

cussions of everything ranging from the ethics of straight, queer-allied couples getting married when their same-sex friends can't to writing decent, easy-to-remember vows to how to get family and friends to give the kind of gifts that help make the wedding itself special: food, guard duty for the bride from her family, photos, decoration, reception planning and more. Stallings writes about deciding what to wear, figuring out when to give a little and when to push for your ideal, how to manage costs (their wedding cost around \$6000, she says, and she's glad they didn't start out their married life with a huge amount of debt despite the received wisdom that "you can't have a wedding for less than \$20,000") and how to make the ceremony and reception fabulous.

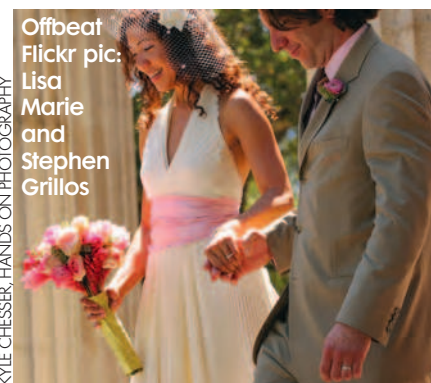
Eugeneans Heather Marie Michaud and Jeff Thomas would probably find their wedding perfectly in tune with Stallings' book. Like her, they called on their community of friends and family to make their day even more special — and they got far more than they bargained for.

When Michaud and Thomas got engaged on May 7, 2005 (or 5/7/5 — they call it "a haiku," Michaud says), they knew they didn't want their wedding to be the traditional walk-down-the-aisle in a church. But what to do: Get married at the Country Fair? Go for a long hike with lots of camping and have the ceremony at the top of a mountain? Maybe that would be asking a bit much of Thomas' relatives, who aren't from Oregon. Also, the state park they wanted to use at the foot of the Cascades? Full up. So after they decided on their backyard ("We have parties there all of the time," Thomas says, and they'd put a lot of effort into remodeling the house and re-landscaping the yard) and picked Mark Stern of Carte Blanche to cater the vegetarian food at their reception (food Michaud remembers as heavenly and perfect), Michaud and Thomas invited well over 100 people to the ceremony. Michaud's sister also made more than 40 pies, so they didn't have a traditional wedding cake but instead a pie variety. Thomas picked out his outfit at Potlatch Gate — "a nice button-up Tibetan shirt and prayer beads" — and both he and Michaud both went barefoot (they knew their backyard well enough to trust the ground).

"We actually got married in the courthouse," Michaud says, so the wedding ceremony itself could focus less on legal aspects and more on sacred, personally meaningful ceremony. Eight friends read from the texts that Thomas picked — some poems, some prose, some old and some newly composed — and they wrote not only vows but also what they call "anti-vows." Thomas explains that in the anti-vows, one of the officiants asked, for example, "Do you promise only to tell jokes that are funny?" and Thomas answered, "I do not." "Do you promise not to get dirty while gardening?" another asked Michaud. The humor was welcome. "Ceremonies can be kind of humdrum," says Thomas, "and getting a chuckle out of the crowd can keep the fire burning."

Then things got even more fun. Samba Ja was supposed to come play in the backyard ... but, Michaud says, "We heard them coming three blocks away, and we all ran out into the street!" Everyone, including the musicians, ended up dancing in the intersection for a while before retiring, sweeping neighbors along, to the backyard. As if that wasn't

enough, a friend who goes to Burning Man every year snuck in a huge silver weather balloon and filled it with helium. "Suddenly, a blinking balloon goes up amidst all of these Christmas lights and prayer flags," Thomas says, "and the balloon rises above the dancers like some trippy lotus flower."



KYLE CHESSEY, HANDS ON PHOTOGRAPHY

Offbeat Flickr pic: Lisa Marie and Stephen Grillos

Tia Molinar, who grew up in Eugene and Texas, also wanted her May ceremony not to be traditional. Her mother Susan Fishel, a local potter and bookkeeper, is a licensed minister of the Universal Life Church and is used to incorporating a variety of spiritual practices into her life, from chakra energy work to Buddhist practices, and agreed to officiate. Tia and her fiancé Michael lived in San Antonio and decided to get married on the oldest ranch in Texas, holding the ceremony outside. Tia remembers that a huge rainstorm was rolling in, but she and Fishel believe that Fishel, through her energy work, held off the rain until the reception ended. As the officiant, Fishel initiated a candle-lighting at the beginning of the ceremony and involved both of the families in creating a welcoming spiritual space for Tia and Michael.

Outside weddings with their connection to nature are important to many nontraditional brides and grooms. Like Michaud and Thomas, Tamara Fuller of Eugene and her fiancé Ryan Stasel hope not to wear shoes at their wedding, planned for this June at Eagle Rock in Vida. ("We'll sweep the lawn with a metal detector to make sure there aren't any fishhooks," Fuller notes). She and Stasel have been together for 10 years, and they'll be married along the McKenzie without a wedding party. "I plan to walk myself down the aisle," Fuller explains, but she's also planning a father/daughter dance. Fuller and Stasel got engaged on a trip to the coast, and they planned to get married on July 7 (7/7/07) — but when they found out that a gazillion other couples had the same idea (and snapped up all of the venues), they switched weekends. "It's a blue moon," Fuller says, "and the first full moon of summer." After growing up with the nickname Druid Girl, Fuller retains what she calls nature spirituality, so she's looking forward to being outside.

And as Thomas mentions and Stallings emphasizes, one key thing is to have fun and realize you're having an impact on your community, not just on yourself. "The whole thing was just this big community event," Thomas remembers. "It was a blast; I had no idea it would be so much fun." For Stallings and Fetz, the festive event became a reason to throw a sort of anniversary party every year, with the 2006 party celebrating the ceremony of Stallings' mother and her mother's partner. Thomas agrees it's a great plan: "I'd like to have a party like this every year!" ■

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