as the engine driving their vehicle in the larger culture war: the commitment, on the part of a growing number of people, to a variety of religious belief that is so thoroughgoing it permeates every facet of life and thought, that rejects the secular, pluralistic grounding of society and that answers all questions internally.

The speakers at the rally in Annapolis made it plain they were committed to squelching not just gay marriage but civil unions and the extension of specific rights to same-sex couples. A few weeks later, however, when the State Legislature ended its session, it included some modest victories for the gay rights forces. A bill passed allowing unmarried partners — gay or straight — to make medical decisions for one another in the event of an emergency. So did another that would add sexual orientation to a list of punishable "hate crimes." And the central goal of the conservative activists, a state constitutional amendment, was tabled for the year.

When I talked with Laura Clark afterward, she was undeterred. "The purpose of the hate-crime legis-