INTERSECTIONS
Stories by Utah’s LGBTQ Community and Their Straight Allies – Utah’s Other Pioneers
Marriage in My World
By Babs De Lay

Up until recently, BIG GAY WEDDINGS were about as rare as a good hair day for Donald Trump. As an officiant for the Universal Life Church, I’ve married hundreds of LGBT couples in the last 30 years here in Zion. For decades, all I could do was hand the brides or grooms a pretty document I made to commemorate the special day. Now, I can sign their actual license. I’ve been involved in myriad weird and wild weddings. There was the one with the two naked Leathermen who presented each other rings, but not rings meant to be worn on the finger; the hot summer wedding with the two overweight brides AND me balancing on a home-made wooden platform in the middle of a swimming pool; and then there’s the woman who wanted her cats to be married before they produced her a litter. Personally, I don’t have many rules for when I officiate other than the words said out loud are life affirming and my payment goes to the charity of my choosing.

The first gay wedding ever aired on TV was on the Fox sitcom Roc in 1991 (when Richard Roundtree’s character got hitched to another man). In 1995 Martin Mull’s character on Roseanne married his partner, to be followed a year later with Friends having a lesbian wedding. Now, with legalized marriage in so many states, a whole new wedding economy is being created. What with, same-sex wedding cake toppers, trans-tailored bride’s dresses, LGBT-friendly reception centers and vacation getaways, etc., etc. This is not anything I could have ever predicted when I was young and full of cum. My own romantic history is layered.

I am one of the folks who got married on December 20th, 2013 here in Salt Lake City. Yeah, third time is the charm! On that fated snowy day the news that Utah same-sex couples COULD get married was flying around faster than grass going through a goose. My Mormon, bishopric-serving attorney called me on the phone and said, “GET THEE TO THE CLERKS OFFICE NOW!” We ran down to 2100 South State St., parked, and raced television-cameramen and reporters to the Salt Lake County Clerk’s Office. None of us were headed the right way, but smiling county workers pointed us in the right direction.

Unfortunately, we ended up in line right behind the big GAY JIM DEBAKIS wedding. Mr. Nervous Nudnik (a.k.a. Jim) was trying to fill out his marriage license application, talk to reporters, kiss his husband to be, arrange his boutonniere, take his ritalin AND not cry – all at the same time. All we could do in the gridlock, with our completed paperwork in hand, was stand behind Jim and his husband and grumble, “Get on with it boys, we want to get married too! Get out of the way already!” Finally we maneuvered around the cameras and the press. We presented our application to the lovely county employee. She was so helpful. Me, I turned into an instant idiot in 10 seconds. How many times had I signed these documents for other people? She asked us, “Who’s marrying you?” I blurted out, “Me? You?” Calmly she told us that we had to go find an officiant and come back once we were married.

OMG OMG OMG. We left, more like RAN from the tiny Clerk’s office to only face a huge wall of anxious same-sex couples and press in the hallway. We heard there were ministers and officiants arriving downstairs that would happily marry people. We were headed that direction, when we ran smack dab into Mayor Ralph Becker his press entourage and handlers. “Hey Mayor, can you marry us?” I yelled.

“Um, uh, I don’t know what to do yet. I’m supposed to go marry Debakis!”

“Well, go do that, then!” we both said.
Downstairs people were everywhere laughing, screaming, crying, pointing, running, posing. Someone pointed out cute Christopher Wharton standing in a corner. He’s a local attorney who not only sports a bow tie but doesn’t even look like he’s graduated high school yet. Chris waved his invisible magic wand over us and signed our license. We raced back upstairs and weaseled ourselves back into the crush of people. I handed the paperwork to one of the staff and asked, no, begged her if the document could be of public record by 5 PM that day. Because, who knew if yet another court would overturn the ruling in ten minutes? She smiled and replied, “I guarantee it!”

My wife Bella and I had gotten married a year earlier at our beloved Burning Man. Our wedding wasn’t legal in the state of Nevada at that time but it meant just as much for us to do it there as anywhere else. It was not stressful like our Utah wedding, and it was so much more beautiful. We have gone for years to the big dance in the desert. We camp with a special group of people who hail from Portland, Alaska, Reno, San Francisco, Denver and San Diego. There’s about 50 of us who bring out RVs and big shade tents. We rent a bio-diesel generator to keep us all running. We provide music and rides to fellow Burners on our art car the “Surly Bird.”

I had proposed to my wife the previous year via a sticky note. I had hid it in the Altoid box she always carried in her pocket. We had long-distance dated for several years before our Burning Man wedding. She lived in Portland, I live here. Every other week, either I was there or she was here, and we often would leave sticky notes hidden for the other while the other was away. Goofy romantic we are, I know. A wedding on the Playa at Burning Man is special beyond words. Everyone is invited! They happen at any time day or night, in the dirt, on top of art, in tents, or even on an art car. The two of us scoped out the art that year. We found an amazing two story lotus flower made completely out of different colored bottle caps. The artist collected these bottle caps from all around the world. While he was making his project, he’d shout out on his social network things like “Drink more Corona’s people-I need those blue & yellow caps!” or “Red CAPS Red! Drink Red Stripe!”

Our bestie, Patty Cakes had agreed to perform the ceremony. Our camp came dressed in their Burning Man finest; 1970’s tuxedos, faux fur coats, wide bell bottoms and the like. We all hopped aboard the two story Surly Bird and crawled out to the bottle-cap lotus (going 5 MPH only because it’s the law!) Being two creatures of strong will, with 50+ equally amazing friends, we manifested what is known at Black Rock City as a TOTAL WHITE OUT! The afternoon winds had kicked up. Light-yellow, acidic, talcum-powder like fine dust was whirling all around us. Visibility was less than 20 feet. The vows were yelled, the deed was done, the corks were popped and the dusty hugs & kisses ran through the night to the thumpa thumpa of the DJ’s good beats.

As we crawled around the Playa later that night, we were followed by well-wishers. A couple dozen bike riders in monkey masks cruised in our dust. they, then mixed in with other bikers who were dressed as bananas. “STAY IN A BUNCH” became our new battle cry for the rest of Burning Man.

We got the stamped wedding license for Utah’s marriage in the mail about two weeks after we turned in the paperwork. We framed it! It hangs almost like a Mezuzah on our wall at home. Every time one of us walks by we tend to kiss our fingers, reach out and touch the thing. It is by far our most valuable possession.