

CIVIL RIGHTS

Holy battle over matrimony*Soon-to-be-released video touts legal marriage for same-sex couples*

by Inga Sorensen

Demian understands that a picture, or in this case, video images, can generate strong emotions, either positive or negative, in people. Couple that powerful medium with highly charged subject matter and you're bound to make some waves.

"The right wing has known that for a long time," says Demian, co-founder of the Seattle-based Partners Task Force for Gay and Lesbian Couples. "Just look at the [anti-gay video] *Gay Agenda*. It's been a very effective tool for them."

Demian, his sole legal name, and his partner of 15 years, Steve Bryant, have been leading the lesbian and gay couples' cause for a decade by, in part, publicly advocating for legal marriage for same-gender couples.

For many years the two have been outspoken proponents of legal marriage for gay men and lesbians, placing them ahead of the cultural curve—both in the broader community and the sexual minorities community.

With a pending court decision in Hawaii that could pave the way for legal marriage between same-gender couples, the culture finally appears to be catching up—and, not surprisingly, many people as well as panicky lawmakers nationwide appear alarmed by the concept of equal marriage rights for same-gender couples. In response, legislation blocking such unions is being considered in several state legislatures.

In Washington, the GOP-dominated state House recently approved House Bill 2262, which sought to bar legal same-sex marriage. The bill said, "It is a compelling interest of the state of Washington to reaffirm its historical commitment to the institution of marriage as a union between a man and a woman and its fundamental role in the procreation and development of children."

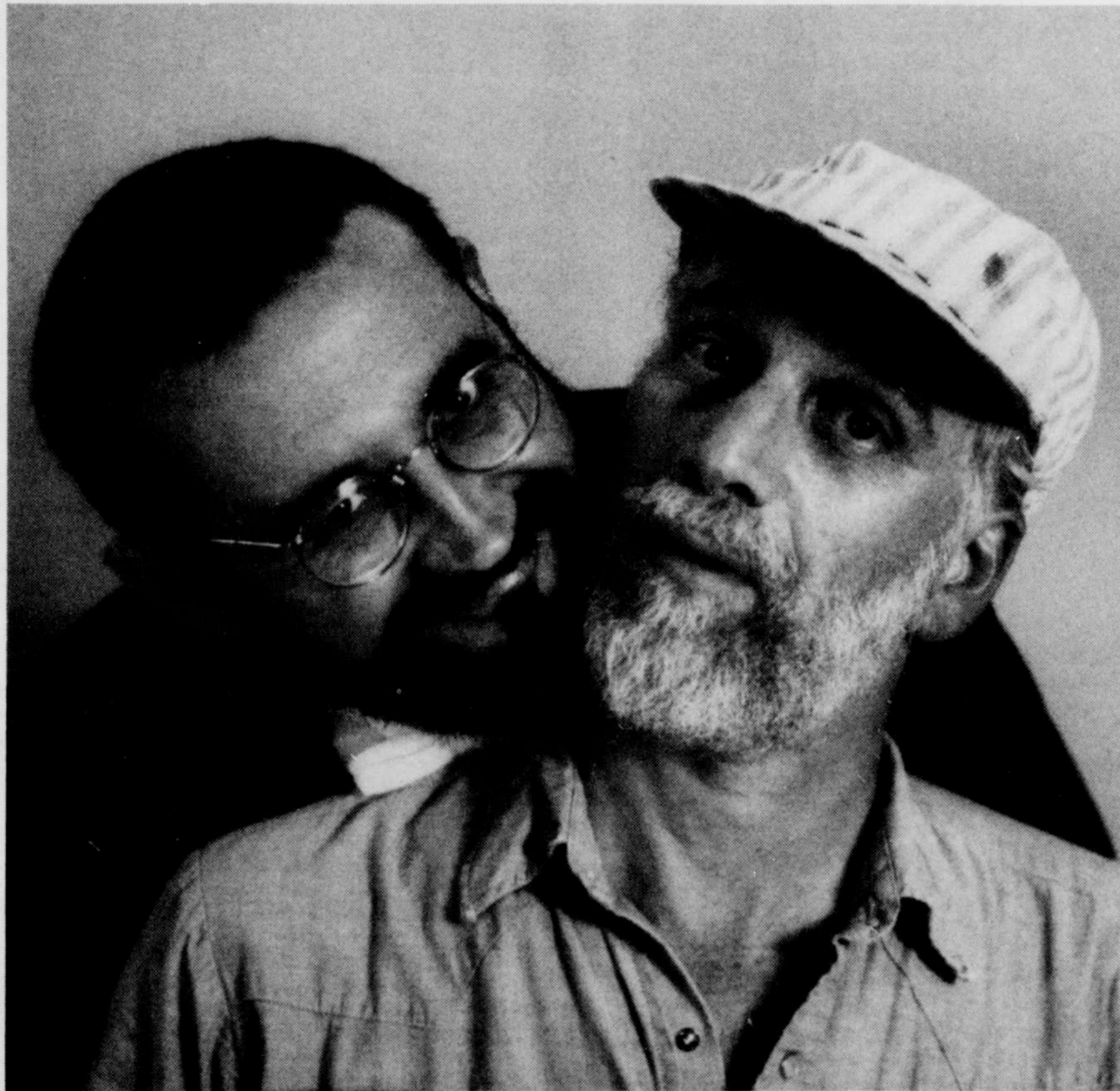
Even though the Senate ultimately killed the measure, opponents of legal marriage for same-gender couples declared victory following the 66-30 House vote, and political observers expect to see a similar bill next session.

Demian, meanwhile, says he recently viewed *Just Married: The Ultimate Target of the Gay Agenda*, which was produced by Bill Horn, creator of the *Gay Agenda*, a video circulated by proponents of anti-gay-rights measures.

Subjects in the latest Horn footage proclaim same-gender marriage will lead to the downfall and destruction of "the family."

"That's one of the reasons our video couldn't come too soon," says the 50-year-old filmmaker and videographer, who is in the final production stages of his video entitled *The Right to Marry*, which makes the case for legal same-sex marriage.

The 70-minute video, which will be finished at the end of April, will present examples of the legal, financial and emotional burdens placed upon same-sex couples who cannot marry, and



Steve Bryant (left) and Demian, co-directors of Partners Task Force for Gay and Lesbian Couples

will examine marriage as a means of promoting intimacy and security in family relationships.

Demian says Partners Task Force is committed to the project "because same-sex marriage is our community's single best opportunity to reverse a full range of discrimination we face as same-sex couples."

Partners Task Force was founded in 1986 by Demian and Bryant, who felt that for decades the gay and lesbian community paid little attention to its coupled members. Demian says the Task Force

says *The Right to Marry* will provide solid data to inform the public about legal marriage for gay men and lesbians. He hopes the video will eventually be shown on public access cable television and made available to homes, libraries, elected officials and community organizations.

"We aren't going to have anti-marriage arguments in this video," Demian says. "We're working from the premise that legal marriage for same-sex couples is beneficial not only to those couples but to society as a whole."

With a pending court decision in Hawaii that could pave the way for legal marriage between same-gender couples, the culture finally appears to be catching up—and, not surprisingly, many people as well as panicky lawmakers nationwide appear alarmed by the concept of equal marriage rights for same-gender couples.

gives voice to and advocates on behalf of same-sex couples.

Partners Task Force published a couples-focused periodical for five years, conducted a "landmark national survey of gay and lesbian couples" in 1988, and has made copious amounts of research available on the Internet.

Demian, who has a doctorate in education,

Family Values: A Lesbian Mother's Fight for Her Son, and Richard Mohr, author of *A More Perfect Union*, which advocates for same-sex marriage.

"All of these people were in town for book signings and things like that. I would call their agents ahead of time and say, 'This is what I'm doing, would so and so agree to be interviewed?' All of these folks called me back personally and said they would be delighted," Demian says.

During the 1995 Seattle Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade he carried his video camera and a sign saying, "Do You Support Legal Marriage for Gay and Lesbian Couples?"

Throughout the afternoon he filmed several "mini-interviews" with parade attendees, the vast majority of whom said they felt equal legal marriage rights should be available to same-sex couples. Several of those interviews will be included in *The Right to Marry*.

"Contrary to some people's claims that the gay and lesbian community doesn't know where it stands on this issue, the people we talked with believe overwhelmingly that we should have the same right to marry as heterosexuals," he says.

Additionally, Partners Task Force recently conducted a survey via the World Wide Web that was designed to assess the queer community's attitudes toward legal marriage. Demian says 800 surveys were submitted, and of the first 400 tallied, 60 percent of the couples said they would get legally married if it were possible, while 22 percent were not sure. Two percent said they would not.

Even if couples personally don't yearn to get married, Demian says many gay and lesbian people believe that they should have the right to do so.

"But there still is a lot of misinformation out there," he says.

The Legal Marriage Alliance of Washington, meanwhile, was founded five months ago as a resource for information on same-sex marriages. It assists existing organizations by sharing information and coordinating strategies.

LMA's immediate focus is to prepare the sexual minorities community and general public for the impact of the Hawaii marriage decision. It is also attempting to build support within the lesbian and gay community.

The Right to Marry costs \$29 plus \$3 for postage/shipping. To order a video or receive more information, write Partners Task Force for Gay and Lesbian Couples, Box 9685, Seattle, WA 98109-0685; or phone (206) 935-1206; e-mail: demian@eskimo.com; Web site: <http://www.eskimo.com/~demian/partners.html>. For more information about the Legal Marriage Alliance of Washington, call (206) 689-6280.

PHOTO BY DEMIAN