



Daughters of Bilitis Founders Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin Marry in San Francisco

By GayWebMonkey.com

San Francisco, CA - Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, co-founders of the lesbian social club and advocacy group Daughters of Bilitis in 1955, will finally realize a lifelong dream on Monday when they become one of the first gay couples to wed legally in California. Lyon and Martin will be honored in a private marriage ceremony on Monday afternoon at City Hall in San Francisco, hosted by Mayor Gavin Newsom.

Over the years, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin have become the unofficial 'poster couple' of the gay marriage equality movement. Their gentle appearance and tough spirits, along with their infinite love for each other, have earned them the respect and admiration of the LGBT community worldwide. In 2003, filmmaker Joan E. Biren documented their extraordinary lives in the film *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon*, which is available as an educational DVD from Frameline.org.

Lyon and Martin met in Seattle in 1950 while working together for the same magazine. Two years later, they began a relationship and moved to San Francisco shortly afterward. Together for over 50 years, Lyon and Martin were part of a group of women who founded the Daughters of Bilitis in 1955.

Originally a social club for lesbians in San Francisco, the organization went on to become the first nationally recognized lesbian advocacy group in the United States. The organization eventually grew to have chapters in over a dozen cities across the country, including Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Detroit, Denver and Philadelphia. Lyon and Martin remained leaders of the Daughters of Bilitis until the late 1960s.

Lyon and Martin were among the thousands of gay and lesbian couples who were wed by the City of San Francisco in 2004 when Mayor Gavin Newsome protested against the ban on same-sex marriage by issuing licenses to same-sex couples. Those licenses were later revoked when the California Supreme Court declared the marriages had violated state law. The couple was devastated by the indignity of having their legal union dissolved.

"Del is 83 years old and I am 79," Lyon said at the time. "After being together for more than 50 years, it is a terrible blow to have the rights and protections of marriage taken away from us. At our age, we do not have the luxury of time."

Lyon and Martin joined several dozen other gay and lesbian couples in a mass lawsuit against the ban on same-sex marriage in California. After years of struggle to find legal recognition for their relationship of half a century, the California Supreme Court finally ruled last month that the ban on same-sex marriage violated the state's constitution. Shortly after the news broke, Lyon and Martin were contacted by San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsome and asked if they would be willing to once again stand together with him and exchange their vows. They agreed, hoping this time their marriage will not be taken away from them.

The sweet, grandmotherly couple may not technically be the first to marry on Tuesday, as other clerk's offices in California may have already begun to issue licenses to same-sex couples before their special ceremony concludes. Regardless, Lyon and Martin's lifelong love will still stand on this day as a proud testimony to why gay and lesbian couples have fought so long and so hard for marriage equality in California, and across the country.

Whether or not Lyon and Martin will have to suffer the sadness of having their marriages invalidated yet again may come down to a voter's initiative proposed by anti-gay marriage activists for the November ballot. Gay marriage opponents want voters to pass a constitutional amendment to restrict legal marriage to between "a man and a woman" only, overturning the California Supreme Court's ruling to allow legal marriage between same-sex couples.

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