

Better To Have Loved and Lost

Couples to celebrate same-sex marriage licenses given but taken away

BY AARON SPENCER

They were floored when they heard. Pat Emerson and Joyce Felton, a Portland lesbian couple, could now get married. Reports of the news zipped from televisions and radios to office water coolers and coffee shops.

"It was overwhelming," Emerson says. "Not only was I not going to get fired or get beaten up, but I was actually going to be legally recognized for who I was."

The next day, March 3, 2004, hundreds rushed to the Multnomah County building, where they stood in line in the cold rain waiting to say their vows and get marriage licenses. Later, more couples flocked to Keller Auditorium downtown, where weddings were held *en masse*.

More than 3,000 gay and lesbian couples were wed during a seven-week period in spring 2004 after Multnomah County suddenly began issuing wedding licenses to people of the same-sex.

The marriages aroused much controversy both locally and nationally, and they were later

ruled void by the Oregon Supreme Court. Oregon voters also passed a constitutional amendment declaring marriage to be between one man and one woman. But one church in Portland is celebrating the fact that the marriages happened at all.

"It was such a joyful time. It was an extraordinary experience," says the Rev. Kate Lore, social justice minister at the First Unitarian Church of Portland, which is throwing a week-end-long event this month, seven years after the marriages.

The celebration comes as LGBTQ advocates in Oregon prepare to make a renewed push for marriage. Advocacy group Basic Rights Oregon has a campaign under way that would make same-sex marriage legal in the state as soon as next year, effectively ending the ban enacted during the fallout from the Multnomah County ordeal in 2004.

"Things have changed quite a bit in Oregon

and across the country since 2004," says Jeana Frazzini, executive director of BRO. "We've seen public support move quite rapidly in favor of same-sex couples' rights."

Here's What You Missed

In 2004, gay marriage had risen to the forefront of U.S. public debate. The previous summer, two Canadian provinces, Ontario and British Columbia, began allowing same-sex marriage. In November 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Court found the state's ban on same-sex marriage to be unconstitutional, and in February 2004, San Francisco began issuing marriage licenses to gays and lesbians.

At the same time, President George W. Bush was pushing to amend the Constitution to limit marriage between a man and a woman. Several states had passed similar laws, and plans were



SUBMITTED PHOTO

"Our wedding was sort of whimsical. We skipped in to 'Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah' instead of 'Here Comes the Bride.'"

-PAT EMMERSON



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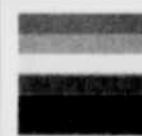
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