

# The Ring Thing



As Massachusetts legalizes same-sex marriage, Portland queer couples grapple with saying “I do”

by Glenn Scofield Williams • Photos by Marty Davis

“Are you guys getting married?” I ask my friend this question as a kind of joke. Lately, it’s the conversation starter that everyone—queer or not—is compelled to ask their queer friends, especially here in Portland. But my friend (who doesn’t want to be named for reasons about to be made plain) has only been dating his boyfriend for a few months, and their relationship is still tender and fragile like a new relationship can be. So the idea of marriage is pretty silly. Right?

“We’re thinking about it,” he says. “We’re talking about going down and standing in line tomorrow.”

He toys with his coffee cup, and for a moment, the bursts and bustles of the coffee shop are the only sounds breaking our silence. Finally he smiles an ironic smile and says, “It’s such an important moment in the struggle for equal rights.” He sounds a wee bit defensive. “We’ve been thinking about getting married—you know, as a political statement.”

Marriage as a political statement?

As we wait, state by state, for the courts and the referendums and the pundits to decide the fate of same-sex marriage, the questions begin to arise in our community’s collective conversations: Why do we want so badly to say “I do”? Why is it that when the rest of the country seems to be at a dead sprint away from the concept of marriage, the queer community is fighting furiously to embrace it? What does marriage mean for us?

Statistically speaking, marriage is in survival mode. According to the latest statistics gathered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (an irony not lost on any of us), the percentage of people who are married in the United States is declining: 59 percent in 2002, as opposed to 62 percent in 1990 and 72 percent in 1970. On top of this, the percentage of all U.S. citizens who are divorced is on the rise: 10 percent in 2002, up

from 8 percent in 1990 and 6 percent in 1980. In 1997, the percentage of first marriages that end in divorce was 50 percent, the percentage of remarriages that end in divorce was 60 percent, and the likelihood of new marriages ending in divorce was 43 percent.

Not the greatest betting odds. The number of straight couples choosing to live together, instead of getting married, is also up: 5.5 million couples in 2000. And in case we are tempted to boast that Oregon stats won’t be so bad, the National Center for Health Statistics reckoned that in 1994, Oregon ranked 35th among the states for divorces issued—with No. 1 being the lowest number.

Which makes this queer guy wonder: If the straight world, with all its cultural, political and social support systems, can’t make marriage work, what good is it? Why should queer couples want to have anything to do with this institu-

*Why is it that when the rest of the country seems to be at a dead sprint away from the concept of marriage, the queer community is fighting furiously to embrace it?*



*Plants, Tools & Good Dirt*

3433 NE 24TH AVENUE  
PORTLAND OR 97212  
503.287.3200



Richard & Lori Vollmer  
Owners

## IN THE MARKET for a NEW or USED CAR?

Stop in at Lithia Subaru  
and take a test drive.  
We'll treat you like family!  
—Jim Andrews

**LITHIA**  
**SUBARU**

*The Beauty of All-Wheel Drive.*

**1-800-311-7310** 1404 Main Street • Oregon City  
[www.lithiasubaruoregoncity.com](http://www.lithiasubaruoregoncity.com)