

Martha McCarthy led same-sex battle

[ONT Edition]

Toronto Star - Toronto, Ont.

Date: Dec 31, 2004

Section: Editorial

Text Word Count: 274

Document Text

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Martha McCarthy For changing the face of Canada.

This 39-year-old Toronto lawyer has played a leading role in helping gays and lesbians win the right to marry in Canada.

McCarthy has represented gay couples who successfully challenged the traditional definition of marriage in courts in Ontario, Quebec and the Yukon.

And this fall, in the culmination of years of work for gay and lesbian clients, she made the case once again before the Supreme Court of Canada in a reference hearing that is now paving the way for the legalization of same-sex marriage.

McCarthy scored her first major win on the issue in 2003 when she helped convince an Ontario court that the opposite-sex definition of marriage violated the Charter of Rights. That precedent-setting ruling allowed same-sex couples to walk down the aisle immediately.

But it was not her first ground-breaking case. McCarthy, who has a husband and three children, was a rookie family lawyer in the early 1990s when a woman walked into her office and "changed the course of Canadian legal history." The case, known as *M. v. H.*, went to the Supreme Court and forced governments to amend many laws to recognize same-sex couples.

In January, Ottawa will table a bill to legalize same-sex marriage, making Canada one of a handful of nations to let gays and lesbians wed.

Clearly, gay marriage is controversial. Many Canadians still oppose the idea. But when historians look back at 2004, they will view same-sex marriage as a legal and social shift that forever changed this country.

Thus, for her continuing work on this landmark issue, Martha McCarthy deserves the Laurel of the Year. Laurels

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