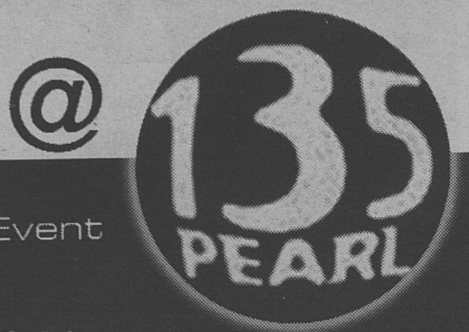


Saturday 7.9.5

PRIDE



135 Pearl
GLBT Pride Event

Doors Open @ Noon

3pm - 8pm: ART EXHIBIT - GLBT
Film Shorts, Art Gallery, &
Performance Art Hosted By
Kelly Arbor. In The Downstairs
Theatre Space.

Dj's Liu, EV, Precious, Phillip Malcomb,
& Craig Mitchell - All Day Dance
Party From 3pm to 2am Inside
The Building And Under The Tent.

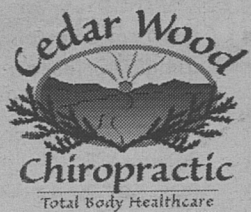
Outside Sound Stage: Opens @ 4pm w/
Singer/Songwriters Antara, Nebulai,
Gregory Douglass, Nathan Jarvis, &
Robert Toms.

POOF! A Drag Cabaret @ 9pm

NO COVER UNTIL 8PM
DOOR COVER STARTS @ 8PM - \$10

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Amazon Trail: Queer Families and Hospice

I didn't know how I was going to cope with my girl's last days. At the end stage of ovarian cancer, she's been growing steadily weaker, increasingly sicker. It was bad enough knowing I was going to lose the kindest, gentlest, wisest woman I have ever known, the woman who found it in her heart to love me just as I am, and who thinks it's pretty special that I love her. How was I going to give her the care she needed? How was I even going to find the time to tend to her and keep my job?

As it turned out, I wasn't as alone as I thought. Her two daughters and a faraway friend arrived. This covered some of the cooking and cleaning and allowed me to work a little bit, but none of us are healthcare professionals. We didn't know tritrating drugs from a Harris flush. We'd all had a little experience with being around the dying, but not quite this intimately, 24/7, and not with the woman we all loved more than anyone else on earth.

All through the processes of diagnosis and misdiagnosis, CT scans, blood, barium and urine tests, surgeries, chemotherapy, a gastroenterologist, an oncologist, a urologist and a super woman gynecological oncologist, I felt confident and supported by professionals. But there came a time when it was just us, suspended between the last physician and the last breath.

Fortunately, my girl had spent several years as a Hospice nurse. She asked the last doctor, "Am I Hospice appropriate?" He answered yes.

We live in a small town, but Hospice is here. They had us signed up and receiving services within the week. When it came to filling out our paperwork the case manager asked for my relationship to the patient and we both answered, "partner." He wrote it down as if he registered queer families every day. All the Hospice folk have been like that, never questioning my involvement, sharing information freely with me, making sure I was included in discussions and decisions. One day the case manager, who is non-gay, turned to me and asked, "So how did you two meet?"

I was so startled that this straight guy would be interested it took me a moment to answer, "Through the Audubon Society." I gave him some details and he looked distressed. Uh-oh, I



thought, here comes the homophobia, but it wasn't that at all. He had never heard of Audubon and thought we were members of some weird society formed around the Autobahn, a German road. We all laughed about that.

When the volunteer coordinator interviewed us, she asked if we had any special concerns, and of course we wanted reassurance that we wouldn't have to deal with a volunteer who was uncomfortable with our relationship or whose agenda was to pros-

There came a time when it was just us, suspended between the last physician and the last breath.

elytize for some religion. It turns out that Hospice, even though this one is affiliated with a church hospital, takes diversity training very seriously. The volunteer assigned to us could not have been more respectful, kind or sweet. I had no idea there were so many people like this in the world.

Even with my girl so ill, working with Hospice has been a pleasure. They take over the prescriptions, give us instructions, send a bath aide three times a week, one or two nurses daily, a volunteer twice a week, supply us with equipment from a commode to baby monitor to "chucks" (bed protectors) and, most important, are available to us day and night, seven days per week.

Hospice work takes a special breed of human being. Their job is to making dying people comfortable. Can there be a greater - or more demanding - service in the world? They need to be continually compassionate, vigilantly protective, able to adapt to any environment or personality

and enthusiastically creative.

One day, for example, my girl had terrible stomach cramps. Daughter #1 caught the nurses as they were leaving the driveway and they returned on the double. The nurses decided on a procedure which involved one getting into a kneeling position on the bed with my girl, the other standing at the other side of the bed, Daughter #1 half-lying on the bed supporting her mom and me at the foot of the bed to run for whatever was needed. That made five of us in a room already filled with bedroom furniture and bookcases.

Then we noticed the dog was missing. She'd last been seen crawling under the bed where the cat was hiding from her. I peered through the puzzles and other stored items to find that the kitty was fine. We called the dog's name and heard scrabbling toenails toward the head of the bed. Beastie is pretty small and very devoted. She'd just wanted to be

close to my girl, so she'd crawled between the frame and the wall - and got stuck. Here's Daughter #1 under one side of the bed, pushing, me under the other, pulling, both of us cajoling worried little Beastie. All the while the competent, calm, adaptable Hospice nurses kept their focus, did their work and took care of their patient while we two idiots hung out under the bed with the dog.

Later, Daughter #1 and I laughed until tears came to our eyes at the ridiculous scene, but it was also the laughter of relief - the nurses' simple, jerry-rigged procedure had been successful and my girl was comfortable again. If Hospice has anything to do with it, she'll be comfortable for the rest of her life. ▼

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>.