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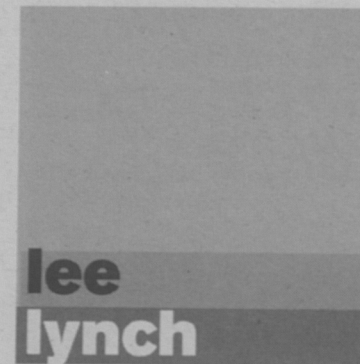
**W**hen I begin to give in to this fear I have of the current political regime in the U.S., all I have to do is remember what it was like in the bad old days. If I consider shutting up and building a great big closet for myself, the bad feelings come rushing back.

The fears pop up when someone like [Attorney General nominee] Alberto Gonzales promises to defend in court the 1996 law in which Congress said states don't have to recognize gay marriages. The man fell all over himself backtracking on human rights issues like torture, yet denying rights to gays was still legitimate currency to pay for an appointment to an exalted legal office. The fears pop up when I look clearly at what exactly it is that Bush understands to be one of his mandates: shoving gays back to the bottom of the political heap.

I remember when fear briefly ruled me in college, when Diana, a pretty woman with long blonde hair and a fun-loving personality, took me under her wing. Whatever her now ancient motives, she decided to help me. It's hard to resist a loving push, even when it's a push away from one's nature. And before gay liberation, even the gayest of us questioned our natures.

I was 18, alone and scared in a sea of heterosexual students. This well-meaning upper-classman worked on me to go on a double date with her and the boy she was pinned to. The boys belonged to one of the milder fraternities on campus, but their idea of a good time was giving a dance to which they would each bring a girl and abandon her at a table with other girls while they drank and cavorted with their brothers. Now and then a boy would collect his girl, dance to a Beatles song like "I Want to Hold Your Hand," then escort the girl back to her table, bring her a drink and go back to his buddies. I allowed Diana to dress me up, make me up and match me with the fraternity president. I suppose she thought that two "brains" would hit it off. I suppose she hadn't figured out I was gay. I suppose she didn't know how very attracted I was to her.

Regardless of either of



our motives, I spent a couple of the most humiliating nights of my life posing as an accessory to a male stranger who, for all his interest in me, may well have been gay himself. Had I been a bit less gay, a lot less defiant and not bored out of my skull, who knows, I might have gone through the charade that heterosexuality would have been for me, like so many lesbians did and still do, unwilling to live as outlaws

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in a country that refuses us the dignity of acceptance, because my social humiliation was just the tip of the very treacherous iceberg of stigmatization.

So great is my fear of those times and the anti-gay attitudes that endure, so deep is my memory of the consequences of living a gay life, that I have considered the option of invisibility. With my silvered hair and aging face, I no longer have to put on the clown suit of college dating, I could just be old. I could stop writing about gay people, which for me is to stop writing at all. I could disappear the rainbow stickers, hide the gay book collection, learn to hang out with nice non-gay people, set foot in a religious building now and then. That would keep me and my loved ones safe.

I don't think it's possible. I might as well slit my wrists and get it over with. Gayness is not about sexual acts. It's a state of mind that questions the status quo. Poor Diana, your project was doomed to failure; accommodation is not an option for the queer soul, though many try.

Bush and Gonzales can stand on gay backs to make themselves taller, they can pass laws to disenfranchise us and they can set the tone for decades of backlash against the gains we have made. But I know that the 18-year old gay kids today have escaped the kinds of fears that make me consider retiring from an out gay life. They have inherited a freedom my peers came late to. I can't imagine it, but I see in their arrogance a pride they didn't have to fight so hard to find. These right wing politicians should enjoy their day in the sun, because it may be their last chance to do it.

They can scare me, but not for long. ▼

Copyright 2005 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>.