

## ***Serendipitous...the faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident!***

**That is how Robynne Sapp and Dotti Berry describe their meeting ... their relationship ... their opportunity to legally marry in the United States ... and their entire wedding weekend in Portland in March, 2004!**



Dotti Berry and Robynne Sapp were introduced by Mary Lou and Bob Wallner, whose lesbian daughter committed suicide.

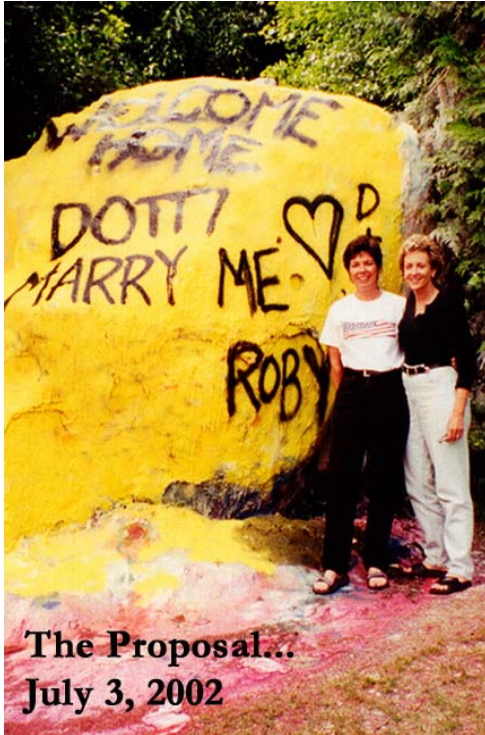
Dotti met Mary Lou and Bob in Lynchburg, VA in 1999 when they first met and stood vigil together with Soulforce, at Rev. Jerry Falwell's church. Soulforce is an organization dedicated to eradicating the spiritual violence from religious institutions against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons ([www.soulforce.org](http://www.soulforce.org)).

Robynne met Mary Lou and Bob at ConneEction, an Evangelicals Concerned conference for gay Christians, where Mary Lou was a keynote speaker.

Today, both Dotti and Robynne called themselves "Christ followers," rather than Christians, as they have come to accept and live their spiritual lives in a more encompassing way, accepting ALL people "just as they are, and wherever they are." The non-violent principles of Gandhi and King have helped them evolve to a new understanding and they utilize four universal principles to guide them:

1. We are all connected; 2. Who we are is enough; 3. There are enough resources of everything in the universe; 4. Non-judgment is essential.

After many months of a long distance relationship, and several flights across country to visit each other, Robynne and Dotti decided that 3000 miles was too far apart and too expensive. They began making plans to be in the same town...the same home...to take that step of committing themselves to each other for life.



**The Proposal...**  
**July 3, 2002**

The night Roby proposed to Dotti will always be a special and fun memory. Roby picked up Dotti at SeaTac Airport on a warm July evening in 2002. As they approached Bellingham, Roby slowed, and reached into the back seat for her flashlight. She handed Dotti the flashlight, and asked her to hold it. Dotti wondered why, but didn't ask.

As soon as they approached "The Rock" on I-5, just south of Bellingham, Roby pulled off to the side of the freeway, turned on her hazard flashers, and said, "Look up there." The light of the flashlight illuminated the huge, brightly yellow painted hunk of stone with **"Welcome Home, Dotti... Marry Me!"** painted in black. Dotti let out a gasp! She was initially filled with inexplicable excitement, but she was also mortified that a piece of the planet had been defiled. She recovered when Roby explained to her that "The Rock" had been serving as Whatcom County's natural billboard for decades, and had been the form of delivery for many proposals, well wishes and welcome home messages.

Dotti, with tears of joy in her eyes, leaned over to hug Roby, and whispered... **"Yes!"**

For Roby and Dotti, the civil marriage license allows them to make a public commitment, and yet it pales in comparison to the emotional and spiritual bond and commitment they have already made to one another. It does, however, create the opportunity to legally protect themselves, securing the "same, not special" rights that mixed-gender couples enjoy, creating long over-due equality under the law.

Dotti says "I have never seen a piece of paper keep people together that don't want to be together, and I have never seen the lack of a piece of paper keep people apart who want to be together in a committed, loving relationship. Marriage offers the opportunity for society to see us 'in a whole new light' and automatically equalizes and validates our status/existence as a couple. It also affords us the same option everyone else has... the CHOICE to marry or not to marry."

Roby says "Dotti and I both grew up in Christian families. Due to the teachings of the church, our families have experienced difficulty with the knowledge that their daughters are lesbian. Even though we have suffered spiritual violence in our culture in various ways, we feel that overcoming our own internal homophobia and allowing people to personally know the truth about us, has been the key to others' acceptance. When we no longer acted ashamed of who we are, the majority of the people we know were able to respond accordingly. When we were fearful, they were also fearful. Others' responses have mirrored our own inner healing.

Having believed for many years that I would never enjoy the privilege of a 'real' wedding, this is a very exciting time for me! Dotti and I desire to honor our relationship in the greatest way our society has to offer...by making a public statement of our love and our commitment to stand together through all the joys and challenges that being in life and relationship brings."

The opportunity for gay and lesbian couples to go to Multnomah County (Portland) and be married came about after Multnomah county officials determined that banning them violates the state constitution. On March 3, 2004, Commissioner Lisa Naito, at a morning news conference with other county officials, said, "We will not allow discrimination to continue." In addition, Agnes Sowle, the county attorney, said that a review of state law led her to "conclude that the Oregon

Constitution prohibits the county from discriminating" against same-gender couples for the purpose of marriage.

Dotti explains that she has waited a long time for this time in history, as she laughs and says "I was 'out' before Ellen was 'in.'" Berry, who was denied membership in Centenary United Methodist Church, as well as Crossroads Christian Church, both in Lexington, KY says, "This is a new dawn. God is good and alive in the universe, painting a new rainbow of spiritual renewal and transformation!"

How did the *journey* to Portland actually begin for Robynne and Dotti? On Tuesday, March 2nd, Roby & Dotti received an e-mail tip from "internet sources" that Multnomah County was planning to begin issuing marriage licenses to same-gender couples the next morning. Sure enough, the rumor was true. Having already made plans to be in Portland, Oregon for a photography convention the week-end of March 5-7, Roby and Dotti knew they needed to **seize the day** and get married while they were there!

Their plans didn't work out as **they** had planned... no, indeed God and the universe had something better in store for them! Roby, who had already lost her voice, fell ill with a cold, and both women were exhausted after having stayed up until 3 a.m. working on press releases and emails to friends and family to share the news of their upcoming spontaneous exchange of vows. After driving to Seattle on Thursday evening to spend the night at the home of their friend, Judy Osborne, Dotti suggested they "listen to their innate wisdom," allowing their spirit and bodies to guide them, as they reconsidered their original plan to arise in time to leave Seattle and be in line at the Multnomah County Courthouse by 9 a.m.

This proved to be a good decision as they slept until they awoke on Friday morning. Feeling refreshed, they continued their journey to Portland where they claimed their place in line at the courthouse around noon. Needless to say, they were not the only ones wanting to be wed that day. There were over 400 other couples with the same idea! In fact, 40 couples were turned away at the courthouse, as the closing time for securing a marriage license occurred at 4:45 p.m. In addition, Keller Auditorium, where officials were offering their services, was closed for the day by the time Dotti and Roby had completed their process at the courthouse. They were then presented with a list of local officials who were willing to marry couples over the weekend. This gave the ladies an idea!

Back in March, 2001, when Roby was contemplating suicide unless she was able to come to the complete and clear understanding that she was loved and accepted by God as she is, she was put in touch with Rev. Bernie Turner, the father of her close friend, Linda -- the first person to whom she ever "came out of the closet" and say "I am gay."

Rev. Bernie Turner is an American Baptist Minister, who has meticulously studied the Hebrew and Greek texts regarding the scriptures that are often used as "clobber passages" against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. After his exhaustive study, he concluded that the Scriptures have been grossly misinterpreted relative to homoeroticism ("homosexuality" was a term which came into our language in 1892, just a little over 100 years ago, and was followed by the invention of the term "heterosexuality" about 10 years later). Today, as daughter and father, both Linda and Bernie stand as allies!

Roby called Bernie and asked "Will you marry Dotti and me?" Bernie was ecstatic! In fact, no one is sure who was more excited about this opportunity... Roby and Dotti, or Rev. Bernie Turner! Plans were then made to have the ceremony in the home of Bernie and his wife, Rosalind, on Sunday, March 7th.

Dotti and Roby had no idea what they were about to experience! Their ceremony was a beautiful, spiritually inspired ceremony with Rev. Bernie Turner and his wife, Rosalind (who stood as a witness), plus a gathering of others from their Baptist Church who came to support Robynne & Dotti.

Rev. Turner began "This is an especially exciting time for gay and lesbian people, as certain governmental bodies have decided to offer the same rights and protections for gay people as the rest of the community enjoys. It is something to celebrate but there are many of us who are saying 'Well, DUH, what took you so long?'"

Among the wedding group was yet another ally couple, a Baptist Minister and his wife, Keith and Betty Spooner; Dotti's friend, Ruth Lukschu, a 79 year old German woman who escaped East Germany on a bicycle and stood as a witness for Dotti and Roby; a lesbian woman, Martha, who has been with her partner for 15 years (and married the week after Dotti & Roby), and a gay man, Don, who was with his partner for 45 years before Lee died of cancer 2 years ago. One ally couple, who has been married for 55 years, sent a bottle of champagne to provide a toast to the newly wedded spouses!

Roby, with tears in her eyes, thanked Rev. Bernie Turner for having provided that life line for her when she first spoke with him several years ago. Bernie was the first minister, a person of "scriptural authority," to assure Roby that she is OK, exactly as God made her! Although she and Bernie had never met "face-to-face" until he married the couple (he and Robynne had only previously emailed), that initial encounter provided Robynne the impetus to take her journey, leading to her choosing to stand before God saying "I do" as she and Dotti took one another as spouses for life.

Having previously decided to marry on July 31, 2004, Dotti & Roby will move forward with that original plan, albeit with some modifications. Rather than having to go across the border to White Rock, Canada to be legally married, and then back to Semiahmoo Resort for their reception, both their spiritual ceremony celebrating their wedding, as well as their reception, will now take place before family and friends at Semiahmoo,

Three supportive ministers from across the country will officiate their ceremony. One of the three ministers is Rev. Dr. Lisa Davison, an ordained Disciples of Christ minister, as well as professor of Hebrew and First Testament at Lexington Theological Seminary, in Lexington, Kentucky. In addition, Rev. Dr. Bill Stayton, an ordained American Baptist minister and the head of the Department of Human Sexuality at Widener University, where Dotti is working on her PhD, will officiate in the July 2004 ceremony. The third minister will be Rev. Jimmy Creech, defrocked by the United Methodist Church for performing holy unions for gay and lesbian couples.

The couple resides in Blaine with their Standard Poodle, Rylee Joy.

***Dreams that  
you dare to  
dream really  
DO come true!***



**"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."**

**-- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

**"It doesn't matter who you love ... but it matters that you love." -- Actress Judith Light**