

DEL MARTIN & PHYLLIS LYON

Del Martin – b. May 5, 1921

d. August 27, 2008

Phyllis Lyon – b. November 10, 1924

“Two extraordinary people ... that have spent the greater part of a half century ... fighting for their right to live the way so many of us, frankly, take for granted.”

– San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom

In 1955, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon cofounded the Daughters of Bilitis, the first national lesbian organization. In 2008, they were the first same-sex couple legally married in California.

Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon founded the first lesbian organization in the United States and have fought for more than 50 years for the rights of lesbians and gays. On June 16, 2008, Martin and Lyon became the first gay couple to be legally married in California.

Martin and Lyon both earned degrees in journalism. While working as journalists in Seattle, the two became romantically involved. The couple relocated to San Francisco and moved in together on Valentine's Day 1953.

In 1955, finding it hard to develop a social network in San Francisco, Martin, Lyon and a small group of women founded the first lesbian organization, called the Daughters of Bilitis. The name was inspired by Pierre Louys's "Songs of Bilitis," a collection of poems celebrating lesbian sexuality.

Though it was intended to be a secret society, Martin and Lyon wanted to make the Daughters of Bilitis more visible. The group began publishing a monthly magazine, called *The Ladder*, which was the first-ever lesbian publication. As editors of the magazine, they capitalized the word "lesbian" every time it appeared.

In 1964, while fighting to change California sex laws criminalizing homosexuals, the couple joined religious and gay community leaders to form the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH). This organization was at the forefront of the movement to gain religious support on gay rights issues. Both women served on the founding CRH board of directors.

In 2004, when gay marriage was offered in San Francisco, Martin and Lyon were the first to wed. A California appellate court ruling subsequently invalidated their marriage. Then in May 2008, a California Supreme Court decision provided same-sex couples the right to marry. On June 16, 2008, they were the first same-sex couple married in California. The wedding was officiated by San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom.

Martin and Lyon have published two books together, "Lesbian/Woman" (1972) and "Lesbian Love and Liberation" (1973). On their 50th anniversary, the documentary "No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon" premiered. In 2005, the National Gay and Lesbian Journalists Association inducted Martin and Lyon into the LGBT Journalists Hall of Fame for their pioneering work on *The Ladder*. In 2007, they received the 2007 Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Pioneer Award.



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