

Don't cats meow?

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It's a good thing for my son that men can't give birth — which I'm told is an experience that registers higher on the pain Richter Scale than an ordeal I suffered through last month — because, if they could, his older sister would be an only child. My near-birth experience began when, as I was driving through Charles Village on my way to Annapolis for a hearing, a somewhat unpleasant pain developed in my lower right side and continued to get worse as I approached Penn Station. After I broke out into a mild sweat several blocks later, I decided it was time to call my wife, not because she's a doctor (she's not — she's one of us), but because I knew she would have more presence of mind than I had at that moment — actually, she always has more presence of mind than I do, but I digress — and would be able to confirm that the appendix was in the area that I complained about.

After consulting one of those books she bought when our first child was born that identifies every conceivable disease and malady known to humankind, she described the symptoms for appendicitis, which did little to alleviate my anxiety because those warning signs sounded painfully familiar. I had a hearing to attend, however, so the emergency room would have to wait, although I promised that I would reconsider my plans for the day if my appendix exploded.

I don't know how many times I've made the trek from Baltimore to Annapolis, but this one was by far the longest one I ever had to endure, and it was not because of the traffic. Imagine your worst 45-minute visit to the dental chair with high-pitched drilling sounds and no Novocain and maybe you'll begin to get the picture. By the time I made it to the courthouse I was half-delusional from the pain and discomfort, which I suppose is better than three-quarters or completely delusional but still is not the frame of mind one should be in when going to court.

Fortunately, medical relief was close at hand because my case was first on the court's docket. That is, until it was delayed for two hours, during which time I considered several times throwing myself out the window to end my misery but didn't, not because I have any moral or religious qualms about suicide but because the fall would have exacerbated rather than ended my agony since the courtroom was on the first floor.

I'm not sure how I survived the hearing — one of my opposing counsel later told me he thought I was going to pass out in the middle of my argument — but I made it to the end and was just about to stand up to make a beeline for the nearest Patient First when the judge, God bless her, decided that she would not hold the matter sub curia but would instead announce her decision from the bench. I've run a lot of marathons before, including one with a stress fracture for the entire distance, but this was a level of sado-masochism like I never imagined, not to mention a PR (i.e., "personal record").

After what felt like another three hours, the hearing finally concluded, at which point I left the courthouse faster than Dustin Hoffman's character in Marathon Man could escape from Dr. Szell's dental chair, and before the clerk's office could write "Judgment for the Defendant" (my client) on the docket sheet, I was in an emergency room nursing a double shot of Demerol for what turned out to be, not an ailing appendix, but a nasty little kidney stone.

Not so subtle

I have shared this story not to impress upon some of you and to remind the rest what serious issues I have, but to make the point that it is virtually impossible for me not to do something once I decide I need to do it. Well, folks, here I go again.

I know that it is not appropriate for me to discuss the merits of a case in which I am co-counsel for the parties who are challenging Maryland's same-sex marriage ban. I cannot stop myself, however, from commenting on the opinion of several people who, according to different news reports, expressed the view that the right to marry a person of the same gender is the same as the right to marry a cat, and entitled to no greater protection.

It is perhaps obvious to some, but apparently not to others, so I'll say it here: Gays and lesbians are human beings, but cats are not. And, as much as I love them, neither are dogs. Sure, many of us in our journeys have come across individuals who think that their four-legged friends are people. But trust me when I say that they're really not human. They might sleep on the bed. They might wear those cute little coats in the winter so that they don't get too cold. They might even perform special tricks and be so smart that it's hard to believe that they're not human. But they're not. They can't speak, they can't read, and they can't write. They're pets.

I would think that the folks who compared same-sex marriage with marrying a cat know this. But maybe they don't. Maybe they really think that Dr. Doolittle is based on a true story. And that Mr. Ed could actually talk. And that Catwoman is a cat. I mean, a woman. Both. Whatever.

I'd like to give their colorful inter-species marriage analogy the benefit of the doubt, but, come on, only a complete idiot — something I know a little bit about in light of my recent experience being one — could misunderstand the not-so-subtle message that relationships between homosexuals, like relationships between people and cats, are not to be valued as human relationships. And only a complete bigot could make such a dehumanizing comparison.

One day, I tell myself, this too shall pass, like my kidney stone, and the pain will be over. We're not there yet, though, and so the fight needs to be fought, one battle at a time. I will refrain from weighing in on the subject any further, with the exception of one last comment I'd like to make to those cat-mongers who stand on the opposite side of the battle line. I don't expect everyone to have the same views that I have about same-sex marriage, nor would I expect there to be unanimity on such a highly charged issue. But there's no reason to treat each other with anything less than the full dignity and respect that all of us deserve as human beings. See you in court.

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