

The Amazon Trail: Civil Rights, Not Equal Rights

Lee Lynch

On March 2, 2002, the Boston Globe proclaimed, "Vt. Panel OK's 'civil unions' for gays/Equal marriage rights not part of measure" (by Lois R. Shea).

Staff writer Shea went on to explain that, "A key Vermont committee overwhelmingly passed a bill yesterday calling for the creation of 'civil unions' for gay and lesbian couples. ... The bill stops short of giving gays and lesbians the right to marry legally ... Civil unions would require a license from town clerks and a 'certification' ceremony similar to a marriage ceremony. Breakups would be handled in Family Court, just as traditional divorces now are."

This was wonderful news. I never would have dreamed we could become this respectable. What troubles me

born of a Labor Union? If so, the single gay parent would certainly have a child out of Unionlock.

But back to the marriage – I mean Union Ceremony (would the Shop Steward be best Civil Servant?). The brides and grooms would of course wear Union Suits.

Should some spoilsport wish to challenge a legal coupling, would the courts, which seemed to intend an equal status, find the relationship separate but Civil or Civil but Equal?

Would a Vermont couple that moved to the mellow West Coast have a Union Pacific? Or, leaving Vermont, would their Union Dissolve? Perhaps we'd call it Seceding. Or would that be the term for our kind of divorce – Seceding from the Union? Eventually, I hope, we'd be Civilly treated in every state of

civil: trill, thrill, frill, quadrille?

Makes for great love poetry, doesn't it? "The lark gave a trill and you gave me a thrill as we danced the quadrille at our Union Civil."

Is it coincidence or a right wing conspiracy that one of our staunchest defenders, The American Civil Liberties Union, has such a similar title?

Why in the world do we give non-gays license to name our bonds? Any gay person could come up with something more clever than Civil Union. If Planet Out held a contest there would be hundreds of good choices, including "marriage." You'd think breeder-legislators would be afraid that some alternative Wedding Party called a Union Party would get ideas about running a presidential candidate to find a more Civil Remedy.

Could we do better? Perhaps we'd have a Wizard who would Oz us, a Star Fleet Captain who would Merge us, a Faerie to Faerie Dust us, a Witch who would Spell-Bind us or a Community that would Enfold us.

Unlike many non-gays we already have these rituals and others, formal or not. It's not the non-gay culture we want to

What troubles me are the semantic problems suggested by the term "civil union" . . .

are the semantic problems entailed by the term "civil union."

For example, if the expression 'Domestic Partner' sounds like hired household help, what does a Civil Union sound like – two people who barely get along? If so, is being Barely Civil a matter of being polite during unclothed intimacies?

It gets worse. Would a breakup be called a Civil War? For that matter, could gays in the military have Civil Unions too, or would they have to endure Militant Unions? Do we need new Rules of Engagement?

If we chose to get hitched in a church, would we undergo a Civil Religious ceremony? These affairs are normally pretty civil anyway. We'd have to call it a Holy Unionization and pay Union Dues.

When we pronounce our equivalent of Marriage Vows, we'd refer to them as Union Vows, like a shop steward's oath of office. Should a Unioned lesbian have a child, would it be

the Union.

If we strayed would our adulteries be called Civil Affairs or Treason against the Union? Before succumbing to a breakup, would we consult a Civil Engineer?

What in the world would be the gay equivalent of Marital Bliss – Civil Bliss just doesn't do it for me. Nor does the Civil Union Bed sound anywhere as appealing as the Marriage Bed. What would we be inspired to do on a Civil Union Night, take Civil Liberties with each other?

We'd celebrate anniversaries by giving State of the Union addresses to which the Supreme Court Justices could decline invitations, as they declined the President's that year.

If Shakespeare was gay, he would have had a heck of a time scanning his lines. "Let me not to the Civil Union of true minds/ Admit impediments" falls flat on the ears. How does a poet find a romantic rhyme for Union: shun, run, outdone, nun? And

share, it's our culture we want to protect – from the governing bodies that are benevolently bestowing a tame title on our love. The scared little baby butch inside me is grateful as hell, but this grownup is having a little trouble with a semantic compromise that defies the very foundations of democracy by replacing the principle of equal with the placating concept of a Civil Union. ▼

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