

Good magic

by Lee Lynch

Last year about this time I devoted a column to the Bonding Ritual I'd been privileged to attend. Since then I've given a great deal of thought to the subject of gay marriage. A great deal. My lover and I have decided to wed.

We've both come to this decision with certainty after pondering innumerable issues around marriage for anyone, and especially

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marriage for lesbians. I'm still grappling with some of those issues, because they won't be resolved by the ceremony alone.

I've tried to think through the subject on my own, and tried also to talk with a therapist about it. But she was straight. Accepting, but straight. How could I trust her to help process what I can't see clearly myself? And why, I wondered, couldn't I see clearly? What was getting in my way?

Then I read Daniel Yates Rist's "Sexual Slander," an article primarily about AIDS in the May 13, 1986 *Advocate*. His premise is that gay men are almost passively accepting the blame for a disease the world at large has conveniently labeled theirs. All in one it is punishment of gays and vindication of straights. AIDS as a symbol is the new pink triangle, a symbol of self-hatred so internalized the victims self-destruct. It's a fantastic article I could recap for the length of this column. But my interest right now is in the self-hatred, and how that applies to me and my struggle with formalizing my love.

Neither the sexual slander of AIDS, says Rist, nor my struggle, will be resolved until "we stop apologizing — for AIDS, our love, our lives." AIDS is, simply, not a gay disease, and marriage not a straight institution. But we believe we must take on the guilt of the disease, and believe we cannot have such a validating tradition as marriage. Rist says, "... even were AIDS cured today, our failure to believe in our integrity remains ..."

And it is that illness, the dis-ease of a weak integrity, which haunts me even as I plan to publicly, passionately and permanently join with my mate. Marriage is for good, clean, upstanding citizens. And I am of the community Rist describes as hardly recovered from our "agonizing years believing lies about ourselves, hideous lies that fed self-hate, that ate away at us until we feared any minute we would be destroyed. ... Lies ... that we cannot love, that we're unlovable, that we're sexually obsessed, that we're all promiscuous, that our relationships don't last."

As I prepare to make my promise, my doubts are not about my partner. No, she's a major miracle in my life and I couldn't be more sure there. What nags at me is my right to the rite, whether I deserve to partake of the blessings marriage is designed to bestow. Rist again: "... our marriages and gay families disgust the law." Churches perpetuate the "vulgar lying images of gays ..." And I, somewhere inside, believe these lies, accept these insults, devalue myself till I fear I'm

giving little of worth to my spouse.

Why bother? Why hassle with these "straight" ways? Some lesbians criticize romantic love and marriage as straying into the enemy camp, adopting their ways, betraying our own. Gays have lived for centuries without the ceremony. Surely a bit of mumbo-jumbo intoned by a person of the cloth can't create a spiritual and social superglue that will insure longevity of commitment, that will guarantee continued interest and fidelity.

That's what I always thought while I was refusing to listen to this silly heart of mine which yearned to set a seal on my love. That's what I always told myself when, at a straight wedding, I watched the good will showered on the couple. Why not us up there, dignified, regally garbed, beaming and beamed upon?

I researched marriage, to learn its roots and the cultural roots of my yearning. In the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, under the entry "Marriage," I learned that the ritual was more about property (goods and human children) than about either love or good will. It wasn't until I happened on the entry "Primitive Marriage" that I began to get the answers I sought.

A marriage rite as a rule is also a ritual act with symbolic significance, and as such is often conceived to have magical efficacy ... as perhaps the most important contract ever entered by the marital partners and as an act that creates a new family, marriage is a crisis. A crisis in human life is surrounded by powerful emotions: forebodings and hopes, fears and joyful anticipations. Innumerable rites exist that are obviously intended to remove the dangers associated with the crisis of marriage. ... The contract is made binding in that members of the community bear witness to it; it is hallowed in that the mates solemnly and openly declare ... that they belong to each other.

This is what I wanted. A blessing, a witnessing, a bringing down of good magic to union I choose in order to obey my internal laws. And this is what I demand: the right to such a ceremony. The universe is full of spiritual bounty; let it shower a portion onto us, a lesbian couple, and not reserve it all for heterosexuals. No wonder we've been barred by every court and every religion from partaking of this sacrament — we might feel legitimate, blessed, accepted by the human race and the gods or goddesses!

My own behavior has been the clue to the disturbance in me. In announcing the event I've choked on the word marriage, or have not shared my plans at all. Would people think a marriage between two women weird, distasteful? Be shocked, disapproving? I've longed to present it as if on a platter, this bit of beauty in my life, but I've feared to stumble as I serve it, feared I'd end up staring, embarrassed, at what had become no more than an ugly mess in someone's lap.

The ceremony is not a necessity. The relationship we're living and building will not dissolve without it. I'm not trying to start, or continue, a trend. But I am seeking a way to give myself permission to take whatever good magic is rightfully ours. It's a tough world we live in. Gay unions are as susceptible as any, or more so, to the dangers out- and inside us.

There is evidence that same sex marriages have taken place as long as there has been marriage. These have been legitimate marriages, performed by the clergy of the time in front of everyone. I want to take back just one more thing that's been taken away. But after a lifetime of learning to apologize, learning to believe the lies, learning to feel and accept the legislated disgust, it's hard to feel worthy, hard to take what I want so badly, hard to acknowledge that I *deserve*. It's hard, hard, hard to step away from the world that would deny me the joy and support of a solid healthy love — and to walk up an aisle, and simply take it.

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