

# EDITORIAL EDITORIAL

## Marital Mythology

Same-sex marriage became legal in the state of Vermont on September 1. We wondered if you'd noticed. It is a date that seems, with the exception of an outside agitator or two, to have come and gone with barely a ripple. Have any marriages that you know of lost their meaning as a result? Have churches toppled? Has the earth stopped spinning on its axis? Though the lack of any apocalyptic signs may be boring, it is not exactly surprising. It seems that marriage has historically come in all shapes and categories. Ours is only the latest redefinition of a rite that has been defined and redefined for centuries.

There are many marital myths. To debunk some of them we suggest you turn to the work of Vermont author and expert on the theology and history of marriage, Rev. John Morris, rector of St. Martin's Church in Fairlee. His book, *First Comes Love? The Ever-Changing Face of Marriage*, tells quite a story. Here are some bits and pieces.

Let's start with "traditional marriage" in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

No such thing, says Morris. There have been many different traditions driven by everything from the power of politics to—most recently—the power of love. The institution of marriage has changed in all sorts of ways during the past 4,000 years.

Much of this conversation seems to begin with the Bible, so we will too.

According to Morris, you can point to various models for marriage which have substantial Biblical support, enough that any argument for our traditional definition as the one chosen path is just plain insupportable. Endogamy, for instance, is one Biblical model. That's keeping marriage within your own tribe or ethnic group. Arranged marriage is a common Biblical practice, often primarily about the transfer of property—often including the bride—or power. This sort of marital alliance was the standard of the rich and powerful for centuries. But perhaps the most common Biblical marriage model is polygamy—always one man with multiple wives. There are many patriarchal forms of marriage in the Bible—especially in texts that reflect the traditions of the patriarchal cultures from which they emerged—but, just to further confuse matters, Morris points out that there is also good scriptural evidence for equality within marriage and in society.

He addresses our myths about divorce as well.

Morris maintains that there are more long-term marriages today than at any time in history. The twist here is all about life expectancy. Though the divorce rate may be high, we are all living longer. So, even factoring in divorce, there are more long-term marriages than ever before.

How about the assumption that the more religious we are the more committed we are?

Not apparently, says Morris. Let's compare the apparent extremes. Beginning with born-again Christians—the staunchest defenders of "traditional" marriage—and comparing them to atheists and agnostics, it seems that there isn't a lot of difference. Thirty-five percent of born-again Christians have divorced in this country as opposed to 37 percent of atheists and agnostics. Twenty-three percent of born-again Christians have divorced twice.

And what about all this cohabiting without a piece of marital paper?

According to Morris, the number of couples living together and even having children without a formal marriage is nothing new. In addition, for the first thousand years of its existence, the church held that a marriage was valid if a couple claimed they had exchanged words of consent—even if there were no witnesses or officiants.

And then there is love.

Over the sweep of history there have been many reasons for marriage. The notion of romance as the primary consideration is, in fact, the most recent development. Very nice, this "first comes love" stuff, but not all that historically significant in the marriage business.

So now we have same-sex marriage, a change that is nothing more than a recognition of relationships with a tradition as old as any cited here. One couple we talked to thought that because they had had a civil union some years ago their marriage would not be such a big deal. They planned a simple private ceremony. But afterwards, they gradually felt a significant difference, a sense of belonging, a completeness they had not quite felt before.

"Hey Linda, say hi to the wife," were the parting words in a telephone call with those folks the other day.

All right. A touch of the jocular.

And it takes a little getting used to.

But it felt just fine.

# LETTERS LETTERS

## Helping Father Mike

To the Editor:

Here's something we can do to help a man who has done so much to help people in need in this community. We are talking about Father Mike at St. Augustine's Church in Montpelier, who has helped people in innumerable ways. He takes food to people who don't have food. He finds a place for homeless veterans to sleep. If someone needs to do their laundry, he will give them money for that. If they need an overnight motel room, he makes that possible.

And now, we feel, it's time to help out Father Mike. Here's the situation. Over the past several years the stairway in front of the St. Augustine's Parish House has fallen into disrepair and the steps have crumbled. Father Mike has been told that repairing these steps could cost as much as \$30,000.

Couldn't a local contracting company contribute their time or services to repair these steps? Or couldn't some of us in the Montpelier community make a donation to this cause?

I have never seen Father Mike refuse anyone who really needs help. Last winter he provided shelter to homeless veterans in town. He gives communion services at Pioneer Apartments, Central Vermont Medical Center, and at nearby nursing homes. He never stops helping people in need.

If you would like to help repair the Parish House steps, please mail a donation to: Father Mike Augustinowitz, 16 Barre Street, Montpelier, VT 05602.

Thanks for your help.

Dorothy Phillips and Carlos Shaw,  
Montpelier

## Sharing, Not Merging

To the Editor:

I am surprised at the media's misrepresentation of (or maybe an overreaction to) a simple letter inquiring about a possible collaboration between Montpelier and U-32. Headlines in both *The Bridge* and the *Times Argus* contained the word "merger." The

idea of merging the two schools was the primary focus of each article.

There are many ways Montpelier and U-32 can share resources, expand opportunities for students and perhaps save the taxpayers money, but there needs to be much dialogue and planning (probably years' worth) between the two schools and the six communities. I hope and believe we can find many ways to share the best aspects of our schools and communities. However, reading recent articles one would believe that a merger is imminent. Such beliefs would be very premature. The Montpelier board only discussed moving forward with an exploration in which, for the first time in years, both school boards have a real interest.

Sue Aldrich,

Montpelier School Commissioner

## Lost Horizons

To the Editor:

I love *The Bridge*. I read it religiously each week. I am distressed, however, to see that you have taken out the *Horizons* section. I know you have to cut down for economic reasons, but can't you do it somewhere else and keep the section focused on the arts and theater? Montpelier has so much in the way of art and theater that it seems too important an area to drop. It's so unfortunate that whenever budget cuts happen, it's always the arts that get the chopping block.

Thank you for producing such a wonderful paper. If more people would subscribe, I'm sure it would make a difference to you economically. I am not a subscriber at this time, but intend to become one. It would be such a loss to our community if *The Bridge* were not on the street every Thursday informing us all of what's going on in Montpelier that week.

I hope you will consider reinstating the *Horizons* section, if not every week, then once in a while, and I hope more readers will become subscribers.

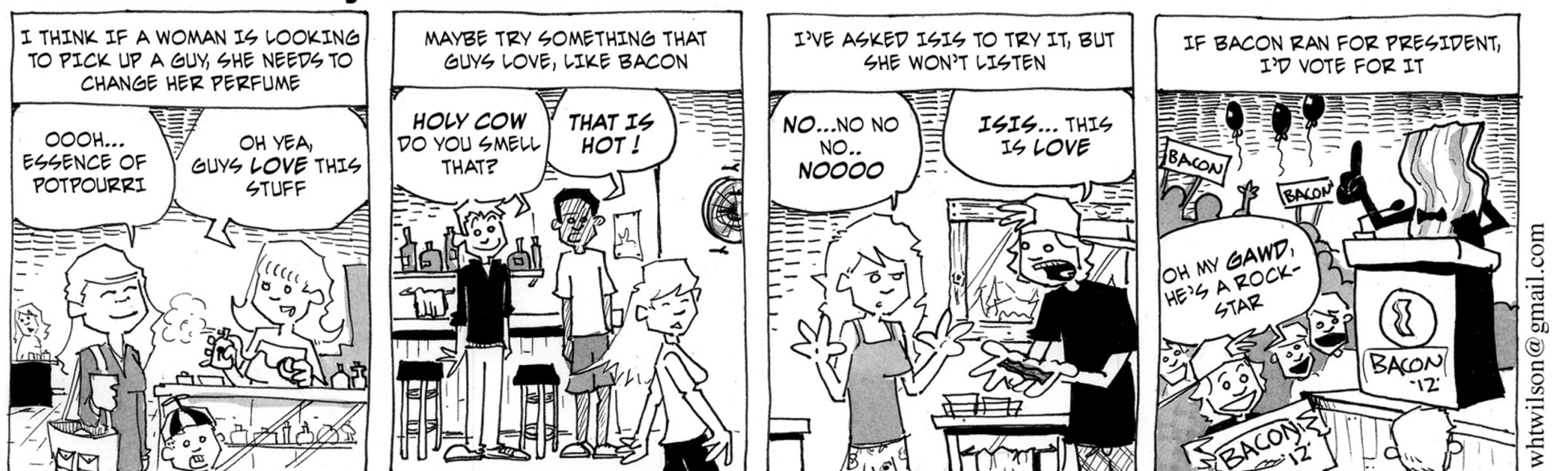
Carol Kendrick, Montpelier

## Correction

Congressman Joe Wilson was referred to variously in our editorial last week. The fact that he has been called many colorful things in the last three weeks does not excuse our mistaken reference to him as "Jim" in the final paragraph. Apologies to all, including, I suppose, Congressman Wilson.

—P.T.M.

## ORDINARY BILL by Will Wilson



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