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Portland's Alternative Realtors represent an appealing alternative for those individuals who prefer not to work with a conventional salesperson. We support our local community, organic agriculture, all recycling efforts, and networking to create a healthier environment.

It is our mission to bring integrity and trust into the real estate profession while creating tremendously satisfying and fulfilling lifelong relationships with the people in our community.

We are Portland's Alternative Realtors.

Sprung!

Yet another couple succumbs to the tensions
of springtime relationship strain



This time last year, give or take a few months, I wrote a column about springtime relationship strain (SRS). It was something I thought all winter-weary Portland couples needed to be warned about.

Unlike most thoughts I get, this isn't one I've had to disavow in retrospect. As a matter of fact, the man I've referred to frequently as Mr. X is now, with spring around the corner, Mr. Ex.

Before you quickly pass the judgment that I would—"Oh dear God, how self-indulgent is this going to be?"—this is not a sob story. Actually I find that at the moment I'm mostly curious as to how this dissolution is playing itself out. From how it's affecting our friends to wondering how straight couples might fare in similar circumstances, there's a mountain to ponder.

One friend cried when she heard. Possibly it was the news itself, or maybe she was upset that we hadn't told her as soon as we knew which course we were going to follow. Regardless, I imagine the situation was similar to parents telling the kids about the divorce. Thankfully we're not expected to take all our friends to Disney World, as is often the bonus prize after the divorce announcement.

Her reaction was surprising, though. It's as though our late-20s generation is in its own particular familial space. Generations before seemed to abandon their families and stick largely with their own queer sex. Generations after don't seem too compelled to leave their families, instead opting for Mom to cook brownies for the after-school meeting of the Sexual Minority Club.

Where family is concerned, we don't have it as hard as our forefathers and -mothers, nor as easy as today's young Turks. What we belong to is a reality where we've become, after four and a half years of union, role models (to borrow from *Love! Valour! Compassion!*).

Mr. Ex was Mr. Fix-It and I was the Kool-

Aid Mom. People would come to our house for Christmas. The guest room was always ready.

I look at what happened to us and our domesticity and wonder how, or why, my parents stayed together as long as they did. After almost five years, I'd gone from being nearly self-sufficient to being a codependent basket case. I'm no therapist, so I don't have license to delve into the state of Mr. Ex's psychology. But after all our discussions and mutual conclusions, we did agree that we were baffled as to how people manage to nurture healthy relationships for decades.

Putting my parents under the magnifying glass (the straight couple I've been able to study most), they seemed to cover up rifts with kids. Once the baby train derailed, so did the marriage. There were no more silver bullets to mend rifts.

Queer couples increasingly have the opportunity to have kids of their own. Maybe that will reinforce relationships, for better or for worse, as it has for our hetero counterparts. Legalizing gay marriage might serve the same end. I'm not sure, however, that constructs to enforce relationship longevity for its own sake are worthwhile.

Don't misunderstand me. I support legalized marriage for queer couples, and I would bet money on the parenting skills of most gay and lesbian parents I've witnessed. But no one can deny that straight couples have often used legalized marriage and children to trap themselves, as much as to enforce their relationships.

Mr. Ex and I tried out our own silver-bullet formula of sexual experimentation, which probably bought us some time but couldn't change the nature of where we were headed.

In previous, shorter relationships, the end always followed something pronounced. Like infidelity or screaming matches. This is the first time I've made it to the end of one of these things with both parties clear-headedly granting that time's up.

Even in this mutually agreed romantic dissolution, it still feels like we're in the midst of what's going on with our generation: the post-Free Love, pre-PFLAG (with an exception made for Ellen DeGeneres) generation. And like our peers, we'll muddle our way through this experience and gain maturity for the next time.

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