

Amazon Trail: Scruffy Little Dykes

lee
lynch

When my friend the Innkeeper told me she was going to an art gallery opening a few weeks ago, I asked if I could tag along. She paused for a long moment and 1,000 reasons for her hesitation raced through my head. "If," I offered, in a very small voice, "you don't mind going with a scruffy little dyke." Immediately, she said, "I've been living with a scruffy little dyke for 34 years."

We went on to plan the excursion. A few minutes later it hit me. I told her, "I just realized what you really said," and got off the phone quickly because I thought I was going to cry. I was feeling a huge wave of appreciation for the good femmes who stay 34 years with their scruffy little dykes (SLD).

And what is an SLD? It's a

A "scruffy little dyke" is a woman who is not tall, but not necessarily short, who's inclined to live in blue jeans, but has a good pair for dress up, or at least a clean pair.

woman who is not tall, but not necessarily short, who's inclined to live in blue jeans, but has a good pair for dress up, or at least a clean pair (some people might look a little puzzled about why my "good pair" deserves that description). She's likely to dress very simply, in t-shirts with short sleeves and maybe long sleeves if it's chilly. In my case I like to have a few denim or canvas shirts or work shirts, to protect me from the sun and because I think a collar looks spiffier on those occasions when I need a little spiffing up. Like art shows.

I know many lesbians no longer believe in femme and butch

because they think this is role-playing, but I have never played a role in my life; I simply know where I fall. Was it something in my baby formula? Was it because I adored my big brother? Is it in my genes? Or maybe it was because my mother taught me that comfort is one of the greater virtues. She, of course, talked the talk

and did not walk the walk, but her daughter took her at her word and is a bra-phobic woman who dresses like a skateboarding teenage boy.

A.K.A. an SLD. And proud of it.

Yet I have to wonder why femmes put up with us. The Innkeeper with the SLD partner could hardly complain if she wanted to. She tells the story of the guest who asked if she always wore t-shirts. The Innkeeper said, "No, in the winter I wear sweatshirts." The difference is that she wears pret-

ty yet interesting sweatshirts decorated with abstract designs or other arresting graphics, and her partner generally goes for solids and handsome illustrations embellished with house paint or sawdust from her many handy-dyke projects.

Sometimes they share.

They both wear jeans most of the time. The Innkeeper disdains the time it takes to "do all that shit," like makeup and fancy girl clothes. But does any femme ever look like an SLD? No way! She looks well-put together. How do femmes do that?

Having recently been thrown over for the dominant society, I am painfully aware that some

women do not put up with us. They want to change us or they give us a wide berth. Some lesbians are otherwise fine partners who were perhaps brought up in a way that makes living with an SLD a trial. Some women are bi and straddle both worlds – including the one that comes equipped with SLDs – with amazing dexterity.

The women I most admire are the ones I call the good femmes, the women who love us partly because we are scruffy little dykes. They will straighten a collar with tenderness in their eyes, walk down the street alongside us with an unconscious protective defiance, and gladly avoid places where we might be made uncomfortable.

They seem to think, the good femmes, that we are beautiful despite a society that finds us repellent. Some of them enjoy nothing better than spending time with a gaggle of admiring SLDs. They are a special breed, these femmes, created to love and be loved by the special breed called scruffy little dykes.

The concept of the SLD has become a family joke now, but we've talked seriously about it too. The Innkeeper is careful to use the words "self-proclaimed" before she uses the SLD term. The best news is that this good femme doesn't see us as SLDs at all. Rather than describing us as little, or scruffy, she sees us as women who dress for comfort, practicality and for our situations, whether we are painting houses, dancing till dawn or cooking breakfast.

What she hasn't acknowledged knowing is, of course, that we dress for her. ▼

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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