

New York State of Mind

My favorite move is *Father of the Bride* and either version will do. I adore the original from 1950 starring Spencer Tracy and the young, beautiful Elizabeth Taylor and also the 1991 remake with Steve Martin and Diane Keaton. In both, the opening scene is a shot of the father at the end of his daughter's wedding. He is surrounded by confetti and empty wine glasses, tuxedo tie loosened, looking generally disheveled and exhausted as he recounts the months leading up to the big day. I love the movie because it epitomizes the cultural understanding of what weddings are and what they are for: to send two people off on a life journey together, blessed by those who love them.

I love weddings. I love the tradition and the pomp and circumstance. I love how it brings families and friends together to celebrate the commitment between two people. Weddings bring families closer together for good reasons. My own family spans between Pennsylvania and Oregon; my journey west 19 years ago was the start of what became a migration of sorts, with my mother moving, followed by my younger brother and now my cousin. Because of the distance, we have unfortunately only gathered together for big occasions and, more unfortunately, those occasions have included several funerals over the years.

Weddings are a much better reason to spend time together and my family recently had that opportunity when my brother and



living out loud

BY KATHRYN MARTINI

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sister-in-law celebrated their marriage. It was beautiful—atop the hillside of Zenith Vineyards on a warm July day, more than 150 people watched them exchange vows, exchange rings and commit their lives to one another. The entire day was perfect. We visited with out-of-town guests, played with our baby cousins, and the 11 family members who made the trip from Pennsylvania saw the sights of Oregon, making the occasion a vacation as well. While taking in the entire experience, I couldn't help but wonder if my partner and I were to have a similar ceremony, would the same attention be paid to us?

The same weekend as my brother's wedding,

the state of New York began issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples. The city of New York issued 659 marriage licenses the first day it was legal to do so, and thousands of couples married throughout the state. It is estimated that same-sex weddings will contribute millions of dollars to the state's tourism industry; New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg is launching an "NYC I Do" campaign to market the city as a wedding destination. The legal rights and benefits afforded same-sex couples are most definitely important, but equally as important is that for those couples in New York, their relationship is finally legitimized.

My relationship with my partner is not as valid as that of my brother and sister-in-law. My brother can't even call my wife his sister-in-law because the law doesn't recognize our relationship. What we have, however committed and steeped in love, is not regarded as equal to my married family members. In fact, my failed marriages to men mean more, legally, than my successful relationship with my partner—and that is unacceptable.

"No one changes society," my uncle said to me recently. "It evolves on its own." I disagree

with him, especially on this issue. The members of society need to push evolution along, starting with treating people equally. New York, along with the other states who recognize marriage equality, is advancing the cause, but until the federal government does the same, we're not really there.

I doubt if we were allowed to marry that I would don a white dress and invite my Pennsylvania relatives to an elaborate celebration. We don't really need to stand in front of people and pledge our devotion to each other, or have people toast us, blessing our union. We know what it means to us, and we work hard on making our relationship thrive every day.

I want the freedom to wed if I desire, but more than that, I want my relationship to my wife to be celebrated and recognized in the same way my brother's is, not just legally—in every way. Someday I want to give my daughters the same kind of wedding, with the same kind of meaning as the one in my favorite movie. I want to send her off on a life journey, blessing her union and have it mean the same, regardless of the gender of the person she chooses to marry. I hope to one day have that chance. ☐

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