

# Pride and prejudice

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## Law keeps gay man from partner's pension

**T**HE NEWS conference was not downtown, but in a drab north-end hotel. Standard community leaders, such as politicians and priests, were not in attendance.

The only letter of political support came from gay MP Svend Robinson, who signed it "in solidarity."

And the wall behind the head table looked like a teenager's bedroom, plastered with posters supporting human rights.

People who think gays and lesbians are something to snicker at would have gotten a giggle or two Wednesday.

But if they sat down and listened to why Jim Bigney is suing the federal government for survivors' benefits under the Canada Pension Plan, they might have not been so amused.

For 12 years, Bigney and John Morrow were partners, sharing a home and life. When Morrow was diagnosed with AIDS, Bigney poured his heart into making sure his partner received comfort and care. He helped him die loved and loving, with his heart at ease.

After all this dedication and trauma, however, the law did not allow Bigney, following Morrow's death in 1993, a day off work to attend the funeral. He had to take vacation time.

Because he is gay.

Six years after his partner's



**David Swick**

death at the terribly young age of 36, Jim Bigney is asking the federal government to acknowledge that gay people are fully human.

### Fear melted away

I'm not gay, but chose to work in a gay bar for four months in the early '80s. Guess what happened? Fear and prejudice melted away, and I was left with a shocking realization.

Gay people are people, too. They hurt and cry and feel and love, just like you and me. Being human, they sometimes have sex. But you know what? Some nights, they just watch television.

Just like you and me.

Yet federal law says only heterosexual spouses can receive CPP benefits. It's a rule giving sanction based on form, rather than substance.

Heterosexuals having deceitful sex, or sex rooted in power rather than love, or sex full of mind games, are given

society's blessing.

But even the most loving, dedicated sex between gays or lesbians is not similarly blessed.

This is unfortunate and odd. Every adult knows intimacy is not defined by appearance or form. The quality of sex depends not so much on what you do with what part of your body, but where your heart is.

Our prejudice against gays and lesbians, and the attendant view that they are simply homosexuals who need to be cured, is rooted in skewed readings of the Bible. A book of wise and holy stories, the Bible is, unfortunately, used to "prove" some hateful points of view.

Slavery in the U.S. and South African apartheid are just two examples of societies where the Bible was used to declare someone else less than equal.

To protect all of us, Canadian society divides the powers of church and state. But we're a young society, and still have some kinks to work out.

If anyone who believes gays and lesbians are less than normal sat down and talked to Jim Bigney, their giggles would fade as the realization dawns that he's a full and natural human being.

And then, just maybe, their heart would open up.