



OUT OF THE CLOSET

ROZ BELLAMY HAS BEEN MARRIED FOUR TIMES – TO THE SAME WOMAN. SHE’S HOPING FOR A FIFTH.

OUR CLOSET RESEMBLES a museum exhibit of all our weddings.

Our two ivory wedding gowns take up a lot of space. When we took the gowns to be dry-cleaned after our commitment ceremony in March 2013, the owner asked, “Do you want us to store the gowns in boxes for you?”

We shook our heads. “No, that’s okay. Thank you.”

He stared at us. I didn’t know how to explain that we might be wearing these dresses a few more times.

.....

OUR SECOND WEDDING outfits hang not far down from our bridal gowns. They are simpler: Rachel wore an emerald-green dress and my late-grandmother’s necklace; I wore an A-line dress in vivid colours.

We wore these frocks for our British civil partnership ceremony held in Melbourne in June 2013. The dress code was low-key; neither of us relished the thought of wandering along Collins Street as a visible couple in our wedding finery. Our commitment ceremony, three months earlier, had taken place in a private and safe space. We didn’t want to bring any attention to ourselves; we did not want to run the risk of hearing homophobic taunts on the city streets.

Since I am a dual Australian-British citizen, it had occurred to us shortly after our first wedding that we were eligible to apply for a civil partnership at a British consulate in Australia. We wanted to have a legally binding commitment since our Australian commitment ceremony was – like its name – ceremonial. The day may have been incredibly significant to us, but did not grant us any legal recognition or rights.

Our families joined us to celebrate what we had titled Wedding 2.0. It was at the consulate, with a portrait of the Queen nearby and a large Union Jack behind us, contrasting with the views of Melbourne.

.....

THE OUTFITS WE wore to our third and fourth weddings are quite different. I wore pants, a blazer and a shirt with sequined parrots on it, and Rachel wore a beautiful blue dress.

They say third time’s the charm, and our third wedding really was. A month after our civil partnership, the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 passed in both houses of parliament in the UK and was granted royal assent by the Queen. We could make it official, a marriage.

We were both studying and working, and it *felt* as though we were married after our commitment ceremony and civil partnership. But once we booked in the new wedding date in December 2015, we realised how much we wanted the certificate. Despite all the joy, stress and expense of our two previous ceremonies, we were still not legally married.

This time, we didn’t have any guests or witnesses. It was just the two of us, back in the consulate with the Queen watching over us, saying our vows and sharing the sweetest kiss. It was two-and-a-half years after our commitment ceremony, and we felt more secure than ever in our marriage. It was time to make it legal – at least in some spaces. On the “soil” of the British consulate, we were married. Afterwards, when we took several steps along Collins Street, we were no longer recognised as a married couple. It is not a nice feeling. It stops the honeymoon before it even starts.

.....

OUR FOURTH WEDDING was part of the mass illegal wedding at the Equal Love for Marriage and Equality rally in Melbourne on 26 August this year. It had been 14-and-a-half years since we met online on a *Buffy* fan board, and fell in love over emails, texts and chats; and then again when we finally met in person. We wore the same outfits as Wedding Number Three, adorned with every rainbow accessory we could find and purple love hearts drawn on our cheeks. I had Rachel’s ivory wedding shawl in my hair like a quasi-veil and an “I’m Voting Yes” sticker on my chest.

We stood nervously on the State Library of Victoria lawn, holding hands. We saw faces we recognised from previous rallies, and new people who seemed inspired and energised. Some were not coping; others were fine and concentrated on protecting the more vulnerable in our community. This day was unlike any of the others. It involved something much bigger than us – our loved ones *and* our communities.

As a celebrant read out the words, we said our vows to each other and slipped our wedding rings on each other for the fourth time. When we kissed, along with all the other couples, the atmosphere was one of jubilation, defiance and romance.

I feel optimistic that change is coming, and that we will soon be adding at least one more set of wedding outfits to our collection.

» Roz Bellamy (@bellarozz) is a freelance writer whose work was shortlisted for the Scribe Nonfiction Prize in 2014. She has recently completed her debut book, a memoir about queer identity and the marriage equality movement.