

THE ENGAGEMENT

Part 1 in a series following the engagement and wedding of local scribe Emily Sweeney and her fiancée, teacher and author Lauralee Summers.



“I always hoped to get married someday ... but only if I met the right match. I never obsessed over it, but it was always in the back of my mind ... and at the same time I knew it would be okay if I was single forever. Call me old-fashioned, but I just think marriage is an amazing institution, a great way to plan your future together, and an excellent way to spend your life, if you're lucky enough to find someone that cool.”

A statement like that coming from tattooed, mohawked, nonconformist *Boston Globe* journalist Emily Sweeney might surprise some, but not her fiancée Lauralee. As the world's discovered since marriage became available to everyone in Massachusetts, the heady feeling of romance comes in all shapes and sizes and genders.

Emily and Lauralee met more than 10 years ago as skateboarding teenagers at Copley Square. While they eventually came out together, at the time they were too busy making a nuisance of themselves with tourists and businessmen and were “clueless” about their sexual identities. Lauralee, along with her mother, was sometimes homeless and, at times, lived with friends while her mother was in a shelter. Emily had a boyfriend.

Over the years, the couple flirted off and on with the idea of a romantic relationship, yet something always seemed to get in the way of it turning serious. That is, until distance did make the heart grow fonder.

Lauralee, or “LL,” as Emily calls her, moved to California for a graduate program at UC-Berkeley in 2001. While there, her memoir *Learning Joy From Dogs Without Collars*, was published by Simon & Schuster. She returned to Boston on a promotional book tour and Emily had an epiphany of sorts. But, as fate would have it, Lauralee was in a long-term relationship at the time.

“When Lauralee came back,” says Emily. “I realized that I had maybe always had a crush on her. A year later when she said she was moving back, I was wicked excited.”

That was the summer of 2004. Soon the two were a couple. Lauralee says, “It was very serious.” And, while both are thrilled same-sex marriage is now legal, they would have had a ceremony no matter what.

“I never thought I was different,” says Emily. “I would have gone ahead regardless.”

This past August, Lauralee and Emily closed on a condo in Dorchester, the first time the two will have ever lived together, and began to plan their wedding. Although contemplating other sites, Emily, a “Dot Rat” at heart (“Dot” refers to Dorchester, and a Dot Rat is a proud resident of the area) would pick The Strand Theatre as her first choice. The Strand, built in 1918, was once a glorious vaudeville and movie house located in Upham's Corner in Dorchester, and while neglected for a time, is now used for community shows and events.

And so, how did the proposal come about? Emily told Lauralee to meet her outside the Park Street T station. She then brought her to the NineZero Hotel, where she had booked a suite. In the room, spelled out in Hershey's Kisses, were the words “I Love You.” Before Lauralee could fully take that in, she says Emily whisked her to the Frog Pond to go ice-skating. Later, back at the hotel, Emily said, “Okay. The reason we're here is because I want to marry you.”

by Kim Foley MacKinnon

In our next installment: Find out their families' reactions to the engagement, how living together for the first time is going, as well as first-time home ownership, and if they've decided what to wear for the wedding. Lauralee says, “I don't want people to say, ‘That's the guy and that's the girl.’” Emily says, “We may ask our fashion-savvy friends and budding local designers to help us create the perfect wedding attire. I'm thinking of customizing another vintage tux with my trusty scissors and safety pins.”