

at the hands of her Catholic priest, who also tormented her with puzzles, riddles and rebuses.

Ultimately, Per's Brad-Pitt-like beauty can't compensate for his lying, cheating and excessive drinking. To the author's credit, however, she doesn't paint the two main characters in the broad brushstrokes of hero and villain. Although there's no denying the third-wave feminist perspective that informs her work, Bryson is too mature, honest and iconoclastic a writer to reduce her characters to victim vs. oppressor stereotypes. Her Clementine is far removed from the saintly Virgin Mary who appears to her in a blue haze through a bus window toward the beginning of the novel. This is a girl who keeps jars of rancid urine beneath her bed, prefers not to share her seat with strangers on the bus, gives as much emotional pain as she gets, and attempts to cut her wrist in a pathetic attempt to score sympathy from her disintegrating boyfriend. In other words, she's *human*.

The novel's pervading elegiac tone alerts the reader in advance that there probably won't be a happy ending, but it doesn't need one. *Girl on a Stick* is subversive in that it's a love story in which the couple's ultimate breakup is the happy ending. It's not that the relationship between Clementine and Per was a mistake, merely that it wasn't meant to be forever. Equally intriguing are the novel's stylistic innovations. Clementine, as narrator, often bridges the invisible divide to address the reader directly, in what the author says was partly intended as "taking the piss of *Bridget Jones's Diary*." There is extensive, semi-Joycean wordplay, and the text is enlivened with drawings, diagrams and crosswords that drive home the interconnectedness of its themes and the fact, alternately depressing and liberating, that our childhood remains with us forever.

Bryson, now 38, admits that *Girl on a Stick* is "loosely based on a relationship I once had" but denies that it's entirely autobiographical. While acknowledging the themes of power and imperialism that crisscross the book, she ultimately exorcises them, and the cynicism of Clementine, with good old-fashioned hope and resilience. "In addition to the power stuff, I was writing about hope and green trees," she says. "About how you break free from such systems and structures and learn to grow sprouts—extra limbs, fingers, hands—and be alive on your own terms." **10**

TONY LETIGRE is an artist, writer, student, fledgling publisher and brazen male hussy. E-mail him at anthonyletigre@gmail.com.

Declaration of Love

Portland author takes a wild trip through same-sex marriage and beyond

by Malka Geffen

Beren deMotier, a stay-at-home mom for the past 16 years, has had her hands full with her three kids and their giant Labrador, guinea pig, lizard and many other pets. Published first in *Just Out* 13 years ago, she's also been using those hands to write freelance articles—social commentary and humor pieces about the joys and challenges of being a lesbian mom. When she and her spouse of 20 years, Jannine Setter, had the opportunity to legally marry in Multnomah County in March 2004, they jumped at the chance. And then, like a true expositor, deMotier wrote about it.

With *The Brides of March: Memoir of a Same-Sex Marriage* (iUniverse, 2007, \$15.95 soft-cover), deMotier delivers a same-sex marriage memoir you could bring home to mother. "It's really about lives—experiencing this unique time in history," says DeMotier. "The desire to marry symbolically and legally is extremely meaningful and universal." The humor and humanity are definitely in the details of the book, which chronicles the impromptu weddings of minivan-driving lesbians who—along with their kids, friends and relatives—deal with the subsequent blow of losing said marriages.

In a chapter full of question and exclamation marks—suitable for the harried way the marriages came together that fateful day—deMotier provides a lens into the mindset and mayhem of the moment. "Would it really happen? I hoisted the port-a-potty up the stairs... and set it by the front door. Would we really be able to get a license and get married? I shoved a dozen nutrition bars into a freezer bag." Bodily necessities are never far from a mother's mind, even when she and her partner are about to get the rights, protections and responsibilities they and their family deserve.

Things weren't all dandy, however, as the children of the couples lined up for marriage licenses got a dose of the hateful and hurtful opposition. "The kids were extremely excited and into us getting married but were pretty shocked at the protesters and how they could believe the things they were saying," deMotier says. "The experience really politicized them."

Although no privileges or rights were ever afforded with the marriages performed in Multnomah County, the support from allies was nothing to balk at. "The biggest thing that happened was that people got it," says deMotier. "In our lives, there were people who assumed we were already married, were on our side and then really got what we'd been denied. The enormous outpouring of love was a very unexpected joy and blessing and was illustrative of how much not having that understanding meant to us."

Having the marriages constitutionally banned and then annulled took the wind out of many happily married sails. "It was the way [the marriages] were annulled," says deMotier. "Saying they were invalid at the time they were issued, saying it never happened."

She and her partner briefly considered moving to Canada. "Feeling alien in our country, we went the day [same-sex marriage] became legal there—it felt so right. The law came first, not religious opinion or opposition," deMotier says.

With kids deeply rooted in Portland, the family decided to stay. "But we're sorrowful, and the invisibility of it is over for everybody but still present for us."

When the news came out about the passage of House Bill 2007 in May, deMotier says she had an article poised to send out. "I really believed it would be challenged. I think [a referendum] will be on the ballot, and we're in for a rough time and more character assassinations. I wish [domestic partnerships] had been called civil unions, and I disagree that domestic partnership is more recognized though it is more palatable because it's clearly not marriage. The people who wrote the legislation acknowledged that."

When it comes to character assassination and harassment, deMotier knows of what she speaks. "We had a 'Just Married' sign up in our yard, and people put a razor blade in our lawn and dog poop...in our liberal neighborhood. It's hard to imagine someone would do that knowing kids live there," she says.

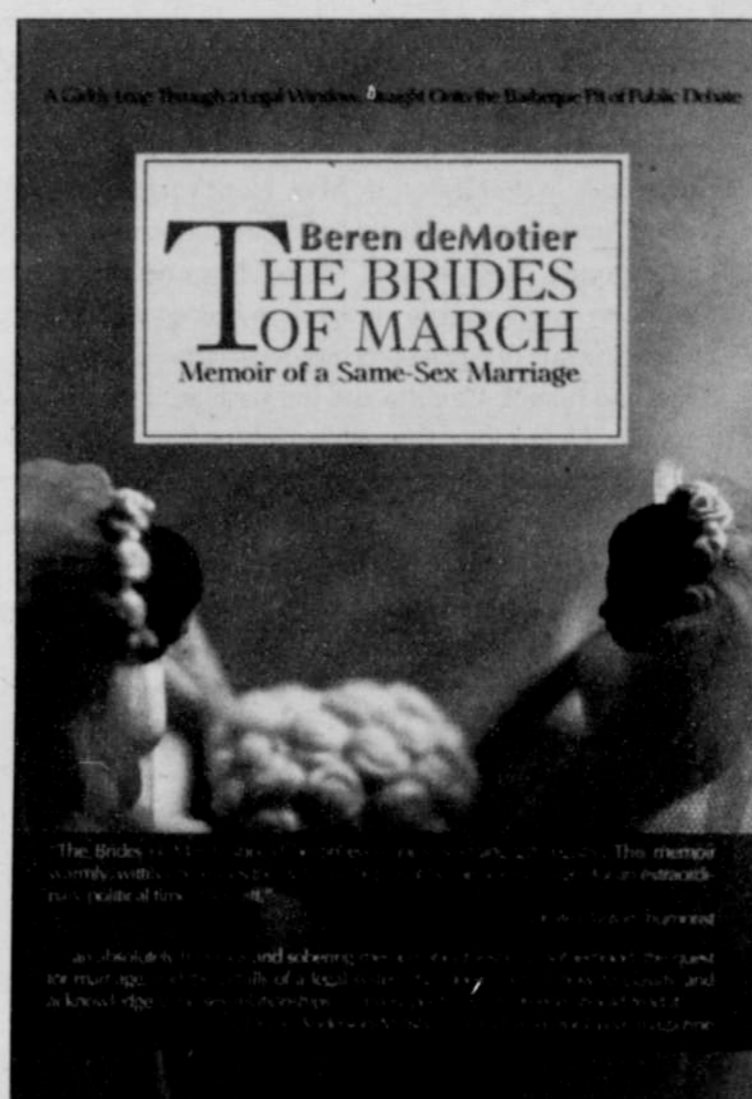
While she doesn't think opponents will use the "sicko stew" approach this time,

deMotier says things could still get ugly. "The most painful part is when straight people who care about you and wish you well think it's your issue instead of a human rights issue that should matter to everyone," deMotier adds.

Meanwhile, deMotier, who has been compared to humorist Erma Bombeck, battles on with her mighty pen. She continues working on articles as well as a new humor book—funny stories about the neighborhood and life as a lesbian mom—called *Maggots Before Breakfast*. **10**

For more information about BEREN DEMOTIER and the book, visit www.berendemotier.com and www.thebridesofmarch.com.

MALKA GEFFEN has plenty of room in her head. Fill it by e-mailing malkageffen@gmail.com.



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