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110 LGBTQ couples marry in Toronto mass wedding



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News services, Toronto Star

It was a perfect day for a June wedding ... or 110 June weddings ... as LGBTQ couples were married in the Grand Pride wedding at Casa Loma in Toronto on Thursday.

By Diana Mehta

TORONTO Inae Lee knows she didn't have the support of her South Korean parents as she wed her partner in Toronto Thursday, but she's hoping the 109 other couples who tied the knot beside her will make up for her family's rejection of her relationship.

Lee was just one of the participants in a mass wedding for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirited couples, which is considered the first of its kind in Canada.

The Grand Pride Wedding involved couples from across Canada as well as participants from countries where same sex marriage is illegal.

For Lee, the event is historically significant.

"In my parents' mind, they don't believe that this can be celebrated. In their mind, it's something that's illegal, it's something that's not allowed, it's very sinful," said 28-year-old Lee.

"I really want to let them know that we are celebrated, and it's OK for us to get married."

Lee married Jenny Chang Ho, who is originally from Venezuela. The pair met in Toronto two years ago and have been together ever since.

"This actually makes us appreciate more that we're able to do this and be able to live in Canada," Chang Ho said. "It's very accepting and more diverse than other countries."

Canada's first legal same-sex marriage took place on June 10, 2003, just hours after Ontario's Court of Appeal pronounced the Canadian law on traditional marriage unconstitutional.

Other provinces followed suit and the federal government legalized same-sex marriage countrywide two years later with the gender-neutral Civil Marriage Act.

For Cindy Su and her partner Lana Yu, Canada is a leading example when it comes to the acceptance of same-sex couples.

"We're really jealous of Canada," said Su, who travelled with Yu from Taiwan to tie the knot in Toronto. "We're looking forward to this happening in our country."

Both women spent time studying in Canada years ago, but only met four years ago in Taiwan. Although Yu's parents don't know about Su, the couple is determined to move the relationship forward and has even planned to try in vitro fertilization in Vancouver after the wedding.

Organizers say up to 1,000 people were expected to attend Thursday's Grand Pride Wedding, which is believed to be the largest of its kind in North America.

It was held at Casa Loma, a palatial Toronto home built between 1911 and 1914, which has since become a popular tourist attraction and event venue.

Despite the significance — and scale — of the celebration, some warn that the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders, queers and two-spirited people (a First Nations term for individuals who are considered to be neither women nor men) still can't be taken for granted.

"This says a lot about acceptance and change in our society, but I don't think we should think that marriage is the great equator of equal rights and human rights," said Helen Kennedy, executive director of national charity Egale, which was involved in planning the "big fat gay wedding"

Kennedy added that more work still needed to be done to combat issues like homophobic bullying, hate crimes and an overrepresentation of LGBTQ individuals among the homeless.