

At H's first Thanksgiving with my family, my stepmom introduced her to my step-great-aunt as my
"VERY SPECIAL FRIEND!"

[by Maggie McKnight]

Later, H and I had a good laugh over it—but then wondered what term we would use to reach a 94-year-old audience.

Women my parents' age and older use 'girlfriend' to refer to any female friend.

me and my girlfriends

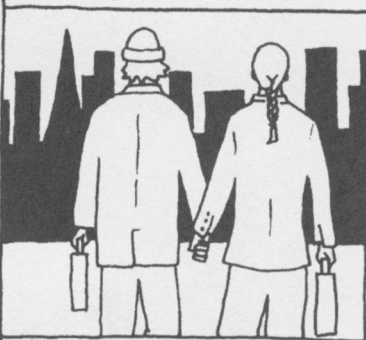


'Lover' is out of the question.



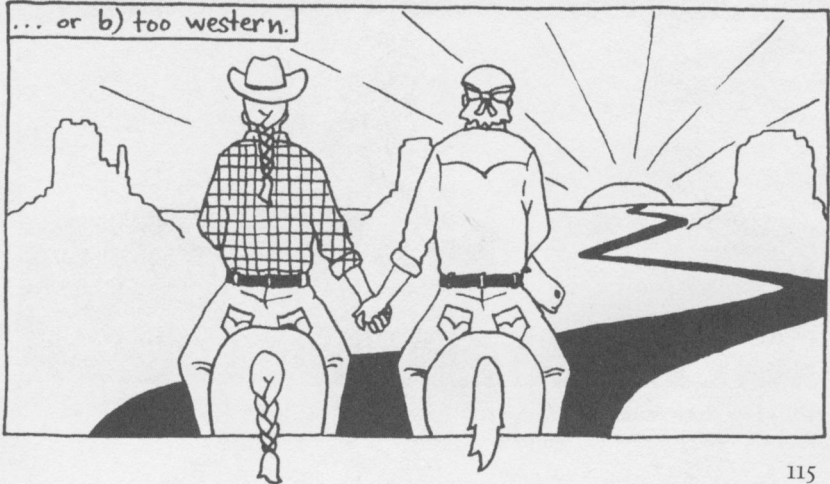
Being gay, we're already acutely aware of our identities being reduced to our genitals.

We use 'partner' when talking to people in our demographic. But to a 94-year-old, it could be:

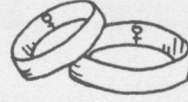
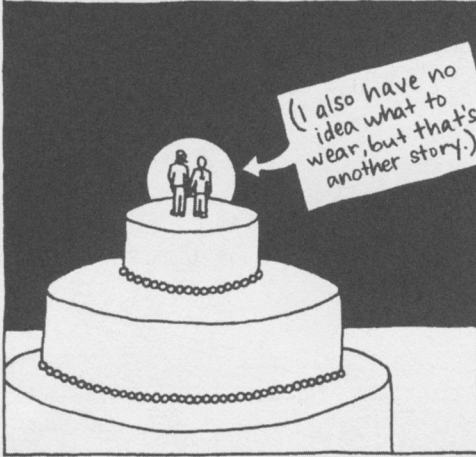


a) too businesslike...

... or b) too western.



Now we're planning a wedding, which only exacerbates the language problem.



We used to be up in the air about the whole marriage thing—it's complicated for us.

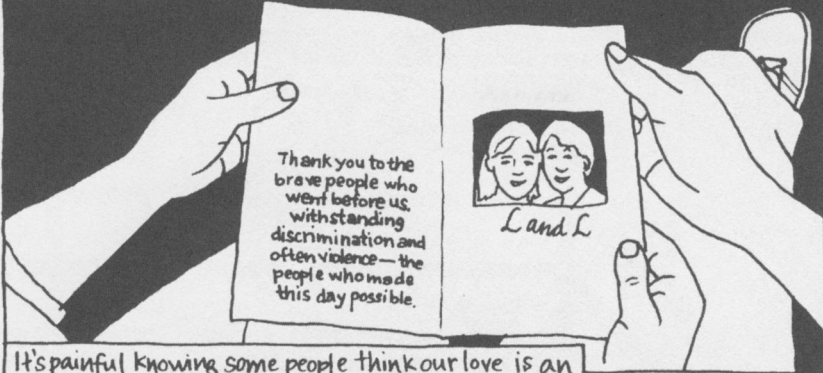
My family is riddled with divorces, H's with unhappy marriages—we don't exactly have a lot of inspiring models.

But recently we attended the wedding of our lesbian friends L and L.



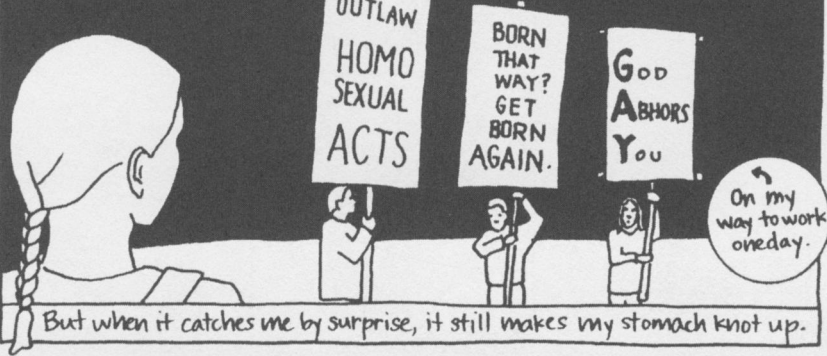
It was in their back yard, on the bank of the Iowa River.

Reading their program, we both became verklempt.



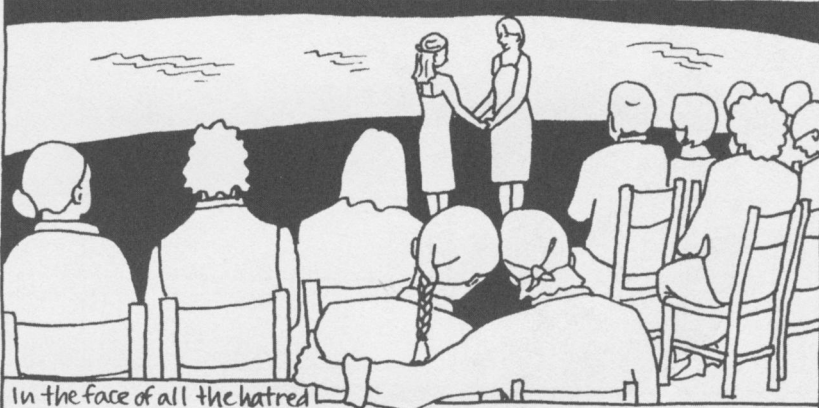
It's painful knowing some people think our love is an abomination—and exhausting wondering where we'll encounter them next.

Sure, we shrug it off, as plenty of people expect us to. We know the homophobes are wrong.



But when it catches me by surprise, it still makes my stomach knot up.

But here were our friends, celebrating their commitment to each other.



In the face of all the hatred and bigotry, they were standing up and saying "our relationship counts too."

During the reception, we stood by the river and marveled at all the folks—family members, friends, gays, straights, people of all ages—who had gathered to celebrate.



I wish I could've seen something like this when I was 19....

We thought especially about the young people, who might grow up in a world where it is perfectly normal for two women to love each other.

We decided then and there to start making plans of our own.



Now I get why queer people do this.

Yeah. I want to do it too.

We're not usually that big on tradition.



Will you marry me?

But sometimes it just feels right.

So now we're "engaged."

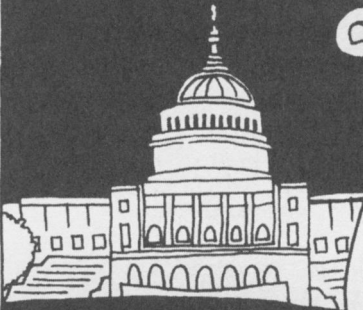
Of course, this creates even more questions about language.

Our beloved American Heritage Dictionary includes us.

marriage (mar' ij) *n.* 1a. The legal union of a man and woman as husband and wife. b. A common-law marriage. c. A union between two persons having the customary but usually not the legal force of marriage: *a same-sex marriage*. 2. A wedding. 3. A close union: "*the most successful marriage of beauty and blood in mainstream comics*" (Lloyd Rose). 4. Games. The combination of the king and queen of the same suit, as in pinochle. [Middle English marriage, from Old French, from *marier*, to marry. See MARRY.]

We want to stake our claim on the emotional and sacred sides of marriage—the commitment, the community support, the cake—without losing sight of the legal reality.

In other words, I don't want to pretend I have access to something I'm in fact very specifically denied.



January, 1996
In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress... the word 'marriage' means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word 'spouse' refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife.

See Appendix

So I've stopped saying 'we're getting married.'

The upside is we won't ever have to call each other 'spouse,' which a) sounds a lot like louse, and b) reminds us of a digestive noise.



Really, being gay has its benefits.

APPENDIX: THE DEFENSE OF MARRIAGE ACT (DOMA)

In 1991, three gay couples who had been denied marriage licenses by the State of Hawaii filed suit, arguing a violation of the state Constitution. Several years later, the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled in their favor.



In response, the federal Defense of Marriage Act was introduced in 1996 by Representative Bob Barr of Georgia. It passed with overwhelming majorities in both the House and the Senate.



On September 21, 1996, after spending the first part of the year in an extramarital sexual relationship, Bill Clinton signed the Defense of Marriage Act into law.

In effect, DOMA does two things:

First, it allows states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. (Currently, Massachusetts and California—at least for now—are the only states where gay marriage is fully legal, though other states recognize certain 'unions' or 'partnerships'.)

Second, it defines marriage, for the purposes of federal law, as only between a man and a woman. (Of course, federal legislation isn't enough for some people, who want a definition of marriage written into our very Constitution.)

The full text of DOMA is as follows:

H.R. 3396

*One Hundred Fourth Congress
of the United States of America*
AT THE SECOND SESSION

Begun and held at the City of Washington on Wednesday, the third day of January, one thousand nine hundred and ninety-six

An Act

To define and protect the institution of marriage.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the
United States of America in Congress assembled,*

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the 'Defense of Marriage Act'.

SEC. 2. POWERS RESERVED TO THE STATES.

(a) **IN GENERAL-** Chapter 115 of title 28, United States Code, is amended by adding after section 1738B the following:

'Sec. 1738C. Certain acts, records, and proceedings and the effect thereof

'No State, territory, or possession of the United States, or Indian tribe, shall be required to give effect to any public act, record, or judicial proceeding of any other State, territory, possession, or tribe respecting a relationship between persons of the same sex that is treated as a marriage under the laws of such other State, territory, possession, or tribe, or a right or claim arising from such relationship.'

(b) **CLERICAL AMENDMENT-** The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 115 of title 28, United States Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 1738B the following new item:

'1738C. Certain acts, records, and proceedings and the effect thereof.'

SEC. 3. DEFINITION OF MARRIAGE.

(a) **IN GENERAL-** Chapter 1 of title 1, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following:

'Sec. 7. Definition of 'marriage' and 'spouse'

'In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, or of any ruling, regulation, or interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, the word 'marriage' means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word 'spouse' refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife.'

(b) **CLERICAL AMENDMENT-** The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 1 of title 1, United States Code, is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 6 the following new item:

'7. Definition of 'marriage' and 'spouse'.'

Speaker of the House of Representatives.
Vice President of the United States and
President of the Senate.

