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NORTHWEST news

MEET THE PLAINTIFFS

Couples say they are just regular people, not superheroes

by Meg Daly



PHOTOS BY MARTY DAVIS

The Rev. Glenna Shepherd of Metropolitan Community Church of Portland weds Dolores Doyle (center) and Kelly Burke as their 2 1/2-year-old son, Avery, looks on March 3 at Keller Auditorium

There's a certain uniformity to the lives of parents of young children. Play time, bath time, meal time, nap time (blessed nap time!).

Not surprisingly, two of the interviews for this article were conducted during children's nap time, the rare moment the parents had to chat about the impact of changing marriage laws on their own families.

Kelly Burke, mother of a 2 1/2-year-old, says she doesn't feel heroic being a part of the lawsuit for marriage equality. "Maybe one day I'll look back on it as making history."

In fact, none of the couples *Just Out* spoke with were trying to be heroes. What they share is the desire to do the right thing for their communities and families.

In defense of love

Julie Williams and Coleen Belisle have been together five years. Instead of celebrating an anniversary, every morning the two make a daily commitment to one another. "We're here for the duration," they say.

Now that Benton County seems intent on marriage equality, Williams and Belisle may just have an official anniversary. When the county announced it would issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, Williams said, "We realized we wanted to."

Williams, 41, was born and raised in Corvallis and teaches at the local high school. Belisle, 52, has lived in Corvallis for 30 years. They say tolerance rules in their hometown. "For people in Corvallis, being discriminatory is more distasteful than their feelings about queers," says Williams.

Since the lawsuit was filed, Williams has had a few disparaging remarks lobbed at her from students driving by while she was coaching track. However, she says she has far more encouraging and supportive comments coming her way from colleagues, students and friends.

"We're doing this for the whole, for all of our friends," says Belisle.

The couple feel they are defending love. Williams says, "The people that feel they're

defending marriage...they've done more to degrade marriage by overlooking the love part and the parts that are exactly the same."

We want the option open

Douglas Dewitt and Dominick Vetri live on a farm just outside Eugene with a small flock of sheep, several baby lambs, two cats, one dog and a blue heron that fishes in their pond.

They have been together 27 years and celebrate their anniversary on Halloween because it is "easier to remember and more fun," says Vetri. Vetri, a law professor at University of Oregon, has a teen-age son who lives with his two mothers.

Though Vetri, 65, and Dewitt, 53, are not sure if they will decide to get married, they are elated by the changes that have taken place in Oregon this past month. "It's a grand way of celebrating the loving and caring that couples have for each other, and protesting the discrimination against our families," says Vetri.

What opponents to marriage equality need to recognize, Vetri adds, is that "committed relationships are what's important."

"We live on your block," says Vetri, "we pay taxes, our children go to school and play soccer and baseball with your children, we work side by side with you, we are in the armed services in Iraq, and we contribute immensely to our communities and to the nation."

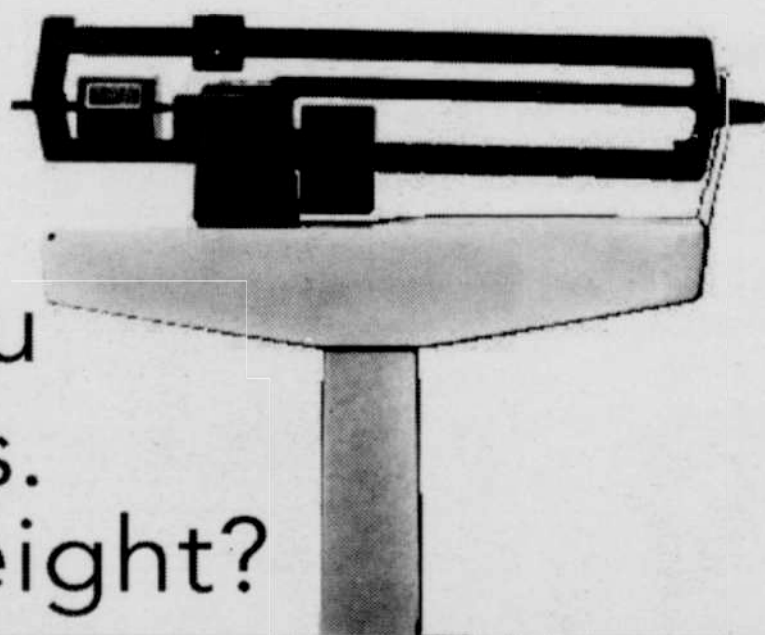
Married, no matter the definition

One fateful day in 1987, Eugene activist Sally Sheklow was scheduled to be interviewed by her friend Enid Lefton, the host of a local women's music radio program. "Watching Enid behind the console...I suddenly saw her in a whole different light," says Sheklow.

The rest, we might say, is history. Well, actually, Sheklow had to woo Lefton for about a month before she began to reciprocate the "special attention," as Sheklow called it.

Though they don't yet have a marriage license, they did celebrate a wedding at their synagogue. It was "a nice Jewish wedding under

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