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PAGE 17

# WINDY CITY TIMES

THE VOICE OF CHICAGO'S GAY, LESBIAN,  
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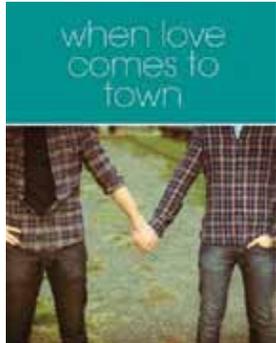


MARY-LOUISE  
PARKER  
ADDRESSES  
CONTROVERSY  
PAGE 25

## Going to the chapel...

Check out our special Gay and Lesbian Weddings section, including editorial, book reviews, opinion, statistics, and business listings. Photo by Dawn E. Roscoe from the book Capturing Love: The Art of Lesbian & Gay Wedding Photography.

pages 19-24



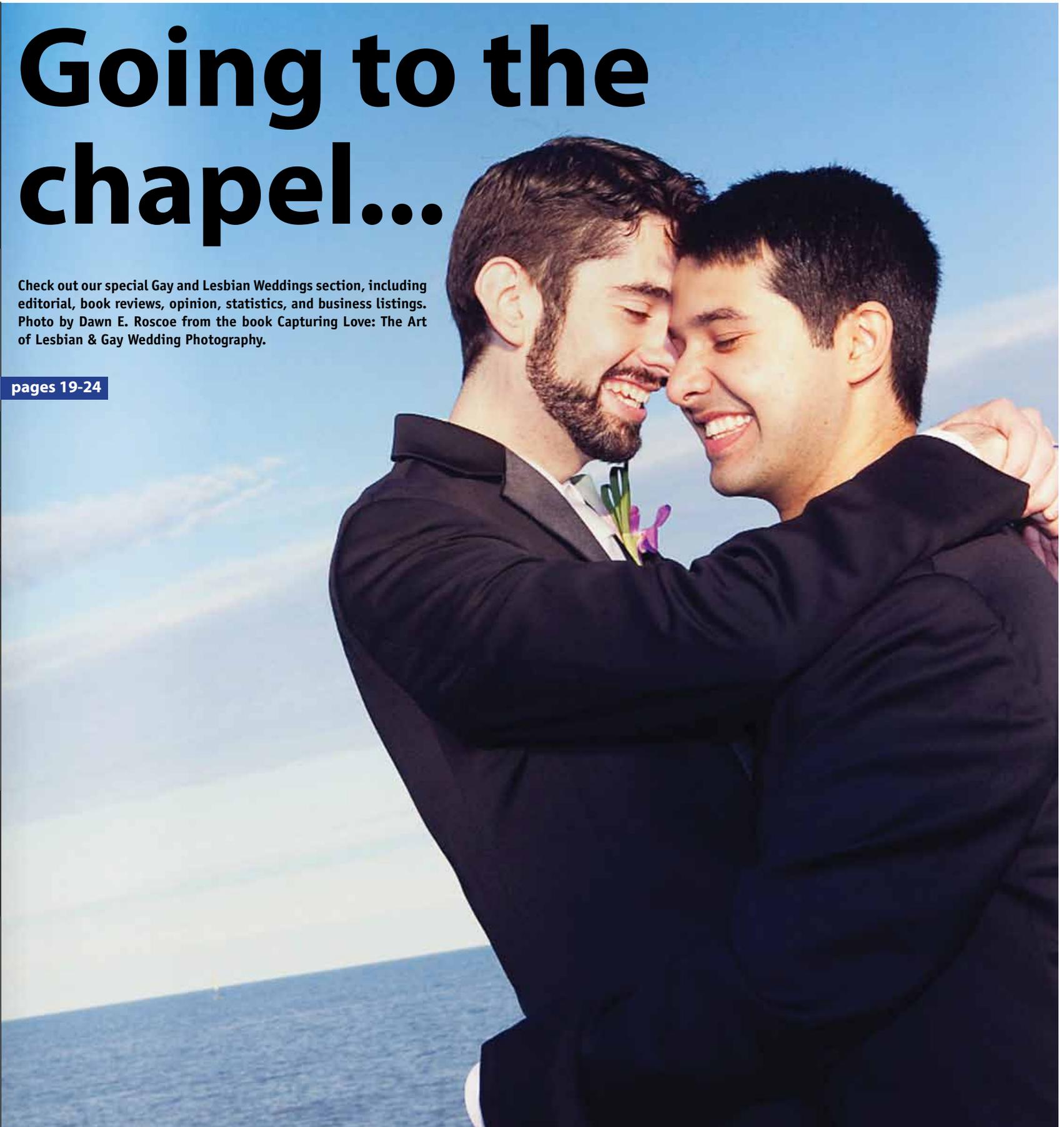
when love  
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tom lennon

SPRING BOOKS  
SPECIAL  
PAGES 26-29



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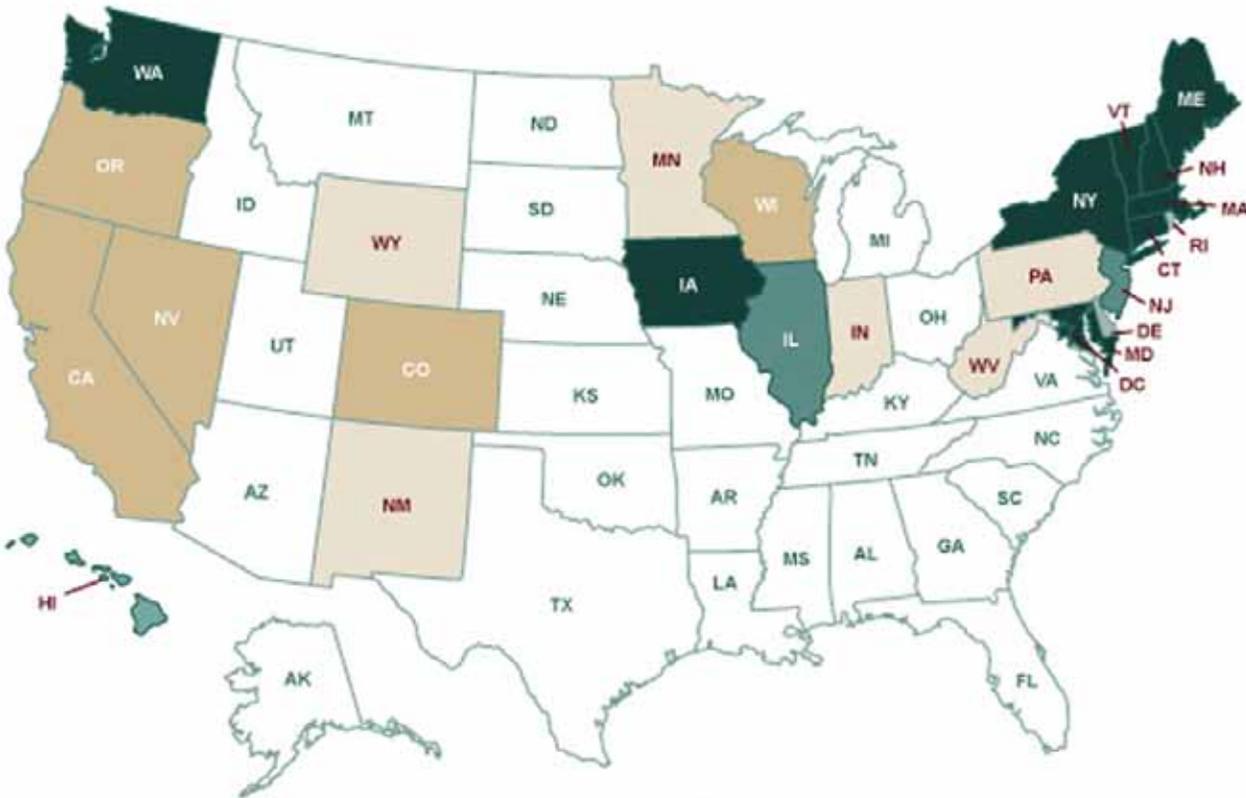
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WINDY CITY TIMES

Gay and Lesbian

Wedding Guide

How marriage equality shapes up in the U.S.



- Marriage
Broad Domestic Partnership / Civil Union and Anti-Gay Constitutional Amendment
Broad Domestic Partnership / Civil Union
Neither Relationship Recognition nor Constitutional Amendment
Some Protections for Same-Sex Couples
Anti-Gay Constitutional Amendment

Last Updated November 8, 2012

Nine states (Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Washington and Vermont) and Washington, D.C., permit marriage for same-sex couples.

New Mexico and Rhode Island explicitly respect out-of-state marriages of same-sex couples, while eight states now offer broad protections short of marriage.

With these advances, a record number of residents live in states that recognize relationships between same-sex couples:

Nearly 17 percent of the U.S. population lives in a state that either has the freedom to marry or honors out-of-state marriages of same-sex couples.

Nearly 39 percent of the U.S. population lives in a state with either marriage or a broad legal status such as civil union or domestic partnership.

Over 42 percent of the U.S. population lives in a state that provides some form of protections for gay couples.

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# Civil Unions: Separate and Unequal to Marriage

BY MEGHAN STREIT



Meghan Streit (left) with wife Shira Kollins. Photos by Erin Drewitz (erindrewitz.com).



I have a 40-pound ivory tulle ball gown hanging in my dressing room waiting to be cleaned and preserved. My dining room looks like a Crate & Barrel outlet, with gift boxes stacked in every corner. I have a shiny new diamond eternity band on my left hand. I'm still sunburned from the 12 days I recently spent relaxing in the Caribbean with my lover. If you didn't know better, you'd think I just got married.

But, I didn't—at least not in the eyes of the Illinois government. I'm gay, so the best I could do was get a civil union. I could spend all the money I wanted on a fancy wedding—a three-course meal for my 160 guests, \$400 designer shoes that I just had to have, the perfect shade of pale pink roses—and I did. But, sadly, no amount of money could buy me equality in the state where I live.

My now-wife and I waited as long as we could to get our civil union license, hoping against hope that the Illinois legislature would legalize same-sex marriage before our wedding. A few days before our Jan. 26, 2013 ceremony, we finally accepted the fact that gay marriage would not be the law of the land on our wedding day. So, we bundled up and headed downtown to the Cook County Bureau of Vital Records to get a civil union license.

That day was so bittersweet. On one hand, it was exciting to formalize our commitment to each other in a way we'd been planning for the last 15 months. It was fun to sign on the dotted line and claim responsibility for one another. But, at the same time, being relegated to civil union status instead of being allowed to get a marriage license (like the ones all of my straight friends have) felt, for lack of a better word, gross.

In our day-to-day life, being gay is nearly a non-issue for my wife and me. We can safely walk down any street in Chicago holding hands. Our families both embrace our relationship and are excited for grandkids. We have a vibrant social circle that includes straight, gay and bisexual people who all have a great time together. I am fortunate that in the world I inhabit, being gay is kind of old news. As a result, I spend most of my days feeling astonishingly normal. I don't think of my relationship as different from or less than my straight friends' marriages—and neither does anyone else who I know.

So, when my then-fiancée and I took the escalator down to the Vital Records office on that cold January afternoon, it felt like we had traveled back in time to 1952, when separate-but-equal was perfectly acceptable. I got a knot in my stomach while we waited in line. My eyes darted around the room, looking at the different signs with information about marriage and civil union licenses. The simple fact that there are two different options and that one of them is not available to gay people sends a subtle but clear message: You are different and you don't deserve the same treatment as the majority.

In my head, I was secretly plotting some sort of protest. I am not the kind of girl who sits in the back of the bus or goes down without a fight. My fiancée knows it, too. She looked at me, silently pleading for me not to make a scene.

When we got up to the desk, we were greeted by a tired-looking African American woman who appeared to be in her mid-50s. I said, "We're getting married, but we're gay, so I guess we have to get a civil union license." That was my

silently negotiated compromise with my fiancée: I didn't want to get arrested and spend my wedding day in jail, but there was no way I was leaving that office without making at least one political remark.

The lady behind the desk responded with the unique brand of irritated ambivalence that only government workers can muster: "Driver's license and date of birth." We came prepared with every piece of documentation we might need and handed it over to her. As the Vital Records lady clicked away at her computer and asked us a series of basic questions like our parents' names and where we were born, she looked up at us over her glasses and said: "You know you have to have a ceremony for this to be official, right?"

She was talking to a girl who had visited 12 venues before choosing the perfect one for her wedding, who tried on 28 wedding gowns, who was forcing her five best friends to wear matching pink dresses as bridesmaids, who sent out miniature snow globes as save-the-dates. I had micromanaged every detail of this wedding down to the pale pink welcome cocktail guests would receive when they arrived and the exact tempo at which the string quartet would play as I walked down the aisle. I wanted to shout at this poor woman about the hours I spent choosing passed hors d'oeuvres and the number of bridal magazines I'd read cover to cover. "Do I look like the kind of girl who gets married without a wedding???" is what I wanted to scream at her.

Instead, I just glared and said through clenched teeth, "Oh yes, there will be a ceremony."

My anger, while misdirected at a government employee, was valid. I shouldn't have had to suffer the indignity of separate-but-equal treatment. Not in a blue state in 2013. We all know that separate but equal means not equal, and it's a shame that history lesson is lost on so many people.

It stung a little bit to bring a civil union license rather than an honest-to-goodness marriage license to my wedding. But, my wedding was an elegant evening filled with delicious food, good champagne, stunning flowers, soft lighting and beautiful music from a live band. It was a night I know my family and friends will remember forever. When I woke up on Jan. 27, groggy from dancing into the wee hours, with my one true love asleep next to me, I felt married—not civil unioned, not domestic partnered—married.

As I write this, the Illinois Senate just passed a bill to legalize same-sex marriage. I am hopeful and confident the Illinois House will follow suit and that Gov. Quinn will sign that bill into law in very short order. For my sake, I wish they had passed the bill a month ago, but I will graciously accept the Valentine's Day gift the Senate has given to the LGBT community in Illinois.

I am married in my heart, and no government can take that away from me, but I sincerely hope that my wife and I are one of the last couples to be treated, however politely, like second-class citizens at the Cook County Bureau of Vital Records. I look forward to the day when two gay people in love can just stroll into that Washington Street basement office and ask for a plain old marriage license—not separate, just equal.

**Meghan Streit is a Chicago-based journalist.**





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# Gay and Lesbian Wedding Guide

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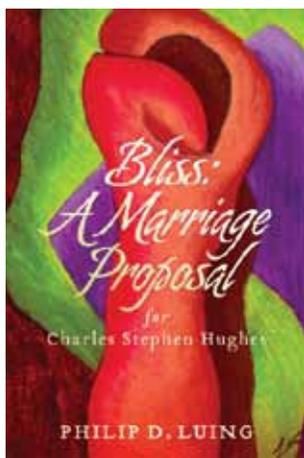
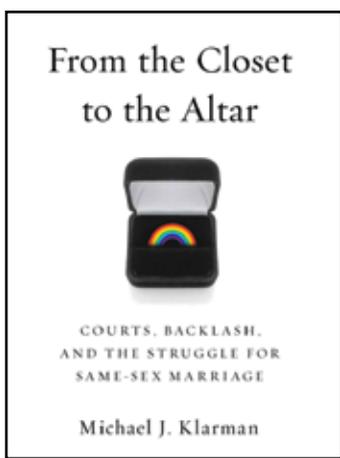
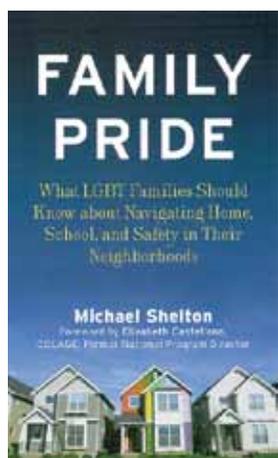
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## Good reads: Books for couples and families

BY TRACY BAIM

**Family Pride: What LGBT Families Should Know about Navigating Home, School, and Safety in Their Neighborhoods** is a new book by Michael Shelton (Beacon Press). Shelton spoke to families from urban and rural areas to look at how they struggle against homophobia and everyday problems. He looks at how some families live “in the closet” in hostile areas of the country, a kind of “passing” that has a cost. Trying to be a “perfect” example as an LGBT family also comes with a price, he writes. Shelton also has recommendations relating to parent-child relationships, government benefits access and fostering tolerance and inclusion in communities.

**From the Closet to the Altar: Courts, Backlash, and the Struggle for Same-Sex Marriage**, by Michael J. Klarman, explores the landmark cases defining this issue as well as wide-ranging and often unintended consequences. The author predicts that gay marriage is probably inevitable in the U.S. and fairly soon. “However, marriage legislation has also impeded other objectives of the gay-rights movement and comes

at significant cost, such as sympathetic Senate candidates losing their bids and state judges having lost their jobs,” according to the book. “The lives of millions of Americans have been impacted by these cases and millions more will be fundamentally changed by how we proceed over the next decade. Every American, on either side of the debate, should know how we came to such a turning point in our history.”

Chicago author and artist Philip D. Luong made a public proposal of marriage to singer/songwriter Charles Stephen Hughes, his domestic companion of nearly 14 years, by publishing a collection of poetry and prose he’s written for Hughes from 1998 to 2012. The book is illustrated with Luong’s paintings. Published by BookBaby.com as an e-book, the collection is entitled **Bliss: A Marriage Proposal for Charles Stephen Hughes**. The book’s inscription reads “a collection of poetry, prose and paintings that culminates in a marriage proposal, private in nature, but made public here for all to read because the personal is still political.” Luong was an active member of NewTown Writers, Chicago’s oldest LGBT writing group, for almost 20 years. See [www.philipdluong.com](http://www.philipdluong.com).

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Photo by Jen Lynne Photography.



Photo by Maggie Rife.



Photo by Dawn E. Roscoe.

# How to 'capture' the love: Book gives advice on wedding photography

BY TRACY BAIM

Are there different challenges for photographers of same-sex weddings? That's the premise of a new book by Thea Dodds and Kathryn Hamm. *Capturing Love: The Art of Lesbian & Gay Wedding Photography* (Authentic Weddings, \$32.95) shows ways for photographers to innovate how they approach same-sex weddings, to make sure to capture the true essence of the celebrations.

Something as benign as wedding photography can indeed be groundbreaking. Ask the folks from *Weddings Unveiled Magazine*. They had refused to run an ad for photographer Anne Almasy because it featured a lesbian couple. Well, after intense pressure, they caved. Publisher Terri Ireland and Brooke Thomas wrote this letter of apology:

"We are incredibly sad that same sex marriage is still an issue in our society. When we were faced with the decision of whether or not to publish Anne Almasy's advertisement, we acted in a manner that does not reflect our personal

beliefs. We truly believe that all love is beautiful and that all people have the right to marry. You might ask that if we feel that way, then why did we make this decision? Honestly, we knew that everyone would not share our belief that all people have the right to marry. The issue is very sensitive and it is also very divided. We knew that it was possible that people would be offended if we published the ad and we knew that it was possible that people would be offended if we did not. We are so sorry that we acted out of fear and uncertainty. We had never been faced with such a decision and we should have acted with our hearts. ...

"We love all weddings. We love all people and would never want to anger, offend or disappoint anyone. We are deeply moved by the outpouring of love and support for Anne. We are so sorry that we have disappointed you and we ask for your forgiveness. If Anne would still like to run her ad in *Weddings Unveiled*, then we would be proud to publish it."

But even though they are just weddings,

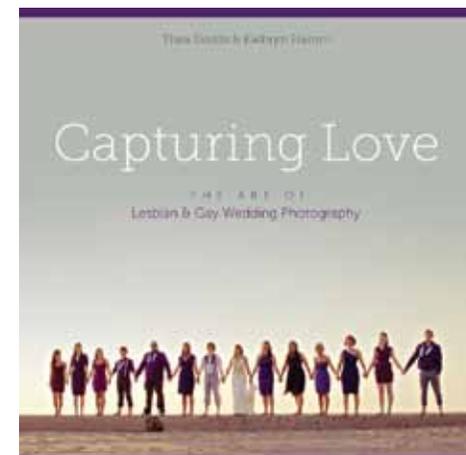
same-sex weddings can be a challenge not because they are controversial, but because photographers do need to make sure they are not falling into stereotypes, of the male-female dynamic of photo setups.

*Capturing Love's* authors are experienced in their fields, Dodds as a photographer and Hamm as a wedding "innovator" with experience as president of *GayWeddings.com*.

"I photographed my first gay wedding almost 10 years ago," Dodds said in her promotions for the book. "And, it wasn't just the first gay wedding I'd worked; it was also the first gay wedding I'd ever attended! I had an absolutely amazing time, but during the course of the wedding and those that followed, I realized that photographing same-sex couples and photographing them well requires more than a 'plug and play' approach from the standard wedding playbook. Simply put, what works for a straight couple won't always work for a gay or lesbian couple. Weddings are changing, and photography education needs to change, too."

The book is both a how-to for photographers and also a photo essay of samples from the work of 38 photographers across the country, including some from the Chicago area (Maggie Rife, Torie McMillan, Dawn E. Roscoe, Denver Smith and Ann Walker of *It's Bliss* with the cover photo of the book). I would have loved to have seen some more Chicagoans known for their amazing wedding photography, including those who also give back by donating their services to non-profits (Kat Fitzgerald, Rick Aguilar and others.)

Adi and Michael are a couple photographed by Dawn Roscoe. In the book, Roscoe talks about how she had used a traditional pose, which can also work. As *GayWeddings.com* notes on their



Cover of *Capturing Love*. Photo by Ann Walker.

Website: "The two men met in graduate school at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. They now live in Chicago, where Adi works as a research scientist at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, and Michael works as a speech language pathologist at All Bright Therapies. They got married in the chapel at Northwestern University, and held their reception at a restaurant in Evanston."

The book's cover photo, by Ann Walker, features the wedding party posing at North Avenue Beach in Chicago, offering the simplicity of a horizon "and the steadfast strength of community," as the authors state, "this, we contend, is one of the true opportunities available when working with same-sex couples."

The book also includes a glossary of terms, including "Chosen Family," "Bisexual," "Gender normative," and "Transgender."

This manual for photographers is actually something I would hope any photographer would use as a learning tool. After all, straight wedding photography could benefit from a fresh approach, too.

See [www.capturingloveguide.com](http://www.capturingloveguide.com).

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