

views: The Fall of The Year

The first fall after my partner and I moved to our house in rural Franklin County was exciting. Our long drives to work were compensated by the glorious colors of changing leaves and the smoky smell of our very own wood stove. To stack our first batch of wood for the winter, we asked all our dyke friends to come up from Burlington for a work "party." A surprising number came that last weekend in October, and all the wood got stacked.

As the last stacker left, I walked down to the end of the driveway to retrieve the balloons we'd used to flag down our friends. There on the black pavement at the end of our dirt driveway was painted a big yellow "L."

I was furious – and scared that someone in our town hated us so much that they would

Euan Bear

gay German with his pink triangle.

I ran back up the driveway to get my partner and a can of black spray paint. I showed her the marking, then blotted it out with a heavy coat of enamel, fuming and fulminating the whole time against bigots and wondering if we'd done the right thing in moving to this small rural village.

I didn't sleep much that night – too angry, too paranoid.

Being branded with a yellow L made us too visible, too vulnerable, akin to Hester Prynne with her scarlet A.

publicly brand us as Lesbians, not that either of us hid it, particularly.

We'd already dealt with mailbox bashing, a new "sport" to us, by learning not to take it personally. Losing two mailboxes in three months didn't have anything to do with us, we were assured by friends – it just happened that our mailbox was on an isolated stretch of state highway, out of sight of our house and perfect for mailbox baseball.

But the yellow L was another story. It felt like a personal attack, like Germany in the 1930's when Jews and homosexuals were labeled as targets for discrimination and eventual death. Hunting season would be opening within two weeks, and already men in trucks with loaded gun racks were driving up and down the county's roads, scouting for likely deer habitat and/or good places to camp and guzzle beer. Being branded with a yellow L made us too visible, too vulnerable, akin to Hester Prynne with her scarlet A or a

The next morning as we drove up to the general store for our newspaper, I began to notice something odd. There was another big yellow L – and another – and another! Some were in front of driveways, some not, but somehow I was pretty sure that there weren't that many Lesbians on our short stretch of highway.

At last the light dawned: those markings were brackets to tell the lane-marking painters which way the double yellow lines were supposed to go – where the passing lanes stopped and started – on the freshly paved road!

We've laughed sheepishly at ourselves about our city-bred paranoia for years – at least until the election campaign of 2000 brought out all those Take Back Vermont signs, when living in the country began to feel scary again.

Later that fall, we had our first Thanksgiving with two lesbian friends who lived down the road about 3 miles. We

arrived at their rambling farmhouse (that we had spent two summers helping to remodel) at the appointed hour. The big turkey had already been in the oven for hours, the vegetables awaited their time to be steaming away, a few hors d'oeuvres were out on the table, which was set with "Maggie's" grandmother's china. "Sheila" brought in some wood for the wood stove – for heat, mind you, not for cooking on. It was just about as Norman Rockwell as you could get, given that we were four dykes instead of the typical "nuclear" family.

After an hour of chat Maggie went to check on the turkey. She came back into the living room, "It's still pretty raw, I don't know what's going on," she reported. She turned off the heat under the potatoes and the squash and the green beans and the pearl onions.

Now, you have to understand that in addition to being a Black & Decker butch who did a lot of the finish work on the remodeling job herself, Maggie also had a reputation as a truly terrific cook.

Another hour went by and the hors d'oeuvres were long gone when she went to check again. Still not done. My partner and I had skipped lunch in anticipation of a major meal, and we were getting really grumpy. But everyone hung in there, wanting so much for this first country Thanksgiving to fulfill our expectations, to replace what we missed from our own birth families.

By the third hour, it was clear that something serious had gone wrong. It turned out that the 60's-era oven was working with only half an element. Maggie dug out a cleaver and hacked the turkey into sections, placing them under the only working oven element – the broiler – and turning them often so they wouldn't be charred. In the face of our half-hearted threats to go out for pizza, she assured us it wouldn't take long.

Six hours after our arrival, we ate the first section of turkey that was cooked, along with overdone vegetables and the apple and pumpkin pies my partner and I had brought. At least we got to eat something, and even the grumbling and gritching pretty much approximated the family bickering that we would have faced in our parents' homes.

It was, as they say, a memorable Thanksgiving for four dykes in Franklin County. ▼

Three cars and 16 years later, Euan Bear still enjoys the fall commute from Franklin County.

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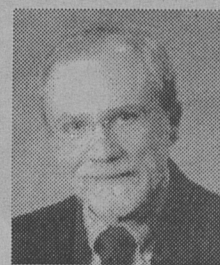
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