

# WEDDING BELL BLUES

Sexual minority marriages are making waves in the media—but it's not good news by Inga Sorensen

Those rascally powers that be at *The Oregonian* are continuing their campaign of inequity when it comes to acknowledging same-sex couples.

On the front page of the newspaper's Saturday Living section, a cutesy snippet periodically appears entitled "Popping the Question," which invites readers to send in their marriage proposal tales.

The readers, no doubt, are expected to feel a collective rapture for the jubilant couples who, thanks to the Big O's boosterism, have an opportunity to share these distinctive moments with the broader community.

Many of *Just Out's* readers have attended the weddings, unions, commitment ceremonies—call them what you will—of same-sex couples. They have their own uplifting narratives that are often laced with strands of self-discovery and courage; in other words, their experiences can make for some captivating copy.

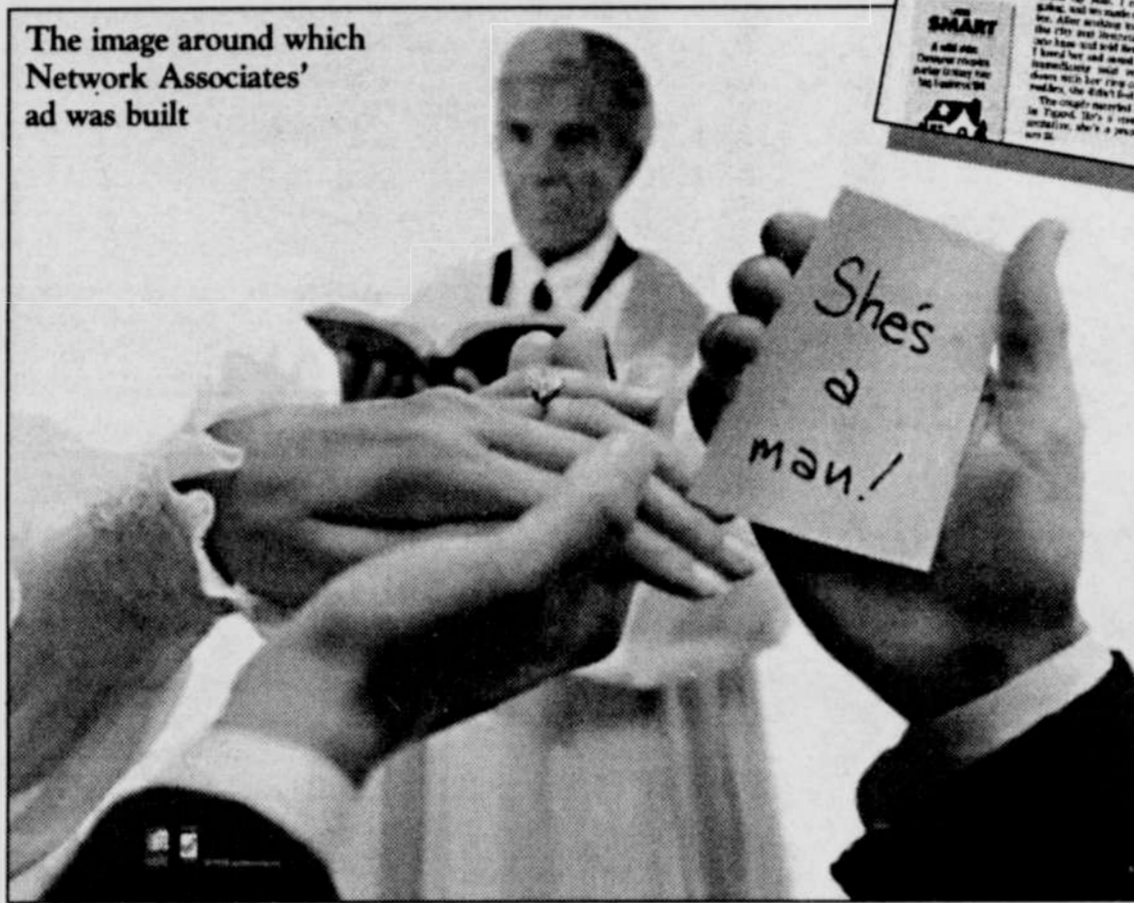
Sexual minorities "pop the question" too. Thing is, *The Oregonian*—the state's largest daily newspaper—won't include queer offerings in its "Popping the Question" segment.

"At this point, that feature has always been envisioned as something that involves legal marriage, much like the wedding announcements, so by default that would be heterosexuals," explains *The Oregonian's* public editor, Michele McLellan, who says same-sex couples can instead contact her employer if they believe they have a "human interest" story of note.

Unfortunately, *The Oregonian* isn't likely to change soon. It has always banned same-sex couples' announcements from its Weddings section.

In response to that discriminatory policy, a lesbian couple brought a lawsuit against the newspaper in the summer of 1996.

The image around which Network Associates' ad was built



At the time, one of the women told *Just Out*: "There is this misperception that gay people don't have long-lasting, permanent and valid relationships. That simply isn't true. I had hoped *The Oregonian* would have recognized this and would have made this service available to the entire community, not just heterosexuals."

The Multnomah County district judge who heard the case wound up denying a preliminary injunction that would have forced *The Oregonian* to publish the women's wedding notice.

Following the ruling, however, *Oregonian* Editor Sandra Mims Rowe said her newspaper would accept same-sex couples' wedding announcements—as advertisements. Married heterosexuals get theirs printed for free.

One of The Oregonian's paeans to legal proposals



based software company whose product is promoted in the ad, which features the hands of a man and woman adorned in wedding attire. The couple is standing before a minister. Another hand is displaying a note to the groom that reads: "She's a man!"

Accompanying the photograph are the statements: "It's nice to know about something before it becomes a problem"; "Because it's what you don't know that can hurt you"; and "It might just save you from an embarrassing situation." Sarah D. Fox, a transsexual woman and communications director for the trans education and advocacy organization It's Time, Ohio!, takes the company to task.

"Along with all the daily torment [trans folk] must endure, there are indeed priceless moments of humor. However, Network Associates' advertisement clearly crosses the line from humor to hatred and ignorance by suggesting that transsexuals are out to dupe unsuspecting men, thereby causing them 'hurt,' 'a problem,' or 'an embarrassing situation,'" she writes in a press release. "It clearly portrays transsexuals as predators and their partners as victims, and it conveys the message that marriages between a transsexual woman and a man are somehow improper."

Representatives of It's Time, Oregon! have also voiced outrage and have contacted company officials, as did *Just Out*.

Speaking on behalf of Network Associates, Alissa Bushnell says the company aspires to be on the "cutting edge."

She quickly adds, "But we certainly didn't intend to offend anyone."

Says Fox: "Besides being hateful, woefully ignorant, and insulting, NAI's ad campaign hurts real people in real ways. Transsexuals are without question the most relentlessly persecuted people in society. There is nothing they would like more than to be left alone to lead normal lives, but society will not let them."

According to Bushnell, Network Associates officials have "been in touch with the [Think Inc.] ad agency and they're working on a new ad."

Meanwhile, a print ad appearing in the Oct. 12 and Oct. 26 issues of *PC Week*, a publication for computer buffs, is being blasted as an example of "corporate advertising transphobia" and is, as one source puts it, "stirring up quite a storm in the transsexual community."

Portland resident Ashley Amelia Hall of Trans-Port, a peer support group for transsexuals, says she got wind of the ad from a friend in California who first spotted it and then mailed copies north.

"When I saw the ad I was absolutely appalled," Hall tells *Just Out*. "I have never seen anything like it. It is so transphobic and insensitive. It's a terrible insult to transsexuals."

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