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The mayor shows heart in San Francisco

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A note from Susan: Some of my favorite columns were written fast, right after news broke. When I reread this one recently, I'm pleased that I was right: We've come a long way since this column was published in winning basic rights for gay couples.

Something huge and historic is happening in San Francisco.

In the past five days, more than 2,000 couples stood in long lines to get married, man to man, woman to woman. Some slept the night on concrete in a chilly rain. They headed here in a hurry after the city's new mayor defied state law and began allowing gay couples to marry on the grand marble staircase inside City Hall.

Mayor Gavin Newsom told a local newspaper he was inspired by George W. Bush's State of the Union speech on Jan. 20, to which he had been invited as a guest.

After listening to Bush oppose same-sex marriages, he called his chief of staff back home to say, in effect, "Let's roll."

Newsom had been in office only 12 days. He is an Irish-Catholic Democrat, and a heterosexual man, married for 2 years.

But he believes, as many others do, that no harm comes from letting gay men and women marry and that state laws barring same-sex marriages are unconstitutional. Over the past few weeks, working quietly, the city recast its marriage papers to change "bride" and "groom" to "first applicant" and "second applicant." It rounded up 200 volunteers to process paperwork for what it knew would be a hectic weekend.

"This is about bringing people together," Newsom said. "It's celebrating life, and love." He officiated over the weekend at the marriages of his gay chief of staff and his lesbian policy director.

A long wait

First to be married on Thursday were two women, 79 and 83, together by will and by heart for 51 years. By Sunday evening the city had married about 1,700 couples, a half-

dozen at a time, in a flurry of vows and flowers. Hundreds more couples were to say "I do" Monday and today.

Opponents, furious, called the episode "municipal anarchy." Lawsuits filed to stop the marriages will be heard this afternoon.

The rest of us might have been furious, too, at an elected official redefining the law, except that nobody was hurt and nobody was shortchanged. I call this civil disobedience, the sort of dramatic class action that will ultimately provoke national change.

The hardest part of what San Francisco's mayor did was deciding to do it. If the mayors of New York, L.A., Boston, Miami, Dallas, Denver and Detroit next week allowed same-sex marriages, every American might soon realize what happens when thousands of gay couples pledge their lasting love: Nothing.

Marriage still OK

If same-sex marriage is a threat to traditional marriage, straight couples in San Francisco must have trembled all weekend, lying awake in fear for their future. But last I heard, no heterosexual marriage had collapsed, and no \$20,000 traditional wedding was canceled because the sanctity of marriage had been sullied.

Those who don't know gay people think all homosexuals want is sex and more sex with as many partners as possible. That's no more true for gays than for straights. Most of us muddle through sexual adolescence, playing the open field, until we realize it's best to nuzzle one familiar body.

Everybody wants love. Everybody wants it to last forever.

Marriage allows everyone to proclaim, to each other and the world, that they're ready to climb into one boat together to sail unknown seas.

On behalf of the state of Michigan, I send best wishes to the thousands of newly married couples for a rich, satisfying journey with honor in the eyes of the world.

Sometimes, love can conquer all.