

DIVERSIONS

Out With It!

by Lisa Bradshaw

Untying the comfortable knot

Last spring The Associated Press sent along a newsbrief headlined "Singer Etheridge to Tie Knot with Partner." Her publicist commented, "This is the first wedding for both of them."

Last month Jonah Goldberg of *The Washington Times* wrote that the media "have collectively decided to mainstream gays. *The New York Times* runs gay 'marriage' announcements alongside straight ones."

On the surface, this is all good news. Finally, queer relationships are taken seriously. But it's what we do with this newfound "acceptance" that will either halt this civil rights movement or segue it to the next level.

A few years ago one of the straight guys I worked with asked if my partner and I would get married. I couldn't believe my ears. "You mean it isn't legal?" he asked.

When you take something for granted, you don't consider that others can't do the same. When Vermont passed its domestic partner registry, I was asked by several straight people if my partner and I would "go to Vermont and get married."

It's amazing what you don't know when it doesn't affect you. No doubt with recent news headlines, heteros now get that gays can't legally marry in the United States. Yet with verbiage like "tie the knot" and "wedding notices," it's easy to just coast down the acceptance trail—for gays and for straights.

That's why it's really important—and I mean *really* important here—to choose your words wisely. Celebrities, of course, have an advantage in being heard. For instance, if I were Melissa Etheridge, I'd have released a statement: "We're having a ceremony to celebrate our love and to commit to each other. We're not getting married, though, because that's illegal in this country."

When victories happen in rapid succession, as they have of late, it's way too easy to rest on our laurels. And it's equally easy for straights to feel proud enough of how progressive they are in supporting all these new queer rights. Being taken seriously can lead to being forgotten.

It's imperative we don't allow the assumption that all people are created equal under the law. It's important to let people know we can't file our taxes together or receive Social Security benefits at the death of our partners—losing tens of thousands of dollars over a lifetime. It's important they know that if I have to make decisions about my partner should she be lying in the hospital, I might have to fly her mother in from Belgium to do the talking. It's important they know I can't sponsor her for a green card because I'm not her wife, and she's not mine.

Am I going to "get married"? Is Melissa Etheridge? No, we're not, and we shouldn't say that we are. It's not our job to make heterosexual couples feel better about themselves. It's our job to make sure they know that institutional second-class citizenry still exists in the United States and that we won't rest until it doesn't. **J**

We're not out of the woods yet

Every August, always-queer-friendly Breitenbush Hot Springs gets hotter and queerer than ever when it plays host to separate closed-camp weekends for gay faes and lezzie ladies.

Through Aug. 17, a couple of hundred brothers gather to dance, sing, massage, trade makeup tips, sunbathe and, above all, soak in hot pools of mineral water. The theme of this year's 33rd Gathering of Radical Faeries is "Just Singin', Dancin' and Touchin' in the Summer Sun."

However, most of the activities (especially the clothing-optional ones) aren't planned but happen spontaneously. "Our gatherings are not passive experiences," say organizers from the Northwest Radical Faeries. "[We] create a cauldron, but you are the potion and the fire."

Then, as soon as the faeries flit away, more than 100 lesbians and gay-positive women fill the grounds Aug. 21 to 24 for Women in the Woods, an earth-centered, nurturing and healing event.

Like the Faerie gathering, nearly all of the goings-on are spontaneous and organized by attendees themselves when they arrive. Traditionally, however, women partake in drumming circles, yoga, crafts, sing-alongs, a talent/no-talent show and, yes, more soaking in the natural hot springs.

"People come year after year because of the magic that happens there," says one of the organizers, Pam Monette, who describes Women in the Woods as a rare opportunity for women to commune with nature and each other. "It's restful, it's exciting, it's interesting, it's quiet, it's fun—it's a combination of a lot of things that...tantalize all of your senses."

To learn more about next year's Gathering of Radical Faeries, call RiverSong at 360-481-4396 or visit www.radfae.org. Space is still available for this year's Women in the Woods. The cost is \$190 to \$255; scholarships are available. Call 503-284-0722 or visit www.womeninthewoods.com.

Breitenbush Hot Springs is located in the Willamette National Forest about 45 miles east of Salem. Visit the retreat center at www.breitenbush.com.

Buck/Mills/Stipe/Pansies

It's been a long, strange journey for R.E.M. College-rock pioneers turned major-label megastars, the DIY band that once called Athens, Ga., home is now a global touring rock ensemble whose members provoke CNN ticker headlines (keywords: Pete Buck, British Airways).

From 1981 to 1997, fans could count on the "Berry/Buck/Mills/Stipe" tag touting co-equal songwriting credits on every record. But when a mid-Monster tour health scare (brain aneurysm) and a midlife crisis ("I just wanna drive my tractor and cook") forced drummer Bill Berry out of the band, the three remaining members found themselves kerplunked into an odd spot. Live or die?

Damn the beckoning grim reaper. The result? 1998's *Up* is a gentle and strange album with overt heartsick odes to Brian Wilson. As the earth shifted beneath the feet of the only band Michael Stipe has ever known, the effervescent lead singer finally stepped out of the closet and laid those persistent rumors to rest. Yes, he's queer. No, he doesn't have AIDS.

The band continues to record as a threesome, with semiregular sidemen Scott McCaughey (Minus 5, Young Fresh Fellows) and Ken Stringfellow (Posies) stepping in to help fill the void.

R.E.M. play the Clark County Amphitheater, 17200 N.E. Delfel Road, at 8 p.m. Sept. 3. Chicago alt-country electronic wizards Wilco open.



Cute guys in shorts work up a sweat during the Rose City Open

Tickets are \$37.50-\$67.50 from Ticketmaster.

Meanwhile back in Portland, San Francisco's all-queer punk band Pansy Division, who opened for Green Day (back in the day), play The Blackbird at 10 p.m. Aug. 20. No doubt, the quarter's new CD, *Total Entertainment*, will be on hand.

Pansy Division says they sound like "a combination of Cheap Trick, The Ramones, Neil Young, Galaxie 500, AC/DC, The Sonics, The Beatles, Tom Petty, Blondie, The Muffs, The Saints, Tones on Tail, Queen, XTC, The Go-Betweens, Motown and more." The band's song "Loose" has a refrain that goes: "I stick it deep inside/I stick it deep inside/Cause I'm loose." Need to know anything else?

The Blackbird is at 3728 N.E. Sandy Blvd. Take the Blame and The Divided open, and just \$6 gets you in the door.

Happy anniversary, Mr. Mensel

Bob Mensel, the artistic director who consistently leads the Portland Gay Men's Chorus to new heights, celebrates 10 years with the nonprofit organization this month.

Mensel points to how Portland, not to mention the entire country, has changed a lot during the past decade. "Ten years ago the gay and lesbian community was still emerging," he notes. "Today things are much different. The Supreme Court's decision striking down sodomy laws was only verification of what we knew was already happening in our city. If Sam Adams decides to run, we may well have a gay mayor.... Heavens, PGMC has four ministers in the chorus!"

The changes in the chorus reflect the changes in the larger community. "An appearance of the chorus rarely raises anyone's eyebrows" anymore, he says. "The fact that the chorus is shortly approaching its 25th year speaks volumes to the stability of not only PGMC itself but our ability as a gay community [to] create and sustain institutions."

The chorus will begin its new season in October, which will include classical, Broadway, contemporary, popular and folk music. "No other chorus in Portland ever attempts the range that is commonplace with the Gay Men's Chorus," states Mensel. "Many gay and lesbian choruses program mindless, popular schlock to win an audience. I'm not willing to do that."

Here's looking at another 10 years, Bob.

Love all

Team Portland Tennis Association plays host to the 13th annual Rose City Open Aug. 29 to Sept. 1 at the Portland Tennis Center, 324 N.E. 12th Ave.

About 150 players compete in Open, A, B, C and D levels in men's and women's singles, doubles and mixed doubles. About 35 Portland-area queers enter the tournament; last year Charlie Huffman of

Beaverton won the Open Singles title.

Fans are encouraged to attend games, particularly Sept. 1, when "some of the best gay tennis players from around the country" play in the finals, notes Team Portland Tennis member Kyle Anderson.

The Rose City Open is one of the Gay and Lesbian Tennis Alliance's sanctioned tournaments, and the events prove to be "more than just a tennis tournament," Anderson continues. "It is a social meeting place of players...who incorporate the tournament as a vacation away."

To learn more about Team Portland Tennis and the Open, visit www.teamportland-tennis.org.



Family, politics and sexual identity collide in the heart-wrenching *Family Fundamentals*

It's fundamental

Filmmaker Arthur Dong sets out on a rather personal quest when he visits religious fundamentalist parents of queer offspring in *Family Fundamentals*, which airs on OPB as part of the POV documentary series at 11 p.m. Aug. 26.

Some parents interviewed specifically fight against civil rights and spearhead anti-gay agendas in this heart-wrenching look at disturbing rifts that often still don't have the power to completely separate family members from one another. The film takes you into the lives and homes of families while also documenting an explosive time in the history of this ongoing cultural war. **J**

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