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Gay and Lesbian Wedding Guide

**THIRD EDITION
Winter/Spring 2015**

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Gay and Lesbian Wedding Guide

Now that marriage equality is the law of the land in, what, like 74 states, all of our lives have been touched by this new wave of love and commitment. I, for one, have served as the best man in a gay wedding. Well, since this was a chance to forge our own traditions, we had to come up with a new title: I was man-maid of best honor. Always a man-maid, and so on ...

What has really impressed me at all the weddings I have attended (and have been privy to via social media) is the unbridled levels of fun. Joyful celebration! Mirth and merriment! It's almost as if I were at a "normal" wedding. But therein lies my point.

Because another thing I have noticed is that nobody says "gay wedding" anymore, simply "wedding." But just calling this a wedding guide doesn't quite cut it. This one's for us. This one's for family!

So please consider these businesses and services as your family grows in lovely, legal splendor!

—Kirk Williamson, editor



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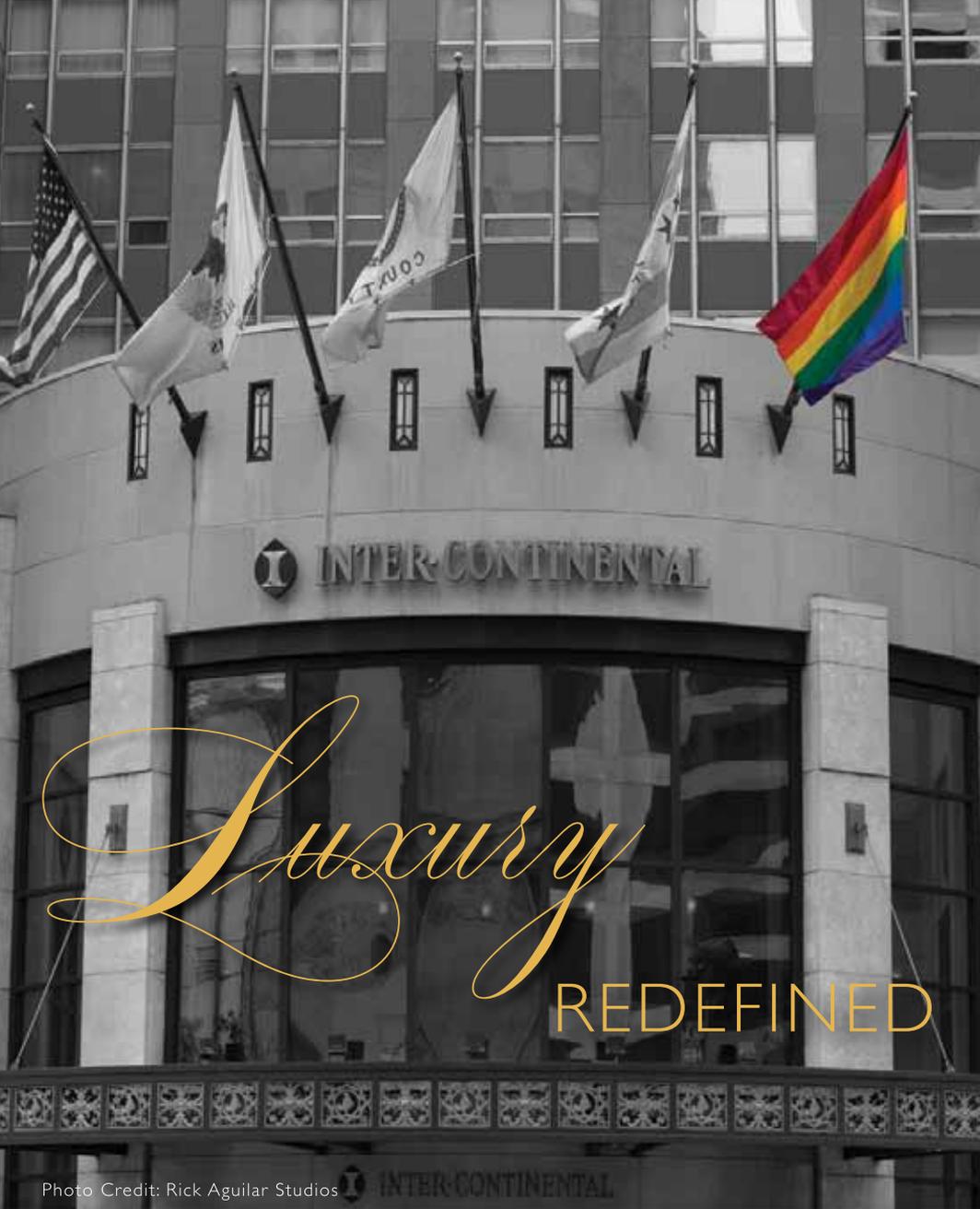


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- 8 SNAPSHOTS OF LOVE**
- 10 FRANKLY SPEAKING ...**
Expert tips to plan your wedding expertly
- 12 SNAPSHOTS OF LOVE**
- 14 HEARTSONGS**
Picking the right music for your big day
- 16 SNAPSHOTS OF LOVE**
- 18 PICTURE THIS**
Photo book documents '80s same-sex couples
- 20 NOTES FROM DIAMOND DON**
- 30 BORDER CROSSING**
One couple's personal story of love, marriage and immigration
- 34 SAME-SEX DIVORCE**
When there isn't a happily ever after
- 38 BUSINESS LISTINGS**

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We asked readers to send in photos of their weddings to share with the community. What we received was a collection of beautiful stories of love and commitment.

All photo courtesy of subjects except where otherwise indicated.



Susana Darwin (left) and **Amy Walsh** made it official Aug. 29, 2014.

Photo by Joe Mazza of Brave Lux

Alexandre Schleider (right) and his husband **Sean** recently wed. Here's their story, in the words of Alexandre himself:

"Sean and I met in April 2008 through Match.com. Between the first email and our first date it took us a month as we were both busy with business travel. Sean moved in with me in Oct. 2009; we thought it would be the culmination of our relationship.

In Dec 2010, when I was in Europe and Sean was in Hawaii, the Illinois general assembly was taking up a vote on civil unions. As we were texting back and forth to each other about the possibility that we could be in a civil union, our hearts grew hopeful. With this landmark legislation being passed in December of 2010 we knew we were destined to be together. On Christmas Eve in Paris, after everyone went to bed, Sean proposed to me!

We decided we would have our civil union on my birthday, June 15, 2011, but didn't tell anyone until our holiday party of 2011 when both families were present.



Then came the fight for marriage equality and we joined by supporting HRC and Equality Illinois by hosting parties and giving money.

Equality won and Sean and I converted our civil union to a marriage license on April 2, 2014, when my mother was visiting us from Paris.

But our happiness couldn't be contained in the dark basement of the city hall. We needed to have a celebration with our friends and family and we did so on Sept 2 at the Firehouse Chicago. We have been incredibly happy since.

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FRANKLY SPEAKING ...

Expert tips to plan your wedding expertly

BY FRANK J. ANDONOPLAS, MBC

The first thing most newly engaged couples ask is “where do I start?” My advice is to first decide on two key elements: the number of guests you want to invite (actually make a list), and what your budget is for the wedding. Both are vital to have decided before you start any planning.

From here you might want to consider hiring a wedding consultant to design, plan and coordinate. Even if you cannot afford to engage a consultant for the entire experience, I actually offer hourly consultations to guide the couple as they do all the legwork with creative ideas, etiquette information, budgeting tips as well as vendor referrals. Either will save you time and help you from making some very expensive mistakes.

The first and most important is selecting the reception and ceremony sites. If they are not the same you will need to check availability on the dates you selected and make sure they are both available at the times you want them. Make sure you can comfortably accommodate your guest count. Also find out the food and beverage minimum (which is usually exclusivity tax and tip so don't forget to add that in) that they require to hold the wedding there.

Other larger venues will charge a rental fee for the space. You will then need to hire a caterer to prepare, cook and serve the food. In addition at this type of venue you will need to rent every fork, glass, table and chair as well as a myriad of other items that will be needed. This will probably be the biggest part of your budget. If ceremony is not in that space, you will need to search for the perfect place to exchange your vows. This can be a garden, church, chapel or synagogue, or any other place you feel is the perfect place to make this commit-

ment. While searching find out the rental costs, the number of hours you can use the site for, as well as restrictions. If ceremony is there, you will need to investigate at “room turn” where the same space is used for ceremony and reception. Ask if there are any extra costs for this.

From here you would need to then move into the other “fixed costs,” which will include the officiant, entertainment/music, photographer and videographer/filmmaker. My advice for this is to make sure the things you were viewing are the work of who you were going to actually have there on the day of the wedding. Then switch out singers and make sure the photos and video are taken by the person who is actually at your wedding.

The remaining things to do are to think about the variable costs and a multitude of choices and designs that come in. Save the dates, invitations, your menu of what is being served, flowers, linen, lighting, upgraded chairs and dinnerware are just a few of the many things that truly are design elements and set your wedding apart from others. But this is also where the cost can go out-of-control, so if you do not have an unlimited budget, this is where a consultant can guide you in choosing the things that are the most meaningful to you and will make the biggest impact.

Frank J Andonoplas has designed social and corporate events all over the country since 1992. Frank is an active member of the Association of Bridal Consultants and is one of only 73 Master Wedding Consultants worldwide. Frank was named Event planner of the year in 2012. His expertise has been featured in wedding magazines on as well as local television segments in addition to the Early Show, and 20/20. For more information www.frankeventdesign.com

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Rosa (left) with **and Amy Duarte** (right) tied the knot in Kane County August 30 of last year, after a decade together.

Couple **Rev. Wayne Bradley** (right) and **Rick Peterson** got married last year in celebration of their 30th anniversary.



Couple **Chris Verbaker** (left) and **Hugo Arrieta** kicked off the new year by getting married Jan. 7 at the Cook County courthouse. The couple is planning a celebration this summer. A happily-hyphenated couple, Arrieta-Verbaker and Verbaker-Arrieta (their new names) live in Lake View with their seven-year-old daughter.



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HEARTSONGS

Picking the right music for your big day

BY DJ MARC 'MOOSE' MODER

Now that Valentine's Day is in our rearview, the wedding planning and invites start to mount for DJs. Without fail, most brides and grooms have visions of the flowers, suits, guests and venues in mind already (most since their earliest memory), but not really music. Music, when all is said and done, is the central part of making memories of your reception and wedding happen. Long after folks have forgotten your piccata chicken choice and turquoise table linens, they'll remember your first song or that ABBA track Aunt Betty got her freak on to. So here's a wedding expert's tips on choosing the correct music for the DJ.

1. **Be certain and specific with the DJ** as to songs that you love, but also those you hate. Pay special attention to genres neither of you care for (hip hop, country and non-vocal house come up a lot). For songs you love, try to keep the danceable ones mainstream, and the ballads personal. You can't get too Top 40 for the wedding crowd, trust me. That said, I recommend staying within your own age group for dance choices. While your mother loves early Rolling Stones, most likely it will drive anyone under 50 off to the bar.

2. On the topic of slow dances, you might have your songs that you love, but **a quick Google search on lyrics should be done** before locking in the special moments. More times than not, popular love songs have underlying menace coated in romanticism. You don't want your attendees reading in anything other than light and love. What you hear as a romantic ballad might actually be written about a dirty side piece. Google it.

3. **Make sure you find a DJ who gets you.** Often venues will have their set DJs they strongly recommend you use, but often they're used to dealing with opposite-sex marriages and a very different musical history than the gay community. Gay playlists and straight playlists often only overlap less than 50%, so get together a list of what I call "Gay Bar Classics," those tracks you used to get down to at Roscoe's back in the day. If the DJ has those, you might be good. And don't be afraid to ask how many gay weddings they've done.

If nothing else, just make sure the DJ has at least 80 Madonna tracks in their library—anything less than that, and you might as well elope.

DJ Moose is now booking weddings for 2015 and 2016. See ad on page 41 for details.



DJ Marc 'Moose' Moder.
Photo by Kirk Williamson

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Kathy Guzman (right) and her bride **Debbie Sciortino** married Dec. 13, 2014, in San Diego.
Photo by Kat Fitzgerald

Joe Kozak (left) and **Bill Collins** celebrated Christmas last year by getting married.
Photo by Rick Aguilar Studios



Richard Stringer (left) and **Donald Rolfe** husbanded up Oct. 18, 2014, after 15 years as partners.

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Bill & Ric, with Ric's daughter Kate, San Francisco, 1987.
Photos by Sage Sohler

PICTURE THIS

Photo book documents '80s same-sex couples



BY TRACY BAIM

Talk about patience. Sage Sohler has waited three decades to put together a wonderful collection of intimate portraits of, and interviews with, same-sex couples across the United States. Step back in time with her new book, *At Home with Themselves*, and experience this era of both love and death, during the early years of the AIDS crisis and the fight for civil rights.

As the LGBT community celebrates the stunning marriage victories sweeping through America's courts, this book provides a needed

perspective on just how long this road has really been. Starting with the photo of two dads cooking with their child on the cover, the book takes you through a myriad of images showing what makes a family, including couples with pets, parents and wedding cakes well before it was legal to be married.

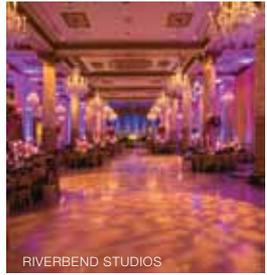
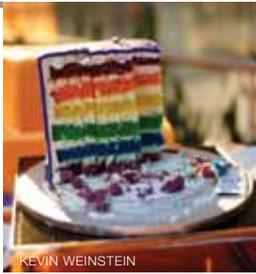
The 122-page softcover book includes 56 black-and-white photographs, interviews of the couples by the photographer, plus an essay by Hunter O'Hanian, director of the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art.

As Sohler writes in the book's introduction, she came to document this community through an unusual story: "One evening in the late 1970s, my cousin Jackie happened to see my father dancing with a young man at a club in New York. When she reported this to me and my sister, we realized, rather belatedly, that our father must be gay. We were intrigued and relieved by this revelation. He had split up with our mother when we were toddlers, and had kept us at arm's length for many years. ... He never 'came out' to either me or my sister, and it became increasingly clear that he didn't intend to. ...

"In the spring of 1988, I was just finishing my same-sex couples project. It had taken me almost halfway into the project to realize that I



Gordon & Jim, with Gordon's mother Margot, San Diego, 1987



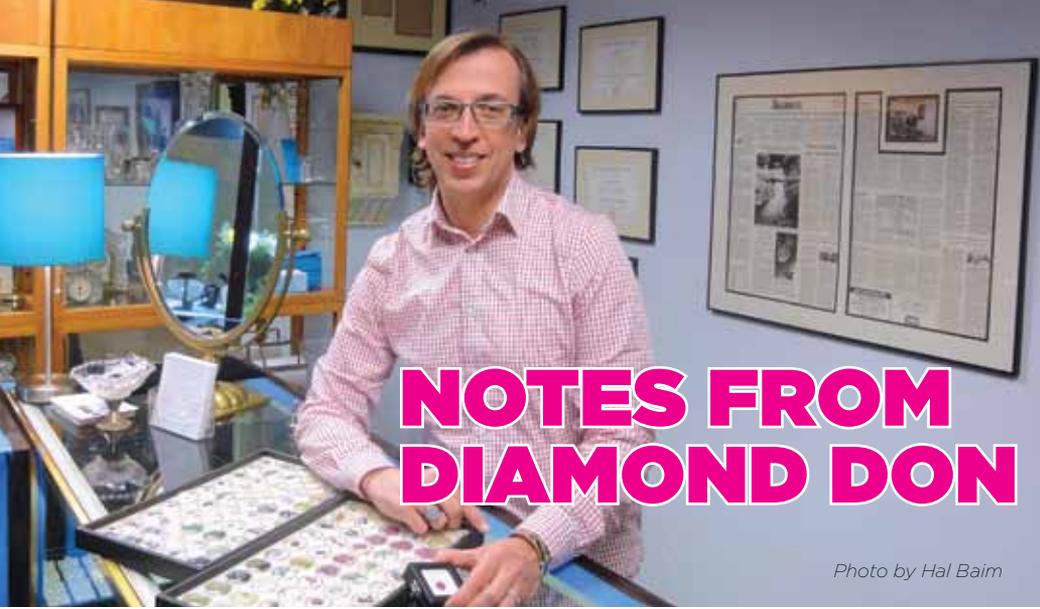
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NOTES FROM DIAMOND DON

Photo by Hal Baim

BY DON STRZEPEK

First, let me say congratulations on making the decision to get married to that most important person in your life—your wife or your husband. Now for some facts. How to choose the right engagement ring and wedding bands? Do you both get engagement rings? What type of metal should you get? Where should you shop? And how much should you pay?

Let me answer these questions as best as I can. The right engagement and wedding bands should be not only a symbol of your love and commitment, but a very open display of your individuality and personality. You are not going to settle on a cookie-cutter style, therefore, find a jeweler who is willing to listen and know about you and your partner. This will not happen on the Internet. The best thing you can do is shop local and make buying rings part of the overall fun experience.

Should you both get engagement and wedding rings? I think so. Why not? Shout out to the world that you are going forward with your lives together. I think the embracing of giving rings to each other is more than a display. Ring giving is an emotional statement. Remember, we are creating trends and traditions like never before.

What type of metal should your rings be made of? The answer is simple. Stay with the

finer metals that work well with your lifestyle and type of work you do. I am going to say avoid the alternative metals. I know they are trendy but they really are just street-fair type of costume jewelry. You both deserve the best for this lifetime expression. The right type of metal is silver, gold or platinum.

Where should you shop? I strongly recommend that you shop local. Shop with a true professional jeweler. Shop at a place where you can establish a personal relationship. Shop with a jeweler who cares about you and the moments in your life. Shop at the places that have always embraced you and will continue to do so.

Finally, how much should you spend? That answer is simple. If you want quality jewelry, do not just shop price point. Low pricing is often a sign of mass-produced and poor quality product. I would not even call that jewelry. Fine jewelry is quality made at affordable pricing. So the answer is to buy what is comfortable for the both of you. Remember, you are going to be wearing it for a lifetime.

Now get shopping. Diamonds are a woman's best friend and now a man's best friend as well.

Don Strzepke is the owner of Tucker, Inc. Stop by 5 S. Wabash Ave., Suite 507; visit www.tuckercompany.net or call 312-263-3317.

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Photo courtesy of Jai Girard Photography



LEFT: Cindy & Barb's Wedding, Boston, 1986. RIGHT: Stephanie & Monica, Boston, 1987.

from page 18

had been inspired to a great extent by my life-long curiosity about my father and more recent curiosity about his lifestyle. I was in New York showing the work to galleries and museums, and decided to call and see if my father was in town. He invited me over for lunch the next day; I had my portfolio with me, but figured I would never get up the nerve to show it to him.

"His partner, Lee, answered the door when I rang. He had long blond hair pulled back in a pony tail, a Southern drawl, and was about my age. Lee made sandwiches for us while I chatted with my father. I mentioned my project and, after some urging from Lee, showed them my photographs. My father appeared to be interested, amused, and touched. As we kissed goodbye later, his eyes teared up. His emotion and relief at my coming out for him was palpable. I began this project in 1986 because the advent of AIDS had led me to think about the prevalence, variety, and longevity of gay and lesbian relationships—the opposite of the promiscuity that was getting so much play in the press. My ambition was

to make pictures that challenged and moved people and that were interesting both visually and psychologically. In the 1980s, many same-sex relationships were still discreet, or a bit hidden. It was a time when many gay men were dying of AIDS, which made a particularly poignant backdrop for the project."

Sohier continues, "Looking at these pictures now, I realize that it took a good deal more courage to stand up and be photographed as a same-sex couple in the 1980s than it does today, and I think the photographs somehow convey that. In some, there's a tentativeness, in others a kind of not-to-be-taken-for-granted raw tenderness. People in my father's generation had grown up feeling that being openly gay was just not an acceptable option. In my generation that began to change, and I was grateful to be witness to it."

Now you can be a witness, too, by exploring this treasure-trove of images. It's like opening a time capsule in your attic, peaking into the dusty photo albums of a generation of courageous individuals and couples.

See <http://www.sagesohier.com/ahwt.html>.



David & Eric, Boston, 1986.



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One couple's personal story of love, marriage and immigration

BORDER CROSSING



Wally Andersen (left) with husband Matt Dans.

Photos courtesy of Andersen

BY WALLY ANDERSEN

Matt and I met online in Autumn of 2005 on Livejournal, the original personal blogging site. He randomly commented on a picture I posted, and we got to talking. At that point in our lives, we were both university students; I was attending Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan, and he was attending Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York, although he is originally from London, Ontario. We started chatting every day, and made plans to meet when he was coming to Michigan to visit his uncle (who was also my American Sign Language instructor) over the holidays. We hit it off, and decided to take a trip to New York City that year for New Year's Eve. While there, we decided to start dating and give a long-distance relationship a try. Over the next year, we would travel to visit each other on basically a monthly basis, and we spent the summer away from school together in Michigan. As things progressed nicely, I decided to propose to him, so I came up with an elaborate plan to travel to New York City for our dating anniversary, and ended up proposing to him in the same bar that we started dating at exactly one year earlier.

After the engagement, we continued to date long-distance for another year until I graduated, and then I moved temporarily to Rochester, New York, to live with Matt until he finished his classes five months later. At this point, Matt still had to complete two internships to earn his degree, and I was sick of driving everywhere, so we packed up and moved to Chicago to start the next phase of our lives. Over the following year, Matt finished his internships and graduated, and then ended up staying after his student visa expired.

As far as the immigration process went, it isn't exactly an affordable process for a single-income family, so we ended up waiting far longer than we originally anticipated to get married and start the process. We are pragmatists in the end, so we gradually cut our plans from a big wedding down to a quick small affair. We helped host an Immigration Equality event, and started looking at options. When John Kerry stated that the Department of State would consider same-sex couples equally for immigration status back in October 2013, we knew it was almost time.

Then, in November when the law changed in Illinois to allow same-sex marriage, even though there was a significant delay, we

started saving up and making plans. Thanks to the February 2014 ruling to allow same-sex marriage in Cook county, we planned for a few days and then went down to the courthouse. We went with a couple close friends from our stay in Chicago, and Matt's sister even drove in on a day's notice from Indianapolis to attend. It was a small group in a small room for less than 10 minutes, but it finally gave us the opportunity to make progress in our lives.

We then got back in touch with the brilliant Michael Jarecki, the immigration attorney we had been referred to earlier by another couple who had gone through the immigration process, and we finally got started working on the process. We compiled photos and stories of us over the eight years we had been together to prove that we had a real relationship, and 10 months later finally had our interview with the immigration agent, who gave us the thumbs up. Matt finally received his permanent green card last week, and we are now finally, FINALLY done with the process.



Photos of the couples' wedding at the Cook County courthouse.





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SAME-SEX DIVORCE

When there isn't a happily ever after

BY GRETCHEN RACHEL HAMMOND

When marriage equality took effect across Illinois last year, there were those who jubilantly rushed to the courthouse to finally have their love validated by the state. There is cautious optimism that by the end of its 2015 session, the United States Supreme Court will have ushered in scenes similar to those that took place at the Daley Center on February 21, 2014 with couples waiting in line for their marriage license—but at clerk's offices across the country.

However there is another reason some same-sex couples will visit their local courthouse once marriage sets in as a nationwide reality. For many of them, the day will be just as emotional and monumental.

But they will not be pledging unbreakable vows of eternal love to each other. They will be litigating and receiving judgment on how they will spend their lives forever apart.

The reality that same-sex divorce walks hand-in-hand with same-sex marriage is one that a 2014 article in *The Washington Post* noted "given the evidence available, the dissolution rate of same-sex marriages seems comparable to, not lower than, the divorce rate of traditional marriages."

The end of a marriage can often come as a shock to at least one if not both of the parties involved. With rage, disillusionment and guilt only beginning to set in many will contact attorneys for initial consultations plying their prospective advocate with questions including division of property, custody, finances and a host of others. Same-sex couples want to know if they can expect equality in divorce.

Michael Gauthier is an attorney at the law firm of Gauthier & Gooch based in Chicago and Wauconda. "The law applies equally to straight couples and the LGBT community," he said. "The problem is the fear of going into the process. You have folks who have been together in committed relationships for decades that for the first time are experiencing marriage which is fantastic but they are also experiencing the other side which is divorce. At this point the courts don't care whether you're straight, gay,

bisexual, lesbian or transgender. The clients are in a different position because they haven't experienced it yet through the course of their life. They don't know how things are going to play out."



Attorneys
Gail M.
O'Connor
(left) and
Michael
Gauthier
(below).

*Photos
courtesy of
subjects*



For a divorcing same-sex couple, concern about how property is to be divided takes on a significant role. Gail M. O'Connor is the proprietor of O'Connor Family Law, P.C. She has been practicing since 1996. "They are more likely to have more non-marital property at issue," she told *Windy City Times*. "There are people who have cohabited for longer but there are concerns about 'what is mine verses what is ours?'"

In a divorce non-marital property "is property you owned before the marriage," O'Connor explained. "You didn't put [your spouse's] name on it or you acquired it during the marriage by way of a gift, an inheritance or as an exchange for property which you owned prior to the marriage."



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Marital property is anything bought or acquired by each spouse from the day they were married to the day the judge signs a divorce decree. O'Connor stressed that even if the couple separates and lives apart long before a judgment is signed, anything obtained by either spouse during the separation is still considered marital property. "Sometimes people want to drag out the divorce for whatever reason," she said. "If you're accruing pension benefits, a 401K or you're paying down a mortgage your spouse is going to get fifty percent of that."

No matter how embittered the couple may be towards each other and so determined to engage in a War of the Roses with their estranged partner over everything from a home to a chipped coffee mug, the attorneys Windy City Times spoke to unanimously said they would prefer their clients think hard before deciding that they will not negotiate or agree to a settlement with their spouse before the case ever comes to court. Litigation is an expensive proposition.

"Even though we tend to get a bad press, most of us care about our clients and most

of us do what's right," Gauthier said. "Make no mistake, divorce is a tragedy and different people respond to tragedy in different ways. People who want to go to war are entitled to their day in court but it's the job of an attorney to explain the consequences and I always ask my clients 'is the juice worth the squeeze?' If you want to take your spouse to the cleaners and rain down hell on the person who has wronged you, do you really want to spend the time, money and effort to get that resolved or save your money and your emotions?"

Sandra Crawford, J.D. is a mediator and collaborative law professional. The firm Law Crawford, P.C. has specialized in mediation and collaboration between divorcing couples for a decade. "The contract you had 'till death do us part, we're going to live happily ever after' is no longer working when you're at the point in time of deciding to separate," she said. "The contract is broken. You need to negotiate your future especially if there are children in the picture be that through adoption or In Vitro Fertilization, if you have property together, a dog you are going to need a plan of action so that you can go into the future with order and some sense of control."

She added that most judges are happier when cases are resolved by way of documents such as a Marital Settlement Agreement before they are ever seen in their courtrooms "If a client shows up at a first interview saying 'I want to get the bastard, I want everything' and so on then we need to [understand] needs and interests," Crawford said. "Tell me something about why you want this thing so badly. People come in with two basic questions: 'how much is this going to cost me? When can you stop the pain?' Divorce is a conclusion. How you get there is a matter of choice."

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The past several years have seen the sweeping recognition of the right to marry throughout the country.

With marriage equality comes divorce equality: the right to be treated fairly in a divorce case on issues including child custody, alimony and property division regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation or sexual identification.

A founding partner at the law firm of Gauthier & Gooch, attorney Mike Gauthier is a resident of the 46th Ward and dedicates his practice to divorce and family law. He and his legal team of attorneys and paralegals support marriage equality, the LGBT community and advocate for divorce equality.

Mike is a two-time ASLA Top 40 Under 40 Lawyer, Martindale-Hubbell has peer-reviewed him as a "Distinguished" attorney and he has a perfect "10" rating of Superb by the AVVO lawyer rating service. With offices in Chicago and in the northern suburbs, Gauthier & Gooch handle divorce and family law matters throughout the Chicagoland area including Cook, Lake and McHenry Counties.



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more on page 42



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Rev. Jacki Belile is a lesbian Baptist minister, life coach, and experienced celebrant in interfaith settings. Her wedding services include custom design and pre-marital coaching sessions.

PHOTOGRAPHY/ VIDEO

Bean Blossom Prod.
www.BeanBlossomProductions.net
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TRAVEL

The Lattice Inn

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Montgomery, AL

334-263-1414

www.thelatticeinn.com

info@thelatticeinn.com

A gay-owned, award winning and unique bed and breakfast nestled in the heart of Montgomery, Alabama's historic Garden District. Guests can enjoy an exceptional lodging experience in a tastefully updated 2906-era cottage. The Inn is the perfect venue for a wedding, honeymoon or romantic getaway. The property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

VENUES

A Church 4 Me MCC

1545 W. Morse Ave., Chicago

708-951-4862

www.achurch4me.org

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Chicago History Museum

1601 N. Clark St.

312-799-2254

www.chicagohistory.org/hostevent

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City Winery Chicago

1200 W. Randolph St., Chicago

312-229-5989

www.citywinery.com

todd@citywinery.com

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Michelle Marchisotta, venue manager

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773-850-1545

Firehouse Chicago is unique, pristinely restored event venue with charming historic details and beautiful private side yard.

GayWedding ChicagoSite.com

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www.GayWeddingChicagoSite.com

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www.keithhousechicago.com

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Mars Gallery

1139 W. Fulton Market

312-226-7808

www.marsgallery.com

info@marsgallery.com

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more on page 44

Mayne Stage

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www.maynestage.com

rentals@maynestage.com

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North Shore Center for the Performing Arts

9501 Skokie Blvd., Skokie, IL

Events manager at

847-679-9501 x 3005

[www.northshorecenter.org/](http://www.northshorecenter.org/rent-the-center/)

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312-422-1325

www.palmerhousehiltonhotel.com/weddings

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