

COMMENTARY

BY MARTY DAVIS

Of reasons and rights

The publisher shares her thoughts on an upcoming gay rights march

I am going to the April 30 Millennium March in Washington, D.C. Until a few days ago, my primary reasons for going were to attend a national gay and lesbian press summit, held during the few days prior to the march, and to spend rare getaway time with my girlfriend.

Attendance at the actual march was secondary at best. I had no sign to carry, no banner to unfurl, there was no fervor, no burning issue, no weight of oppression motivating my attendance. In fact, I have more than once questioned the very need for this march. What is the goal? What is to be achieved?

In looking back at the scant few years that have passed since Stonewall, the civil rights movement of the 1960s and women's rights battles of the '70s and '80s, I see great achievement in the contemporary movement for gay equality.

By no means do I believe the work is done. But at the same time, I feel that keeping a slower, steadier pace is not an illogical strategy. As such, I have had concerns over the rapidly explosive issue of same-sex marriage. I will admit that I have questioned the pace—are we moving too fast, trying to force same-sex marriage upon a nation that is simply neither educated, nor receptive, nor prepared to accept the concept? Is there a possibility that we stand to do more damage than good by an acceleration of our demands?

Recent events are causing me to rethink my position and look more deeply at the reasons gay men and lesbians would be desirous of marriage rights. First, I am now aware of the need to look beyond the symbolic and spiritual and cultural aspects of marriage. We must look beyond the patina of shame and scars of damage that those privileged with marriage rights have brought to the very institution they are so reluctant to share with others.

I seriously believe that those leading the fight for same-sex marriage are not doing it with the notion that they'll be the first gay couple to be married while skydiving or swimming with dolphins at Sea World or dressed as giant condoms. I do not believe that our leadership is battling for the television rights to *Who Wants to Marry a Queer Multi-Millionaire?*

No, what we as gay men and lesbians need are the legal and civil rights that come with marriage—the rights to pay our taxes as couples, the legal protections, health benefits and the protections of personal property afforded by marriage.

If you have not had the opportunity to watch the recent HBO show *If These Walls Could Talk 2*, I absolutely beg you to avail yourself of a video and watch the first sequence of this show.

Forget the hype about Ellen DeGeneres and Sharon Stone. (Don't even bother with the second and third segments of the show.) The first part of this trilogy, however, will knock the very breath out of you. Even though it's set in 1961 (and, yes, it's different now), you will be absolutely wrenched by this performance—and you must know that it can still happen today.

Gay men will be impacted just as strongly as lesbians. Don't be put off by the marketing of this film as a lesbian show. It is about you and your life also—and you must watch it and then you'll know why I'm now going to Washington to march for the right to same-sex marriage.

Fighting for our rights extends beyond marches in our nation's capital. For most of us, the main tool and weapon of choice will be our right to vote and our emerging status as a viable voting bloc of gay men and lesbians.

On May 16, Oregonians will have their primary election. Gore and Bush will apparently be the presidential candidates without input from our state; however, that does not even begin to negate the value of our votes. We'll be electing mayors and legislators and making decisions that impact the cores of our communities and our state. You must register and you must vote.

The April 21 issue of *Just Out* will carry our endorsements for the May primary election. If you have strong opinions about a candidate or an issue, let us hear from you now.

Contact Just Out at (503) 236-1252; P.O. Box 14400, Portland, OR 97293-0400; justout@justout.com; or www.justout.com.

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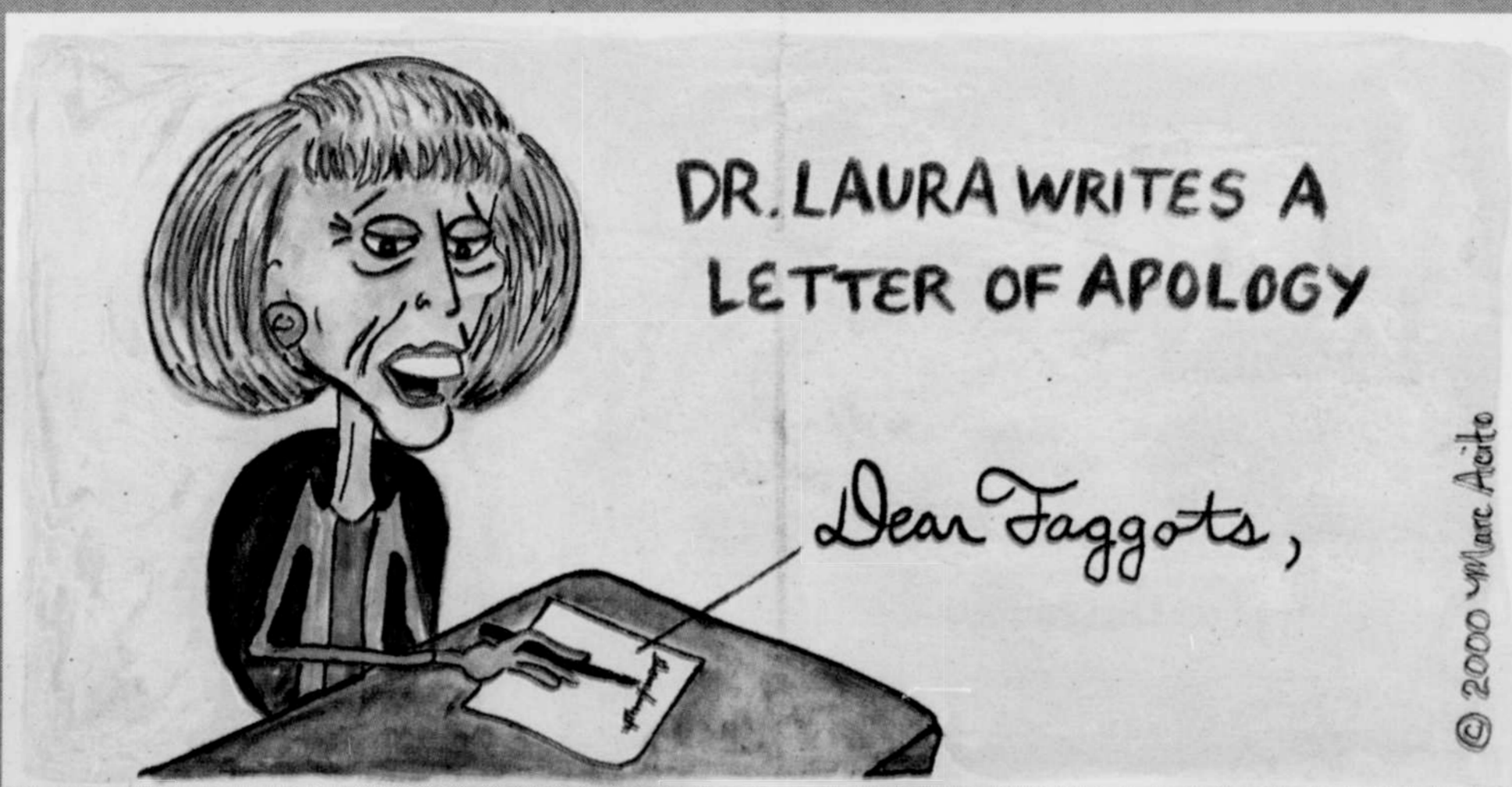
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Letters to the editor should be limited to 500 words. Announcements regarding life transitions (births, deaths, unions, etc.) should be limited to 200 words; photos are welcome. Deadline for submissions to the editorial department and for the Calendar is the Thursday 15 days before the next publication date. Views expressed in letters to the editor, columns and features are not necessarily those of the publisher.

The display advertising deadline is the Monday 12 days before the next publication date.

Classified ads must be received at the just out office by 4 p.m. on the Thursday eight days before the next publication date, along with payment. Ads may be placed by telephone or via the Internet with Visa or MasterCard payment.

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