

ribbons & broomsticks

OLD RITUALS MADE NEW *by Suzi Steffen*

So you want to get hitched somehow, but you don't want to go through the rigamarole that constitutes a wedding? You want something more than a quick trip to the justice of the peace but less than a 400-person ceremony in a religious institution with 16 attendants and a bawling flower girl?

Maybe you're the kind of straight person who's cool enough not to get married until your queer friends have the same rights. Maybe you're the kind of queer person who thinks it'd be mighty nice to cement the relationship in some ceremony that nets you the same household goods that weddings have provided for your het siblings. So what's to be done?

Well, if you're a big neopagan or in love with the heritage of the Celts, there's always the handfasting. Handfasting's about as romantic as it gets, what with the couple (or more, for those poly folks out there in committed two-couple or four-partner or etc. relationships) tying ribbons over their conjoined hands in a Celtic knot. Check out the elvish pair at www.handfasting.info for ideas and information — though *EW* recommends you not buy pointy ear extenders — and don't miss out on photos of handfasting capes. A handfasting can come in or at the end of a more traditional wedding, but

for neopagans, it often stands as its own ritual, when the bonding folks or their guests do the tying. Since it's not yet as commercialized as the bridal industry, the handfasting thing is under your control. Sure, pictures on the Internet may be replete with medieval/Renaissance joy, but say you're a leather pair: You pick the material, boyos and grrrlz, and you decide what image you want to present to those attending your self-written ceremony.

Then there's jumping the broom. This option seems to have grown out of the ceremonies of African and African-American slaves in the U.S. South who weren't allowed to get married. When I say "weren't allowed," I mean that they were considered property like teacups, tables and cotton gins — and at any moment, a slaveowner could decide to sell his "property," and husbands and wives would be ripped apart, children from their parents, siblings from each other. So jumping the broom was one of the many forms of resistance open to the slaves. Neopagans also say that Welsh and English traditions included jumping the broom in a somewhat different form (and for different reasons). But the custom became more popular among African-American couples after the miniseries *Roots* aired in 1977, and it's so well-understood as the equivalent of marriage (just like the handfasting-influenced "tying the knot") that one can buy books like *Jumping the Broom: The African-American Wedding Planner*. Folksinger Catie Curtis, who lives in Boston and has now been able to get married to her partner thanks to Massachusetts' legalization of same-sex marriage, originally jumped the broom with her partner to formalize their relationship.

So sweep out the white dress and unity candle blahs with ceremonies of your own. And if you want to sign those papers giving straight people (and soon, if the religious wingnuts don't get their way, same-sex partners as well) some rights? Go ahead and do that quietly — if you can get your hands out of those knots.



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541-342-1243 • sarahsmith@inncline.com