



Men who have Sex with Men account for approximately 42% of all new HIV infections and 60% of new infections among men.

Don't get scared,  
Get Tested

National HIV Testing Day  
June 27th

Burlington  
361 Pearl St.  
Mon. June 27  
9-7  
Tuesday June  
28-Fri. July 1  
9-5  
800-649-2437

Rutland  
27 South Main St.  
Mon. June 27th  
1-3 and 6-8 pm  
Wed June 29 10-6  
802-775-5884

Montpelier  
73 Main St.  
Suite 401  
June 27th  
1-3 PM  
800-649-2437

St. Johnsbury  
1235 Hospital Dr.  
Suite 1  
Mon. June 27th  
8-4  
802-748-9061

St. Albans  
20 Houghton  
Street  
Monday June  
27th 12-2 pm  
802-524-7970

Newport  
100 Main St.  
Suite 220  
Monday June  
27th 11-1  
802-334-6707



MPM~OITMMPM~OITMMPM~OITMMPM~OITMMPM~OITM

## Amazon Trail: Thirty-Sixth Anniversary

**M**y friends the innkeepers are retired now. They fill their days like many older couples do, with gardening, traveling, spending time with friends. They were spending time with their nice Republican lady friend one day recently and happened to mention that they were celebrating their 36th anniversary.

The Republican looked thoughtful, then commented, "Thirty-six years is a long time." She had obviously never thought of them having the stability and longevity of a married couple, possibly because marrying each other is against the law in Oregon. In the ensuing conversation, the nice Republican lady was taken aback again when the couple referred to prior relationships. She'd also never thought of either of them with other women. And this was someone who had known them for years.

Who could fault her? You never see our names in the paper and a sappy wedding picture on top of the T.V. Especially 36 years ago, no gilt invitations were sent out and no one threw rice. That was around the time my senior year lover and I moved in together. We had twin beds – so no one would know. Far from announcing ourselves to the world, we purposely hid both our relationships and ourselves. People like this nice Republican lady had never heard the words gay, together and 36 years in the same sentence then – and they still have not now.

The only time non-gays even knew they were looking at a lesbian couple was when one of us appeared very, very butch, and then sometimes the straights were wrong – because who hasn't seen a cute little number in the grocery store and smiled in greeting, only to realize the pack of kids and the father rounding the corner belonged to her. Whoops.

One of the innkeepers reminded me of the signals we used to use. It was heavy breathing in her neck of the woods, or a hiss, when one of her crowd spotted a likely sister. I used to display a pinky finger, a gesture once associated with gay men, to sound the alert. Yes, I was saying, there, look, another one of us! Though we never seemed to see as many as we needed to in order to come to full acceptance



of ourselves.

I wonder what it feels like to belong to the dominant society. There must be a sense of ease instead of a constant awareness of difference. There must be a freedom to speak the words that describe their lives instead of that instinctive lowering of the voice when saying "lesbian," "my partner-she" or "our bed." I wonder how it feels to have automatic approval from one's family for at least one's gender preference. Instead, as one of the innkeepers said, we have a tradition of "Keep your mouth shut." What a

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bummer of a way to live. No wonder those of us who dared get mad threw ourselves into gay liberation.

That's another of the things the innkeepers' nice Republican lady friend didn't get – she said she'd never thought of either of them being with other women. She had not a lick of consciousness that the retired innkeepers have a history with each other, before each other and as part of a huge population of women like themselves who all kept the secrets and all used the coded language and all had, at one time or forever, loving relationships.

I was reminded recently that I once wrote some stories about two widows who met in senior housing and fell in love. I

have since had the privilege of meeting these women, over and over. I thought I'd made them up – I didn't know that really happened! None were widows, but all came to recognize their lesbian selves after decades of marriage to males. One of these couples has now been together over 20 years after coming out, with each other, in their 60s. The couple I met most recently has about three years under their belts, one having come out late in her 60s and the other early in her 70s.

Is the straight world ready to hear about old women coming out, about the heterosexual divorces at age 70 that result? These things are just not talked about. As a result, that nice Republican lady really had to grapple with the fact that her innkeeper friends have spent a lifetime together. Maybe in 14 years the world will have progressed to the point that the innkeepers can get their pictures in the paper for their golden anniversary. In the meantime, at least lesbians can celebrate their

longevity. Happy 36th anniversary to the retired innkeepers and to all the other gay couples who have managed to live happily ever after – while keeping their mouths shut. ▼

Copyright Lee Lynch 2005. Lynch's 12th book, the novel Sweet Creek, will be released from Bold Strokes Books in January 2006. Lynch lives on the Oregon Coast. Her web page is at <http://leelynch6.tripod.com>.