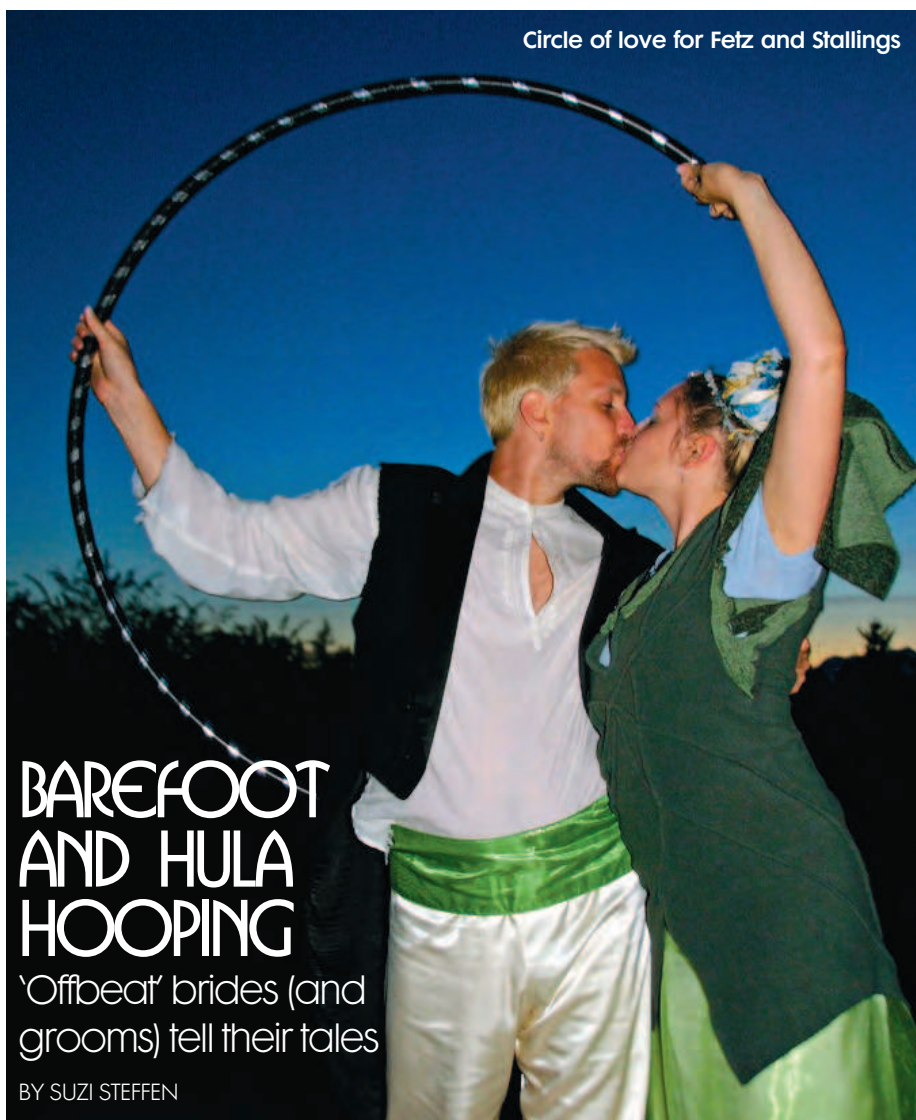




Circle of love for Fetz and Stallings

BAREFOOT AND HULA HOOPING

'Offbeat' brides (and grooms) tell their tales

BY SUZI STEFFEN

When Ariel Meadow Stallings and Andreas Fetz started making out at a rave in 1998, they weren't planning on hooking up for good. But love sparked in the warehouse where they met, and they stayed together. By early 2004 the questions and the pressure were flying thick and fast from relatives, friends and even friends of relatives.

One day, Fetz's father, stepmother and another couple took the younger two out for dinner. They started peppering Fetz and Stallings with questions about "the M-word" and "the C-word." According to Stallings, "This code-speak confounded me — the only C-word I know is the one that ends with

'unt' ... but of course she meant children."

Despite the pressure from certain family members, they didn't end up with a traditional wedding. No way. After all, as Stallings writes in her first book, they were planning a "hippie/raver/freakfest wedding," for which she wanted to dress "like a fairy-freakish electro forest queen" and Fetz, who "dresses like the Midwest academic feminist he was raised by," wanted something comfortable because they'd be outdoors. Everything (complete with intertwining vegan-iced and dairy-iced carrot cakes, a discussion of humanure and many, many hula hoops) came off marvelously in August 2004 after months of blogging and

Stallings' "control-freak" planning. So what to do next? Clearly, help others with their fairy freakfest forest (or underwater scuba diving or circus musical or Burning Man) weddings. That is, write a book.

Stallings is a self-described computer geek who long ago created her own website and compulsively updated blog. Her wedding memoir, she thought, would be called *And the Bride Wore a Hula Hoop*. Actually, even the book idea was nontraditional: Stallings never planned to write it until someone else wrote the pitch for her. Students in the postgraduate professional publishing course at Columbia, a course Stallings had finished several years before her wedding, took a class in which they had to get a real author to agree to pretend to write a book, which they then had to pretend to pitch to publishers. Stallings says, "They heard I was doing this weird wedding, and they said, 'Hey, would you write a pretend book for our pretend publishing course?'"

That "pretend" book turned into *Offbeat Bride: Taffeta-Free Alternatives for Independent Brides* (Seal Press, \$15.95), which has a publication date of Jan. 28 and can be ordered now online. It's a fun and smart read, full of helpful thoughts for those readers longing to get some tips on figuring out the whole wedding thing — without glossy magazines full of dress shots and bloated with advertising dollars. The book contains not only a memoir of Fetz and Stallings' process (and, one might say, product) but also charming stories, tips and ideas from many other brides (and a few grooms). The book itself is not glossy, but Stallings' interactive website (www.offbeatbride.com) and her Flickr group (www.flickr.com/groups/offbeatbride/), where other "offbeat" brides can upload photos, take advantage of the whole Web 2.0 thing. Though the Flickr group has only been up for a couple of weeks, several people have already found it and added their photos to the mix, with everything from a Burning Man wedding to a hilarious grocery store-bought-due-to-bakery-disaster wedding cake to a groom wearing a garter under his kilt. "My background is about writing as a form of community develop-

ment," Stallings says, so she hopes that the Flickr site and offbeatbride.com can take on lives of their own. Why? Because "every month, there are tens of thousands of women planning intelligent weddings."

When Stallings' agent sent around the book, the publishers in New York "just didn't know what to do with it," she says. Stallings and Fetz were married on Bainbridge Island, and Stallings isn't surprised that Seal Press, a West Coast publisher, would pick it up. But "I spoke to people in the East Coast who did jam band weddings, people in the South who did picnic weddings, people in the Midwest who did really simple, reserved, quiet events," she emphasizes. Even women from the U.K. responded to her research requests on indiebride.com (a website that she says is invaluable, "a lifesaver," for those not wanting to stick to the track as suggested on more "rigid" sites like theknot.com).

"Offbeat covers a wide spectrum," Stallings says. So when she wondered why the publisher chose a cover for her book with a woman in a traditionally white dress, she remembered that many people would consider the cover bride's hot pink hair crazy offbeat. "Entering into this event-planning process makes people who are really pretty traditional feel like complete freaks," she says.

Those planning a wedding in and around Eugene will no doubt appreciate Stallings' dis-



Fairy queen Stallings

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