

# Amazon Trail: Are You Married?

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**E**very now and then something happens that makes my world shift. The ground tilts and great heavy doors open to the light. I know I will never be the same.

This time it happened in a pretty mundane way. My girl and I are refinancing her house because, without the ability to get married, it's the only way to legally arrange for it to belong to both of us. It's an expensive solution, but maybe cheaper than the wedding we can't have. Of course, we don't get the honeymoon either.

I've been gay a long time, though, and usually just go along to get along. So it was a shock when, sitting with my girl at the title company, the non-gay escrow officer looked at both of us and asked, "Are you married?"

There was a pause before we answered, "No." In that pause was the weight of gay history: a thousand beatings, a million firings, an army of gay kids thrown out of their parents' homes; hundreds of marches, dozens of attempts at legislation, a universe of hopes. I thought of saying, "We can't!" but stayed silent as I felt centuries of fear flush out of me in that moment and realized how very far we'd come.

I have a running dispute going with one of my innkeeper friends. She tells me how much has changed for gay people, and I tell her that nothing has changed while there are people who blindly hate us. Well, my friend, you're absolutely right, something has changed. The escrow officer was just an ordinary middle-class woman (she made sure to mention her husband) who, ten years ago, one year ago, would never have asked that question, but today she has not only to consider that we might be married to each other, but in doing so has to acknowledge that gay people exist.

And we have to deal with not being invisible any more. In the 21st century we can't be trembling in our clogs with fear that an escrow officer will "Guess" our secret. All kinds of clerks behind counters and desks need to know our status and we need to be able to be up front about it. We're losing the choice to live in closets!

This doesn't mean no one hates us. And if the right wing gets to write its obsolete scriptures into

there will be an openly gay governor who doesn't have to resort to infidelity to be true to himself. It's important that Governor McGreevy has not apologized for being gay, only for being unfaithful. Perhaps the straight public will learn – those who are open to learning – what a mistake it is to enforce compulsory heterosexuality.

"Are you married?" There is something about those words that implies more than the question. It has echoes of "Shouldn't you be married?" I can't imagine the escrow officer was thinking any such thing, yet the implication was there. She made a point of her concern about protecting us in the wording she used, in giving us a document that recognized the seriousness of our commitment. Perhaps the true union is between the words gay and marriage. That shocking proximity may have done as much to stretch minds

## lee lynch

our Constitution, the escrow officers of the world won't ever have to ask again. But meanwhile, they've been forever changed by our liberation movement. And that's what's different. They may be fundamentalist or Republican, but same-gender couples are in their world. "We're here, we're queer, get used to it!" is more than a rallying cry, it's become a reality.

## My innkeeper friend tells me how much has changed for gay people, and I tell her that nothing has changed as long as there are people who blindly hate us.

Whether my girl and I would marry or not if we had the chance is beside the point. Part of me rejects the whole gay marriage movement as frivolous and not the issue I'd have chosen to take a stand on. Part of me is elated at the exposure we're getting, win or lose. Part of me wants to smash the patriarchal institution of marriage and the rest of me wants to drag my girl to the altar so I can pledge my troth publicly.

No matter, the word gay is being shouted from political podiums, splashed across front pages and talked about in straight homes and religious meetings. Gay! Gay! Gay! There's no escaping us. The governor of New Jersey couldn't escape himself. "I am a gay American," he said, and those were no cowering words. It won't be long now before

as the thousands of recent photographs of two women in bridal veils and two men kissing.

Something has finally changed, my innkeeper friend. There is now a global consciousness that includes the unthinkable, and there is no turning back from that. Our escrow officer was the voice of an expanded universe that is large enough to include the once abhorrent thought of two women, two men, finally getting their honeymoons.

"Are you married?" What a lovely question. ▼

Copyright 2004 Lee Lynch. Lynch is the author of eleven books including *The Swashbuckler* and *the Morton River Valley Trilogy*. She lives on the Oregon Coast. Her web page is at <http://leelynch6.tripod.com>.



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