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Hershey was exiting a relationship and needed desperately to find an apartment in the city. Enter Oxley.

"[Lynnae] had some rooms for rent in a house and needed a housemate," says Hershey. "We met, talked. Things worked out, and I decided to rent one of the rooms."

Oxley jokes: "[Molly] apparently was courting me for a while before I realized what was happening. The whole late-bloomer thing, I suppose. Anyway, we hit it off, had a lot in common and both decided to stop playing the field, so to speak."

Hershey says their relationship has been "kinda like in the fairy tales, with a couple of twists." The best way she can find to describe their relationship is: "It's always seemed that our relationship was just meant to be and we happened to be there to let it happen."

Neither woman grew up dreaming of marriage. And as lesbians, neither thought it would be much of a possibility anyway.

"I never pictured myself in the white wedding dress and all of that stuff," Hershey says. "But at the same time, I never ruled out falling in love and being in a long-term, committed relationship with someone."

Oxley agrees. "I've always thought of marriage as something so far off. So to be honest, I never really dreamed about it. I've always thought, if confronted with the situation of marriage with someone I loved, it would be then that I would figure it out."

That time has come, much to the couple's surprise, and "figuring it out" has proved complicated.

Hershey remembers reading the newspaper March 3: "At first I was in shock, like I was in some limbo land, and I kept reading the words to be sure my eyes weren't playing tricks on me. I was very excited about the prospect of being able to get married and having our relationship—which, in my mind, is already a marriage—becoming something legalized and not only symbolic."

The couple spent the rest of the week discussing their feelings and deciding what they wanted to do. Oxley says it was not as easy as just jumping in the car and going for it.

"On one hand, Molly and I didn't want to get caught up in the emotional, romantic wave of getting married only to sober up and find out that it wasn't recognized anywhere except two places outside of Portland," says Oxley. "On the

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—Lynnae Oxley



Molly Hershey (left) and Lynnae Oxley are waiting until same-sex marriage is legal statewide

other hand, we do have a tendency to overthink things, and that can damper any spontaneity. We just wanted to protect ourselves and each other."

By March 7, their plans had begun to come together. They could enlist their minister friend to conduct the ceremony. They had two witnesses at the ready. They could plan the reception with friends and family for summertime. All they had to do was go get the license.

But something caught them up short. At the 11th hour, they decided not to do it.

"We asked ourselves if we wanted our relationship to be thrown into the political, legal and financial storm that would arise from issuing marriage licenses to gay couples," says Hershey. And the answer was not a resounding yes.

"We were both honestly torn," Hershey says.

The couple decided they were not willing to risk the precautions they had already taken to protect their relationship—the deed to their house, their wills, their powers of attorney.

"I wanted to find out if this legalness of same-sex marriage was going to stick," says Oxley. "I think that until we can go down, get a license to marry, get married and have it recognized by everyone, the two of us will wait it out and protect each other with other means."

We don't

Whether or not Oregon decides to recognize the marriage licenses it issued, not all queer couples are anxious to get to the courthouse.

Drew McWilliams, a 48-year-old mental health administrator, has been there and done that. He admits that in spite of a second-grade "crush on President John F. Kennedy" and on "fellow classmates," he learned to hide his impulses. "I firmly had ingrained [in me] that the only way I was going to have a partner, children and be accepted was to hope to love and marry a woman."

So, shortly after college, that's precisely what

he did. "I did get married briefly to a female co-worker who was accepting enough of the limited details I shared about my homosexual struggles."

It didn't last long, and with the dissolution of his marriage went the dream of ever being married again. "Over the years I have both accepted this loss of a marriage option and have learned to not see it as the only way of designating a committed love relationship."

McWilliams fought the demons of marriage past almost from the beginning. "My parents' marriage ended in divorce when I was an infant," he says. Through tense and difficult mandatory visits and watching his parents verbally spar, he learned to distrust marriage. "The primary effect this had on me was not knowing what a day-to-day love relationship could be like. Marriage had the negative connotation of a frustrating divorce."

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—Drew McWilliams

In 1996, McWilliams met and fell in love with Stephen Michael Blair, a 30-year-old freelance writer. After a month, they moved in together.

"I think we chose to be a couple," Blair says, "because we shared a zany sense of humor and we both felt very safe together."

McWilliams adds, "We both felt at home with one another right from the start."

The couple attribute the success of their relationship to such qualities as constant communication, humor and acceptance of each other as they are. "If one of us is in a tight spot," says Blair, "we make sure to talk about the issue right away so that it doesn't fester for too long and become unmanageable."

McWilliams and Blair were vacationing in Palm Springs, Calif., when they read the news that marriage licenses were being issued to same-sex couples back home. "I was very happy that the option of marriage was open for those who wanted it," says Blair, "but I didn't feel especially jazzed about getting married."

After discussing the issue and recognizing "how glad we were that this was becoming an option for gay people in our community," the couple came to the heart of their vision of their relationship.

"My decision to be Drew's partner," says Blair, "is a lifelong commitment to love and care for Drew. I don't think that getting married would constitute a greater commitment than the one I already have."

McWilliams adds: "Commitment is truly not enhanced or ensured by a legal marriage ritual. Having ways to celebrate and participate with others around our commitment are what seem essential to me."

In the end, they chose not to get married. Perhaps for McWilliams, the ghosts of marriage past are strong enough examples of the institution to affect the need for it in his own life. Perhaps he simply feels marriage is simply redundant. "I feel as fully committed to Stephen as I could possibly imagine," he says.

For Blair, the instinct to avoid marriage goes deeper. In high school, before coming out, he recognized that the act of declaring his sexual orientation would exclude him from certain rites of passage.

"I resented the fact that I was excluded from these traditions, such as marriage," Blair explains. "Over time this resentment developed into feelings of aversion toward the marriage ritual. It boiled down to a simple conclusion: If

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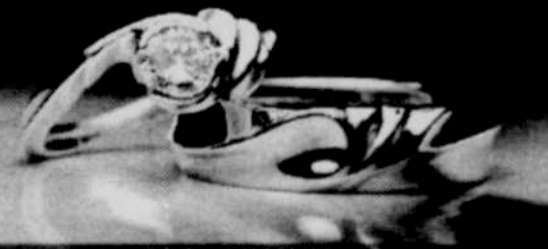
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