

Freedom means freedom for everyone

BY CECE BARNES

CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

The first thing I fell in love with was her voice. We were at a party at Carefree Lounge in Southeast Portland. She was from Georgia, and she had a southern drawl that grabbed my ear. I had to talk to her.

"No, honey, I can do this by myself," she replied, and introduced herself as Necole Hines. We started to hang out more and more. We bonded over late nights watching the TV show "Reno 911". We both loved basketball and music and movies. We'd both recently moved back to Portland. As we got to know each other, the deeper we fell in love.

So I, not sure what else to say, asked her whether she was the kind of woman who needed someone to take care of her.

I wanted to marry her because marriage establishes that real commitment. I wanted her to know I was there for her, no matter what happens, and that she was more than

my girlfriend. Our bond was a forever bond, and I wanted us to grow old together. This is a real commitment. I wanted her to know that if anything happens to her, I would be there.

So I asked her to marry me, and last November we had a beautiful wedding at the Kennedy School in northeast Portland.

Our life looks similar to any other couple. We're raising a family together. We have a daughter named

Hannah who is the best kid in the world. Our dog, a yorkie-chihuahua mix, seems to have an endless amount of energy. I work as a coffee roaster. Necole is studying to become a nurse. We're spending most of our free time right now remodeling the bathroom.

We want the freedom to marry for similar reasons as anyone would want it. Imagine if you'd been told it were illegal to marry the person you love? Marriage says family in a way that no other word does. It's one of the few times where people make a public promise of love and responsibility for each other and ask our friends and family to hold us accountable. And it's as simple as the golden rule. Treating others as one would want to be treated includes allowing same-sex couples to marry.

Thirteen states plus the District of Columbia allow all loving and committed couples to marry. The recent Supreme Court decisions add to the momentum, and in November last year, voters extended the freedom to marry to same-sex couples at the ballot box in four states. A growing majority of Oregonians support the freedom to marry.

Oregon, however, is the only state on the West Coast that does not allow gay and lesbian couples to marry. It's our turn to extend the freedom to marry to all couples. That's why I just signed up to volunteer with Oregon United for Marriage. This is

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Necole Hines (left) and Cece Barnes

our moment not only to win marriage, but to build a movement.

Oregon United for Marriage is a broad coalition of organizations and individuals who support the freedom to marry. Right now the campaign is gathering the signatures necessary to put marriage on the ballot. Since late July, we've collected more than 90,000 signatures, and most of these signatures have been collected by volunteers.

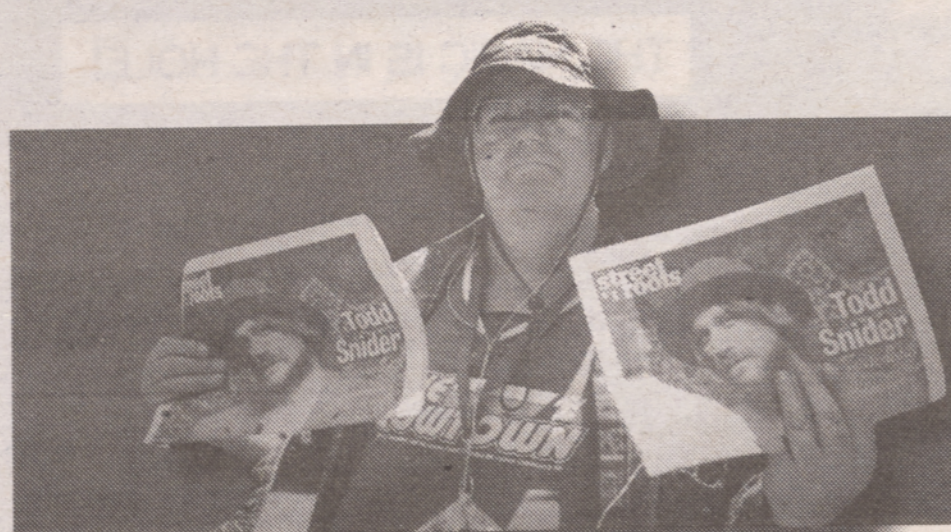
Every signature is a chance to have a one-on-one, heart-to-heart conversation about why marriage matters to all of us. It's our chance to tell our stories, to engage our neighbors and colleagues, and to help new leaders emerge. This is our time to win.

The campaign will be tough. Our families will be on the line. It will be expensive -

politically, financially and emotionally. A loss would be devastating. To win, we need to build the largest grassroots campaign our state has ever seen.

I'm helping by volunteering my time and speaking and writing about why marriage matters. I hope you'll get involved, too. Freedom means freedom for everyone, and I hope you will help us win the freedom to marry.

Help win the freedom to marry! You can also help by donating, writing a letter to the editor, talking to friends, registering to vote, registering other people to vote, hosting a house party, signing up to receive our email updates, following us through social media, volunteering at the campaign office. To find out more, go to www.OregonUnitedForMarriage.org.



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