

## ★ **Accidental Activists: Mark Phariss, Vic Holmes, and Their Fight for Marriage Equality in Texas**

**David Collins**

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*Collins shows that change, even of the smallest kind, comes at the cost of great dedication and even greater love.*

It took four decades of lawyers, litigation, LGBTQ activists, and patient, persistent engagement to legalize gay marriage. *Accidental Activists* documents part of this struggle through the efforts of one gay couple to realize their dream of equality. Including wonderful color photos, copies of letters from President Barack Obama and former Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, as well as court transcripts and personal interviews, *Accidental Activists* is an important record of a key time in American history.

David Collins's book emphasizes the significance of the fight for marriage equality. Though it is an institution with spiritual roots, marriage is legislated by the government, all while remaining an emotional, personal, and legal commitment. Marriage creates family of choice, Collins shows, not blood. Historically, LGBTQ people have been denied this basic right, as well as the benefits that come with it: inheritance and child custody laws, end of life wishes, health decisions and privacy, and property ownership, among them.

Mark Phariss and Vic Holmes went to bat for marriage equality in Texas, which isn't known for its progressive, inclusive views. Phariss described politics in Texas as "a blood sport." The couple's anxiety as they pushed for gay marriage was influenced by threats and acts of violence: "One extremist ... had decided he was going to 'fix' all this with his long-shot rifle."

Collins painstakingly records the men's experiences, from the sensational to the mundane. His research, which includes extensive interviews with Phariss and Holmes, cuts deep into the subject material. *Accidental Activists* quickly becomes a story of more than just two men, with significance beyond the state of Texas.

This book is the universe in a grain of sand: an incredible, detailed, humane account of one couple's activism for same-sex marriage. The exhaustive account is an invaluable resource for LGBTQ history, policy changes, and Supreme Court decisions. Most importantly, Collins emphasizes that gay marriage is only the beginning—and that change, even of the smallest kind, comes at the cost of great dedication and even greater love.

CLAIRE FOSTER (University Press 2017)

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