

Lane County's ONLY Full-Service Internet Service Provider

SPECIAL OFFER

unlimited dialup \$9.95/mo for first 3 months when you switch from any ISP to OIP/Dataworks. This offer includes spam/virus filtering. (DSL \$14.95/mo for first 3 months)

www.dwco.com 541 942 7088



LIVING OUT BY SALLY SHEKLOW

Building Bridges

Understanding those who disagree

"So, tell me about life in Oregon." *Aura-GAWN* is how the 30-something woman from Virginia pronounces my home state.

I should be tolerant – I'm the only woman at this writing conference in Dayton, Ohio who isn't wearing high heels, and nobody's bad-vibing me. During our networking session we're supposed to meet each other, aided by nametags dangling from everyone's necks. Despite permission to chest-gaze, I do my best to make eye contact.



Ms. Virginia and I exchange business cards. She balances on four-inch stilettos, flicks back her professionally streaked hair and says she's married to an army man and writes about military life for a mainstream newspaper, apparently having no shame about any of this.

Her lack of coyness encourages me. "My wife and I are plaintiffs in a lawsuit challenging marriage discrimination against same-sex couples." A fun fact to toss around at an event where I'm already weird for wearing sneakers. We're getting impatient, I say, for our 16-year relationship to be legally recognized – "I want the law to stop discriminating against us."

The marriage topic establishes a connection. People who don't get the gay thing can still understand wanting to be married.

Virginia Woman's been following gay marriage in the news. "I wish I could support you." She daubs at an eyelash that has sprung free of the Maybelline.

Turns out Military Wife has gay neighbors. A couple of good-looking guys live next door – friendly, lovely garden, bring nice wine to her dinner parties. Then there's the wild guy in the shabby apartment who entertains a steady stream of male houseguests. What she imagines goes on in there is so far out of her realm of acceptable behavior (but not her curiosity!) that she'd vote against legalized marriage for same-sex couples rather than "endorse a promiscuous lifestyle" – as if nobody but homos has multiple partners.

Dayton, Ohio reminds me that beyond the pale of my comfy *L-word* world are lots of folks who aren't tuned into the marriage-equality zeitgeist. Scads of Americans still don't have any gay people in their life. Or they don't know they do. Or they know the two queer households in their neighborhood and base their political decision-making on their limited exposure. The land of stereotypes and fear is their comfort zone.

Between us is a chasm, an enormous cultural divide. Somebody's got to build a bridge.

Throughout the three-day conference, the Virginian and I snag moments to chat. In the corridor after a workshop session she takes hold of my arm, "You've got me in such a tizzy! I can't get this marriage thing off my mind."

I want to understand her thinking, to get a handle on how a fair-minded person like her can support discrimination. We talk over lunch, in line at the book signing, during a lull in the keynote address. She tells me what it's like being married to a military man, the commitment it takes, the struggles. I get it. She works hard for her marriage to succeed. It's precious to her. She feels protective.

I tell her I admire her and respect her marriage. I share more about mine hoping she'll return the goodwill.

When the conference ends and we say our good-byes, she is coming around. "I'm going to keep thinking about what you've said."

I will keep in mind that good people – reasonable people – can oppose so-called gay marriage (it's just plain marriage, folks) and still be worth talking to. Their reasoning won't hold up when they really examine it because discrimination is wrong. Let's hope most folks want to do the right thing.

Equality doesn't mean we can't be different, I remind myself. That's what it means to honor diversity. We don't have to be alike to defend each other's civil liberties. And I don't have to cram my feet into pointy-toed pumps to support someone else's right to do it.

Writer Sally Sheklow and her wife are one of nine plaintiff couples represented by the ACLU in an anti-discrimination lawsuit against the state of Oregon. Sally teaches magazine and essay writing at Lane Community College, Downtown Center.

At your YMCA...

Active Older Adults Day

May 27th, 2004 • 8:00-5:00pm

* FREE FOR ALL PEOPLE 50+ YEARS OLD *

PLEASE COME PLAY AT THE YMCA

SPECIAL EVENTS 9:00 - 2:00PM

9:30 - 11:00am **Blood Pressure Check**

11:30 - 12:15pm **Chair Massage**

12:10 - 1:00pm **Lunch Talk, Topic "Aromatherapy"**

1:00 - 2:00pm **Chair Massage**

CLASSES OFFERED 9:00 - 2:30PM

8:00 - 9:00am **Tai Chi**

9:00 - 10:00am **Deep Water Aerobics**

9:00 - 10:00am **Hatha Yoga**

10:30 - 12:00pm **Strength & Stretch**

11:30 - 12:15pm **Arthritis Fitness**

1:30 - 2:30pm **Functional Fitness**

EUGENE FAMILY YMCA

686-9622 • 2055 Patterson • Eugene

It's where your family belongs!