

The Amazon Trail: The Good Life

"One thing I know: Social Security is so firmly embedded in the American psychology today that no politician, no political party, no political group could possibly destroy this Act and still maintain our democratic system. It is safe. It is safe forever, and for the everlasting benefit of the people of the United States."
— Frances Perkins

As if life isn't daunting enough, the Social Security Administration periodically mails me information about my meager lifetime earnings and what I can expect to have doled out to me at retirement — if Mr. Bush and his cronies don't retire the Social Security Administration first. Frances Perkins was a Boston Brahmin with a mission, twelve years the Secretary of Labor "under" FDR, the first female cabinet member. Although I am grateful to this woman who mothered Social Security into being, I wonder if she ever realized, as she worked to save the American laborer from penury in old age, just how close to the

**lee
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I barely make ends meet now, so there's no way I can stop working at 66.

If I work until age 70, then I will be awarded \$1592 per month. Watch me breathe a sigh of relief. I'll be able to pay the electric bill, but not for repairs if the already old wiring fizzes. Oh well, I suppose it's never too late to start cooking over a campfire on the back patio. But this wasn't your vision, was it, Frances Perkins?

Am I whining? I was brought up privileged compared to my parents. Grandma Lynch supported the family with a vegetable garden on the far side of town when railroad man Grandpa broke his leg. My mother's father

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edge our life-saving benefit checks would leave us.

I know I'm not alone in my concern for the future. Lesbians all over the country are gasping at news of this involuntary downward mobility — and I know I'm in better shape than many. If I retire in ten years, a year later than my father would have received social security had he lived that long, I will be entitled to the grand sum of \$1203 per month. While it's true that this is better than moving in with a distant niece or nephew (if they'd even want the burden of a very queer aunt), I'll have little to live on after paying for my house.

was a fireman who never even owned a plot of land on which to grow vegetables. Shame on me for expecting the good life I've been living to go on past my earning years — though at this point it looks like they may all be earning years. I try to imagine 80-year old Lee keeping up with the social work I do now, arthritic fingers crawling on the keyboard, crackling voice making professional calls to young whipper-snappers who pass notes to the next cubicle that read, "It's the antique geek again — rescue me!"

If I could face doing the math I'd probably find that my average earnings come to some

princely sum like \$20,000 a year. Despite the temptations of our consumer society, I've been able to stash some of that. If I manage to hold onto my savings and the government doesn't gamble away our social security monies on Wall Street, I'll be able to buy charcoal for the campfire. Watch this 80-year-old in patched Old Navy jeans push a grocery cart with a ten-pound bag of charcoal through the 100,000-square-foot Sooper-Doooper Mart and home. I'll festoon my stolen cart with radical bumper stickers, but after the shopping trip I'll be too exhausted to light a match, much less make one of those well-balanced, nutritious meals recommended for elders.

Poor Frances knew we needed guaranteed health care, but, she explained, "the experts couldn't get through with health insurance in time to make a report on it." Besides, there was talk that she was a communist, the same charge leveled at Hilary Clinton when *she* tried 60 years later. We might have lost the whole package had health care been included.

I think I'll start praying to the outrageously sensible spirit of Frances Perkins to intervene and at least preserve old age Social Security. She said, "What was the New Deal anyhow? Was it a political plot? Was it just a name for a period in history? Was it a revolution? To all of these questions I answer 'No.' It was something quite different ... It was, I think, basically an attitude. An attitude that found voice in expressions like 'the people are what matter to government,' and: 'A GOVERNMENT SHOULD AIM TO GIVE ALL THE PEOPLE UNDER ITS JURISDICTION THE BEST POSSIBLE LIFE.'"

That's the bumper sticker I want on my shopping cart. ▼

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Lee Lynch is the author of eleven books including The Swashbuckler and the Morton River Valley Trilogy. She lives on the Oregon Coast and comes from a New England family.

past on telephone poles. As I scrolled through the pics, I came across one labeled Sylvia and Marsha. When I opened it, there was Marsha, my recently deceased friend and mentor, smiling broadly, standing next to this fierce Latina trannie, reminding me that solidarity crosses over into the spirit realm and that all struggles for justice are the same struggle.

Blessed be, Marsha and

Sylvia. Like Orpheus, I want to turn in the underworld and see you both dancing like the beloved Eurydice. My time will come, but it is not this time. There is more to be done today, in this world. Happy Samhain. Happy New Year. La Lucha Continua. ▼

Pippin is a Radical Faerie working to build sanctuary at Faerie Camp Destiny. He can be reached at pippin@sover.net

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other radical queers and allies began organizing a massive memorial procession for Sylvia that would march from the Stonewall Inn to the Piers. They encouraged everyone to plaster pictures of Sylvia across Greenwich Village. In the email announcing these plans, they sent out photos of Sylvia to be wheat-