



Against all Odds

Love, devotion abound in same-sex marriages

By ERIN SCHULTE
Senior Reporter

It was a non-traditional wedding.

The betrothed chose for their wedding attire matching black jeans and jewel-colored satin shirts, one fuchsia and one purple. They both wore engagement rings — one adorned with a pearl and the other an Alexandria. Theme colors for the wedding were shades from the rainbow.

More noticeably, the couple to be wed was made up not of a bride and a groom, but a bride and a bride.

Ignoring laws that say gays and lesbians cannot marry, Janyss Ballard, 30, an employee of UNL's food services, and her wife, Patti, 44, were married by a licensed minister from the Universal Life Church last October.

Though the marriage is not legally binding, Janyss and Patti say they consider it binding in every other facet of their lives. They expressed their commitment and love for each other in the personal vows they wrote for their ceremony.

Solemn vows

"I told Patti that she was my laughter, my hope. That she was my home," Ballard said.

Between the two of them, Ballard and her wife have three divorces, three children and one happy marriage.

Both were married to men, and both divorced after six years. Patti, who asked to be referred to by her first name only, then married a woman. Then she met Ballard at a PFLAG meeting.

Ballard says she didn't "steal" Patti from her former wife. She says she wasn't the cause of their divorce, which came in the form of council with a clergy member, but when Patti asked her out, she stole her heart.

"I fell in love right away," Ballard said. "We were platonic friends, but lost touch and I didn't hear from her for a long time.

"Which was OK, because it hurt when she was with somebody else."

Out of the blue

But a call out of the blue erased all that hurt in an instant, and by their second date, Ballard said she was ready to make Patti her wife.

"Ever heard that lesbian joke?" Ballard asked. "What does a lesbian take along on the

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JANYSS BALLARD
UNL food services employee

second date? A U-Haul!"

The two proposed to each other, and were married last fall. Although some lesbians opt for the one-in-a-tux, one-in-a-wedding-gown formal theme, neither Patti nor Ballard ever wears a dress. So they went casual for their outdoor wedding, at which they had 30 guests. The guests were mostly friends, as their families aren't very accepting, Ballard said.

"My mother came to the ceremony, but she sat really stiff and clenched her teeth and practically cried — not tears of joy," Ballard said. "She slipped away afterwards, and she didn't even speak to us.

"My sister didn't show up at all."

After the ceremony, guests showed up for a three-tiered formal wedding cake at a rainbow-themed reception at the Super 8 motel.

Home and hearth

When the time for that infamous U-Haul came, the couple moved something more important than their furniture into their home — their children. Ballard has one elementary school-aged daughter; Patti has two teen-age girls.

Although Lincoln is a fairly accepting town, Ballard said, the two do not touch each other in public for fear of being assaulted. They say that can be difficult at times, so they are very affectionate with each other at home.

"We have a rule in our house," Ballard said. "We won't be closeted in the house.

"If (the children's) friends come over, they have to be prepared to tell who we are. Their close friends know that we're gay."

Ballard said if any gays or lesbians are interested in getting married, their best bet would be to call the Unitarian Church in Lincoln, which, after extensive pre-marital counseling, marries same-sex couples. The Metropolitan Community Church, she said, is also primarily a gay and lesbian Christian church.

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