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Gay Seattle

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Published by University of Washington Press

Atkins, Gary.

Gay Seattle: Stories of Exile and Belonging.

First paperback edition. ed. University of Washington Press, 2011.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION

When I first started work on *Gay Seattle* in the fall of 1992, I thought the project would be quick, maybe a year. As a narrative journalist, my passion is fusing stories about real individuals and their struggles into reflections about bigger political questions. In the case of *Gay Seattle*, that question was about how a group of citizens marginalized for decades journeyed from a life spent in closeted exile to having a public voice—in other words reaching a sense of *home*. Naively, I figured historians and sociologists had already done their jobs and that an overview of important events and individuals would be readily available. I thought it would be easy enough to then plot other details of the sexual and gender outliers who had been living in a city that was simultaneously Midwestern in its outlook and raucous in its embrace of Alaskan-inspired natural riches.

Instead, the research and writing took almost ten years. I learned to look for needles buried in the haystacks of microfiche and microfilm in city, county, state, and federal archives. I read records of lobotomies performed at the state's mental hospitals. I tracked key individuals who had disappeared from the Seattle gay scene and were living, as I was sometimes told, "in the islands somewhere." For years I sent my students out with video cameras to record interviews with both old-timers and those young and brand new to the queer side of the Northwest.

I am happy that over the past decade since its publication, the book has been well received. It collected several awards, among them a Washington State Book Award for what was called the importance of its subject and the quality of its storytelling. It also received a good share of critical praise, from both journalists and academic historians. I have to admit, though, that while I was happy that the hardback edition would join other durable hardbacks on library shelves, I also wished it was, well, lighter and more mobile—the kind of book you could easily carry, bend, and mark up without feeling guilty. So I am very happy that

the University of Washington Press has decided to issue a new paperback edition of the original, as well as to bring the book into the twenty-first century by digitizing it for all those whose libraries now reside on an e-reader, smart phone, or other book device.

This new edition is not intended to be a revision of the original work or an expansion to cover in great detail what has happened since. It is also not intended to fill what are still pressing needs in Seattle's sexual history—a book about the rich history of transgender Seattle, for example. Those tasks are better left to entirely new books—or entirely new types of media platforms for storytelling. However, in this introduction I do want to update a few key ways in which the saga of coming home has unfolded since the stories in *Gay Seattle* closed in the mid-1990s.

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As I was writing this preface in November 2012, Washington state citizens were determining the fate of what was called Referendum 74. The vote was to decide whether all adults in the state should have an equal civil right to marry the person they love. The state legislature had approved the idea, but now the voters had their chance at approving or vetoing what the legislature had decided. Although six states and the District of Columbia had already legalized same-sex marriage, it had been courts or legislatures that made those decisions. Each time voters had a direct chance to decide, majorities rejected same-sex marriages.

In that respect, the situation in Washington State at the end of 2012 was similar to that encountered three decades earlier, when, in 1978, Seattle voters had to decide the outcome of Initiative 13. That anti-gay initiative would have repealed the city council's decision to add "sexual orientation" to the list of types of citizens who could not be discriminated against in housing or employment. Across the country, opponents of civil rights protections for gays and lesbians had successfully overturned every similar decision by a city council. (The story of how Seattle became one of the first cities to *retain* its protections, breaking the opposition's national campaign, is told in chapter 14.)

A campaign about and a vote by a majority upon the rights of a minority is, of course, a peculiar idea, especially when that majority has been deeply trained by particular historical or cultural blinders to see possibilities only one way—in the case of Referendum 74, the possibility of what "marriage" meant. For me, having been raised as a Southerner during the civil rights days of the 1960s, the campaign brought to mind the movie *The Help*, which earlier in 2012 had won the Academy Award for Best Picture. The plot of *The Help* focused on a fictional white women's bridge club in the 1960s that was planning a "Home Help Sanitation Initiative." That initiative would have insured that all white families employing African American maids and nannies provided them with outside toilets. That way, the black women could then be banned from soiling the inside

bathrooms being used by the whites. The woman promoting the initiative, a character named Hilly, feared that allowing the black maids to use the inside toilets would infect white families with disease and threaten the whites' identity as superior.

Her solution: separate but supposedly equal toilets. But, of course, they were not really equal if they were still *outside* instead of *inside* the home. That very notion of being *outside* or *inside* is what the stories in this book track.

As related in chapter 7, as early as 1971 gay activists in Seattle—tipped off by a supportive state legislator named Pete Francis—had realized that state law did not actually define “marriage” as having to be between a man and a woman. The law referred only to “persons of the age of 18 who are otherwise capable.”¹ It was the cultural blinder that assumed the persons involved must be a Jack and a Jill, not a Jack and a Jack. One activist, who had taken on the name of Faygele ben-Miriam (his real name was John Singer), promptly filed for a marriage license with a friend, Paul Barwick. In what then became the basic message that would echo through four subsequent decades, until the 2012 referendum, the men told the journalists who showed up for the inevitable rejection of a license by the county clerk that they were simply “two human beings who happen to be in love and want to get married.”

When they were denied that right, they sued. To wiggle its way out, the state court of appeals had to construct its own blinders about marriage, which it then defined as being for the “procreation and rearing of children.” The court added that the prohibition of marriage for same-sex couples “results from the impossibility of procreation.”

That logic was perhaps applicable to eighteenth- or nineteenth-century forms of arranged marriages designed to perpetuate families and the control over property. But it had been replaced by the prevailing twentieth-century ideal that emphasized romantic love and union between the two people involved, without regard to whether or not they bore children.

For more than two decades afterward in Washington State, the issue idled as lesbians and gay men focused their journey toward a public voice in other, more pressing arenas—rights to not be discriminated against in jobs and in housing; to use public accommodations openly like everyone else; to have health care that did not presume they were perverts; to build new social groups that would end their isolation; to create businesses; to cope with crises such as Initiative 13 or AIDS; to change the minds of churches that had theologically cast them aside; to seek an honorable equality in the nation's military. The tasks were many and even mighty, but they were also quite focused on rights that could be exercised individually—the individual gay man who should not be discriminated against in a job, the individual lesbian who should be able to rent an apartment, the individual with AIDS needing to access good health care. Recognition of relationships was another matter, something that gays and lesbians in Washington

State were reminded of in 1998, when the state legislature passed the “Defense of Marriage Act” that put an end to the old law that Ben Miriam and Barwick had used. Marriage, the new law dictated, could only be between a man and a woman.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, progress in the social sphere had been such that many lesbian and gay couples had begun to feel quite supported by their heterosexual friends and accepted within their families, even if the law had not kept pace with social mores. Family acceptance had been a significant turnabout from the stories that seemed to dominate in the 1970s when couples, especially lesbian ones, often had to fear their families. That was especially so if one or both of the partners had young children they wanted to bring into the same household with their spouse. In 1972, for example, one of the organizers of Seattle’s first Gay Women’s Resource Center had commented that “many people have never heard of a ‘lesbian mother’” and could not even grasp the concept of “a lesbian with children”—so strong was the notion that lesbians and gay men sat completely outside any possibility of marriage, family, or procreation.

One of the first and most powerfully public stories of romantic love between two lesbians, one of whom had two children and the other, four, came from Seattle during those years—the story of Sandra Schuster and Madeleine Isaacson (told in chapter 8). Their quest to simply love the person of their choice and found a family would run through four years of psychiatrist visits, religious tests imposed by a King County superior court judge, and court testimony by eleven different psychiatrists and psychologists. The King County judge would finally decide, first, that despite being lesbians the two were fit mothers, and, second, that they could keep all their children together under the same roof. But other family members appealed that decision to the Washington State Supreme Court, which then issued an astounding decision. Six of the nine justices ruled that, *individually*, the lesbians were indeed fit to be mothers and could keep custody of the children. But, on the second question, four of those justices in the majority ruled that Sandy and Madeleine needed to break the family apart so as not to expose their children to the notion of a committed homosexual *couple*. Those four justices wrote that exposing the children to homosexuality in their home would make the mothers unfit.

The other three justices in the minority ruled that Sandy and Madeleine were not fit and custody should go to the fathers. So those three did not even bother to address the second question about the children and mothers living together.

As a result, the court had created a legal split: 2 yeses on fitness and staying together as a family; 4 yeses on fitness, but requiring family dissolution; 3 noes on fitness and silence on the family breakup (breakup was presumed by the decision to give custody of the children to the fathers). There was actually no majority statement that overturned the lower King County decision that the family could stay together.

So Sandy and Madeleine had won, in a sense, and could keep their family living together.

Within such thin legal threads and case-by-case agony lay the fate of same-sex couples and the families they wanted to form. While it was seen as bad enough to be a homosexual, even more threatening was the notion that homosexuals might actually move *inside* to claim a role within what was held to be the supreme form of relationship: romantic, heterosexual, monogamous marriage.

By contrast, an openly lesbian professor at the Jesuit Seattle University—Jodi O'Brien—wrote in 2004 that she and her lesbian partner always happily attended the Mormon weddings of her six siblings. They were, as she put it, “two lesbians in an extended family of prolific heterosexual Mormons.” O'Brien knew that as a lesbian couple, she and her partner were “separate but not equal” in the eyes of the law, but within her extended family, she felt “separate and acknowledged.”

O'Brien, a sociologist, reflected on that feeling: “As many lesbian and gay families have discovered through difficult legal and social entanglements . . . when a situation of inequality exists, ‘acknowledgement’ is at the whim of those who hold power.”

“The current ‘marriage wars,’” she continued, “can be viewed and analyzed as a battle to define complete inclusion in U.S. culture. For many supporters of same-sex marriage, the battle is about the simple justice of being able to define one’s own family and have this definition recognized and respected as a basic human right. . . . For others, the battle is about who holds the power to determine justice in any form—what some observers have referred to as the ‘just-us’ justice defined by those who see themselves as the keepers of a predetermined cultural truth.”²

That was why the law on marriage needed changing.

The Washington State Supreme Court upheld the legislature’s restriction of marriage to a man and a woman, but in doing so, three of the justices who were in the slender five-justice majority urged the legislature to consider what to do about obviously committed gay and lesbian couples—what, in other words, to do about queer romances.

By 2007, pushed by an emergent group of gay and lesbian lawmakers, the legislature relented just enough to approve a solution that would still keep gays and lesbians outside, but get them a little closer to the house. It agreed to allow “domestic partnerships” with very limited civil rights to be recognized state-wide. In 2008, the legislature had added to the number of state-level civil rights that could be attached to the “domestic partnership.” That adoption of domestic partnerships was a step in the right direction and one that had been pursued in an incremental fashion by lesbian and gay activists and legislators. Better something close but still outside than nothing at all.

Opponents had tried to overturn the legislature's decision through a state-wide vote but had failed. So the issue sat for three years in a *détente* of sorts.

Then, in 2012—the same month *The Help* was winning an Academy Award—the state legislature, again prodded by activists, legislators, and a changing climate of opinion, finally agreed to allow the word “marriage” to be used to define same-sex couples. Governor Christine Gregoire, who had initially opposed the idea, had changed her mind. She actively promoted and signed the new law. Immediately, opponents called for a referendum on whether a majority of citizens would uphold the law. They turned to the National Organization for Marriage for help, because that group had been engineering defeats for same-sex marriage throughout the country. It was well funded by the Roman Catholic Church. By summer the opponents had collected enough signatures to force the vote and the campaign was on.

In one particularly powerful scene in *The Help*, an African American maid hears the white women openly talking about the inferiority of black citizens like her, especially the danger of their hygiene. All she can do is listen.

During the months leading up to the vote in Washington State, as I watched the “Vote No” referendum ads talk about gay and lesbian relationships and try to raise fears about what would happen if they were recognized as “marriages,” I was often reminded of that scene. Didier Erbion in his *Insult and the Making of the Gay Self* offered insights about the phenomenon of others who hold the power of acknowledgment talking about those who do not. Erbion observed that through that act of language—the power of acknowledgment and of insult—those who are considered “queer” discover that they are “a person about whom something can be said, to whom something can be said, someone who can be looked at or talked about in a certain way and who is stigmatized by that gaze and those words.” The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre had put the sensation this way: “It is as if a page of a book suddenly became conscious and felt itself *being read aloud* without being able to *read itself*.”³ That was what *The Help* had potently depicted: the black maids listening to the white children they had raised discuss them as if they were simply pages of a book to be read aloud.

The R-74 campaign turned out to be similar: It put same-sex relationships and their families onto a page—or into a television commercial—and read them aloud to make them either fit, or not fit, a majority viewpoint about marriage. If gay and lesbian relationships were recognized, the anti-gay ads proclaimed, parents who objected to same-sex marriages being discussed in schools might be arrested. People who owned businesses and refused to accommodate lesbian receptions might be fined and forced to sell. Individuals who expressed support for traditional heterosexual marriage might be fired from their jobs. Even the pro-74 ads urging marriage equality mostly featured supportive heterosexual couples talking *about* same-sex couples and their families, presumably because

that was more politically effective than same-sex couples talking about themselves.⁴

Lesbian and gay romances were being read aloud and the argument was about a singular word—"marriage"—a word that not only conveyed civil rights but, more importantly, packed cultural and historical power. Why, I had to wonder, had this quest against the odds, the quest to achieve "marriage," become such a central identifying feature of the queer movement in Seattle and Washington State—as well as across the nation—by the early part of the twenty-first century?

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In *Gay Seattle*, I write about the desire of every human being to "come home"—by discovering home, by being born into it, or by imagining it. As I point out in the prologue to the original hardback edition, "home-making" can occur through participating in stories that unfold across several generations. It involves knowing and telling those stories about "what grandpa and grandma did," or what "uncle this" and "aunt that" experienced—or even better, being able to see and re-see that story repeated and lived, evolving in particular spaces of geography and mind.

"Making home" becomes an act of *narration* about particular people in particular spaces.

In that prologue, I quoted a theologian, Walter Bruggemann, and it is worth repeating his words here as this book is reissued. Bruggemann said that when writing of those whose common experience of one another arises not because of their race or their economic class or their religion but rather from their shared experience of being *emotional outcasts*, then "the central problem is not emancipation but rootage." In other words, the issue is not simply the "freedom" to go out—or in 1970s' gay rhetoric to "come out"—although that act of speech can be important. Rather, the task is finding roots. Bruggemann elaborates: What is important is "not separation from community but location within it, not isolation from others but placement deliberately between the generation of promise and fulfillment."⁵

For lesbians and gays and other individuals either self-designated or involuntarily designated as sexually "queer," knowing the stories that enable them to connect emotionally with being between the "generation of promise and fulfillment" can be especially difficult. Even if a person happens to be lucky enough as a child or a teen to have a family that supports them and even if they never feel "different" or bullied in schools, the prevailing re-telling of historical stories remains so relentlessly heterosexually oriented that knowing "one's own story" as a gay man or lesbian woman often has to wait until later independence, with the ability to buy books like this one. Fortunately, in the last decade the Internet

has lowered the age at which gay and lesbian youth can begin to “come home” within the safety of their own computers or smart phones. For example, in one remarkable development since this book was first published, Seattle’s Dan Savage, a syndicated columnist, author, and editor of *The Stranger*, began the “It Gets Better Project” with his partner, Terry Miller. Gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals relate their own stories on videos posted both on the “It Gets Better” website and on You-Tube, helping connect queer youths who may feel isolated to a sense of worldwide community and a historical saga being told in multiple voices.⁶

In *Gay Seattle*, I examine a century of stories—pre-Internet—from the 1893 adoption of the state sodomy law through the 1995 death and “state funeral” of the man who was then the only publicly gay state legislator, Cal Anderson. I also recount the shifts in the saga’s plot during that century as each generation faced a particular challenge that then shaped its identity as queer citizens.

For example, the book examines how citizens in Seattle were criminalized and sent into a legal exile for their consensual sex through the adoption of that first sodomy law. Punishment for consensual oral or anal sex could include a ten-to-fourteen-year sentence to the state penitentiary in Walla Walla. Gays and lesbians in Washington no longer worry about that, although across much of the world, punishment for consensual same-sex “sodomy” is still the leading fear of queer citizens. *Gay Seattle* tells the story of how generations accomplished the change in Washington State.

Similarly, the book traces the way in which the medical and health professions helped create that exile by labeling desires for nonheterosexual, nonreproductive sex as mental perversity, a “sickness.” Today, at least when queer individuals reach adulthood, we no longer have to fear involuntary commitments to mental hospitals, but certainly part of the continuing saga is that as children and teens we may be pressured into the “reparative therapy” still popular with those who oppose same-sex or different-gender desires. Only California now bans those therapies as medically and psychologically dangerous—and that ban occurred as recently as October 2012.⁷ A child who is different in his or her gender or sexuality may still have to fight labels of being “sick” from peers and family, as well as face bullying.

Gay Seattle also examines religion’s contribution to the exile by making an entire group of citizens “sinful” for their sexual desires and behaviors and by refusing to recognize their relationships. The book’s focus narrows to Seattle’s Capitol Hill, which by the end of the twentieth century had become the symbolic home of both the city’s Catholic and its queer citizens. A flashpoint occurred as Seattle’s justice-minded Catholic archbishop of the 1980s, Raymond Hunthausen, clashed with the Rome insider who later became Pope Benedict XVI, Joseph Ratzinger. This story of “Catholic Hill” and the tensions it reflects

continued right into the twenty-first century and became a major factor in the Referendum 74 campaign in 2012.

The book then tracks the steady fight by generation after generation of gay and lesbian citizens to gain an equal and public voice—or, as Bruggemann suggests, to secure not just the “emancipation” that the individual act of “coming out” provides but the “rootage” that “coming home” allows.

To gain that voice required altering several different types of public conversation about homosexuality—what rhetoricians like to dub “discourses”—and so behind the individual characters and stories in *Gay Seattle* lies a structure that analyzes how those who have no public voice must go about acquiring one. It has seemed to me that transforming at least eight cultural discourses is important:

Religion, because it provides many people with a general understanding of the world and of life;

Law and Politics, because the conversation about these two forms the sources of agreement about how to organize life together in an orderly way;

Art, particularly theater and dance, because there we enact stories about how our lives are lived and felt, and as I discuss in chapters 5 and 10, it is on the dance floors of the most ordinary bars that those who are marginalized can often express rhythmically what they are not allowed to express in language;

Medicine, because here we gain understandings about the body and mind and how to care for them—and learn to recognize when we are “sick” or “well”;

The Marketplace of businesses and services, because it is through our commercial transactions that we often meander within a “bazaar” with others who can be very different from ourselves; we hunt and we pursue experiences within what can be a maze of surprises;

Education, because it provides the memories and experiences that are presented as important knowledge to be remembered—not only through schools but also through museums that record who and what will or will not be a story deserving of being called a legacy;

Geography, because it is imagined both as a *space* for new explorations—in this case for sexuality and gender—and as a *place* for security and being at home; and, finally,

Home and Family, because these two offer the private space where we construct and hope for support of the personal identities that can then be presented to the public.

You can find each of these “conversations” about gays and lesbians addressed in *Gay Seattle*, albeit some more heavily than others. Religion, law, and medicine formed the triad of exile. Theater and dance served as the initial point of bonding for those citizens who shared little other than their sexual identities. They then carved a geography that could provide a sense of home and family,

first in Seattle's Pioneer Square and then in the University District and on Capitol Hill. They began to transform the other discourses—about law and politics, religion, and education. The making of home unfolded, story-by-story, as courageous individual after individual stepped forward to alter particular discourses. While no book can recount everything that should be recounted, I try to provide enough stories to give a sense of how the saga proceeds.

At the point at which the original edition of *Gay Seattle* ends, in the mid-1990s, AIDS had become the dominant concern, and so the medical and legal discourse about how to respond to the disease and how it was affecting Seattle's queer residents was at the forefront of the narration in the final three chapters.

The stories have now continued for another two decades. As I wrote in *Imagining Gay Paradise*, "the pursuit of a homeland can extend across generations, especially if the homeland is to become one that no longer has to feel like a paradise created from magical realities"—a separate land of the imagination—"but part of the ordinary landscape and ordinary imagination."⁸

As with any saga, then, the focus of the narration shifts as each generation confronts a particular challenge. For gays and lesbians in Washington State, the focus by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century had become *family*—more specifically, *marriage*.

Before returning to that, however, it would be useful to pick up where the original edition of *Gay Seattle* left off and update a few of its themes.



Notably, contesting against AIDS has now faded from center stage as the dominant plot of the current generation's stories. By no means has a cure for AIDS been found, but the disease has been brought under significantly more control by the use of various drug combinations that were only beginning to be discovered in the early 1990s, when *Gay Seattle* ends. The medical crisis, which also drew in legal and political arguments about the civil rights of people living with AIDS and how reliably government agencies at all levels were responding, has moved to the sidelines; so, too, have some of the grassroots organizations and facilities created to meet the AIDS crisis. In 2001, the Chicken Soup Brigade and the Northwest AIDS Foundation, both chronicled in chapters 17 and 18, merged into a single agency, the Lifelong AIDS Alliance. That largely followed the same activist-to-professional route of earlier groups such as the Seattle Counseling Service and Stonewall (whose stories are told in chapter 9). Organizations such as Seattle AIDS Group (chapter 17) and People of Color Against AIDS Network (POCAAN) (chapter 18) remain active, but Seattle's ACT UP (chapter 18) is no longer part of the story at all, having faded away. Bailey-Boushay House, created as a hospice for people with AIDs, is now twenty years old and focuses on those who live with what for many has become a chronic condition.

It is a good news/bad news situation. AIDS is no longer the politicized dis-

ease that could be used to define gay men as separate, or—as *Gay Seattle* relates—even to define them as good citizens who were no longer to be seen as sinful but who were to be viewed as models of compassion. Now AIDS is part of the “rootage,” a long-lasting unfortunate part of our lives as citizens facing all types of health issues together. But its legacy as a moment in time when lesbians and gays had to pay more attention to their relationships with each other and with *family* may have something to do with the dramatic way in which, within a decade, the focus of the saga had shifted to *marriage*.

Another topic I paid a great deal of attention to is *geography* and how individuals re-imagine particular physical spaces as part of a home where a minority comes to express itself. I explore how that first occurred for Seattle’s gays and lesbians in the city’s Pioneer Square area (chapters 3–5), then shifted to the University District (chapter 8) and to Capitol Hill (chapter 9)—which is also “Catholic Hill” (chapter 16)—and then, more specifically, how the geographic space focused on Broadway Avenue’s development of a gay marketplace (chapter 15).

With the passing of time, Broadway has waned in symbolic importance as key gay-owned businesses, such as Bailey-Coy Books, have shuttered or moved, as the Elite Tavern did. Perhaps the biggest blow to Broadway’s role as a geographic center for Seattle’s queer community came in 2006 when organizers of the annual Pride Parade decided to move the event to downtown, ending with a festival at Seattle Center rather than what had become the traditional site of Volunteer Park. It was an ironic twist to the story of the parade itself. As I chronicle in chapter 15, the parade began as an activist civil rights march, always full of tensions between those who wanted it to be political and those who simply wanted it to be a celebratory party. In 1980 the civil rights Dorian Group seized control but, ironically, moved the event away from downtown government offices to Capitol Hill and even proclaimed its theme to be “Celebration.” The next year, a political activist group took control and moved the event back downtown on the theory that that was where the government was centered and where the protests needed to be heard. The battle seesawed until 1985 when the event finally and officially became a “parade march” and settled onto Broadway with a “Freedom Rally” at Volunteer Park. It was a typical Northwest-style compromise that over a twenty-year period became a comfortable ritual.

Then, it went back downtown, but to the retail and festival centers of Seattle, not to the government centers. Some argued that the move gutted the very idea of a geographic center for gays and lesbians, and in many respects they were right. Broadway and Volunteer Park did seem to lose some centrality. Others said that the move was simply the next step in “making home”—embedding the most public queer function right into the heart of Seattle’s business and amusement park zone. They had a point, too. As the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported, “To some, the move signals the advances gays and lesbians have made in society. Holding the festival at Seattle Center—where more traditional celebrations such

as Bumbershoot and Bite of Seattle take place—can be seen as a sign of mainstream acceptance and an acknowledgment that gays are part of the entire city, not just one neighborhood.”⁹

Other changes in geographic imagination were also happening on the south end of Capitol Hill, where most of the gay and lesbian bars had moved after leaving Pioneer Square in the 1970s and 1980s. This was the nighttime play area, where the theater of dance and bar socializing and the steam of gay saunas still proved its value for every new generation (chapter 5). Along what is known as the Pike/Pine corridor of Capitol Hill, some of the pioneering gay and lesbian spaces still remained. Bryer Herak’s Wildrose Bar for women (chapter 8) pushed past its quarter-century anniversary, although ownership has changed. Neighbours, once the target of a hate-group’s plot to use a pipe bomb to turn its entry into a “meat grinder” for gay men (chapter 18), became the zone’s longest-running gay-oriented nightclub: thirty years. The Cuff Complex, R-Place, and Encore (its name altered to Purr) rounded out the five that by the late 1980s had helped solidify the corridor’s imaginative importance of having a “nighttime home” within which to cruise and meet. Closer to downtown Seattle, the city’s two remaining gay bathhouses worked their way past their thirtieth anniversaries, Club Seattle having begun in 1982 (and now, under new ownership, known as Steamworks) and the harder-core Club Z having survived repeated rumors of closure (chapter 17).

What was different by 2012 is that the nature of the geographic corridor itself had changed. Auto repair shops, small warehouses, and mom-and-pop cafes had yielded to fashionable restaurants and bars, expensive cafes, mid-rise modern apartment buildings, and pricey cupcake and ice cream shops. Elliott Bay Bookstore, once a stolid retail anchor of Pioneer Square, had moved into the corridor. While some of the queer bars maintained their traditional clienteles—the Cuff and Purr mostly for men, the Wildrose mostly for women—others like Neighbours had become dramatically mixed with men and women of various sexual orientations. The newest bar to open in 2012 simply called itself Q.

Much as the Pride Parade had now been embedded into Seattle’s downtown, its revelry occurring in the same zone as the city’s biggest music festivals, so over time had the queer-oriented bars become embedded in what was now one of the city’s general entertainment and eating zones more than a specifically gay-imagined geography.

The city had come to join its queer citizens. Rootage and embedding had become the plot.

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A third significant shift of stories that has occurred since the closing chapters of the original edition of this book relate to the political and legal discourses, that arena of conversations where citizens move toward agreements about how to

organize their city, state, or nation in an orderly—and, one hopes, just—fashion.

For decades, the most important goal for gay men and women within that particular set of stories had been to add sexual orientation to Washington State's civil rights law. That way, men and women could not be fired or denied housing simply for being lesbian or gay. The quest had begun in Olympia in 1977 as a response to the dismissal of a gay schoolteacher, Jim Gaylord. Pete Francis, the senator who had helped the early Dorian Society and Dorian Group of gay activists rid the state of its nineteenth-century sodomy law in 1975, had warned that pursuing civil rights inclusion could be a very long fight (chapter 13).

No one imagined just how long.

The 1977 attempt had been rebuked; so had every attempt made every year thereafter by the state's first gay legislator, Cal Anderson, in the 1980s and early 1990s (chapter 19). And the same would happen when the man who had worked so closely with Anderson as his campaign manager and assistant, Ed Murray, was appointed to the legislature in 1995 after Anderson's death. Each year would be a snail's slog—succeeding in one legislative committee only to lose in another, succeeding in the House only to lose in the Senate.

Often for Murray, part of the challenge was overcoming the same homophobia that Anderson had encountered as the “gay legislator.” One of Murray's fellow legislators later told the *Seattle Times* that “very few people treated [Murray] like a regular guy. They didn't joke around with him. People didn't know what to say because he was the ‘openly gay’ legislator. It took a long time, especially for the men in Olympia to treat Ed like a regular guy.”¹⁰

In 1997, Hands Off Washington (HOW), which had successfully fended off anti-gay initiatives by building what was the first effective statewide political network (chapter 19), decided to circumvent what seemed to be a permanently stalled legislative process. Instead, it would introduce its own initiative amending the state law on the single point of preventing job discrimination. HOW was buoyed by polls that showed a majority of the public believed in equality when it came to hiring, promotion, and firing. Perhaps, it seemed, the magic time had come to ask voters to not just simply defeat anti-gay attacks but to vote positively to welcome gays and lesbians “inside” the house, rather than continuing to let them be discriminated against when it came to the workplace.

HOW quickly learned what Jodi O'Brien had described. Acknowledgment was “at the whim of those who hold power.” A landslide 60 percent crushed HOW's Initiative 667 with a “no” vote, and HOW as an organization vanished.

It was back to the legislature. And back to Murray. After I-677's defeat, Murray would say, “the gay and lesbian political structure basically imploded and went away.” He picked up the phone and started calling activists to lay out a strategy, the one he had already begun to pursue. The key: Murray himself had to become a power broker in the legislature and then advance bills like a game of chess—every move contemplated and executed slowly.¹¹

Murray would decide what committee to join. What committee to lead. What issues would bring anti-gay legislators into alliances with him.

"I wanted to be viewed as a power," Murray would later tell the *Seattle Times*. To gain power, he followed the obvious route: the flow of the state tax dollar.

In 1999, while still in the state House of Representatives, Murray became co-chair of the Capital Budget Committee. That committee controlled the money for constructing and repairing public buildings, such as libraries, schools, public housing, and historical and cultural buildings. Every representative was interested in its workings.

Murray moved an easy pawn forward, becoming prime sponsor of a non-controversial bill requiring Washington school districts to adopt anti-bullying policies protecting all students from harassment and intimidation. Gay, lesbian, and transgender students were not specifically mentioned, but they did not have to be. No parent wanted a child bullied. The law included a half-million dollar carrot to help school districts with training. Before Murray had gained his budget committee co-chairmanship, twelve other legislators agreed to be co-sponsors. After he was named budget committee co-chair, sixty-five became co-sponsors. That was an automatic majority of the members of the House.¹²

Murray next targeted the House Transportation Committee. It controlled the budget for highways, the Washington State Patrol, and issues relating to transportation, such as mass transit. Once he became chair, he helped write two comprehensive packages to raise money to construct roads and bridges—the largest investment the state had ever made in its transportation network.

Every representative wanted a piece.

After twelve years, Murray left the House and moved to the state Senate in 2007, much as Cal Anderson had done. By then, the state House, nudged by both Anderson and Murray, had already become supportive of gay civil rights. It was the Senate that was the usual roadblock. Murray asked to sit on the Ways and Means Committee, the primary channel for controlling tax and pension policies and for channeling any tax money headed to capital projects. He became chair.

If you were a state senator who wanted money for a district—and who did not?—you had to encounter Ed Murray.

As he was maneuvering those pieces into position on the legislative chessboard, Murray was also changing the rhetoric that lesbian and gay lobbyists and activists used in Olympia. In 1993, during Cal Anderson's big push for the civil rights bill, an important part of the strategy had been to bring forward lesbians and gay men who had suffered actual discrimination in jobs, housing, or public accommodations. Opponents had been arguing that lesbians and gays were not really victims of discrimination in the same sense as racial minorities—especially since gays and lesbians could simply stay closeted. At the time, Murray had been president of the Privacy Fund, which hired a lobbyist every year to work on the bill, and he had been the first to testify at a packed hearing on the

bill (chapter 19). In his opening line, he reflected the rhetorical theme that had been chosen, telling the lawmakers “my grandparents immigrated to this country to escape oppression.” No American, he continued, should have to endure oppression or discrimination.

A decade later, as a state senator, Murray would decide that that strategy was not working. It would do no good to prove people were being victimized by discrimination as long as opponents kept claiming gays and lesbians simply needed to practice “don’t ask, don’t tell—the sound bite that had by then become popularized as the compromise allowing gays and lesbians to stay in the U.S. military. Want to avoid discrimination in a restaurant or in a job hiring or in renting an apartment? Then “don’t tell” and “don’t show.” Stay in the closet.

Instead, Murray would say later, “I decided we’d talk about why this [civil rights protection] was good for the economy and why this was good for business, and stop being victims.”¹³ He pushed the new gay/lesbian lobby group founded in 2004, Equal Rights Washington, to hire lobbyists who could talk business—both to solicit corporate support and to focus on business issues with conservative lawmakers.

In 2006, Murray once again introduced the same bill that had been introduced for so long—with a change that added two words, “sexual orientation,” to the state’s prohibition against discrimination in jobs and housing. Somewhere in the Senate process each year, even when Democrats held the majority, conservative Democrats had always voted with Republicans to kill the amendment.

When the day for the debate came, a Republican senator from Port Orchard, Bob Oke, delivered one of the most impassioned speeches against the bill. Murray watched from the wings of the Democratic side with his long-time partner, Michael Shiosaki.

Oke began, “Having a child who chooses to be homosexual is very painful.” Oke had used the word *chooses*, the point of the bill’s opponents always having been that if a citizen *chooses* to be discriminated against, the state should not protect that person from the consequences. Oke continued, “I know this because my daughter has chosen the life of a lesbian. From the very first day she shared with me what her lifestyle was, she has been trying to change me. And I, quite frankly, have been trying to change her.”

His daughter had called once, asking whether she could bring her lesbian partner to visit. “There was a long hesitation on my part,” Oke said, “and I said, ‘I can’t have that.’”

“That’s called tough love.”

A reporter asked Murray how he was doing as he watched the debate unfold.

“I need this to be over,” he replied. He had been working hard to persuade Republicans, but it was a tight game that he knew could be stalemated or lost.

Another Republican senator, Bill Finkbeiner of Kirkland, rose. As Senate minority leader the previous year, Finkbeiner had voted against the bill, which

had been rejected by one vote when two Democrats had joined Finkbeiner's Republicans. But at the beginning of the 2006 session, he had announced that he had come to better understand the level of discrimination against gays and lesbians.¹⁴

The issue, he began to argue with a surprising framing, was whether it was "OK to be gay or lesbian in the state." Then he said, "We don't choose who we love." That directly countered Oke's argument about *choice*. He continued: "The heart chooses who we love." He added, "I don't believe it's right for us to say it's acceptable to discriminate against people because of that."¹⁵

What had been the legislative goal of the state's lesbian and gay community for three decades suddenly seemed in reach. The chess pieces had moved into place, and when it came time for the decision, the bill would finally pass, 25–23. Finkbeiner's vote was crucial.

Civil rights had been acknowledged on a statewide level at last.

Pete Francis, the state senator who in the 1970s had advised Seattle's first gay civil rights group, the Dorian Society, had long since retired. But on the day of the signing, he was there with Ed Murray.

*

One other shift in the political and legal discourse demands mention. As had happened in other port cities at the end of World War II, Seattle's lesbians and gay men had become more visible when returning military decided to call home the cities to which they were being discharged. The war had sent thousands of men to work in Seattle's airplane and shipbuilding industries, then had shipped them out to fight and filled their jobs with women. Miss Boeing of 1942 had even told her aerospace union's newsletter that she "liked men's work better because it doesn't seem so trivial and sissified" (see chapter 3.) After World War II ended, it was no surprise that many stayed on where they landed since the port cities offered freer places to perform a gender differently or express a marginalized sexuality.

Through succeeding decades, as lesbians and gay men became more organized, their bars and social networks became more accessible to new soldiers and sailors passing through Puget Sound's military bases, and by the 1980s and 1990s Washington State produced service men and women willing to openly challenge a military policy that banned homosexuals from serving and that, at times, aggressively pursued them in witch hunts. Among the most prominent who had challenged that ban were Colonel Margarethe Cammermeyer, who had been chief nurse of the Washington State National Guard (see the Epilogue), and Army Staff Sergeant Perry Watkins.

As the stories in the original *Gay Seattle* came to a close, a new chapter in this particular segment of the legal and political discourse began. As had been true for racial minorities such as African Americans and Native Americans, the military was an important symbol of inclusion or exclusion in American

society—as well as a very practical source of equal access to the kinds of benefits that other citizens enjoyed. Financial help for training and education. Help for ongoing medical costs through the Veterans Administration. Pensions and retirement. And so if gays and lesbians were ever to be inside the American home rather than outside, they needed to be able to be in the military.

During his campaign for president in 1992, Bill Clinton declared that he wanted to end the military ban against homosexuals, and, once inaugurated, he moved immediately to do so. But in ensuing months, Clinton found himself outmaneuvered by congressional conservatives and a rigid military hierarchy, and by December 1993, political compromise had created its own form of “separate but [not] equal” with the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. Under it, the Pentagon agreed that it would not ask for information about sexual orientation on recruitment forms or in interviews, and homosexual service members were not supposed to say anything. Just stay silent, even among all those heterosexual service members who would be talking about and displaying their own relationships. The military was still free to discharge and investigate homosexuals. The Pentagon never seems to have agreed to what sometimes was said to be a third prong of the policy—“Don’t pursue”—and so in the seventeen years that “Don’t ask, don’t tell” was in existence, more than 12,000 gays and lesbians were kicked out of the services.¹⁶

One of the first challenges in the nation to the new policy came from Petty Officer Mark Philips, stationed aboard the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Nimitz*, homeport Everett, roughly thirty miles north of Seattle. Philips had been trained as a reactor operator, and in the window between Clinton’s election, the president’s announcement that he would lift the ban, and the subsequent rollback to “Don’t ask, don’t tell,” Philips came out to his commander. He had served for four years and had an outstanding record. In subsequent interviews with navy investigators, he told them that he had discovered he was gay only the year before, had since had sex with men a dozen times and planned to continue doing so, and that when ashore he often went to gay bars in the Seattle area two or three times a week. None of his sexual encounters had occurred on the *Nimitz* or on military bases, and all had been consensual.¹⁷ The navy started discharge proceedings, but then waited to see how the battle between Clinton and Congress would end. Philips was dismissed from the *Nimitz*, his pay cut in half, and he was sent to Sand Point Naval Station in Seattle, essentially dry-docked.¹⁸ Once “Don’t ask, don’t tell” was in place, he was discharged. Philips’s battle, first against the proceedings during the interim period and then against the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy itself, was launched on the grounds that the military was violating his freedom of speech to discuss his relationships just as heterosexuals did, his equal protection with other service members regardless of sexual orientation, and his privacy, given the questioning that occurred when his same-sex life came to light.

U.S. District Court Judge William Dwyer, hearing the case in Seattle, challenged the idea that consensual sex off base with someone not in the military could possibly affect military morale or cohesion, a point the government attorney conceded. Dwyer even called the military rules “foolish and cruel.”¹⁹ But in the end he had to conclude that under previous court precedents, the government had only to meet the lowest of three possible constitutional burdens of proof in order to justify its punishment: The Defense Department needed only to show a “rational basis” to justify its unequal treatment of homosexuals and heterosexuals, not the more “significant” or “compelling” reasons it would have needed were the case about discrimination against soldiers on the basis of, say, race or religion. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals also turned aside Philips’s arguments and supported the navy’s right to discharge him. Applying similar “rational basis” scrutiny, the court panel wrote that homosexuals were not what in civil rights parlance was known as a “suspect class” because of any long history of discrimination or political powerlessness. Only if they had been would the higher burdens of proof be appropriate, the court panel said.²⁰

For years, judges would continue to turn aside challenges to the constitutionality of the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, largely because of the low burden of proof they placed on the government to justify its approach.

Then came the landmark case of Major Margaret Witt, who had entered the Air Force in 1987, becoming a flight nurse, and who, in 1995, had been transferred to McChord Air Force Base in Tacoma. She had received a Meritorious Service Medal, an Air Medal, an Air Force Commendation Medal—and had even become something of an Air Force poster child, her face appearing in Air Force promotional materials for more than a decade.

Starting in 1997, she entered a committed and long-term relationship with another woman that would last through August 2003. Together, they shared a home in Spokane, 250 miles away from McChord. Witt’s partner was neither a service member nor a civilian employee of the military.

Witt tried to follow the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, never mentioning her homosexuality and sequestering her relationship all the way across the state from McChord. But in July 2004, a year after her relationship ended, the Air Force pursued the matter. An investigator contacted her to discuss an allegation of homosexuality, and when she refused to talk to him, still following her half of the “don’t tell” policy, an Air Force chaplain asked to discuss her homosexuality. Once again, she refused to say anything. In November 2004, her superiors started separation proceedings, telling her she would no longer receive pay, earn any points toward promotion, or get retirement benefits. It took another sixteen months, but in March 2006, the Air Force initiated a discharge.²¹

Witt resisted and sued, but bound by the precedent of “rational basis,” Seattle-based federal District Court Judge Ronald Leighton immediately dismissed

her case. Her lawyer appealed to the Ninth Circuit on what seemed a quixotic mission.

But then came the surprise.

This time, the Ninth Circuit ruled that the court would apply “heightened scrutiny” to the military’s actions against homosexuals. That was a higher burden of proof that first required the government to have a “significant” reason for the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy itself, then to provide an analysis of whether the application of the policy to Major Witt herself “significantly advanced” the government’s interest in maintaining “cohesion” in military units. Finally, there would be an additional analysis of whether there could have been other “less intrusive” ways for the Air Force to achieve its aims of preserving “cohesion” rather than discharging Major Witt—perhaps through more training for homophobic unit members. The circuit judges avoided directly overturning the policy itself by agreeing that the first of the three points was met: unit cohesion and morale was a “significant” reason for the policy. But they then ordered Leighton to conduct a new trial on the second and third points. The court would no longer automatically assume that the dismissal of a particular homosexual service member was justified; the government would instead have to prove how Witt’s presence was disrupting her specific unit’s cohesion and would also have to prove that there was no way other than discharging her to deal with the disruption.

In the new trial, Leighton ruled that the government had failed to prove there had been any interference in unit cohesion by a consensual same-sex relationship taking place miles away from McChord. And he ruled that even if there had been disruption, the military could have found another way to remedy the situation short of discharging Witt.²² She had won, and the terms of the legal conversation had been substantially changed.

What had altered the Ninth Circuit’s mind? Public opinion had certainly shifted. Gallup polls were showing that by 2009, 69 percent of Americans favored allowing openly gay men and lesbians to serve, compared to 52 percent opposed to the idea a decade earlier.²³ But courts do not ground their opinions in public opinion polls.

Instead, the circuit relied most heavily on the U.S. Supreme Court’s own decision that had come in the intervening years. In 2003, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Supreme Court had struck down all the remaining state sodomy laws that criminalized consensual same-sex behavior. Protection of private, consensual sexual behavior between adults, the Court had decided, was part of the Fifth Amendment’s guarantee that citizens would not be deprived of their liberty without due process—and while the Supreme Court had not specified what burden of proof would be required for the government to meet the “due process” requirement, many of the precedents it had relied on in deciding *Lawrence v. Texas*

required some sort of “heightened scrutiny” as part of the due process. Similar heightened scrutiny was now justified, the Ninth Circuit said, when the military dismissed gay or lesbian service members for their private sexual behavior.

By winter 2009, the final phase of “Don’t ask, don’t tell” would begin. President Barack Obama in his first State of the Union address urged Congress to repeal the law, and the politics finally moved forward to bring lawmakers and the military together to make the change Clinton had sought so long before.

On September 20, 2011, the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy ended. Gay men and lesbian women were finally able to serve openly *inside* the military.



Back to marriage.

The question is only four words long, yet it is laden with such potent cultural significance that it sometimes seems as if it has become the most important one that any individual can ask of another: “Will you marry me?”

That importance is relatively recent, arising mostly since the nineteenth century re-focused marriage away from property arrangements and dowries, when the questions being asked were likely to be traded between heads of families rather than two individuals. Only in recent decades—and only in some nations of the world—have stories about the romantic passions of one individual for another moved to the fore and even more recently do they no longer have to end as romantic tragedies about lovers kept apart by families or religious requirements—those early romantic stories of Romeo and Juliet, Lancelot and Guinevere, Abelard and Heloise.

Instead, stories have yielded to the usually happier endings that mass-produced romance novels and Hollywood cinema have been giving us since the mid-nineteenth century.

In the 1970s, when the lesbian and gay movement began to gather new momentum, it seemed that practically no one was promoting the notion of marriage as a goal. For example, the most important gay male writers of that period—the members of the literary circle that came to be known as the “Violet Quill”—insisted that one of the main undertakings needed to be challenging the “conventionality of [the] social imagination.” In their novels, Andrew Holleran and Edmund White among others acknowledged the lure of domesticity represented by heterosexual marriages and households, but then immediately savaged it, arguing that an essential part of the very reason for the gay and lesbian movement was to challenge the notion of marriage. David Bergman, in his book *The Violet Hour: The Violet Quill and the Making of Gay Culture*, points out that whatever sense marriage might make for heterosexuals, writers like Holleran and White and many others considered marriage “a formula for disaster in homosexual ones.”²⁴

In *The Farewell Symphony*, for example, White explained: “Guys just sort of

fell in with each other, buddies rubbing shoulders. We wanted sexual friends, loving comrades, multiple husbands in a whole polyandry of desire. Exclusivity was a form of death—worse, old hat. . . . We were intent on dismantling all the old marital values and the worst thing we could be accused of by one of our own was aping the heterosexual model.”²⁵

It was not simply gay men questioning the heterosexual model for the sake of sexual play. Lesbians delivered harsh socialist critiques of the way in which marriage represented the values of capitalism and property and even harsher feminist critiques of the way it supported paternalism. Laurie Morton, a member of Seattle’s Radical Women, declared in a mid-1970s speech, for example, that she had come to understand that “we gays are not persecuted as social outcasts because we are sick, or perverse, or child molesters as our oppressors would have us believe. . . . No, the roots of oppression go much deeper. The truth is that homosexuality challenges the most basic social institution in this system of private property and profit: the unit upon which capitalism is built—the heterosexual monogamous family” (see chapter 8 in *Gay Seattle*).

And indeed that seemed to be true, as the case of Sandy Schuster and Madeleine Isaacson illustrated. The triple supremacy as far as the culture was concerned was romantic, heterosexual, monogamous marriage. The flipside triple taboo, condemned by the same culture, was fraternal, homosexual, philandering relationships.²⁶

The notion of a romantic, same-sex, committed couple, particularly one raising a family, was inconceivable and inconceivably wrong—even, it sometimes appeared, among gays and lesbians themselves.

In Seattle, that attitude was manifested in many ways. When the Gay Community Center opened in 1969 on Capitol Hill, it placed a large sign directly on its porch so it would be visible to every passerby. It showed three of the symbols for “male” with their arrows pointed upwards, and three symbols for female with their crosses pointed downward, all linked together. The number three was important: gays and lesbians would no longer be isolated; henceforth they would have groups they celebrated as families. But they would not couple into twos as heterosexuals had done. Even Faygele benMiriam and Paul Barwick, who had applied for the first gay marriage license in King County, admitted that they were not a couple in the traditional sense. “In the 1970s, you weren’t couples and lovers,” Barwick would say years later. “We were collective. We weren’t a pair. We weren’t partners.” (See chapter 9.)

Seattle’s lesbian women, in particular, set out to form collectives where they could build new family-style relationships through consciousness-raising groups and worker co-ops, and, often enough, they moved together as groups out to islands in the San Juans or, most popular of all, to Vashon Island. (Interestingly, as the most recent census indicates, Vashon today continues to have the highest percentage of same-sex households in the state.²⁷)

The new sense of connection, as Holleran had suggested in some of his novels and as other writers argued, would not come from what heterosexual marriage offered—attaching to one person—but, as Bergman observed, from being “linked to an entire community.” Marital-like fidelity and monogamy could actually threaten deep friendships with others.²⁸

It was a pride in being seen as *wrong* rather than, as is often on display today, a pride in being seen as *natural* or, as the title of a current television program suggests, a pride in being the *new normal*. And that sense of wrongness was an important pride. Without ever having developed a pride in what *queer* meant, the resilience against the crushing insult and the capricious withdrawal of acknowledgment could be dangerously, possibly fatally, weak.

Looking back over the decades, it is certainly reasonable to argue that AIDS in the 1980s had a major impact on cracking if not destroying that desire to dissent from the heterosexual norm of marriage. But it is also equally true that the response to AIDS actually proved the point being made in the 1970s. As Bergman writes, “The AIDS epidemic reaffirmed—not weakened—the Violet Quill’s belief that intimate relations couldn’t be modeled on the conventional family, for as many of them discovered, families could not necessarily be trusted to provide the care people needed. They saw repeatedly how gay men relied on a large network of friends and social services—not their families—to provide their needs.”²⁹ In Seattle, that had certainly been the case, with many of the social services being created by the grassroots actions of lesbians and gay men themselves. The promotion of the idea of a network of friends taking care of one another was one of the main keys to the success of Seattle’s early educational strategies against AIDS, such as the “Rules of the Road” and “Safety Pin” campaign (chapters 17 and 18). Nowhere was the combination of gay sexuality and fraternal—rather than romantic monogamous—relationship better captured than in a 1987 “Brother-to-Brother” poster produced for the local People of Color against AIDS Network. It showed partially nude, gay, African American men in a Cascade Mountain river gently bathing one another.

There were three, not two.

The battle for marriage, then, suggested changing not only the way the public talked about lesbian and gay relationships, but how gays and lesbians envisioned themselves. Three different discourses would be affected: the one about *family*, the one about *politics*, and the one about *religion*.

It started in Seattle with what seems not as much a first step as a toe wiggle. In April 1989, Seattle’s Human Rights Commission ruled that the electric utility, Seattle City Light, had violated the city’s Fair Employment Practices Ordinance by giving only employees in traditional marriages benefits such as health coverage, medical leave, and bereavement leave to attend funerals of family members. On August 14, the city council voted to create a category of employee dependents called “domestic partners,” persons who would be eligible for ex-

actly two benefits: medical leave and bereavement leave. Fewer than 400 of the city's 10,000 employees were affected—and most of those were heterosexuals living together but not married. Any couple seeking the benefit had to file a written document confirming a close relationship that involved responsibility for each other.

Even that was enough to prompt a referendum call by opponents who organized as “Citizens for Family.” But they initially failed to gather enough signatures to place a referendum on the ballot to either accept or reject the council's action. But by spring of the following year, opponents were back with an initiative to overturn the law, which by then had gone into effect.³⁰ The rhetoric for Initiative 35 would set the template: everything would be about defining “family” and “marriage,” “gay rights,” and “religious teaching.”

Seattle's Roman Catholic archdiocese, with Archbishop Raymond Hunt-hausen still in charge but now tightly leashed by the Vatican's Joseph Ratzinger (see chapter 16), sat out the vote. Adopting silence was significant, given that San Francisco's archdiocese at the same time was adamantly and publicly opposing any change in the definition of marriage and family to include “domestic partners.”

The same month the initiative was filed, the Seattle City Council expanded the benefits available to its employees who had domestic partners, now including health and dental coverage. In November of that year, Seattle voters defeated the initiative to repeal the original Family Leave Ordinance, and “domestic partnerships” were on their way to being the so-called “separate but equal” solution.³¹

A decade and a half later, Ed Murray would be the main figure guiding the campaign to gain legal acknowledgment of lesbian and gay relationships in the state Senate. His replacement in the House, Jamie Pedersen, would help head the effort there. Pedersen, a young, Yale-educated lawyer sometimes described as a “blond, baby-faced family man”³²—he and his partner were raising four children, including triplets—had worked on the case challenging the legislature's Defense of Marriage Act. When it lost, he was ready to push immediately for full marriage legislation. He would instead learn to follow Murray's advice about the chess-board of incremental steps. As he said, “In court you have the ability to seek exactly what you want and you deserve. It's natural to the process to be somewhat absolutist.” But the political process was different. Not only did a majority of legislators have to be persuaded to possibly risk their careers, he acknowledged, but also there was the subsequent referendum and initiative process to contend with, which could quickly undo the hardest-won legislative majority.

And so they proceeded slowly, through the creation of very limited domestic partnerships in 2007 to the addition of more legal rights in 2008 to an “all but marriage” expansion in 2009, intended to put the partnerships on the same civil law footing as marriage. At that point, opponents triggered a referendum

to try to stop the snail-like movement toward equality—but the referendum lost, 53 percent to 47 percent. It was the first time in the United States that voters had approved a statewide law expanding the rights that lesbian and gay relationships could enjoy.

Seemingly, if legislators could be convinced and a statewide organization could be effective enough to ward off the inevitable referendum launched by opponents, the goal of full acknowledgment of marriage might just be in reach.

Murray, Pedersen, and the others planning the final stage of the push paused to be sure.

Two years went by.

Then, the February 2012 action by the legislature provided its grasp on one handle of that grail. The other handle would be R-74.



During that inevitable referendum to overturn the equality law passed by the legislature, the role of Catholicism would become one of those fascinating side stories to the main plot of the saga.

For one thing, Ed Murray was himself Catholic. He prayed at the St. Ignatius chapel on the Jesuits' Seattle University campus on Capitol Hill—and Capitol Hill, of course, had once been informally known as "Catholic Hill" because it was the geographic and symbolic center of Catholic institutions and immigrants in Seattle (chapter 16). Catholic crosses were everywhere on the skyline. Murray had even been the go-between for his good friend Cal Anderson, who was not Catholic, when Anderson decided he wanted to be buried from the home of the archdiocese at St. James Cathedral. Murray made the necessary arrangements with the Reverend Michael Ryan who oversaw St. James and who, as chancellor of the archdiocese, was the number 3 priest in the local hierarchy. Murray as a teenager had met Ryan while participating in a "Search" program for young Catholics and the priest had since become a mentor and a friend. It was Ryan who cleared the way for the then best-known gay legislator in the state to have what amounted to a state funeral from the cathedral, even though Anderson was not Catholic (chapter 19).

Also, Governor Christine Gregoire, who initially rejected the idea of marriage equality but eventually passionately embraced it, was Catholic. She, too, grappled with her religion's official anti-gay marriage stance—and then set it aside for the sake of a broader religious and civic understanding.

And, on the other side, one of Referendum 74's most powerful and most vocal opponents was the archbishop of Seattle, Peter Sartain.

Catholicism was certainly not the only religion in the mix of debate about Referendum 74. Evangelical Christians tended to join the opponents, while mainline Episcopalian and Protestant denominations in Seattle tended to endorse the idea of equality. However, it was the Catholic Church as an institution

that played a special role. The church could not endorse political candidates, but it could take stands on political issues such as same-sex marriage and work to defeat whatever Rome and the guiding American organization, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, did not like. To do so, it used its wing charged with that kind of political action, the Knights of Columbus, and funneled money to the National Organization for Marriage, which was fighting attempts to equalize marriage throughout the country. The Catholic Church positioned itself as one of the leaders, if not the leader, of the campaign to stop recognition for lesbian and gay relationships nationwide. In Washington State both NOM and the Knights of Columbus directly supported the opponents who had launched R-74.³³

Murray himself usually tried to avoid talking about his Catholicism. He would joke that he no more wanted to be known as a “Catholic lawmaker” than to be known as a “gay legislator.” When a Seattle newspaper, *The Stranger*, listed him among the city’s “Best Christians” and asked him how he lived his faith, he responded, “By not talking about it.”³⁴

For Murray, the Church’s theological insistence that homosexuality was a sin and that homosexuals must practice celibacy made him feel only partly accepted—“always one foot in,” he would tell a writer for the *National Catholic Reporter*, “and one foot out.”³⁵ *The Help* movie comes to mind with its images of those who serve the family but who, as Sartre said, are pages of a book being read aloud, rather than granted a voice.

In 2010, J. Peter Sartain became archbishop of the Western Washington archdiocese with its headquarters at St. James Cathedral overlooking downtown Seattle. Cardinal Ratzinger who had clashed with Hunthausen in the 1980s had since become Pope Benedict XVI, and both he and his predecessor John Paul II had since been careful to appoint archbishops in Seattle who would follow their strict approach on homosexuality. Sartain was no surprise in that regard—although, as the Referendum 74 campaign would prove, he was even more willing than his predecessors to aggressively insert himself into situations opposing gay civil rights and to use local churches as political platforms.

“I can’t change what the Scripture says or what the church teaches,” he would tell the *Seattle Times* in the course of the campaign. Nor did he appear to want to offer any flexibly pastoral approaches to what dogma—and Pope Benedict—said on issues of sexuality, contraception, and same-sex marriage.

In the same season when Sartain was beginning his fight against the state’s new marriage law, he was also being appointed by the Vatican to investigate the leading organization of nuns in the United States for its supposedly “radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith,” particularly its approach to discussions of sexuality.³⁶

After the state legislature passed the marriage law in February, Sartain wrote to all Catholic parishes under his charge. In his letter, he urged the priests

in each parish to pass out petitions to gather signatures to insure that the referendum would be called. He also urged all members of the church to sign the petitions and to vote down the new law.

The Catholic bishops heading the other two dioceses in the state—in Spokane and Yakima—joined Sartain in his opposition. As the referendum moved toward a vote, their denunciations would grow shriller and more inflammatory. At one point, the three claimed that the law would threaten religious liberty and make Catholics victims of discrimination—supposedly because private Catholic schools would not be able to teach that there was “unique value” to having children raised by biological mothers and fathers.³⁷

Sartain began to connect decisions about voting on Referendum 74 to individual morality and to “what we believe God has been doing from the creation of the world and how he invites us to be partners in continuing his work until the end of time.” He had a video posted on the Archdiocese’s website in which he insisted that Catholic notions of marriage had to be implemented in state law, lest marriage be “harmed beyond repair.”³⁸

He left nothing unclear about the clarity of his own mind.

Sartain’s stance, though, eventually triggered its own backlash. Other Catholics challenged him publicly. Many of the parish priests refused his requests. At the Jesuit’s St. Joseph Church, which had years earlier hosted a gay-lesbian friendly Mass (chapter 16), the Reverend John Whitney said no to the idea of gathering signatures. So did the campus ministry that ran St. Ignatius Chapel at Seattle University, where Ed Murray worshipped. In a particularly symbolic slap, so did the Reverend Mike Ryan, who was still chancellor of the archdiocese’s home church, St. James Cathedral.

Other Catholics went further than merely refusing Sartain’s request that they sign petitions and vote against same-sex marriage. More than sixty priests who had left the Archdiocese published a letter insisting that same-sex marriage was consistent with Gospel teachings. A contingent called “Catholics for Marriage Equality” joined the Pride Parade in June 2012. More than 1,000 Catholics bought a full-page ad endorsing Referendum 74 and urging votes *for* marriage equality. And, in the boldest move, the president of a significant Catholic institution, the elite Jesuit Seattle Preparatory School, specifically disagreed in his official blog. He argued that heterosexual reproduction did not have to be seen as the primary purpose of marriage. Instead, he said, the purpose of marriage was to unite two people, regardless of procreation. The Prep president, Kent Hickey, added that even though he tended to be “more conservative on social issues than the norm in the Pacific Northwest . . . I support Washington’s gay marriage law.”³⁹

Just after Easter, the two Catholics so opposed to one another—Murray and Sartain—met. The archbishop requested the meeting and went to the state senator’s office.

Murray was not sure what to expect. They exchanged pleasantries about

Murray's other social justice work. Then they came to what Murray would tell a reporter later was "their disagreement."

It was obvious from the start that neither man was going to change his position. They simply disagreed. At one point, Murray finally asked Sartain whether, given the archbishop's power and passionate involvement against the law, he intended to use his power to deny Murray communion at church. The clash between the Catholic hierarchy and those of its members who were lawmakers often raised such questions, although that had more often occurred in the context of abortion laws. But a few months after the Murray-Sartain meeting, an archbishop in New Jersey would explicitly call for those Catholics supporting same-sex marriage to forgo communion.⁴⁰

Murray remembered what happened next in his meeting. In what was certainly a pregnant moment, Sartain answered no. He would not go so far as to force Murray and other Catholics supporting equality entirely out of his house of worship. Murray recalled that the archbishop claimed the church would still be "welcoming."⁴¹

Murray and other Catholics like him could continue to come inside for communion so long as they put their relationships outside.

*

When the Washington State Legislature enacted its law changing the wording for marriage, the actual text change was small. Instead of the law reading, "Marriage is a civil contract between a male and a female," the wording that had been approved now simply said "two persons" of age. It was an echo of that text under which Faygele benMiriam and Paul Barwick had tried to marry forty years earlier.

Governor Christine Gregoire signed the new law shortly after it was passed in February 2012. She referred to it as "a day when we did what was right, we did what was just, we did what was fair."

When Murray stepped to the microphone, he began simply. "My friends, welcome to the other side of the rainbow."⁴²

Then began nine months of opponents gathering signatures and both sides campaigning. This was that other half of the chess play that Murray, Pederesen, and other organizers knew would come as soon as the legislature acted. As expected, the opponents drew their biggest money from the National Organization for Marriage. NOM contributed more than \$1.4 million to Preserve Marriage Washington. Another \$300,000 would flow in directly through the Catholic Knights of Columbus.

Top corporations instead endorsed equality for gays and lesbian relationships. Starbucks, Expedia, Nordstrom, Nike, Boeing, T-Mobile, and others all supported the legislature's change. Names from Seattle's list of millionaires, even billionaires, also gave money to Washington United for Marriage, the

group supporting equality. Microsoft's Bill Gates and his wife, Melinda Gates, each donated \$250,000; Gates's father, \$350,000. Steve Ballmer, also of Microsoft, gave \$100,000.⁴³

On Sunday, July 22, a former Amazon employee, Jennifer Cast—who had been one of Amazon's earliest hires and was a lesbian mother of four children—sent an email to Jeff Bezos, the company's founder and president. She had worked with him years before when the company still had only a handful of employees, and now Cast was working to raise money for the pro-74 effort. In the email, she described the pain she had suffered as a young lesbian, and then she wrote, "I want to have the right to marry the love of my life and to let my children and grandchildren know their family is honored like a 'real family.'" She continued, "We need help from straight people," and she asked Bezos to consider donating \$100,000 to \$200,000.

"Jeff," she added, "I beg you not to sit on the sidelines and hope the vote goes our way."

Two days later, she got a reply. It was not clear how long Bezos had already been pondering what to do or whether he had already decided before receiving Cast's email. But that did not matter.

"Jen," the email from Bezos said, "this is right for so many reasons. We're in for \$2.5 million." It was signed "Jeff & MacKenzie," his wife.⁴⁴ It was the largest donation ever given to support same-sex marriage.

By the end of the campaign, supporters of marriage equality had raised more than \$14 million; opponents, about \$2.7 million.⁴⁵

In November 2012, the majority that held the power to acknowledge or not acknowledge decided to uphold the state legislature's decision. Fifty-three percent, about 1.6 million, approved Referendum 74 and the new marriage equality law; 1.4 million voted against it. It was the same percentage split that had upheld the previous "all but marriage" domestic-partnership law in 2009. However, the number of votes cast in 2012 had been two-thirds greater—almost 3 million compared with 1.8 million in 2009—so the ability to maintain that margin meant that the incremental approach had worked. More voters had grown comfortable with the idea that same-sex marriages could be a reality in Washington State.

The "separate but [not] equal" domestic partnership could be dismantled.

On December 6, the first day that the newly confirmed law would allow same-sex marriage licenses to be issued, more than 800 licenses were applied for across the state. There were no public protests from opponents. In downtown Seattle, the recorder's office at the county Administration Building opened at 12:01 a.m. by orders of the King County supervisor, Dow Constantine. "I don't want couples to wait a minute longer than legally necessary to get the rights" they had won, he said.⁴⁶ The plaza outside the building filled with hundreds of gay and lesbian couples standing in the nighttime damp and winter cold. Inside,

Constantine positioned himself behind a recorder's desk that he markedly noted was much like the one that Faygele benMiriam and Paul Barwick had gone to three decades earlier in the same building—when they had been refused. “The struggle began decades ago,” Constantine said, “and it’s led us to this day.”⁴⁷ This time the license would get signed—by the county’s top official—and the first would go to two West Seattle women together for more than thirty years, Pete-e Petersen and Jane Abbott Lighty.

Three days later, after the state’s mandatory waiting period between license and nuptials, hundreds took their vows in the lobby of the Seattle City Hall, which had been especially prepared with wedding chapels. Each newly married couple then passed down City Hall’s grand outside staircase to cheers. The *Seattle Times* published an entire front page with photographs and a headline two inches high: “Making History by Saying ‘I Do.’”

The *Times* also republished a photograph from the 1979 Pride March—a protest march (not a “parade”) in which a flat-bed truck had carried a cardboard closet with the banner, “Closets are for clothes, not people.”⁴⁸

The symbolism was striking: The closet had been exchanged for City Hall’s public outdoor staircase.

After what had seemed insurmountable odds and implacable opposition, lesbian women and gay men in Seattle were coming home to relationships fully recognized by the state—even if not by every church. On December 9, 2012, there was a Hollywood ending for the story of lesbian and gay romances and marriages.

How would it fare, this change in the cultural ideal of romantic *heterosexual* marriage to now include a parallel ideal of romantic *homosexual* marriage? How, among younger lesbians and gays in particular, would such a reality fuse with—or overwhelm—those 1970s visions of challenging and *queering* relationships, of taking pride in not being the norm, of being “wrong”?

As with any saga, there will be another generation of stories to come.

G.L.A.

February 2013

NOTES

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