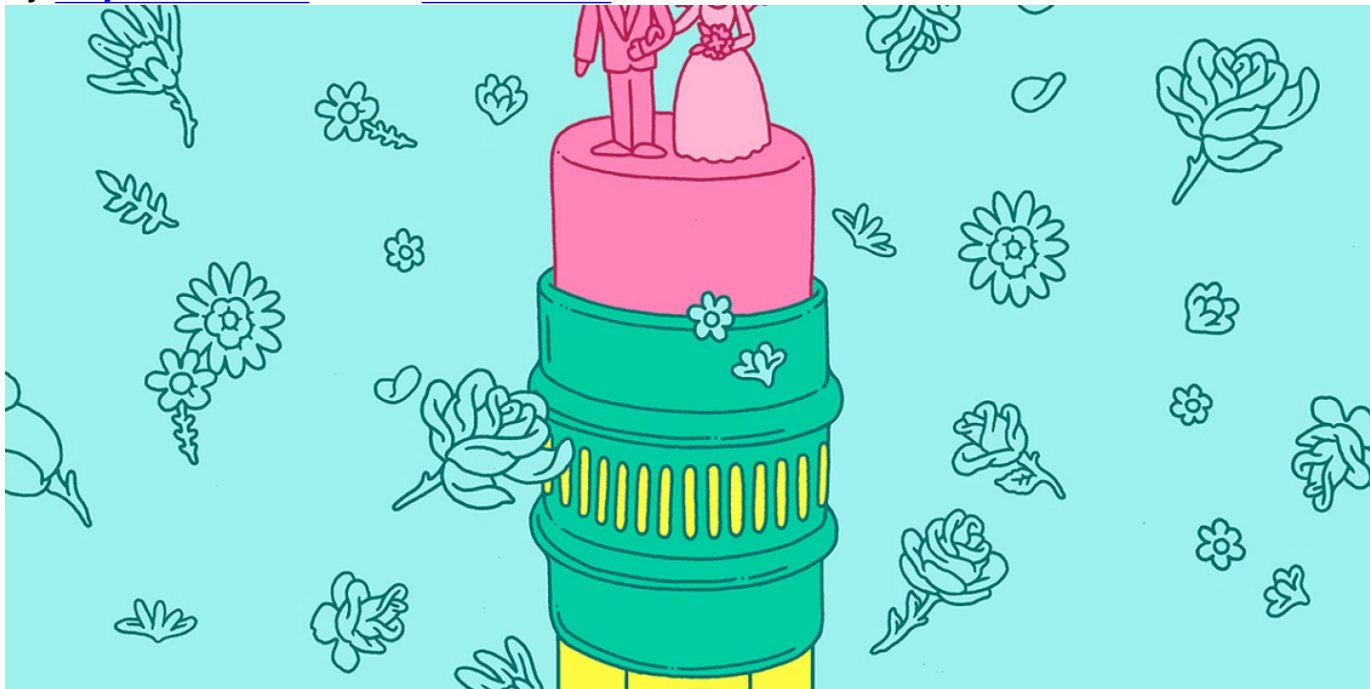


Love is revision

Marriage is an opportunity to keep working on the same story each day.

by [Alejandra Oliva](#) in the [March 2023](#) issue



(Illustration by Eric Nyquist)

Last year, my husband and I revised our wedding.

Our initial wedding was in October 2020, almost by accident. We had been planning on getting married then anyway and were halfway to planning the big traditional wedding, with the catering and the DJ and all the rest. Sometime around July, it started becoming clear that the world wouldn't be cooperating with our plans.

And even so, as our wedding date approached, we decided it was worthwhile to do a little jaunt down to city hall to solemnify our consolidation onto my better insurance plan. We could have a party on some later, less pandemic-ridden date.

But when our parents caught wind of our plan, things went a little haywire. My mom was offering to drive up to Chicago from Texas, and my dad was asking if we

couldn't move our appointment to a day he wasn't teaching. My in-laws, who live about 45 minutes away, were wondering which of the many local aunts would also be invited. Our envisioned day of a little local bureaucracy and some nice takeout was turning into a bit of a production, which is how we ended up getting married by my brother-in-law in a joyful, entirely improvised blur in the living room of our apartment, in the presence of our masked-up parents, my husband's grandmother, and our dog.

I don't regret not having a big white wedding, but what I did wish for and miss was the chance to celebrate that wedding with our community—the people we see every day, those who knew us when we first started dating, those who helped us become the people we are.

And so this past year, just about two years after wedding 1.0, we held a party (The Party) that was not a housewarming, not a wedding, and not exactly a house party either, but it did involve about 50 of the people we love best chatting and laughing and meeting each other in our basement, talking to our parents, drinking beers. Many of them had flown across the country to be there, and it felt, as all good weddings do, like a gathering of love under our roof, like the relationship we were building with each other was actually a relationship we were building together with the world.

The Party was largely a casual affair, but we did set apart a little block of time to say nice things to each other in front of an audience. The Party wasn't exactly a wedding but also wasn't *not* one; in the same way, these weren't *not* vows.

The vows I said to my husband in 2020 and the nice things I told him in 2022 both started with the same anecdote, from our first date. I was 22 at the time, fresh out of college and working one of those horrible first jobs, the kind that doesn't pay you enough and takes up all your energy and doesn't give you much back. My apartment had bedbugs and no air conditioner, I felt itchy and sweaty and inept all the time, and I hadn't written a word since I graduated. And yet, on that very first date, I told him I would write a book, and he told me, without missing a beat, that he believed it.

And so, sitting down to write vows in 2020 and nice things in 2022, I realized that his belief, as lovely and unearned as it was on that first date, had been backed up by the kind of action and support that made it true. From before we got married until about two weeks before The Party, I had also been working on writing and then

revising a book.

Book revision, if you've never done it, is the kind of monumental task that feels unachievable until you've actually, well, achieved it. It's still unbelievable to me that I wrote even a single draft of a book. Taking that just-barely-completed, only-here-by-a-miracle draft and going back into it and making it better by tearing out hard-won passages and writing in new ones, rearranging and reimagining what I had initially written as the foundation to the book was, quite frankly, terrifying.

Kiese Laymon has written that love is revision and revision is love, and what I think he means is that, in the same way you return to a piece of writing over and over again to try to make it the best version of itself you can, you should return to your relationships, over and over again, to revise and reimagine, to fix what doesn't work and strengthen what does. Revision requires an attention that is both honest and loving—not allowing yourself to get attached to your own little flourishes and darlings when they don't serve the project, celebrating the parts where, for once, you've managed to write exactly the thing you wanted to.

George Eliot, in *Middlemarch*, called weddings “the beginning of the home epic.” We often think of them as the beginning of a grand story that moves, like the hands of the clock, only forward with time. I haven't been married for very long, but getting the chance to revise our wedding, to bring more people into the celebration and the joy of it, also clued me into the idea that as much as a marriage is an ongoing story, it's also a daily return to the same story, a daily opportunity to revise it for the better.

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[Jon Mathieu](#), the *Century's* community engagement editor, engages [Alejandra Oliva](#) in conversation about her article, relationships, revisions, and her first book.