

'I really didn't know it was different'

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"There's not really a whole lot that I didn't learn and anything that couldn't be taught."

His 12-year-old sister Michaela shares the same view.

"I didn't really know it was different until about Grade 3 or 4," she said. "I just never really thought about it."

In her presentation to the same House of Commons Committee in April one of the children's parents—Deborah Eaton-Kent—talked about their family life.

She described a typical week.

"We did our bills, walked the dogs, cleaned the garage, went to work, sat through an exciting hockey Day of Champions, attended a church seminar, shoveled the walk again, argued about money, talked and visited with friends and family, and collapsed at night from exhaustion. In short, a typical family during a typical week," said Deborah.

However, she said she and her partner Margaret, who have been together for 25 years and several years ago held a commitment ceremony, didn't do any of those things as a legally married couple.

Deborah said the same-sex marriage issue comes down to human rights.

"Either you believe that all people are created equal or you don't," said Deborah to the committee.

Earlier this year a provincial court ruling in Ontario paved the way for same-sex mar-

riages in that province and the federal government's same-sex marriage draft legislation bitterly divided the Liberal party and dominated a caucus retreat this summer.

While Deborah and Margaret, whose lives revolve around their children, say they have "lived their marriage", they do want to get married.

"What's more important at this point is, do we have the option, and that's what it's all about," said Deborah.

Although Matthew and Michaela don't believe much would change if their parents were to marry, as they view them that way anyway, they are both strong supporters of the right for same-sex couples to marry.

"Why do other people get to choose?" asked Michaela.

Matthew sees it as an equal rights issue, and that every Canadian should have the same basic human rights. Discriminating against same-sex couples by not allowing them to marry would be breaking the law, he said.

"People who are against this are people who are really just bigots...if they had lived in the 1960s they would probably be racists. This is an opportunity for them to spew their hate."

Deborah said over the years she and Margaret, who feel fortunate to have found each other, have faced their share of hatred, nastiness, rejection and intolerance. Their journey together hasn't been an easy one.

"In the 70s and 80s this was

not an acceptable lifestyle," she said.

For many years they had to hide their relationship.

When a person hides who they are from others "it does something to people psychologically," said Margaret.

"If you cannot fully express yourself and be respected for who you are it's not healthy," said Margaret. She added however, it's been so long since they had to hide their relationship that she has almost forgotten what it was like.

It wasn't until the couple decided to have children that they began disclosing their relationship to close friends and colleagues.

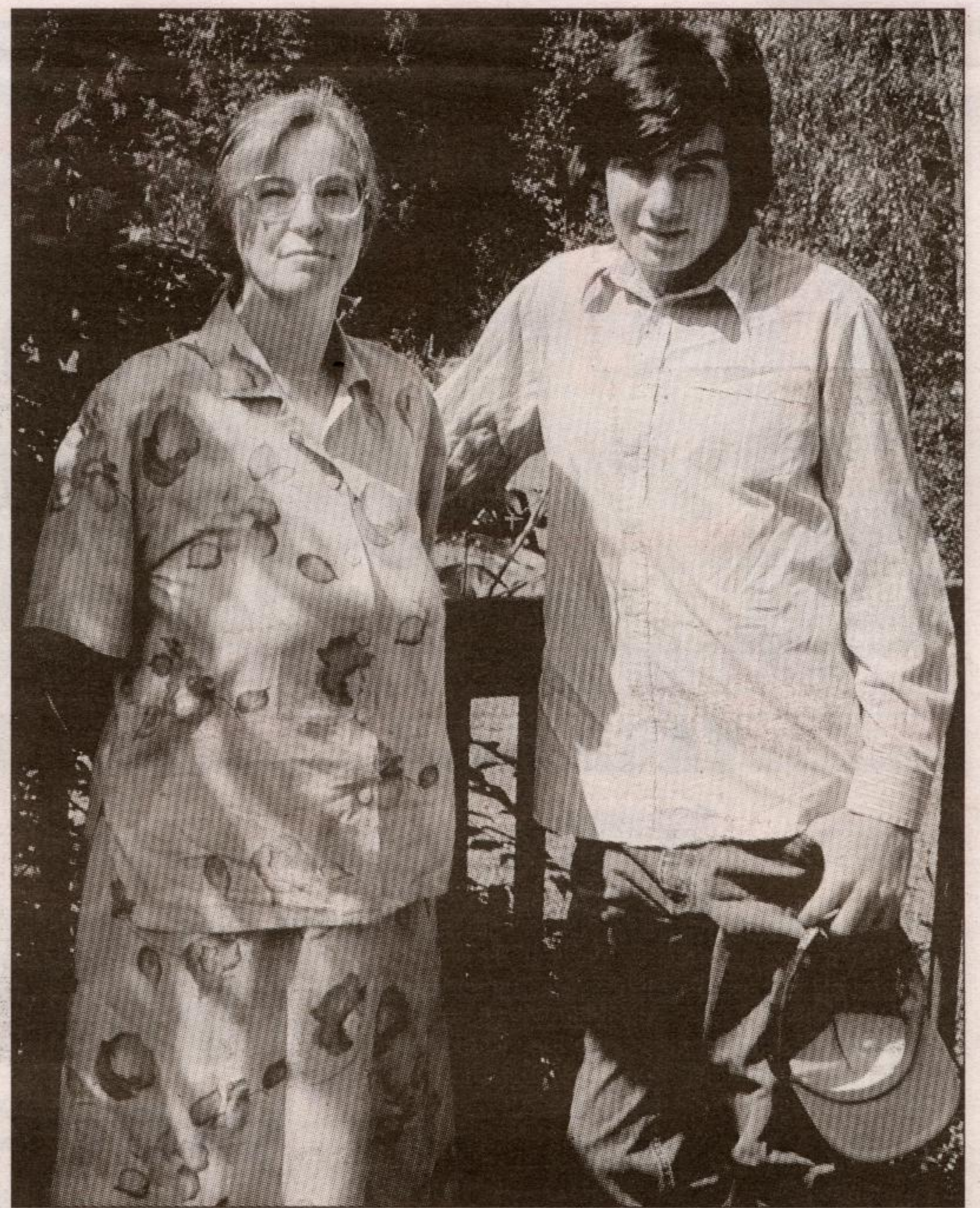
Deborah, who worked in the Toronto investment industry however, said she remained in hiding about her relationship on the job for fear of discrimination.

"I had to pretend I was a single mother," she said.

Margaret said it was important for her when she got the legal right to adopt the children in 1995. When she finally could, she said however, it felt somehow strange and anti-climactic because she had been their parent from the beginning.

The couple thought long and hard a few years ago before making the move from their Toronto home, a neighborhood where they were comfortable and accepted, to the rural area of Halton Hills.

They were concerned what people's reactions would be. For the most part they have



MARGARET AND MATTHEW EATON-KENT

been positive.

The kids faced questions from some of their classmates about their family. Matthew said he has been teased a bit, but he has never seen it as a major issue.

They joined a local United church; Deborah and Margaret identified themselves as each other's partner, and were "totally accepted." They said they have made many close friends here.

Margaret recalls when she took a petition to her church

two years ago seeking signatures in support of a private member's bill calling for the legalization of same-sex marriage. They were overwhelmed by the response.

"Everyone lined up including the little 92-year-old lady who is all bent over with osteoporosis," said Margaret. "The comments that we got were mostly people saying we thought you could already do this."

—By Lisa Tallyn, staff writer

Local churches, politicians oppose changing definition of marriage

The same-sex marriage issue has evoked strong opinions right across the country, and Halton Hills is no exception.

The majority of area politicians and local church representatives polled on the issue are opposed to changing the definition of marriage however, not everyone shares that view.

Halton MP Julian Reed is among the rank and file Liberals who don't like the federal government's draft legislation to allow same-sex marriage.

"In 1999 when the motion came to the floor to preserve the current statement, I voted for it," said Halton MP Reed. "My position would not change."

While he wants to hear from the Supreme Court on the matter, he said he won't support the amendment that would allow same-sex marriages based on his personal view, a view that seems to be shared by hundreds of people who have called or e-mailed Reed on the issue over past weeks.

Reed estimated he has heard from approximately 400 people, and only one was in support of allowing same-sex marriage.

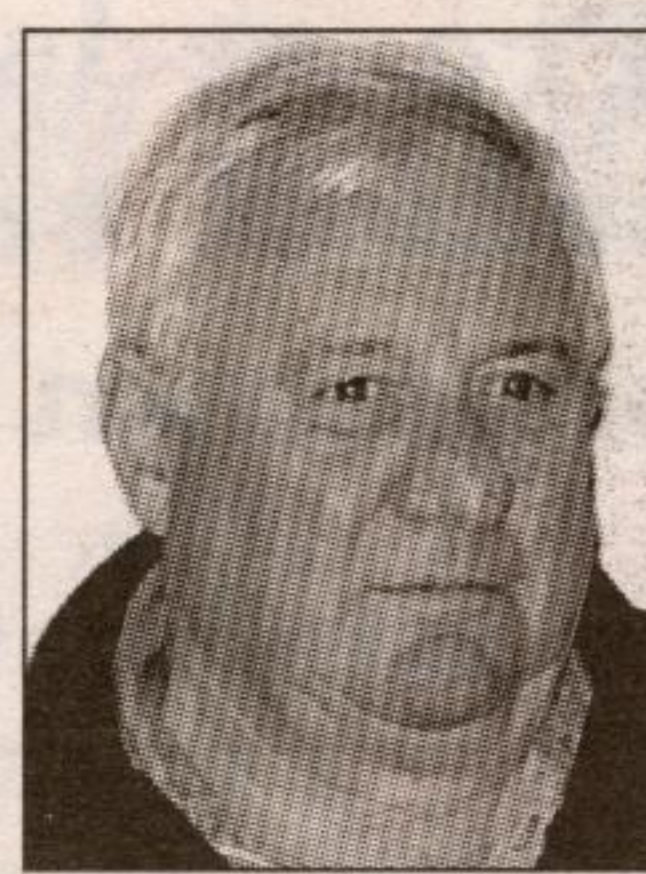
Reed said he doesn't have a problem supporting homosexual unions, "where the problem emerges is putting it in exactly the same category as marriage."

"It's a matter of social values," said Reed. "The institution of marriage is as old as civilization itself, and one of the purposes of marriage is procreation and a family unit."

He stressed the family unit—consisting of a father, mother and in most cases children has been "the basis of our society" which he would not like to see changed.

He added he is concerned about the power the Supreme Court has in this issue, which he believes reduces the power of the legislature.

Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh is circulating a petition asking the Liberal government to confirm the sanctity of marriage as the union between one man and one woman.



JULIAN REED

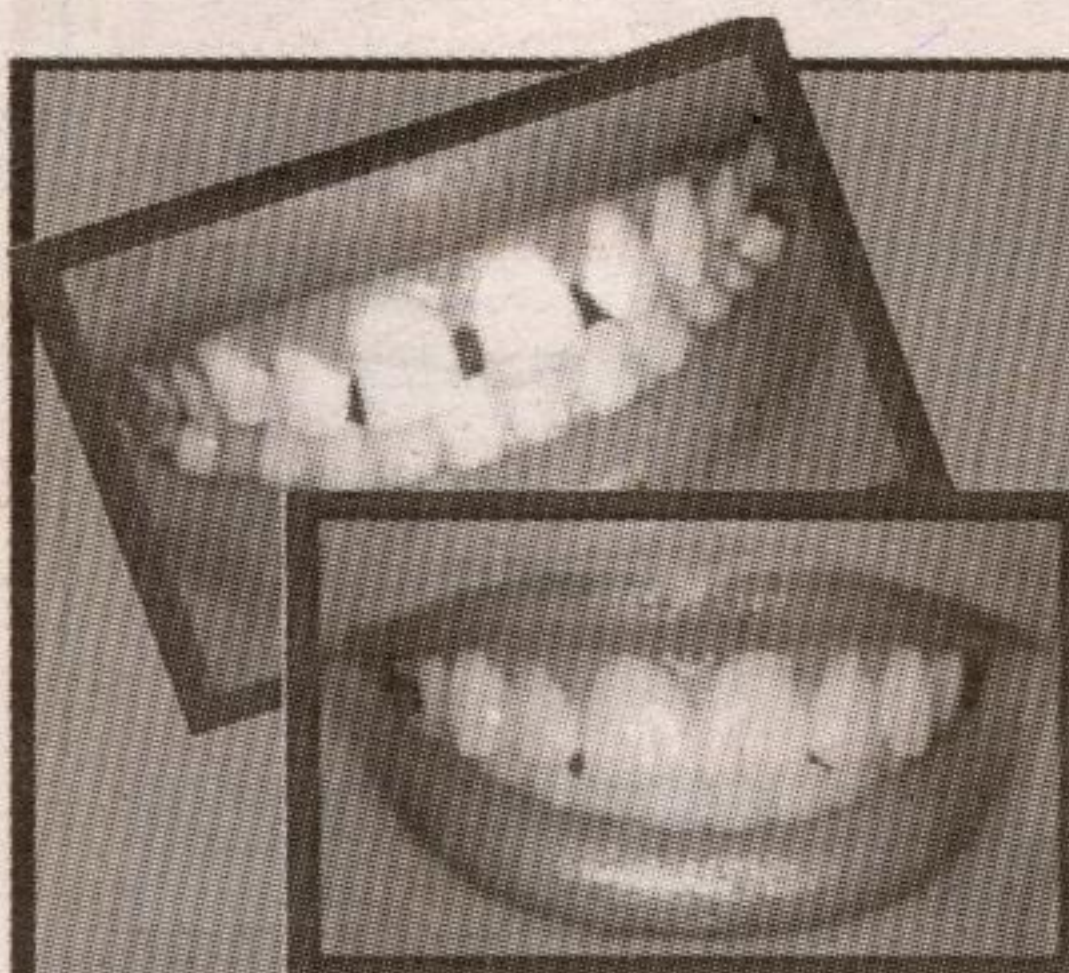
"This is an issue for the federal government however, in my opinion it crosses all political boundaries and the people of Halton have my commitment that I will do all I can to ensure that marriage continues to be the union between one man and one woman," said Chudleigh. "It is not an issue for the courts to decide, but rather one that should be made by Canada's parliament."

Chudleigh said he recognizes a need to identify other types of co-dependent living arrangements to solve the issues of inheritance, employment benefits, pensions and living wills.

"Marriage is an ancient rite. I strongly believe that there are some things on which the foundations of our culture, our way of life and indeed the very civilization we so cherish are built," said Chudleigh. "The sanctity of marriage is one of those things."


Robin Coverdale, chair of Halton's Anti-Homophobia Committee, does not share Chudleigh's view.

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