

Amazon Trail: Dyke Statues

I met a really sweet young lesbian not long ago. By young, I mean that she was in her thirties. She let a mutual acquaintance know how welcomed she felt by our community. In her own, she felt discounted and rejected because of her relative youth. I'd really thought things had changed since the days when Suzy and I trailed the grown-up dykes around New York. We, of course, were jailbait at 15 in the era when to be a lesbian was a crime, and the women we so admired, emulated, lusted after and copied had no choice but to shun us.

Why would any community today be anything but enthusiastically welcoming to those who will carry on our spirit, our work, our histories? Surely we are not fearing that the young whippersnappers will in some way supplant us?

I think the generation of gays that created a liberation movement, gave name and form to women's and gay male spirituality, started our publishing and music

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industries, put positive images of gays on T.V. and in films, accomplished the impossible with Act Up and similar groups, is on the verge of being granted some form of legal recognition akin to marriage, got the Supreme Court to outlaw sodomy laws and Justice Clarence Thomas to call such laws "silly" — I think my generation of queers doesn't need to worry about getting credit where credit is due.

**lee
lynch**

I've been thanked many times for being a pioneer and for recording the present that was becoming our history. I'm pleased and grateful when a younger person recognizes and values what s/he has inherited, and I try to pass back the baton. If not many of them are taking up the reins, could it be because we're loathe to hand them over? I'm not involved in activities like planning marches or providing health services or even keeping one of our few remaining bookstores running, but I suspect that there are hordes of 20- and 30-somethings who are quietly learning the ropes. I was way surprised when I found myself one of a smattering of suddenly mature women holding the lesbian pens that would endure. The young gays will be surprised too, when they wake up to find themselves in charge of fundraising galas or managing gay-friendly motels in resort towns.

There is also an army of gay kids in their teens who have the energy and vision to do their part to sustain our community. Maybe the next revolution needs to be generational. We can't just rack up victories, then sit on our laurels, complaining that purple-haired 25-year olds with nose rings shouldn't be canvassing for votes, or that no one wants 72-year-olds at the Halloween ball. Nor can the new dykes and gay men take their relative freedom for granted — the right wing is never going to go away. How can we combine the strengths of all ages to do what needs to be done to make the planet safe for our people?

A warm welcome apparently goes a long way, according to that report from my friend. We don't have to become best pals with someone decades older or younger, but oh, the thrill to see the young gays strut and prance and many seniors dare to live outside the closets they were born to. When I am with a peer, how our eyes spark with laughter and pleased self-consciousness when we break into a

duet of some Meg Christian song.

I'm no organizer, but I host a potluck at my home on Thanksgiving and the Fourth of July. This year there was no one under 40, but we ranged well into our 70s. The sense of continuity and of family I experience when I look around the boisterous bunch of us is inspiring and sustaining. It took all of us to get this far and it'll take all of us to maintain the gains we've won.

One night at a potluck heavy in the category of what a 30-something lesbian called, "short, white-haired women," I was brought to tears of pain as they discussed a memorial to the women in the group who had died. There was no question of putting names on the plaque — even in death the anonymity of these women must be preserved. We weren't going to spell out the name of the organization because, daringly, it contained the "L" word. There was great sadness in the plan, and although I sensed pride, it was a queer pride that we needed to hide.

What if, that night, there had been some young women with blueberry-colored hair and Doc Martens shoes, one with a skateboard parked at the door and another wearing leather pants and a t-shirt that ended just above her navel. What if a third, in goth black, had sprung from her supple, cross-legged position on the floor and cried, "Who are you protecting? Not me and not yourselves. If you really loved these dykes you'd get enough cash together to hire a sculptor and put up a damn dyke statue!"

"Cool!" the other baby-dykes would shout.

The rest would have had a choice: quietly ignore these fearless pups or soak up a little of their outrageousness. The mute memorial could have found a voice and while that voice would have been quieter than the kids', it might have broken some lifelong chains of silence. ▼

Copyright Lee Lynch 2003. Lee Lynch is the author of eleven books including The Swashbuckler and the Morton River Valley Trilogy. She lives on the Oregon Coast.

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