



# Exes in the Wedding Party

*Should our former wives play a role in our upcoming nuptials?* **By MICHAEL M. APPELL**

**W**hen Guy and I decided to tie the rainbow knot next summer after 13 years of unwedded bliss, no one was surprised. But everyone still wants to know: What are you going to do with your ex-wives?

My ex told me that a friend had the temerity to suggest that she, my ex-wife, should be the one to “give me away.” Hadn’t she raised our two sons with me? Hadn’t she stood by me during my midlife coming-out process? Not to mention the parties at Guy’s and my home where she made clever repartee with our gay friends. So how do *you* know Guy and Michael, someone would inevitably ask, and she would always pause just long enough before responding to make everyone squirm a bit in their skinny jeans. With my parents now deceased, no one has known me longer than she has.

A cheerful Quaker, Guy’s ex had unfailingly invited us to Christmas dinner at her poinsettia-appointed home, giving refuge to two Jewish boys who happily turned down the yule alternative of Chinese food and a movie. As manager of a nursery, she’d carefully chosen both pines and perennials for our yard over the years and ensured

that fabulous flower arrangements arrived on time for my sons’ bar mitzvahs. How could we not find a role for her?

My ex never chastised me about my “change of life,” despite the emotional devastation that comes with divorce. By refusing to bemoan my sexual orientation, she made it easier for our sons – both straight – to grow into young adulthood with a minimum of scar tissue. When our younger son won the dance competition at a drag show in college, she reminded me that drama queens come in every size, shape, and sexual orientation. Her only source of consternation was monetary: *For this we paid private school tuition?*

Both of our exes have moved on to date other men, fiddling carefully with new relationships to ensure they get the “tuning” right this time. If there is bitterness, it won’t intrude on our wedding. The festivities won’t be a reprise of “Sunrise Sunset” but

rather a whole new musical still being composed. In truth, our ex-wives have changed their tune as much as their once “straight” husbands have. They’re the courageous early adopters of a 21st-century cultural ethos in which two men can legally marry while their ex-wives stand on equal footing as family who “knew us when.”

All the philosophical musings aside, somebody has to draw up the invitation list to the rehearsal dinner. If our ex-wives are in the wedding party, it might follow that we should include them in this select gathering. But then we risk our relatives’ looking around and wondering whether too many people at the rehearsal dinner have already “rehearsed” too much with each other. With no tradition to guide us, numerous scenarios come to mind. We could designate our exes as official greeters, but that just feels wrong – and, after all, this is not a Walmart wedding. Usherettes? How demeaning! Holders of the *chuppah* poles for the wedding canopy? Now that feels a little *too* close.

Perhaps their attendance is enough. When they hug us after

the ceremony, they’ll embrace both the men we have been and the men we can never be again. In the court of public opinion, they will always be the star witnesses in our coming-out trials. We broke our oaths to them, but they refused to hold us in contempt. Won’t their sheer presence render some kind of judgment about the men we have come to be?

The threads our exes have woven into our lives have given us infinitely more color, strength, and, yes, clarity. Tug a bit on that bridal braid and you’ll find that all of us at the wedding – male or female, gay or straight – are secretly hoping the toasts will be brief so we can get to the filet mignon.

But all that still leaves the question: Who *should* give us away? When I asked Guy what he thought, my Israeli-born fiance responded with his usual directness. “We’ve already been given so much,” he opined. “No one needs to give us away.”

*Michael M. Appell is a writer in Newton and teaches at Brandeis University. Send comments to [coupling@globe.com](mailto:coupling@globe.com).*

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