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Autobiography & Memoir

A Passionate Engagement: a Memoir
Ken Harvey
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Ken Harvey wants to be married, a reasonable enough desire, since he's been part of a cohabitating couple for nearly a decade. But little is easy for a gay couple, even one living in Massachusetts before, during, and after the same-sex legal marriage fight was waged.

Harvey, a middle school teacher and the author of a previously acclaimed short story collection, writes with uncommon insight and compassion. Without a hint of "poor-me-ism," Harvey deconstructs the effects of the unfolding political drama in his own living room, where he and his partner-turned-fiancé watch, discuss, and wait, as judges and legislators decide their future rights.

Slowly, and then with a vigor even he finds surprising, Harvey steps into the role of political activist, armed with signs, solidarity, and hope. His partner prefers a more measured wait-and-see approach, and the ongoing conversation between the two, both spoken and not, is rendered in authentic, sensitive language.

As they make their tentative way along the path from partners to pre-marital counseling, Harvey and his fiancé, like all couples, must integrate impending marriage into the fuller spectrum of their lives. The author weaves in stepchildren and one ex-wife, career considerations, work colleagues, and home-buying, to create a full circle feeling: this couple is committed and moving toward marriage while life swirls around them, sometimes to their benefit, sometimes not.

The author is at his best studying the fabric of his own life and actions, identifying which threads connect him with wider and well-understood basic human struggles, and where other threads, representing more uniquely challenging situations, are strained, frayed, ready to snap. While Harvey is guardedly buoyant, he's also aware of the irony marriage presents for a couple who exchanged rings years ago.

> *It still seemed premature to announce our engagement, a word that seemed all wrong for a couple who had been together for so long. We'd been engaged in our relationship for years now. Using that word to describe our future plans sounded like a step backwards.*

A Passionate Engagement is both love story and activist journal, intimate personal narrative and social commentary chronicle. Harvey delivers a moving but never mawkish account of an important human drive and how it intersects with politics, public perception and personal struggle.

Harvey's engagement comes to its uplifting end. A reader will understand however, that the author's story is about more than saying "I do". It's about passion for living fully engaged – as a spouse, partner, step-parent, teacher, and human being.

Lisa Romeo