Lei’d in the Shade

It’s never too late to say Alhoa

September 1, 2003 By Josh Sparber

Who: David Braaten

What: his wedding to Wes Riley
Where: Kona, Hawaii
When: 06.07.03

After an online intro and three years of inter-island hopping, Hawaii residents David Braaten, 54, and Wes Riley, 59, decided to tie the knot. While Wes deemed the bash a commitment ceremony, David, positive since the mid-’80s, insists it was a wedding (“I’m not politically willing to give up the word marriage,” he says). While on honeymoon in Kauai, David savored the joys of getting hitched.

Hula is pervasive here in Hawaii, so at the ceremony, Wes and I had hula done by people who knew what they were doing and hula by people who didn’t. The minister of Christ Church Episcopal even got up to do the dance as an impromptu gift! There was great energy and a lot of laughter.

From the very first time we met, I knew that I really liked Wes, so I was kind of caught between liking him and feeling I was a threat to him (he’s negative). But he just kept pursuing—calling and emailing and talking, until I realized that I was running on fear, not possibility.

There is really a life here to be had, even if my health is still up and down a lot. Between HIV, hepatitis C and now my gallbladder, my health has made me feel very tenuous on the planet. When my lover of eight years passed away in ’89, I didn’t expect to be living much longer. With him, marriage wasn’t something that we ever put any energy into. Now, I think it’s more of a self-conscious thing about laying claim to a future.

For me, part of getting married was to say, “I am not giving up on life. I’m choosing a future, and HIV and fear are not going to be the ruling factors. Love is going to be the ruling factor.”

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