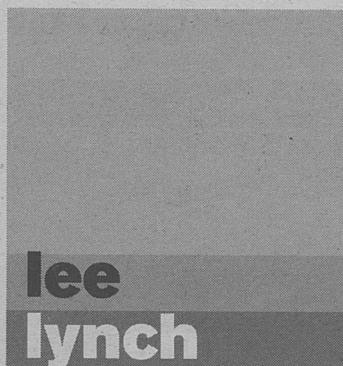


Amazon Trail: My Lesbian Apprenticeship

I heard about gay bars in the city shortly after I first came out.

They were definite destinations on my baby dyke itinerary, but it was the Hayloft that really intrigued me and my small set of underaged cohorts. The "Loft," as we so urbanely referred to it, was out in the suburbs and completely inaccessible to us. Not only were we too young to go to bars, we were too young to drive.

In my desire for gay authenticity, the unattainable Loft was replaced by the city bars. The Swing Rendezvous – or the Swing Lounge – or the Swing – as it was variously known – was my first triumph. It was a dive saved from the reckless depths of sailors' bars only by the lack of sailors in uniform and its distance from the wharves. The bar itself was up front with the



like a pro. Of course, after the festivities, I had to get back on the subway, take two trains to the end of the line in Queens, then walk the two miles to my parents' apartment, a majorly sobering trek. Why my mother never asked the reason I smelled like an ashtray filled with whiskey, I'll never know. Once in

castles in my lavender sky.

Then I moved to Connecticut, where you had to be 21 to get into a bar. I lost all memory of disillusionment and yearned for gay people and places with a constant intensity that made me feel like I was on fire. In the city, I'd at least observed my people from inside. It wasn't long before I heard about a place down by the railroad station, but it came with warnings. It was supposed to be a tough, dangerous dump that drew from the seamier side of town. I had so romanticized the Greenwich Village bars that I never figured out until I went to this forbidden watering hole several years later, that what was considered tough in Connecticut paled against what I'd already survived.

I was usually in enough trouble in college without chancing a visit to such a purported den of iniquity. I had a new destination bar: the Cedar Brook, or the Brook, as the in-crowd called it. Again, it was way out in the 'burbs, in affluent Westport, Connecticut, across the Post Road, irony of all ironies, from the State Police barracks. It's celebrated as the second oldest gay bar in the country now, but then it was just a rickety old roadhouse that regularly soaked up as much of the flooding brook as it did spilled beer.

By this time, I had doctored a copy of my birth certificate. One Saturday night, a bunch of us took over a booth at the Brook, where we worked up the courage to get onto the empty dance floor. The trouble was, we had a curfew back at school, and an hour's drive. It was much too early for anyone but the serious, all male drinkers at the bar and us silly kids, pining to belong. By the time the gay girls started arriving, it was time for us to leave.

What did that matter? I'd spent a couple of hours in a place where I could once again dance a lesbian dance. ▼

Copyright Lee Lynch 2005. 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>.

It was dark and smoky, and the uneven wooden floors, where we did the outlawed bump and grind, were sticky with spilled drinks and who knew what else.

juke box, the tables and tiny dance floor in back. It was dark and smoky, and the uneven wooden floors, where we did the outlawed bump and grind, were sticky with spilled drinks and who knew what else. Yet, even now, when I hear the first beats of certain rock'n'roll songs, I feel a tremor of nervous excitement in my gut and the exhilaration that went with my right foot pushing out to dance in that room where the music became like water to a high diver.

It was my first bar. My ID was borrowed from an 18-year-old who was such a regular at the Swing she wasn't carded anymore. I was in! I slipped the ID back to her once I'd passed the bouncer and tried not to worry about a raid. Liquor held the same romantic appeal as the bar, so I lapped it up

my bed, I was jubilant – a real lesbian who went to gay bars!

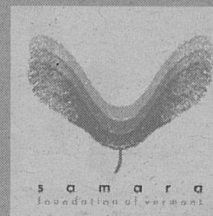
After my first bar, I was so sophisticated that I didn't bother with fake ID. I tried to mimic the rocking walk, the tough, sibilant way of talking out of the side of my mouth that seemed to convince bartenders and waitresses – mostly straight – that I, at 17, was a vetted butch barfly. I was starved for identity, for validation by my own people, and the bars gave me that even though, once inside, I was too young to mix with anyone but the girl I was with. At the same time, I was beginning to learn that the bars were a rip: boring, expensive, scary places that drew preying men as much as they drew lesbians. Still, I ached to enter more gay bars – Googie's and the Music Box, Pam Pam's and the Sea Colony – the

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