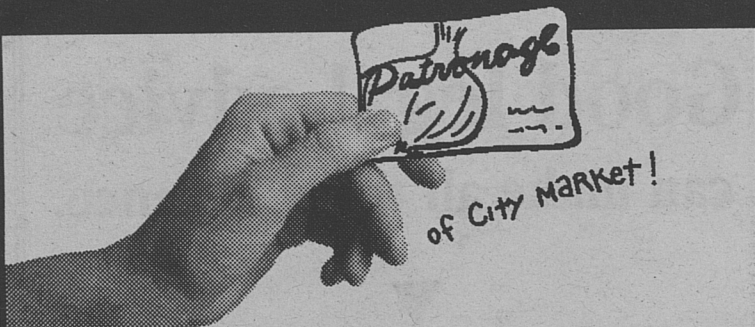


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# Amazon Trail: Old Dykes, Old Faggots

I thought I'd freak on my 58th birthday. It's that kind of year: creeping up on 30, on 40, on 50, on —. Well, maybe I'm a little freaked, but only by the number, because lemme tellya, 58 is filled with new beginnings for me and I am elatedly surprised at how very ready I am for them.

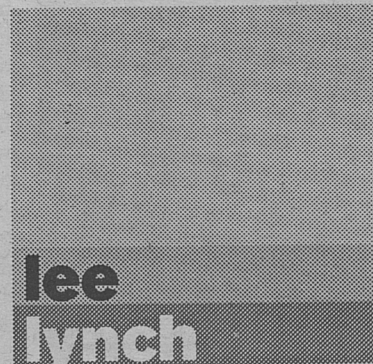
But isn't "old dyke" the only term in the English language that's worse than "old faggot?"

Maybe to an uneducated straight. To those of us lucky enough to be gay, they are terms of affection, respect and even awe. When I was a baby dyke I wanted nothing more than to be an old dyke, someone who'd been around the block a few times and looked like an aging Peter Pan. And now here I am, getting closer to old dykedom and still having the time of my life along the way.

Everything is new! Car, home, job, relationship, even my body — which has shed most of its aches and pains like an old skin even while adding the extra weight recommended after menopause. If you'd told me five years ago that a) everything in my life would change and b) I would survive the changes and come out the other side rejuvenated, I would have raised an eyebrow and said, "Yeah. Right." Life is just a proving ground, and we get to prove our stuff over and over. The thought can be daunting, but it's kind of cool that no matter how low our reserves seem, there's always something to draw on.

Take the new car. The old one had only 105,000 miles on it, so I was blown away to learn how much more it would cost to fix when it stopped running. I know, I know, I was warned that Ford stood for Fix Or Repair Daily, but I wanted an American car for once. So there I was with the car that's supposed to last me till retirement and it's dead in the water.

My consolation prize was a new Toyota Matrix. These are basically staid old Toyota wagons, but redesigned to appeal



to younger drivers. Like me. It looks like some kind of space pod that was mated with the old French Citroen to drive like a Jeep. The last 2003 they had on the lot was red. The radio can blast the windows open it's got such good bass. Motor Vehicles sent me a plate whose letters are ZPY. In other words, check it out: someone old enough to remember Citroen is driving that flashy ride!

And then there's the relationship — but I'm so astonished to be in one that I can't begin to talk about it. Just don't believe anything — and I mean anything — they say about post-menopausal women. Experience, self-knowledge and a mature, solidly grounded lover go a lot further in my book than one impetuous, dewy-eyed young thing bringing out another. No matter what your age, love is love, romance is romance, passion is passion. Saving the best for last has taken on a new meaning for me.

I feel like a living rebuttal of the Alone Myth. We've all heard it, how old dykes and old faggots are going to spend their declining days alone and die alone and friendless in a hostile world, but that's not what I'm seeing. Au contraire, I know or hear about too many lonely and

bitter old hets living for their grown children and grandchildren and struggling with feelings of uselessness, of being left out.

Meanwhile, gay women and men who have lost loved ones to death or to the thousand other circumstances that can isolate us, seem more prepared than our het counterparts to start over — it's not the first time for most of us. Often rejected by birth families, we have created gay families throughout our lives and they continue to evolve around us as we age. We don't spend time with our gay elders or juniors out of duty either, but with the exuberance that comes from discovering real kinfolk.

Was it just a month or two ago I that I was getting lost in my kitchen, afraid of a steadily

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declining memory? That news of yet another friend retiring was discouraging? I am not an old dyke by any means, but I'm beginning to understand my full powers. The book I'm finishing is decidedly not my last — I am so anxious to start the new one that I've covered several feet of wall with poster-puttied notes.

And my job — it's evolving into exactly the kind of career I've always wanted. Researching labor statistics may not be everyone's cup of tea, but after too many years of providing direct services, I get to do the research, the writing — the fun stuff.

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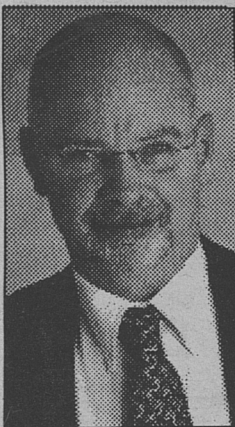
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