

KEN: I want to start by introducing myself to the congregation here. I've met some of you but not many of you. Most of the guests that I've invited here, with some notable exceptions, are friends I've studied and worked with in a very personal way at the Centre for Training in Psychotherapy. So I find myself in a position of mostly speaking to people who I feel either don't know very much about me, or who know entirely too much about me. But I guess that's how it is with marriage - when two communities - two families - join together to recognize a new union.

And, since I feel like I'm kind of cozying up to the in-laws, I think this is also a great opportunity to tout my own Mennonite credentials. My background is in that broad category of Russian Mennonite, specifically Mexican Mennonite. I grew up being actively involved in a congregation of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference. This was my faith community, and in this context I searched and struggled with many aspects of life, including faith and sexuality and the seemingly competing identities of being Christian and also being not exactly straight.

So it is amazing and remarkable and (w)hol(e)y to me, that I find myself here, in the Mennonite Church, to receive, in some ways, a long awaited blessing. And I am also thinking, how queer of this congregation to offer such opportunity for blessing and reconciliation.

I also find it more than remarkable and more than coincidental that the event that has brought me to this full circle, spirally, bless-ed moment is my marriage to someone who actually became a Mennonite by choice. I have to say, I couldn't have imagined that I would marry a Mennonite preacher 20, 10 or 5 years ago. Especially 5 years ago.

So here's a story of how this marriage came to be.

In December of 2013, I moved in with my friend Sarah Shepherd to 13 Close Ave, right next door to the current building used to house workers with Christian Peacemaker Teams, where Peter resided, and where we now currently live together.

At that time, Sarah would occasionally talk about the witty, smart, funny and oh-so-mature Brit next door who she thought I'd really get along with.

What she didn't know was that I already had an inkling about who this Peter guy may be, due to my perusing the website OKCupid.com. I came across this profile of a very cute, ecumenically-oriented anarchist and activist-- and from the way the profile was written, I knew that we must at least have some friends in common.

Earlier in November, I also caught a glimpse of a very charming guy doing a TV spot on CBC, shamelessly promoting the White Poppy campaign to the Canadian public.

So, connecting the dots, I decided to finally send a message on okCupid.com, basically saying, "Hello, I think I'm your neighbour." And it ended up that Sarah's hunch was right: we did get along quite well.

PETER: On December 22, 2015, we were walking by Lake Ontario. In the middle of a conversation about something different, we began talking about getting married. We'd discussed it months before and agreed that it was a good idea, but privately, each of us was wondering when this would happen - and hoping that it would be soon. Since neither of us wanted to wait long, it was a big relief to realise that we on the same page.

We did not want to wait. To wait for a time when we could invite parents and siblings and expect them to come. To wait for a time when we were rich enough to throw a party for everyone we knew. We did not want to wait to get married, so we started to organise.

The next day we went to get our wedding license from Toronto City Hall. There was something remarkable about the ordinariness of it all. We took a number, got in line, gave our documents and got what we needed with a smile from the clerk. We didn't need to fight or protest or explain. We were welcomed.

We asked four people to be our witnesses, two from Ken's past and two from mine, all of them people that we are both close to. In the days before our wedding on January 4 we took a road trip to fetch Mark Andrew from St Thomas, Ken's high school friend and a fellow refugee from the church, and Shane from Kitchener, a close friend for many years. Mark Andrew invited us to attend his Quaker Meeting, giving us the opportunity to speak to the gathered Friends of our happy intention and to experience their joy for us.

Early in the morning of January 4, my teammate Carrie left her mother's home in State College, Pennsylvania, and drove to Toronto. She arrived at the CPT house in time to take me to the airport to pick up the fourth witness, another CPTer and close friend, Kathy Moorhead Thiessen. We chose January 4 as our wedding day because Kathy had a six hour layover in Toronto on her way from Winnipeg to serve on team in Iraqi Kurdistan. We picked her up and drove to Toronto City Hall.

We outlined our intended service to our gathered witnesses and spent some time together as we waited to go to the Wedding Chambers. Ken and I took a walk together, both feeling nervous energy and a sense of joy about the gathering of intimate friends. We have a significant moment as we recognise our fears, hopes, and the depth of our commitment to each other to continue together. We go back to our friends and head up to the Wedding Chamber.

We stood in a circle with our witnesses and the officiant, who warmly welcomed us with poetry and a blessing. We had asked Kathy to read First Corinthians 13, and Mark Andrew to read the following excerpt from Henri Nouwen:

KEN: "When we honestly ask ourselves which **persons** in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead **of** giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and

bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.”

PETER: Rather than preparing vows, we decided to have what we called ‘open space’ - a time to speak spontaneously to each other in the presence of our witnesses.

KEN: I opened by speaking about what had been with me for the last couple of hours: nervousness and fear. It was amazing to acknowledge my fear in the ceremony itself. And I spoke about this bond that Peter and I have, that is a relationship open to fear and uncertainty. Our relationship, at its best, is a conversation in process.

PETER: Choosing to have a conversation felt very right. Of course, I had everything I was going to say prepared well in advance. It was concise, heartfelt and it checked out theologically. But instead of saying any of that I spoke about our strength together. Our strength is that we build each other up. In our sharing together, our living together, we encourage and provoke vision, courage and capacity.

We were pronounced married and signed the registry along with Shane and Carrie as witnesses. The service took around 15 minutes, bringing us together as a couple in that small circle to express and have recognised our commitment, intentions, and love. Today we expand that circle.