



Travis Heying/DN

Tim Hopkins, left, and Rollin "Rollie" Bower would like to marry but face legal restrictions against same-sex marriages.

## Gay marriages face legal obstacles

By Paula Lavigne  
Senior Reporter

Gina Matkin shows off her wedding ring — a leaf-patterned rose stone set in a silver band. Matkin and Randy Reinhart exchanged rings during a private wedding in the woods.

They met two years ago at a potluck dinner.

The couple live together. They wash dishes together. They cook together. They care for their two dogs, Chelsea and Butch, and their aloof cat, Eleanor.

They also think about having children — but there's a problem.

Both are women, and while they consider themselves married, the state of Nebraska does not.

Same-sex marriages are not recognized anywhere in the United States. However, Hawaii is considering legislation that would grant marital rights to same-sex partners.

If the legislation passed, the question would then be whether same-sex marriages in Hawaii would be recognized in other states. Utah and South Dakota already have passed laws saying they would not recognize same-sex marriages from other states.

Most religious denominations do not perform or acknowledge same-sex marriages, but the Rev. Charles Stephens, a minister at the Unitarian Church, has performed about 15 same-sex marriages in the past 10 years.

"My idea of a wedding or ceremony such as this is this is for them, it's not for the rest of the world," he said. "It's a commitment they want to make in a public way."

Some states recognize domestic partnerships, which cover certain legal benefits. Companies like IBM and Apple offer the same.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Committee on Gay and Lesbian Concerns also is investigating whether the university can recognize faculty domestic partnerships and offer medical and insurance benefits that currently are offered to faculty spouses.

Without legal rights, gay and lesbian couples, unlike heterosexual couples, cannot file joint taxes, include each other on insurance or medi-

cal plans or be automatic benefactors in a will.

"It denies us to have the benefits legal spouses have," Matkin said. "It's awkward when you have to fill out an application that asks you to mark single, married, divorced or widowed when none of those legally apply to me."

"I'm none of the above."

Every legal document — from owning a house to opening a joint bank account — has to be specially prepared, she said.

Reinhart said she and Matkin had to draw up powers of attorney to make sure they would be able to make decisions in case of accident or death —

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GINA MATKIN

Partner in a same-sex relationship

something that would be automatic for a legally married couple.

"It makes me frustrated, sometimes angry," Matkin said. "I don't sit around and think about it, but when I run into obstacles it gets to be a pain. We're in a relationship that's as committed as heterosexual couples."

Beyond the legal document limitations, Matkin and Reinhart confront another obstacle — adopting children.

Mary Dean Harvey, director of Nebraska's Department of Social Services, created an interim policy in January banning the placement of foster children in homes with gay or lesbian parents or with non-married people living together and demanding the "placement of children in the most family-like setting."

The policy also would have been supported by LB255, which was introduced by State Sen. Kate Witek of Omaha. The bill corresponded with

the social services policy but was killed in the Health and Human Services Committee hearings in late January.

Eileen Durgin-Clinchard, the regional director for Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, testified against the bill.

She said LB255 would "effectively tie the hands of the professionals who work in a day-to-day basis in their efforts to provide the most appropriate foster care placements for each individual child."

Matkin, who works as a training consultant for the Department of Social Services, said the policy was "another example of a little bit of igno-

sexuality at 21, Bower was married. Bower and his wife divorced when he was 27. They had no children, but he said he would like to be a foster parent some day.

"I feel I missed out on something," he said. "I know a lot of gay fathers who are proud of their children."

A child would give him a sense of being, Bower said.

"It would give me something to show off," he said, laughing. "Parents just like to show off their kids."

A perception exists that putting children with homosexual foster parents would turn the children into gays or lesbians, Hopkins said, but that perception was not true.

"If you think about it, where do gay people come from? They come from heterosexuals," Hopkins said. "You can't change a kid by letting him grow up in a gay home."

Homosexuality is not a learned behavior, but children who grow up in gay or lesbian homes may learn another lesson — to respect other people's differences, he said.

Homosexuals also are stereotyped, Bower said.

"You never see normal people like us," he said. "You see the drag queens, and that's where the perception comes from."

Both Bower and Hopkins said senators and the public needed to be educated about homosexuality.

"Some senators just show a lack of education," Hopkins said. "One even asked, 'OK, so how do you chose to be gay?'"

People need to open their eyes and be more comfortable with homosexual behavior, Hopkins said.

But this education and acceptance should not be forced, Bower said. Last July, when Bower and Hopkins were in Las Vegas, they said they were able to walk hand-in-hand without people staring at them.

"It felt wonderful," Bower said.

Though they said the university had become more tolerant of homosexuals, the fear of the unknown still existed.

"At the university," Bower said, "you get these kids from out on the farm saying, 'Look at the gay people. They're weird.'"

rance mixed with fear of the unknown."

"If you observe our household, it's not different than a married, heterosexual household," she said. "We do dishes, garden, go on vacation."

"We're very responsible. We're not criminals. The thought that someone wouldn't trust us with the care of a child is ridiculous."

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Tim Hopkins and Rollin "Rollie" Bower haven't gone through a marriage or commitment ceremony yet, but the two have been living together for almost two years.

Hopkins said the fact that his and Bower's marriage wouldn't be legal offended him and made him feel like he was not good enough.

"Each relationship has it's own merits — gay, straight or whatever," he said.

Before he discovered his homo-