

CEREMONIES of the HEART

Celebrating Lesbian Unions

Edited by Becky Butler



The Seal Press

Trinity Ordoña

& Desirée Thompson



Trinity (left) & Desirée (center) & Mistress of Ceremonies, Syl (right)
photographer: M. Shu

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A Thousand Cranes

Desirée: We fell in love in July, 1985, while Trinity was visiting her sister in Hawai'i. Trinity says she fell in love with me within the first twenty minutes. It took me a little longer, since I was in a relationship at the time. Though we had these feelings for each other, we didn't act on them; mainly because I wasn't ready to leave my relationship of three and a half years. During the month after we met, we wrote a few letters and talked about how we felt about each other. Then we stopped all communication and didn't see each other until December of 1986, when Trinity returned to Hawai'i and we started our relationship.

Trinity: In May of 1987, five months after we began our relationship, Desirée moved from Hawai'i to San Francisco. The following month, the San Francisco Women's Building offered a four-week seminar called "Lesbians Choosing Children." By this time, I had already had very strong feelings of wanting to have a family. I had never had those feelings until Desirée and I were together. In fact, after our third day together, I had this overwhelming sense of desiring a family, though I didn't realize at the time that it meant having children. To me, the concept of family was associated with meeting somebody who was compatible with my personality, my cultural background, my politics, and whom I just liked being with. That feeling hit a very familiar place in me; it reminded me of my own family, having parents who were together for almost fifty years. Because of that, I had a very strong sense of bonding and commitment, and when Desirée moved to the Bay Area, I wanted us to check out these family issues. We sat through the seminar and found ourselves in a great deal of agreement, both about the desire to have children and also about how we would raise children. We had to work out a few differences, like who would be the donor and the relationship of the donor to the children, but we came to agreement pretty quickly.

Once I realized that we both wanted to have children, I said very bluntly to Des, "We're just going to have to get married." In my mind, if you're going to have a family, and if your family is arising out of a commitment to another person, why not formalize that commitment in marriage? That's how I had been raised as a Filipino, and I didn't see that it should be any different because I was with Desirée. I knew that our marriage in the legal sense was not going to be recognized by the state, but I had long be-

fore come to the conclusion that marriage is really a commitment between the two people involved, and everybody else is just a witness. I talked to Desirée about this idea, and she had some reluctance.

Desirée: In the beginning, I was strongly against marriage. The word alone sparked my feminist revulsion for the hold that patriarchy has on women. I had viewed my coming out as a political decision, and marriage was not at all a comforting thought. But slowly I began to think of marriage as an expression of my love and commitment to Trinity. She was not going to be "keeping me in my place" as a woman, the way a man would. I was not going to lose my identity by changing my name or having "her" children. We were simply deciding to make this journey through life, with all of its ups and downs, together. I have no regrets about that decision. Going through the ceremony has brought respect for our relationship from our friends, and when we have what seem to be insurmountable differences, neither of us gives up or threatens to leave the relationship, the way we would have before we were married. We're going to be together for a long time, and we are committed to working our differences out together.

Trinity: The day after we got married, I was driving the car, and Desirée proceeded to talk to me about how to improve my driving habits. I turned to her and said, smiling, "Well, honey, you've got about forty years to get used to it, so you can start now." With a chuckle, we both realized that in time I would change and she would change. That is, she would get used to the way I drive, and I would get used to the way she criticizes me, and somewhere in between we would both make some adjustments. But we had a long time ahead of us; there was no need to rush.

Desirée: Once we had decided to get married, we said, "Well, how do we do it?" We realized that someone had to propose. Trinity had been talking so much about marriage, but it didn't seem that she was going to do the proposing. So, surprising even myself, I proposed to her. I don't remember exactly how I did it. I know it was a quiet moment at home, and I asked her to marry me. And then she became coy and was very reluctant to say yes.

Trinity: I just said I needed to think about it for a little bit.

Desirée: Which seemed absurd to me, since she was the one who had felt it was so important to be married.

Trinity: Anyway, I accepted soon thereafter, and we called our friends, Carmen and Karla, and they invited us over for dinner. We celebrated with a nice dinner and toasted each other with champagne. Then, a few weeks later, we got our rings: very simple gold rings which we managed to get

for a reasonable price and which we started showing off as our engagement rings. That was December of 1987. The next question was how to go about telling our friends and family, and how to plan the ceremony.

Desirée: We went out and bought a bridal planning book. It was a *Brides Magazine* bridal book with a white heterosexual couple on the cover, but it helped us think about a lot of things that you have to think about in terms of having a somewhat traditional wedding ceremony.

Trinity: We figured out our wedding invitations, which we did on a Macintosh. We fought with each other over how to put the invitation together, but we more or less agreed on what to say. Then we put together our wedding list.

Desirée: Trinity kept inviting everyone who walked by.

Trinity: No, honestly, since December I had been telling all of our friends that we were getting married. And, of course, I would extend invitations even though we had no idea how many people we were really going to invite. So when it finally came down to sending out the invitations, I had to sit down and remember how many people I had already invited. It turned out to be quite a number; we had a hundred and twenty people at the wedding.

Then came the issues of family, wedding dresses and how we were going to put the ceremony together. The first thing we did was set the date. We knew that we wanted our good friend and matchmaker, Ku'umeaaloha, to bless the ceremony with a Hawaiian wedding chant. If we had it on the San Francisco Gay Day Parade weekend, it would be a great opportunity for her to come to San Francisco, be at the ceremony and also be here for that weekend. Her lover, Pianohea, was a member of a Hawaiian band, and soon after we had asked the two of them to come, the band volunteered to come and play for the wedding. So we had the person to officiate, a Hawaiian wedding band and the date.

Then we had to talk about wedding gowns, and that was where my family came in. My mother is a seamstress, which had been a very big plus for me while I was growing up. I had seven sisters, and you can imagine the situation with all of us fighting with each other over shoes, skirts and blouses. We came from a poor family, and we had to make sure that everything had multiple purposes. Anyway, I told my mom in January that we were engaged, and the first thing she said to me was, "Why are you going to do that?" Then she said, "She's going to leave you, anyway." I realized that in the past she had seen me in relationships that lasted for two or three years and then broke up. She had never seen me with anybody for more than a few years; from her perspective, it never worked out. The next thing

she said was, "Besides, you're too bossy. You're too domineering." I said, "Gee, Mom, you're a great help." I chuckled, and she laughed, and I realized that she was trying to decide whether she thought this was a good idea or a terrible idea.

It was very important for me, though, to know where my mom stood, so a month later I called her and asked her if she would make me my wedding dress. She said, "Why don't you wear your sister's?" (My sister had just gotten married the year before.) I said to her, "No, Mom. I want a Filipino dress, one with Maria Clara sleeves." Those are the butterfly sleeves on the traditional Filipino woman's blouse or folk gown. It's a very distinctive style. When I told her that I wanted a Filipino dress, she started changing her tune. Of all the girls in my family, I was the only one who had ever asked her for a Filipino dress, and I think she was really very touched by that. So, without making any commitments one way or the other, we continued to talk, and I said I would be down in April.

In the meantime, I told Des that I didn't want to send out our wedding invitations until I knew where my parents stood; if they weren't going to come, I wouldn't even bother sending them an invitation, but if they were, I would like them to be the first to receive an invitation. So Desirée and I flew down to San Diego in April. I think Des was quite anxious because I kept hinting to her that in our family, whenever the girls get married, the boys always have to ask my parents' permission. It's considered customary and respectful in Filipino culture. Des kept wondering if that meant she had to ask my mom for my hand in marriage. I said, "No. That's not exactly it," though I knew that I had to have some way for them to approve or not.

So in the middle of April, there I was standing in the dining room trying on the dress that Mom had agreed to make. I had also brought down a picture of Desirée when she graduated from Kamehameha Schools in Honolulu, which are for Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian children. In the picture, she was wearing a formal gown called a holokū, which is a traditional Hawaiian dress. We wanted Mom to take Desirée's measurements so we could send the measurements over to Hawai'i and have the dress made. Mom took the picture. She looked at Des and looked at the picture and looked at Des again, and after a minute or two, she said, "Gee, I can make that." So in that weekend, Mom made both of our wedding dresses. With Mom making the dresses, I knew she approved and that I didn't have to worry anymore. We went ahead and sent our wedding invitations to the family. My parents and many of my twelve sisters and brothers came. Altogether, seventeen members of my family were there.

Desirée: I, on the other hand, had a hard time with my family. I wasn't out

to them, even though I had been a lesbian and they had known all my past lovers; it was something that we didn't talk about. I thought that the best way to do it would be to talk to my brother. I felt that he would probably be more understanding, and if it he wasn't understanding, then my parents definitely would not understand at all. At the time, my brother was working in Washington, D.C. It was kind of strange when I called him because we don't really keep in contact; I guess he thought something might be wrong when I called out of the blue. I asked him if he would come to my wedding, and he said, "Sure." I said, "Well, it's not a regular wedding," and he said, "I know." I said that I would be getting married to Trinity, and he said, "I know," and that he would be there.

I was quite surprised that he knew. When I moved to San Francisco the year before, I had given him my computer. Occasionally, I had written letters to Trinity on the computer—love letters, intimate love letters. I thought that I had erased them from the computer completely, but the letters remained in the computer memory. He said that he had read them and discussed them with my mom. I thought, "Well, then she knows." I asked him whether he thought my parents would come to the wedding. He wasn't really sure, but we both agreed that he would be the one to ask them.

He called my mom the next day, and they had a three-hour conversation. She was upset, very upset. She felt that as a mother she had done something wrong, and that there was something wrong with our generation that we couldn't all be "normal." There was no way that she was going to come to the wedding. My brother called my dad the next day. Apparently, Mom hadn't said anything to him, and my dad had a similar reaction. He wasn't very happy about it, and he couldn't see coming to the wedding.

It wasn't really a surprise to me. I had never come out to them because I couldn't face those kind of statements, that kind of rejection. I was pretty devastated to actually have that fear confirmed. To this day, we do not talk about me being a lesbian. I get cute acknowledgments of our relationship from my dad, but my mom has never said anything.

Trinity: In terms of work, I'm out to my boss and a few select friends there, but I didn't know whether to invite my co-workers to the wedding. I asked a good friend at work what to do. I went over the list with her, and we talked about it. I asked her what I should do about the co-workers' husbands, and she said, "Well, let them decide what to do." I said, "Okay. I'll just invite the people I want, and if they want to bring their husbands, I'll tell them that's okay." And that's exactly what happened: I invited my three co-workers and my boss, and they all brought their husbands or

wives. They even threw me a little surprise wedding shower, which was really nice.

Our friends were also a big help during the wedding. We asked them to do a lot of different things. We paid for all the expenses, but we asked our friend, MeiBeck, to take responsibility for the wedding car. She got a red mustang convertible and decorated it, including "double happiness" in Chinese on both sides of the car. Friends tied cans to the back of the car so well that we couldn't get them off for a couple of days.

Desirée: People also helped us make a thousand gold paper cranes. In Hawaiian-Japanese tradition, when you get married, the bride is supposed to make a thousand paper cranes, origami style. This is important for good luck, and a thousand cranes would bring us lots of good luck. I had never made a crane before, so I bought the paper and the instructions and figured out how to make them. I even made out little step-by-step instructions, so that people could see how to make them when they came over to help. Twenty-six friends helped us make the cranes. We went to one party where a friend was celebrating her birthday, and we took some paper to make cranes with us so as not to waste any time. People started joining in and learning how to make the cranes, and by the end of the party we had made a hundred cranes.

As the wedding approached, we had to be sure that we made a minimum number of cranes per day. In June, when they were all done, Dafna and Barbara strung them up, and we ended up with fifty strands of twenty cranes each. Transporting them to the restaurant was no small feat, but it turned out very nice. Each crane takes about five minutes, and we figured out that it took us a hundred and fifty hours to make all one thousand cranes.

Trinity: Including the ceremony, we had four hectic but wonderful days of getting married and celebrating. On Thursday, our friends flew in from Hawai'i. There were three musicians and Ku'umeaaloha, plus instruments (including a stand-up bass), plus three huge boxes of flowers from Hawai'i, which included our wedding leis and and na leipo'o, which are head leis. Thus began the partying, which carried on for three days after that. On Friday, my parents arrived, and my sisters began to fly in from San Diego, Reno and New Jersey. Desirée's brother flew in from Washington D.C., and another friend came in from Boston. By late afternoon, we gathered everybody together for our wedding rehearsal at Golden Gate Park. By the time we came back to the house, my mother had already prepared the traditional wedding party dinner, during which both sides of the family meet. We socialized, and at the end of the evening we took out the two thousand orchids and made leis for the family members who were to

arrive later.

Following tradition, Desirée and I separated that night. She went with Belle, her Best Woman and friend from Hawai'i, to a good friend's house. I stayed at our apartment with my parents and my sister Katherine from New Jersey. The next day, Desirée called, but I was not allowed to speak to her; we talked to each other through Katherine. My other sister, Dolores, who had flown in from San Diego, came over to do my makeup. My hairdresser also came over to put my hair up. And Mom helped by packing my honeymoon bag, like she had for all my other sisters. Desirée went through the same process. Karla did her makeup, and Veronica, who had driven up from Los Angeles, did Desirée's hair after having only a few hours of sleep. It was really very hectic, and a lot of people were involved.

The wedding started at three o'clock. Since we weren't supposed to see each other until we walked up the aisle, so to speak, Desirée stood on one side of the park and I stood on the other. We both hid behind bushes until the music started. When the music started, we came from opposite points in the park and met in the middle. Then we began our ceremony.

Desirée: The ceremony was pretty traditional. I was the one who created the ceremony itself, having been to so many weddings. We started out by exchanging leis. We had a pikake lei and a maile lei which we exchanged with each other. Since our fathers weren't walking us down the aisle, we decided we would include our families in the ceremony by giving them leis, also. My brother was late, so he missed this part of the ceremony. Then we proceeded to exchange vows. That was really cute because we had been practicing and telling everyone exactly what they were supposed to do, but when it came to our part, we'd never clearly stated even to each other what we were going to do. When it came time, I went ahead and talked about my commitment and my love for Trinity, and about working through the ups and downs together. Then I waited for Trin to give her vows. But she was waiting for me to give her the ring—in my mind the rings came later, after the vows. So there was this long pause.

Trinity: In the meantime, Des started crying. Fortunately for me, my Best Woman had brought Kleenex, so she gave me one and I dabbed Desirée's eyes. But I continued to wait—for my ring. Finally, Des whispered to me, "What are you waiting for?" I said, "Our rings." And she whispered, "Later." So I turned to the audience with a smile and, as if nothing was amiss, proceeded to give my vows. Since I had the ring exchange as part of my vows, I had to toss that part out and fill in the gaps in a very impromptu fashion. Finally, we exchanged rings, and then after that came the Hawaiian wedding chant. After chanting, Ku'umeaaloha said to everyone in English, "The signs have been good. The gods are with us. The cel-

ebation can begin—they are one now." I felt that we were married. We both turned around and smiled at everybody, after which we were pelted with bird seed.

Desirée: Then the fanfare began with a procession of cars through the park. It was really fun to get all the double-takes: people would look and say, "It's a wedding," and then they would look again because there were two women and no man. We also decided to drive down Castro Street. In the Castro, people cheered us as we passed—two women, sitting on the back of a convertible, at the front of a row of cars blasting their horns.

Trinity: We got to the restaurant and had a really sumptuous meal of Thai food. Then the program began, during which we proceeded to get roasted in public by our best friends. They told very personal and intimate things—very lesbian kinds of things—and periodically I would remember that we were in mixed company, and that my mother and father were listening. But it was really a very special, very happy occasion.

Our good friend, Syl, was the Mistress of Ceremonies and ran the wedding reception program for us. Several friends of ours also performed. Ku'umeaaloha danced a couple of hulas and got Desirée up to dance one with her, to everyone's enjoyment. Carmen sang a Mexican love song for us. Desirée and I had taken ballroom dancing, so we did a cha-cha to Anita Baker's "Rapture." Soon after that, we began a Filipino tradition called the dollar dance, during which everyone who dances with the newlewyeds pins money on them, which the couple keeps for the honeymoon.

Then my brother, who had brought his three-piece band with him, started playing, and we had dance music for the rest of the evening. We had the smashing of the cake in each other's faces, and we laughed together over that. Then we drank champagne and got toasts from everyone. A very surprising toast came from my mother, who welcomed Desirée into the Ordoña family, not only as a daughter-in-law, but as another daughter. I swelled with pride, knowing that Mom really accepted us. A number of my friends have commented on how important it was for them to see such support coming from a family.

Finally, we closed up the party and moved to our honeymoon suite. The next morning, we rode in our car for the Gay Day Parade. We waved to everybody from our wedding car, with cans clanging down the street and a sign saying "Just Married." That was our big wedding celebration; it was a very memorable one.

Desirée: We have been married for two years now, and we have been continuing in the plans we had talked about even before we got married. We have bought a house here in San Francisco.

Trinity: We bought a two-unit flat, with my sister and brother-in-law upstairs and Desirée and myself downstairs.

Desirée: And we're currently making plans to have a baby. The timing will be determined by whether Trinity goes back to school or not. We need to get our finances together before we can go ahead with that.

Trinity: We want to have a child and raise her/him here until she/he is about five, then move back to Hawai'i. I feel that there is a better climate there for people of color, for ethnic people. We want our child to be raised in a place where she/he would be proud to be a person of color and not have to fight to be included and to be recognized as a normal person.

We are very happy we got married. Desirée and I are very committed to each other and very committed to starting a family with one another. Desirée still teases me when I do this, but every time the occasion comes up, I bring out the wedding pictures, play the wedding video, or drag out the wedding dresses. People love to hear about it. I think they love to hear about it because love and commitment are such natural things.

This account is based on audio recordings made by Trinity Ordoña and Desirée Thompson.



Trinity Ordoña: I am thirty-nine, and I've been a lesbian for seventeen years. I'm Filipino-American and come from a family of thirteen children. Both my parents immigrated from the Philippines to the U.S. in 1946, and I grew up in San Diego. My adult life, however, has been centered in the Bay Area, where I have lived since 1972. I work at the University of California, San Francisco, and am also very active in the Asian-Pacific lesbian community. The ceremony that we describe, and the love that we honored through that ceremony, was and continues to be very private.

Desirée Thompson: I am a blend of Asian-Pacific people. I am of Japanese, Chinese, Native Hawaiian and German ancestry. I'm thirty-four and have been a lesbian since 1977. I'm a letter-carrier. I tell my story to dispel the myth that Americans are just white people. Asian-Pacific people have been a part of nearly two hundred years of U.S. history, and we still are not seen as part of this country. To tell my story is to say that Asian-Pacific lesbians and gays exist; we fall in love, we make commitments and we get married.