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The Amazon Trail: Pacific Thanksgiving

I found myself thinking of Thanksgiving as I made my way to a peace vigil last night. These vigils are held every Friday evening during what passes for rush hour in this small town on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. I am drawn to such gatherings like families are to a Thanksgiving dinner. I could no more ignore at least an occasional peace vigil, civil rights demonstration, take back the night march or gay pride parade than I could forget to vote in an election. These are not acts of civil disobedience for me, but of civic duty. I am grateful that democracy is still alive.

I passed a grocery store — pumpkins eight cents a pound. Thanksgiving must be near. I have so much to be thankful for this year: a warm, mostly dry home for the rainy season, a break from watering the garden, a case of fresh apples, a basket of ripe tomatoes, both sauced and frozen for the winter months.

Growing up in an America energized by victory in the 1940s, lulled by a prosperous security in the 1950s, faced by the temptation to make smugness a national virtue in the early 1960s, somehow a whole generation of activists sprang from this somnolent nation. The children of the children of immigrants, for the most part, we were raised on the horror of Hitler and the equal horror of the A-bomb. What else could many of us become but anti-nuclear weapons, then peace activists, when we were regularly herded into school hallways to practice for air raids? We were scared.

As no bomb fell on P.S. 20, I find myself preparing for Thanksgiving Day forty-odd years later. I watch for notices that free-range turkeys can be ordered at the co-op, wait to see the price of organic cranberries, remind friends that Thanksgiving dinner is at my place this year. The Innkeepers will bring their secret-recipe mashed potatoes, the librarian her green bean dish. The poet will surprise us and the faraway friends will bring a pie. The southern lady will make ice cream. Will the cranberry relish be coming this year? Who wants to make stuffin'? Do I have enough cinnamon sticks for the cider?

I'll be grateful if, by Thanksgiving, we haven't invaded Iraq. At the same time I'm thankful that we're doing what we can to defend ourselves. Is this war or is it peace and if it's not war can I stomach such a defensive peace in a world boiling over with angers? There's been a sniper loose in the country. What's to stop our enemies

**lee
lynch**

from sending a dozen, thousands like him to launch a guerilla attack in every town?

When Thanksgiving Day arrives each year my first gratitude has nothing to do with world peace or turmoil. I'm simply grateful we're all women and it won't matter that I have no T.V. reception for the football games. My second gratitude is that there are always instructions on the box of turkey-roasting bags to get me started. The third, that the Innkeepers are always ready with calm advice when I call to wail that the turkey will be over-, under- or un-done. This is as much turmoil as I can handle.

On the street corner, with my NO WAR sign, I'm

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grateful that I can voice my opinion, surprised and gratified at all the horns honking in support. But what is this peace I'm demanding? How else can we protect ourselves but with uniforms and weapons? In college my war protest meant that I would not tolerate the slaughter of my brother or of my friends Gene or Donald or Walter. What good does my sign do now to protect any of us from slaughter by terrorists who have no qualms about seeing us disintegrate in flying firebombs?

Thanksgiving Day

always arrives in a whirl. First the kitchen steams up, then I'll ready my mother's stainless silverware and my collection of 1950s tablecloths for the arrival of the card tables that will supplement my rusty-legged relic. Finally we'll all be seated, the ice cream machine churning out back, and someone will yell, "Grace!" and someone else will say, "Who's Grace?" and I'll get wet-eyed and embarrass myself by telling them how grateful I am for friends.

Last year we had a moment of silence for loss and peace. This year in the wake of bombs exploding all over the world, and of a sharpshooter killing civilians in Home Depot parking lots, our silence will be a year's more earnest. And the next day, the Friday after the great American feast, we'll meet at the center of town to hold aloft peace signs and to hope for signs of real peace. ▼

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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.