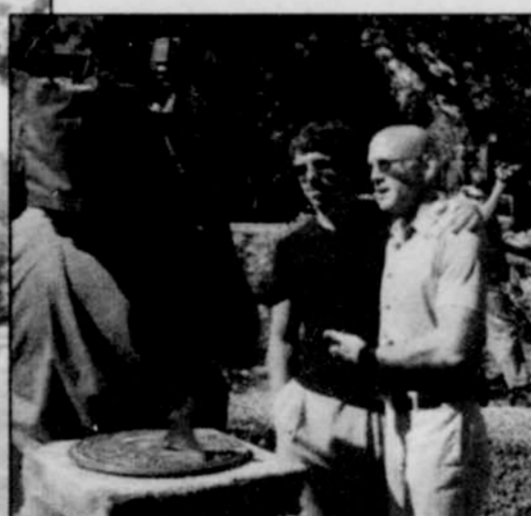


NORTHWESTnews

NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Oregonians get married in British Columbia by Jim Radosta



Joyce Arend (left) and Laura Lonac marry July 18 in Vancouver, British Columbia; inset, Marc Acito (left) and Floyd Sklaver meet the press July 23 in Victoria

Portlanders Joyce Arend and Laura Lonac were married July 18 in Vancouver, British Columbia. They are likely the first Oregon couple to tie the knot since the province's Court of Appeal legalized full same-sex marriage July 8.

Arend and Lonac began planning the trip several months ago in anticipation of the Vancouver Music Festival but decided to take advantage of the historic opportunity. The couple have been together for 10 years.

"I have always wanted to have a public acknowledgment of our relationship...but we wanted it to be legal also in the eyes of the government," Lonac says. "So we've never had any other kind of ceremony."

Lonac says the couple received nothing but positive feedback from the moment they set foot on Canadian soil. When a customs official asked why they were visiting, they told him they were crossing the border to get married.

"He burst into a big smile and gave us a thumbs-up and said, 'Well, congratulations,'" Lonac says. "That's the nicest encounter I've ever had with a customs guard in my life."

The supportive atmosphere continued throughout the trip when the couple dealt with hotel clerks, rental car agents, marriage bureau personnel and waiters. They even snagged some free champagne as congratulations on their nuptials.

At the folk music festival, Arend returned the favor by writing on the back of her shirt: "JUST MARRIED. THANK YOU, B.C." The couple say dozens of people approached them with handshakes and smiles.

"I think it really has taken a while for it to sink in," Lonac says. "Every once in a while we'll look at each other and just burst out with, 'We are married!' It's really a pretty amazing feeling."

Arend, 48, is CEO and administrator of Ore-

gon Eye Specialists, an ophthalmology group. Lonac, 47, was a schoolteacher for 21 years; she now works as a clerk at Midland Library.

"It seems like there are a lot of heterosexuals who just take it for granted, and for us it's something really special because we have had to wait a long time, and it hasn't been an easy road," Arend says. "I can't wait to introduce her [as my wife]. I can't wait to file a joint income tax return."

Lonac says they had no idea they were the first couple from Oregon to legally marry in Canada. "It never crossed our minds. We didn't want to be first; we wanted to be married."

Another Portland couple, *Just Out* columnist Marc Acito and contributing writer Floyd Sklaver, made history July 23 with the first same-sex wedding to take place on the grounds of the British Columbia Legislature in Victoria. The 15-minute ceremony was filmed by four Canadian television networks for inclusion on the evening's news.

"It was quite a show," Sklaver said. "I always cry at weddings, and I always wondered if I'd cry at my own." (For the record, he did.)

The couple's wedding plans were so hasty that they ended up recruiting a waitress they met the evening before to serve as one of their witnesses. And same-sex marriage is so new to the province that the marriage license lists the couple as "bride and groom." (For the record, Acito is the lucky lady.)

President Bush cast a dark cloud over the couples' joy July 30 when he declared another cultural war on homosexuals (see sidebar). Still, Arend hopes people in the United States will look back on this time and realize that the sky doesn't fall when same-sex couples get married.

"It can never be a bad thing when two people that love each other commit to each other," she says. "How is that bad?" ☐

BUSH, WHACKED

During a rare news conference July 30, President Bush was asked a question about the morality of homosexuality. Here is his response in its entirety:

"Yes, I am mindful that we're all sinners, and I caution those who may try to take the speck out of their neighbor's eye when they get a log in their own. I think it's very important for our society to respect each individual, to welcome those with good hearts, to be a welcoming country.

"On the other hand, that does not mean that somebody like me needs to compromise on an issue such as marriage. And that's really where the issue is heading here in Washington, and that is the definition of marriage. I believe in the sanctity of marriage. I believe a marriage is between a man and a woman. And I think we ought to codify that one way or the other. And we've got lawyers looking at the best way to do that." ☐

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