

## Love and Marriage in Sin City (June 29<sup>th</sup> 2002)

**citytalk** By Shelly Lawler

### Treasure Island Las Vegas 12:30 Saturday afternoon.

"Hi I'm Hank's Aunt Laura from Hawaii," welcomed the brightly dressed women in front of me. "And you are?"

"Well, I'm just here to witness the wedding," I explained as she caught sight of a long-lost relative. "Wonderful," she gushes hospitably, moving on. "Enjoy yourself dear."

I settled back in my chair, take a sip of iced tea and drink in the view from the outside terrace at Treasure Island, ringside to a moat harboring 2 replica sailing vessels that put on a show 6 times a day all week long on the Las Vegas Strip, complete with pirates, pirotechnics and a battle that ends with one ship sinking. It is arguably one of the most entertaining spectacles in town.

But this afternoon the "HMS Britannia" serves as the location of Christy Jones' and Hank Stephan's wedding. The captain stands tall in full uniform ready to administer the vow's. A pirate perched in the crow's nest will swing down to deliver the rings on cue. An attentive wedding consultant is poised to scatter rose petals along the bride's footpath.

More than 123,000 weddings were performed in Las Vegas last year. What's the draw?

"The number one reason is convenience," says Tanya Flannigan, a spokesperson for Mirage Hotels. "The idea of everything from ceremony to reception in one location is very appealing."

And there is always room at the inn.

The Bridal March has begun.

"It's a perfect day for a wedding and a family reunion," says Aunt Laura, smiling as she grabs her camera and takes her seat. Folks strolling along the strip stop to watch the action as lovely Christy glides over the gangplank to meet her mate.

Forty five minutes later we enter the Grand Canal Shops at the Venetian to see the soon to be wed Mr. and Mrs. Padilla exchange their vows in the white-and-gold wedding gondola while cruising the Venetian's quarter-mile-long canal. As the minister pronounces them husband and wife, onlookers break into enthusiastic applause and the gondolier bursts into a wedding song.

Las Vegas' most spontaneous nuptial option has to be the Chapel of Love "Say I Do" Wedding Drive Thru. Just pull up to the window, and faster than you can say burger, fries and a coke you can be married by the Reverend Belinda

We've been hanging around for an hour waiting for something to happen. "What's that?" I ask startled by a sirenlike blast.

"We had that installed in the drive up outside because we never knew when someone was here," explains Reverend Belinda, adjusting her frock. "[The horn] blast means somebody's about to get married.

Scott and Tammy from Wisconsin decided a few days earlier that "it was time." They found the chapel of Love in the Yellow Pages – and one limo ride later they were Mr. and Mrs. Leland

"When Mr. and Mrs. Charles Vallow of Austin, Texas, were making plans for their 10<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, they "wanted to do something fun" with family and friends. So they decided to have Elvis renew their vows at the Viva Las Vegas wedding chapel. And for those loved ones unable to attend - no problem. Viva Las Vegas' ceremonies are broadcast live on the Internet so folks can dial up and watch the show from anywhere on the planet.

Voted the number one wedding chapel in this desert city, Viva Las Vegas offers more than 14 themed weddings, from Rock-and-Roll to Intergalactic to Gangster. themed weddings. If all the worlds a stage, owner Ron Dewar has all the elements you need to star in your own production. All you have to do is decide who you want to be.

In the lobby, Shannon Morton and Matthew Dye wait along with Matthew's son, Christopher.

"We chose the Camelot package because we wanted to include Christopher and make the day special for him too," Shannon says as the door opens.

"It's time." The wedding coordinator ushers them in and quickly goes over blocking. Soon enough it's, "Places everyone."

Theatrical lighting and a thin layer of fog create a mystical effect. We are transported back in time to the noble court of King Arthur. A velvet cloaked Merlin beckons Matthew and Christopher to join him on stage. Accompanied by music from Camelot, Shannon walks slowly up the aisle to meet her dashing knight.

Throughout the ceremony, young Christopher stands at attention proudly holding his sword. Merlin speaks of the Round Table and the circle of love. Shannon, costumed as Guinevere, and Matthew, as Lancelot, pledge their hearts to each other and seal their vows with a tender kiss.

Pictures follow, and then Merlin gently leads them to exit stage left. He opens the door and with a final wave sends them out into the warm afternoon sun.

It's a magical wedding – Las Vegas style.

## **Facts**

How many weddings a year?

City Hall reports somewhere around 123,000 in year 2000... on the rise in 2001.

What do you need to get married?

Las Vegas wedding options give new meaning to the saying "Where there's a will, there's a way..."

A sense of humor, imagination and \$35.00 cash gets you a marriage license and a multitude of opportunities. Each casino has a wedding consultant staff ready to customize your big day. Plus there are over 60 independent wedding chapels.

You must be over 18 or have signed parents consent. The Courthouse is located at 200 South 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and the phone number is 702 455 4415. As the sign behind the cashier notes "Exact change is appreciated".