

SKEETER



BITES

BY SKEETER SANDERS

Happy New Year. So here we are in the final, year-long countdown to the year 2000. This is the time when I write my New Year's resolutions, then count the time before, one by one, I break them.

For 1999, however, I made only one resolution: to clear up some unfinished business in the Great Marriage Debate. And I'm keeping that resolution by asking you, Mr. and Ms. Queer Vermonter, the following question:

Why are so many of you so adamant in your desire to get married legally at a time in history when more and more people — that's right, straight people — are saying "To hell with marriage!" and engaging in alternative forms of partnership?

Did you know that there are, according to the Census Bureau, a record 5.6 million unmarried partners living together in the US — only 30 percent of whom are same-sex? And their numbers are growing.

For the first time in the nation's history, more than half of all first-time births in the US are of babies born to unmarried women — only 30 percent of whom identify themselves as lesbian or bisexual. Clearly, the social revolutions of the '60s and '70s long ago wiped out the stigma attached to what was used to be called "unwed motherhood."

It seems almost incredible, but the Census Bureau even reports that a whopping 74 percent of

Assault Charges Upgraded

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his mother says she won't allow him to go back to school.

Neither defense attorney David Nicholson nor prosecutor Rosemary Gretkowski would comment on the case.

The Vermont District Court has scheduled Curavoo's hearing for January 13th.

Curavoo could face expulsion from school in addition to stiffer legal penalties if convicted on the elevated charges. The maximum fine in the case doubles from \$1,000 to \$2,000 and the maximum jail sentence increases from one year to two. ▼

VOLUNTEER

We need help

(but you knew that).

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Alternatives to Marriage for Queers AND Straights

Americans define a family as "a group of people who love and care about each other," regardless of whether they're related by blood or not, regardless of whether they're married or not.

So why, at a time when legal marriage is losing its appeal to increasing numbers of straight people, are queers so hell-bent on partaking in what is obviously a crumbling institution? It makes absolutely no sense to me, especially with the growing variety of alternatives to legal marriage that are now available.

I'm a Pagan, and it's been a long-standing tradition for Pagan couples to "handfast" — form a trial marriage without legal sanction — for a year and a day. After that 366-day period (367 days in leap years), if the couple decides to stay together, then there is a

formal commitment ceremony. It is the couple's prerogative to decide whether to have their commitment legally sanctioned. (Only about half elect to do so.)

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Domestic partnership, all the rage among queer couples in the late '80s and early '90s, has become increasingly popular among straight couples, especially those under 30 and — surprise! — over 60.

In fact, some senior couples — particularly those whose pre-

vious spouses died — choose domestic partnership because they would actually lose significant financial benefits they receive if they married legally.

There is even an organization, the Alternatives to Marriage Project, that provides resource information and support to persons who choose not to marry legally, regardless of sexual orientation. It is an especially valuable resource for polyamorous individuals in multi-partner rela-

tionships. ATMP maintains a Website at www.netSPACE.org/atmp.

So with all these alternatives available out there, why tie yourselves down with a marriage license?

RADIO, RADIO — Regular readers of this column know that I host a weekly jazz and R&B program on RWGDR-FM (91.1), the community station of Goddard College in Plainfield. I am happy to announce that I am now also a part-time DJ at The Point (WNCS, 104.7 Montpelier; WSHX, 95.7 St. Johnsbury; WRJT, 103.1 White River Junction). I host the Saturday late-night show, "The Point Overnight," from midnight to 6:00 a.m. The Point also cybercasts on the Web at www.pointfm.com. ▼

CROW'S



CAWS

BY CROW COHEN

I used to be militantly non-monogamous from about the mid-'70s to the mid-'80s. By that, I mean I fiercely clung to an analysis which I learned from my radical lesbian feminist sisters. It went something like this: monogamy is related to the patriarchal concept of male "ownership" of women and their offspring. Via compulsory heterosexuality, men are empowered by society to be heads of families and by extension, heads of church and state, owners of land, rulers of the world.

Since, after all, you really can't continuously uphold this tyranny by violence alone (although the threat of rape, battering and outright murder of women are the underpinnings of male dominance), one of the methods used to seduce women into cooperating with their oppressors is romance. Enter the shining white knight with candlelight and roses who will sweep m'lady off her feet and "protect" her for the rest of her life.

So we radlesfem revolutionaries came up with some antidotes which we deemed "sexual freedom." Here's the formula. 1) Declare yourself a lesbian, which is the strongest statement a liberated woman can make that they are no longer interested in male approval or attraction. 2) Since monogamy breeds delusions of "ownership" and promotes possessiveness, make love with whomever you want whenever you want, then "work

On Non-Monogamy

through" those antiquated feelings of jealousy and competition with support from the community (better known as "processing"). 3) The safest way to pull all this off is to sleep with your friends. Having a series of "sexual friendships" is much more revolutionary than seduction, intrigue, and privatized coupling,

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which are all by-products of romance.

It didn't work for me. I remember a few years ago sitting at my kitchen table with a young lesbian friend of mine as I described this non-monogamous theory so many of us dykes in Burlington swore by when we were all flying around under the banner of "sisterhood is powerful." She said, "Yeah? How did it go?" I burst out laughing and couldn't stop. It was like describing the events leading up to World War II and casually being asked, "Yeah? How did it go?" The prolonged laughter was obviously a release of years of accumulated pain.

The reason it didn't work for me was that I denied my deep-seated need to link intimacy and commitment with sexuality. Perhaps that's a patriarchal concept, but I think it's more likely related to one of the profound gifts of female conditioning —

to value relationship and communication of feelings above all (as opposed to male conditioning to conquer the world at all costs).

It was a politic that also did not promote spiritual discipline — that is, delaying immediate gratification in order to stay still and face those terrifying fears of intimacy so many of us have

(probably due, in all fairness, to growing up in families full of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse).

But can't you be intimate and committed to more than one person at a time? Maybe. I can't though, especially since it's such damn hard work. It's like trying to keep two or more long, long trains on the track at the same time. (You know, where you shut off your car at the RR crossing waiting for it all to go by? Life stops and you just sit there and wait, reading esoteric messages on boxcars, wishing like hell you could move on.)

I believe that one of the missing links back then was that this community endeavor (that's exactly what it was in this small town and small state) was not girded up by strong commitment to ethical principles that we all more or less agreed on and constantly reinforced for one another. Nor was there the nurturing it

takes to help each other face the obstacles within that get in the way of practicing tolerance, patience and compassion. Jealousy and competition were rampant because we switched from one lover to another (or piled one on top of the other — sometimes literally) before we gave ourselves time to grieve — to confront those demons within that drive us to hurt one another and that cause excessive guilt, shame, or self-hatred. In other words, we simply didn't give ourselves the time and space to feel the loss when the relationship turned sour. To quiet down and be with loss is hard stuff. That's when asking for help comes in handy.

What can I say? We were young. Our hormones were raging. We were revolutionaries in a hurry. We did the best we could. Some of us became great friends with our ex-lovers. Some of us were able to explore our sexuality in a more or less safer context than the patriarchy had to offer at the time or even now, probably. What have I learned? That adherence to ethical principles ultimately leads to joy, freedom, and fulfillment with or without sexual companions. Can non-monogamy (or polyamorosity) ever work well? Perhaps, but if and only if we truly have evolved into a "tribe" that has in place a system of ethics that works in our lives. Otherwise, it's a setup for another flimsy revolution that falls apart due to abusive behavior. Goddess knows, there have been lots of those. ▼