

20 Years to Plan a Gay Wedding

Written by Jack Garman
Friday, 21 June 2013 08:57

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Los Angeles, CA – Jack Garman, author of MOW- April 25, 1993, The Day The American Gay Community Found Its Voice is pleased to announce that in honor of Gay Pride Month his ebook is free to any Kindle device on each Sunday in June (\$9.99 all other days).

http://www.amazon.com/MOW-April-American-Community-ebook/dp/B00A634OV2/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1371321641&sr=8-1&keywords=jack+garman+mow

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20 years ago same-gender marriage first got major exposure. It happened during the March On Washington for Gay, Lesbian and Bi Rights and Liberation on April 25, 1993. Organizers estimated that nearly one million gays and lesbians from around the country gathered in Washington to show their support for every issue within the GLBT community. During a week of related events that preceded the March, huge crowds surged through the streets of DC to make a place for themselves in the modern world.

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On Saturday, April 24, the day before the March, The Wedding took place. Scores of gay and lesbian couples gathered for a mass wedding, presided over by Troy Perry, Founder of MCC, Metropolitan Community Church, an evangelical Christian church established in 1968 to serve the GLBT community.

Those couples' commitment to each other anchored the rest of the issues of the week in their long-term struggle for legal recognition.

Now, 20 years later, that struggle has reached the Supreme Court. No matter what their decision, the March On Washington was a watershed event that established a new attitude within the GLBT community and beyond about how a larger society will see their GLBT members.

The social forces put into motion by the MOW is best understood with a visit to Washington during a week that set up two decades of unprecedented change.

Jack Garman, then Manager of Lambda Rising Bookstore in Baltimore, went to the MOW for a week and attended numerous related events in the lead-up to the March itself. He describes them all here, and includes the results of dozens of interviews with others from across the country as well some reflections on his personal journey as a gay man.

The result is an incomparable documentary-style reliving of this historically significant event. Any history of the modern Gay and Lesbian movement would not be complete without a thorough description of the way this enormous event energized a population and made it possible for them to claim rights many would work so hard to deny them.

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Excerpted from

MOW – April 25, 1993, The Day the American Gay Community Found Its Voice

by Jack Garman

Where is That Guy?

The Wedding

I waited a while longer, took some pictures of eye-catching Quilt panels, and then moved on. I had to get to The Wedding. Not my wedding, The Wedding. My wedding was another matter.

The Wedding was schedule for a spot around the corner from the Quilt site, halfway down the block. Thousands of couples jammed the space set aside for them. They so completely filled the entire street for a full city block that they were beginning to creep up the lawn of the Smithsonian building. The crowd was so densely packed together that I was afraid I wouldn't be able to stand in the middle of everything and hold my camera over my head. I was afraid I'd step on someone's foot, or fall over and interrupt The Wedding. I made a beeline for the densest part of the crowd.

As I reached the edge of the crowd, I came across a part of the street blocked off from pedestrian traffic where people wrote messages in the street with sidewalk chalk. Everywhere I looked, there were hearts with Jim Loves Andy and stuff like that in the middle of them. I watched the people as they drew their hearts. They worked quickly and then looked for someone to give their chalk to. All around them were people who waited patiently for their turn with the chalk. They complimented the work of the person they waited for and thanked them for the chalk and took the chalk and did their thing and then looked for the next person who needed

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the chalk and got their own compliment and then they scooted away, smiling the best smiles you ever did see. I assumed that people in couples have their own politeness rules. Maybe I should pay more attention to them. Beyond the chalk garden, where the crowd really got thick and heavy, there was a very beautiful woman with dramatic black hair and an air of confidence and self-assurance who held up a sign that said, "I need a wife."

I thought I would stand next to her and hold up a sign that said, "I need a husband."

Then I remembered my experience over the phone and I decided that I take this stuff too seriously to do what she was doing. Darn that serious streak in me, anyway.

I made my way through the crowd and finally found a good spot. Along the way, I met Joe from Chicago. We talked about how each of us wanted to meet someone to marry at The Wedding. Both of use felt foolish to show up an event where everyone was already in a couple. Of course, both of us were single.

I asked him about how he got to the March.

"I asked ten different friends if they would come with me to this March. They all turned me down. Even my own brother, who is also gay, wouldn't come with me."

I was not in the mood to get hitched, all of a sudden. There was a solemnity to this affair, even though the crowd was bubbling with chatter, bright and gay. The few couples in tuxedo jackets, usually over shorts and with brightly colored cummerbunds, reminded people that there is another quality of gravity to the experience. It wasn't simply a matter of having a party and getting into a pretend marriage, as if it was nothing more than some sort of pick-up game at a public basketball court.

I saw two Jewish women under a chuppa made from a rainbow flag and I though it must be fun to be Jewish and to know that you had better be able to bring along four good friends if you plan to get married so you have enough people to get your chuppa up in the air.

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Once the crowd had filled the street from curb to curb and beyond and for nearly the entire length of the block, the ceremony began. The first person to speak to the crowd was the first open lesbian ordained by any denomination. She got that ordination nineteen years ago. She limited her remarks to the developments of our community over the past twenty years and she got an enormous ovation.

Then Troy Perry, founder of the MCC spoke. He told us first off about the way two men, lovers, organized the previous March on Washington in 1987 and that both are now dead from AIDS. I thought of the way two men who loved each other were able to create an event like the 1987 March that was so important to the way the rest of us have been able to find each other. If that's not a good reason to marry someone you love, I don't know what is.

Up until this moment, I've never understood why people cry at weddings. It occurred to me that it wasn't about the remembrance of the two men who had died. After all, when was the last time you went to a wedding and the celebrant started off by talking about the deceased. Mourning is a different matter. While mourning shows up in just about every aspect of our gay and lesbian daily lives, I've found that we as a community are just as able to feel other human emotions stirring within us while we are mourning as anybody else. In other words, mourning hasn't entirely taken over our lives, much as our detractors would like it to.

I began to cry, just a little bit, from the thought that this wedding is for people who overcame something and who then demanded happiness in their own lives as their own birthright. When they saw their lives and their loves in that light, they knew they didn't have to wait for anyone else to come along and approve their marriage. They simply did something about it themselves.

Robin Tyler, a funny lady, introduced her partner of 28 years. I thought 'how could anyone live with a comedian for twenty eight years?' Big round of applause. Then she pointed out that although "two lesbians are men's greatest fantasies, 2000 lesbians are men's greatest fears." Lots of cheering and applause. Then she described an experience she had on a trip to Russia where she met one of the men who work to bring some light into the gay and lesbian community in his country. She asked him about the dangers he faces in his country and wanted to know why he took such chances. He answered, "I would rather live one minute in the light than the rest of my life in darkness. We have a duty to love each other." If we are going to have any sort of future as a community, it will express further what he said.

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Throughout the crowd, people shouted, "What he said! What he said!"

There was a guy standing in front of me who had his head shaved except for a triangular patch of hair that he dyed pink.

The next speaker was Patrick Gill who, along with his lover, was suing the city of DC to grant them a marriage license. I supported him all the way, but I will always treat our requests from government agencies as somewhat unsatisfying. I don't think we find personal truth by government decree. We find personal truth in our bedrooms, and there must a stout and well-defended barricade between the two.

He kept using the words I, he, and us while talking about his lover and about our community. I found that appealing and I thought it created an important dialogue. Then he said, "It is ironic that society stereotypes us as being unable to form stable relationships while at the same time society denies us the means to stabilize our relationships."

The crowd went wild.

Karen Thompson, caregiver of Sharon Kowalski, was next on the podium and got quite the ovation. Once you look at your own life challenges then you can begin to appreciate what Karen went through to stay in touch with her lover. She was the primary caregiver for Karen after a serious car accident and the family got a court order to keep her away.

"The first line of protection is to come out" she told us all.

I remembered all the times people had told me to be less out or to hold myself back. They told me to compromise and don't rock the boat. I wondered many other ways people have told me something that isn't in my self-interest, but in the interest of keeping that closet in good repair for the day when they finally succeed in shoving us back into it. After all, the closet is for their convenience, not ours. The closet makes them happy, not us. The closet keeps their lives in order, not ours. Sharon hadn't had the luxury or the good fortune to have come out yet, and so, after the car accident, her partner spent years in court fights. She further advised extensive

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legal documentation to compensate for the lack of a marriage law.

I met Dave Leiss, a nurse from southern Pennsylvania. He was with two female friends, who were in a couple. He had seen my "Husband Hunting" button and decided to come a little bit closer. He struck up a conversation by saying "Hi."

He told me he decided to come out as a New Year's resolution at the beginning of 1993. He told me how during the first few weeks of the year he came out to his parents, to his friends and to his coworkers. He said he felt very lucky to have a great deal of support from them in the process. This March is the first rally he has ever attended and the experience has blitzed him out. He couldn't wait to tell me what he and his friends saw on the Metro on their way over here.

Turns out, he saw the same family I did. The ones who didn't heed the warnings and were on a Metro car full of homos. He told me he heard them sing Barney songs like it would protect them from something. Whatever was the danger, he couldn't tell.

Meanwhile, on stage, there was a lesbian couple who told of being together for 33 years. They got quite an ovation. They had met in a bar and fell in love at first sight.

By this time, the ceremonies were impending. The assembled couples were about to be married. Maybe their home state wouldn't recognize them with any sort of legal or financial benefits, but they would recognize each other.

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