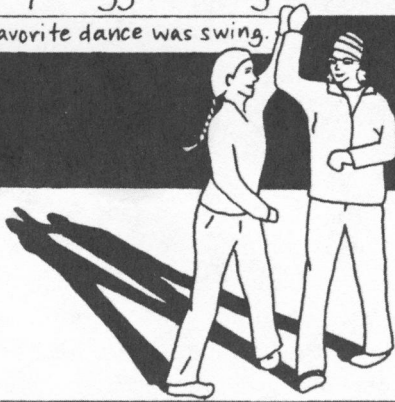


SWINGIN' by Maggie McKnight

In preparation for a family wedding, H and I took a "social dance" class this spring.

Our favorite dance was swing.



We were the only same-sex couple in the class. The instructors, who referred to the person leading as "the gentleman" and the one following as "the lady," seemed a bit flustered by our presence.

IN DANCING, THE GENTLEMAN'S THE BOSS BUT THE LADY IS ALWAYS RIGHT. HANA! HA HA HA!

HA HA!
HA HA!



I, having danced before and being the one who twisted H's arm to take the class, was the gentleman. H was the lady.

The thing is, I would be the one wearing a dress at the wedding: a white strapless bridesmaid's dress.

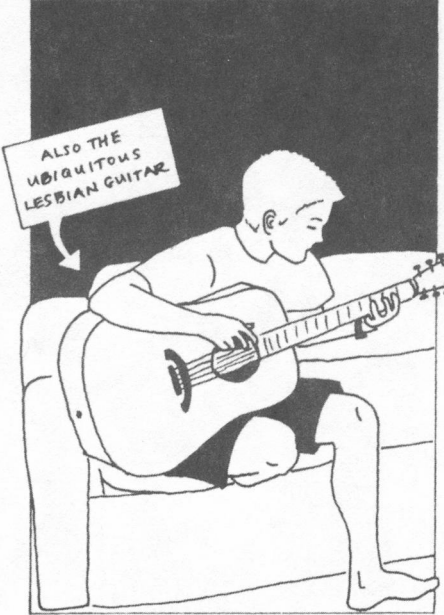


It had been years since I'd worn a dress. I know I wore a few skirts in the late 90's, but I must not have worn a dress since high school.

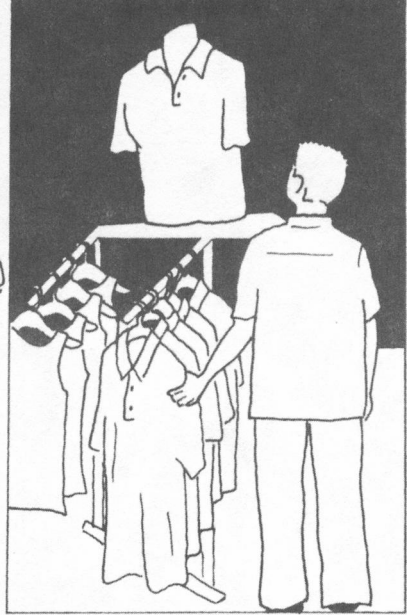


When I first came out at age 19, I thought it was my responsibility as a lesbian to defy the patriarchal conventions of the gender binary.

I had, of course, the standard-issue lesbian crew cut.

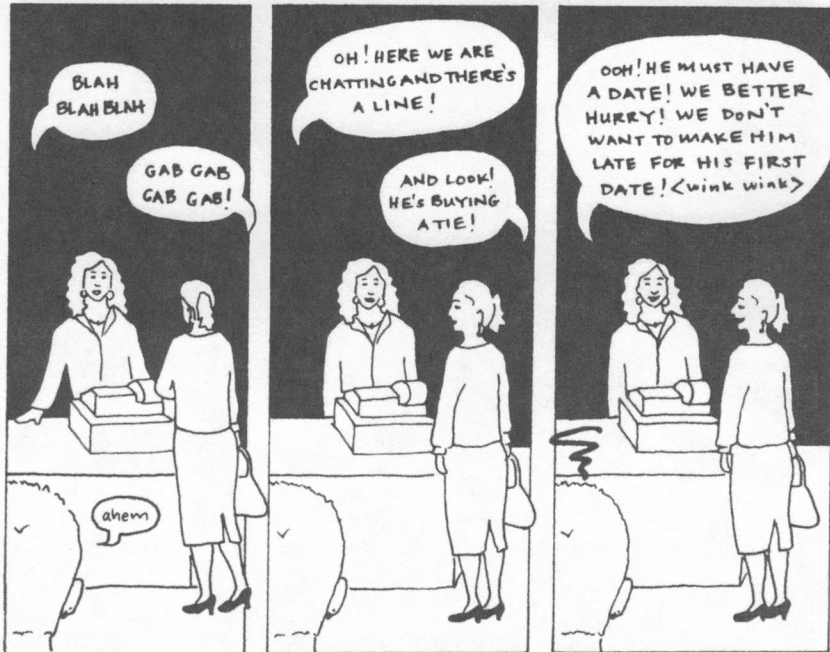


And I shopped mostly in the men's and boys' departments.

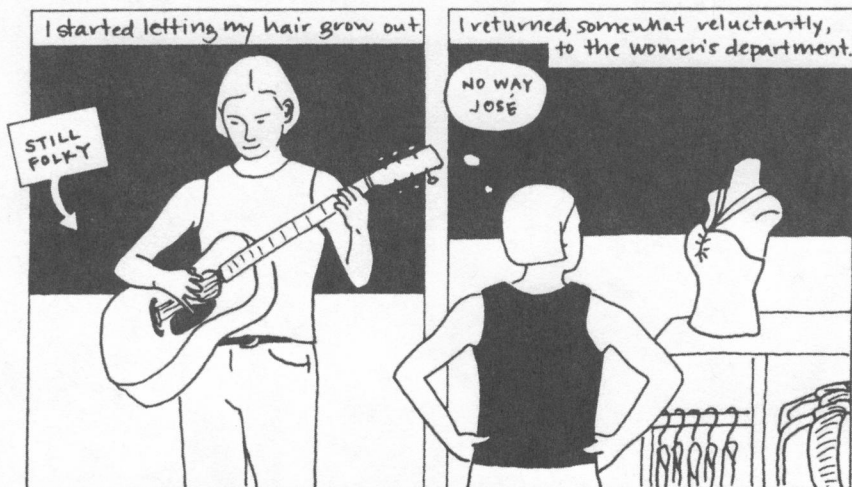


But for the most part, rather than shattering people's gender assumptions, I was simply seen as a boy. Usually a prepubescent boy.

Once I went to a thrift store to buy a tie for a costume party. I was in a hurry, and the cashier was chatting with someone at the register.

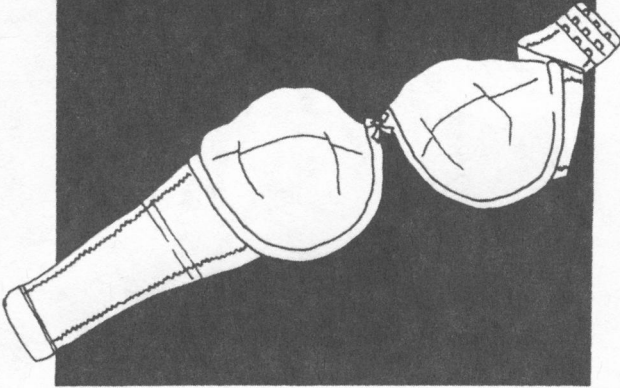


Eventually this kind of thing got old. Also I realized that my self-imposed lesbian costume felt just as oppressive as the de rigueur "girl's clothes" had.



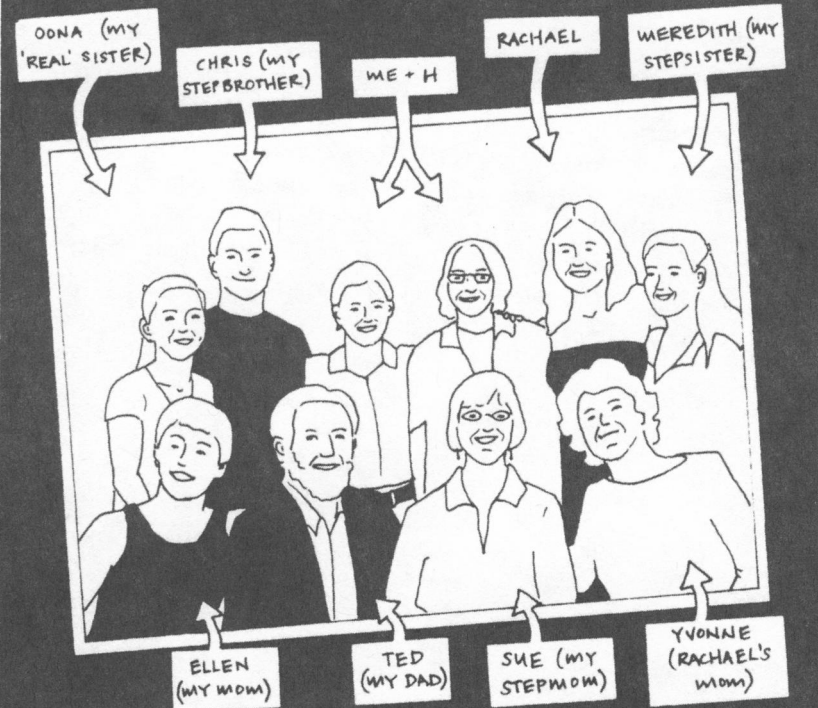
Now I wear what's comfortable, which is usually women's clothes — ones that fit. Just nothing too girly.

My sister's wedding would be the first time I'd worn a strapless bra (an oxymoron if I ever heard one).



Rachael and I usually just call ourselves sisters, but technically she's my step-step-sister.

She's my stepmom's stepdaughter. When Rachael's dad (divorced from her mom and remarried) died, Rachael, who was ten, continued to split her time between her mom's house and her stepmom's. Eight years later, my dad married her stepmom, who also had two other children.



The wedding was to be held in New Jersey, at the groom's Catholic prep school. Here we are at the rehearsal dinner: 5 kids (plus H), 4 parents.

By the time the wedding rolled around, I felt mostly comfortable in my dress.

It was even kind of fun—like Halloween.

I fell right into place as one of the girls.



Then when we gathered in the church lobby for the procession, I made an unpleasant discovery: a hefty stack of post-cards amidst the bulletins for parishioners.

Dear Representative _____,

I urge your support of The Marriage Protection Amendment, a constitutional amendment to protect traditional marriage between one woman and one man. Traditional marriage is the God-ordained building block of the family and bedrock of a civil society, and we tamper with it at our own peril. For the well-being of our children and our society, we must not allow the creation of same-sex "marriage," not by any name.

Signed, _____

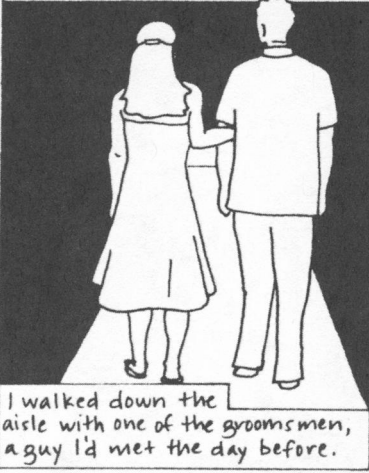
(print name)

(address)

(city, state, zip)

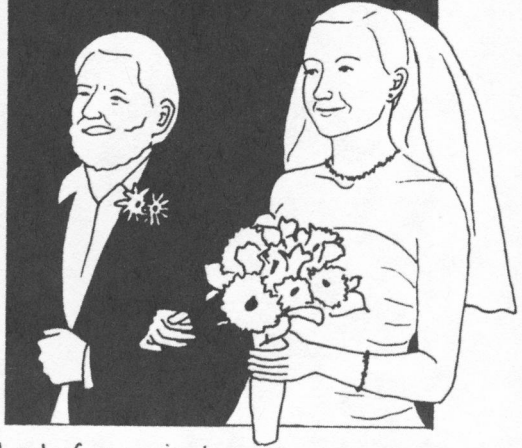
I felt like I'd been kicked in the face.

And then the wedding began.



I walked down the aisle with one of the groomsmen, a guy I'd met the day before.

I cried when Rachael walked out with my dad. Brides always make me cry.



Still, I couldn't get the postcard out of my mind.

The ceremony was a Jewish (Rachael's mom's side) - Catholic (Alex's family) - Filipino (Alex's mom's side) affair. I felt sick the whole time.

OONA AND MEREDITH (I'M A FEW GALS BACK)



At least my dress stayed in place.

Later I learned of what was happening in the pews.

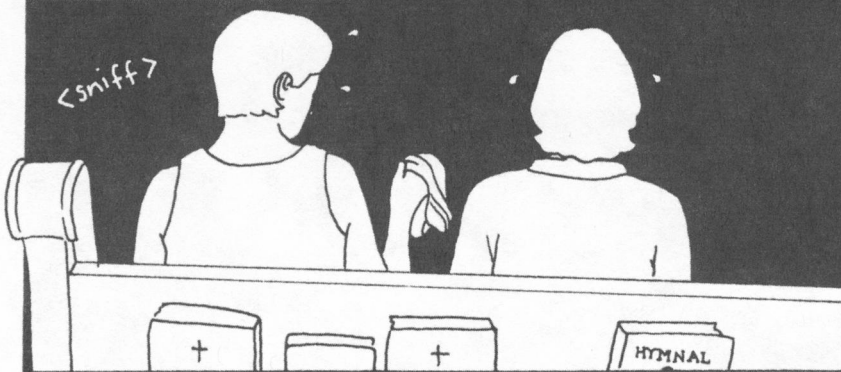
See, because of my white dress, I was wearing a g-string (definitely not standard fare for me).



I gave a pair of my usual underpants to H, in case I wanted to change into them later.

H gave them to my mom, who was carrying a purse.

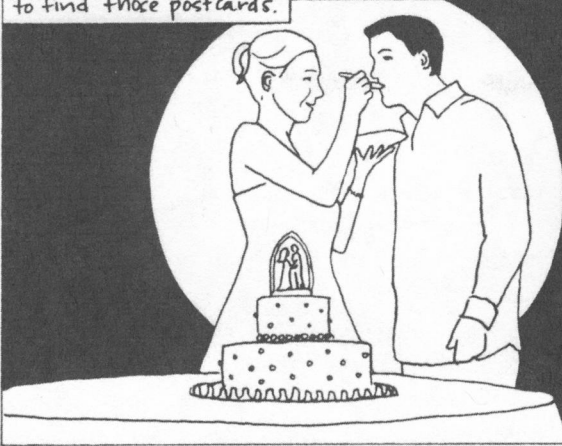
Brides make my mommy cry too... and she'd forgotten to bring Kleenex. She and H shared my underpants.



And offered them to the weepers in the pew in front of them.



During the reception, I wanted to talk to the pastor who ran the place — not to argue or debate, but to tell him how painful it had been to find those postcards.



But I lost my nerve.

When the dancing started, I finally let myself relax. We were among the first on the floor, knowing that at least no one in my family would ever question our right to be together.



My strapless bra was heading south, but I felt like my lady and I could swing the whole night away.