

## Love knows no gender

By Ruth Ostrow

THEY joked it would be the wedding from hell, literally, with Hell's Angels bikers down one aisle, and Dykes on Bikes down the other. But the wedding of the year -- when prominent lesbian activist, a founder of Sydney's Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras, and one of the original Dykes on Bikes, Kimberly O'Sullivan, married straight, macho biker Bob Steward -- was as lovely as any fairytale marriage.

The bride looked radiant in her traditional white dress, even if the groomsmen rocked up on Harleys with their bandannas, helmets and leather jackets, and the bride's entourage comprised gays, lesbians and transsexuals.

It was a real When Two Worlds Collide at the Chapel Hill reception centre outside Sydney in the Blue Mountains, but under the blue church windows the mood was as sombre and beautiful as any conventional marriage.

"I decided to go for a white dress but I did have a tough time finding the right style because I never had any training to be a bride," said the blushing Kimberly, who outed herself as being in love with a man in my Heart & Soul column earlier this year.

"Most straight women dream of this day all their lives and are prepared, acting out, reading all the girlie magazines. I had none of that. Realising I was a lesbian early on in life, I preferred reading bikie magazines and fantasising about one day being all decked out in leather gear."

She said organising the wedding was a real drama too. "I just didn't have any idea of what to do. But luckily I had all those years of organising rallies and demonstrations at Mardi Gras events to draw on. After Fred, I could handle anything," she said, referring to her nemesis, the Reverend Fred Nile, whom she met many times in the street stoushes and political bun-fights of the early 1980s. Kimberly's unusual love story began last year when she was working as my personal assistant and researcher, helping me answer mail that I received as a sex and relationships journalist and radio presenter.

One day she stumbled across a letter that tugged at her heart. It was from a biker named Bob, who had unburdened himself in a poignant letter. For reasons she didn't understand, she found herself calling him, and they ended up on a date.

"I think I have found my soul mate," she announced to me one day, while we sorted the mail. "And what a strange and marvellous irony that he is a man," she said, shaking her head in disbelief. Later she explained: "I'm not straight because I'm attracted to women not men. My soul mate happens to have a penis, but it is what's in his heart that I'm so in love with."

Kimberly, who has dedicated her life to fighting sexual intolerance and parading the slogan "Love Sees No Gender", finally came out to Bob about being a lesbian. She shed tears of joy when he announced that he was "even more in love" with her than before.

But there were tears of sadness on the way. Members of the gay community were not as tolerant of Kimberly's turn-around, prompting her to make an impassioned plea in my column: "I have fought for years for sexual honesty and against hypocrisy, believing that this will make the world a more tolerant, compassionate place. I now want the same rights from my friends."

But her sad experiences did not dampen her enthusiasm to tie the knot. And on December 5 she walked down the aisle with Bob, to cheers of support from the odd mixture of friends.

"It's all so surreal, so bizarre," announced one guest, a writer with the gay newspaper Sydney Star Observer, as Kimberly and Bob circled the chapel on the back of Bob's bike before rolling into the reception area to cut the cake.

Not surprisingly, there was not much intermingling of the two crowds. The gay women, many in lesbian marriages and with their female husbands and wives in tow, huddled together, while the bikers sat apart drinking beer and ribbing Bob about his wedding night.

The most bewildered guest of all was Kimberly's mother who sat in a corner looking very punch-drunk. "Well it's all a bit of a shock," she said, trying to muster a smile. "I mean ..." but she never did finish her sentence, preferring instead to sip on her cup of tea and stare straight ahead.

But all their friends were delighted. "I've never seen Kimberly look happier. She seems to have found that inner contentment," said a close girlfriend and sex activist.

"I think the weddin' was real good," said a biker, covered in tattoos, who was picking his teeth with a bit of wire. "And Kimberly's real good," said another leather-clad easy-rider, throwing back a tinny.

Bob and Kimberly admitted, in their self-crafted marriage vows, that they were from different worlds, but pledged they would encourage each other to grow and thrive as individuals.

While the differences were obvious on the day, the similarities were all too obvious the night before. Kimberly's hens night -- a night of gay revelry at a host of wicked lap-dancing venues and strip joints -- had to be cancelled when the blushing bride made a challenging discovery. Bob and his biker mates were planning his bucks night at the same venues.

From the heart

Dear Ruth,

Regarding your reader who asked for advice on how to reconcile his Christian beliefs with his need for more sex from his wife (Review, 27/11). While I commend him for his openness, if my boyfriend was going to a massage parlour and reading erotic literature, I'd feel un-sexy, jealous, maybe even manipulated into sex. I would become more sexually unapproachable. I'll pray for you both.

Kerry,

Essendon, Victoria

Dear Ruth,

Concerning your reader's query about sexuality (Review, 27/11), Christianity must accept that sexuality, in any form, is no barrier to spirituality. Sexual energy cannot be denied or suppressed. Eventually it will out somehow. Guilt,

shame and neurosis result from not fully understanding sexuality. Free sexual expression in a loving environment promotes harmony and balance. Try giving up sex? Why not try giving up eating and sleeping? Spirituality is not denial but acceptance of one's self at every level of being.

Keith and Ann Fowler,  
Rochedale, Queensland

Dear Ruth,

Your article on whingeing is important because it touches on positive thinking. Continual complaining about anything only leads to a reinforcing of it. For instance, my wife and I are worried about one of our children, but we restrict conversation on the matter by mutual consent. In this way we are able to maintain a reasonable equilibrium. It is reasonable to be critical about some things in life, or indeed one's partner, but I like to restrict my complaints to two at any one time. Your idea of making a joke about it is equally valid.

Peter Gillard, e-mail

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