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Party Animal *The Joy And Stress Of Celebrating*

By Christina Ianzito

Making the commitment: Family and friends toast as here come the grooms.

The best man was almost obligated to make an off-color toast to the married couple, and Fred Pardo's brother, Thomas, didn't disappoint: "If any one of you felt that tremble in the earth during the ceremony, it was my grandmother rolling in her grave," was one of the printable jokes that elicited peals of laughter from the crowd. "And tell my mom she's not losing a son, she's gaining another gay son."

Fred, 51, turned to his partner, Don Harvey, 54, and said in a tone of mock exasperation, "Welcome to my family!"

Three years ago, Fred, a social worker with thick dark eyebrows, white goatee and bald head, met Don, a tall, quiet, bespectacled scientist who works on the National Museum of Natural History's butterfly and moth collection. Two years later, around the time that Fred moved into Don's cluttered little bungalow in Adelphi, Fred proposed. They aren't especially political about their sexuality -- although Fred's license plate does say "IM OUT R U" -- and tried to refer to this as a "commitment ceremony," rather than a wedding, which, Don says, "it's not, legally."

Nonetheless, last winter they met with Kathryn Hamm, an Arlington-based same-sex wedding planner



affiliated with Gayweddings.com. "There aren't rules," Hamm told the men, who decided to forgo the standard (for heterosexuals, anyway) white-tiered cake for a tray of cookies, cannoli and eclairs ("I don't like cake," Don explains), and had their invitations printed by a company called OutVite.com.

It felt like a wedding, though, in a cozy 18th-century stone mill in Adelphi, on a cloudless Saturday afternoon. Fred's best friend, Gerry Miller, a former Catholic priest who became a leader in a gay-friendly splinter group called the American Catholic Church, officiated. He led the two (Don in a brown suit with lavender shirt, Fred in charcoal gray with blue) in their "pledge to each other a covenant of holy union" and exchange of rings (both gold with

purple sapphires) and vows ("My love for you will always be on my mind, on my lips, in my heart and in my soul"). Finally, Miller intoned, "I now pronounce you lifetime partners" to the rapturous applause of about 75 friends and relatives.

During cocktails, Fred's boisterous Italian/Irish family from New Jersey mingled with Don's quiet Protestant clan from Ohio. Fred's sister Eileen Kiernan was still a bit emotional after the ceremony. "It made me cry," she says, "because it was so real. It gets you in the heart." Don's brother, Dennis, who had accompanied Don down the aisle, was asked whether he'd call himself Don's best man. "I guess," he said, sheepishly. "I don't know the protocol for this."

During the buffet dinner, semi-drunk cousins clinked on glasses to make the couple kiss -- the strange compulsion of wedding guests everywhere. Fred and Don bashfully complied, repeatedly, until their first dance: a country western two-step to Tim McGraw's "Just to See You Smile." The rest was a mix of country and disco, complete with the Village People's "YMCA." There was also a little waltzing and a lot of Frank Sinatra (everyone sang along), until time ran out, and Fred handed a small crystal flower vase to each departing guest, including his old friend Harry Wise.

"All he dreamed about 15 years ago was a house with a picket fence and someone to love," Wise said. "And now he's got it."