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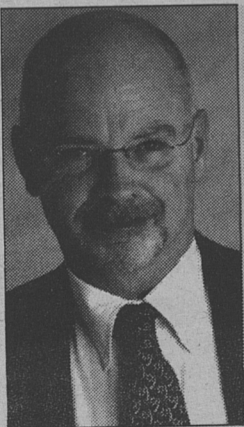
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# OUT in the MOUNTAINS

# Amazon Trail: The Magic Quilt

**A**fter someone close dies everyone greets the bereft with the same question, "How are you doing?" Heck, I ask it too. It's an awkward time and it's hard to know how to express concern and caring. The trouble is, I haven't a clue what to answer. All kinds of responses come to mind, from a friendly "Fair to middlin," to a hostile, "How would you feel if the love of your life just died?" I know I'm falling apart, but the truth is, I haven't a clue how I feel.

My pianist friend told me that I'm in limbo. She's usually right about these things. The dictionary reports limbo as a place Catholics believe is located on the border of Hell which houses "unbaptized but innocent or righteous souls such as infants and virtuous individuals." I agree with that bit about the border of hell, but doubt a queer like me would ever meet the Catholic standards for virtue.

The definition of limbo that more closely fits my feelings is "an imaginary place for lost or neglected things." When Marcia was alive, I was home. If we'd been, goddess forbid, in a refugee camp, as long as we were side by side, I would have been home. Sometimes now, no place on earth feels like home.

When the pianist said I was in limbo, she listed my circumstances: Marcia died, I'm selling our home, I'm living in a town I don't particularly like, I can't write much, and my job is not supporting me. Until that point I hadn't realized I was such a mess.

I received a post from a friend in New York yesterday: "Every stupid little thing takes up more time than it's worth, and I can never figure out why." I wrote back that I identified completely. Just getting up in the morning requires a day's worth of effort and long past bedtime I'm prowling the house looking for — for Marcia, I guess. All I want to do is take refuge in writing lesbian stories, but I'm like a small animal on a treadmill — the running becomes everything and then I must rest. Yet for all the running I get heavier in body and soul and have no energy available to resist comfort foods or to tackle simple efforts — which feel monumentally complex — that might help me move past this abyss, like sorting and packing our belongings.

I thought grief was a matter of gnashing teeth, wailing and tear-



ing out hair. Instead it's this unproductive slogging in place that leaves me unable to concen-

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trate, remember what I'm doing for more than 30 seconds at a time, and dealing with new age miseries from bilateral carpal syndrome to sleep apnea.

I didn't even have the get-up-and-go to attend the Cindy Sheehan vigil this week. It seemed so futile to protest war; there has always been war and there will probably always be war. The sorrow and anger of the mothers' peace movement in Ireland did not stop the fighting over there, why would it here? Meanwhile, many of the maimed soldiers, the war-widows and widowers, parents and partners of sons and daughters murdered in a hot country where we don't belong are in limbo with me.

Last night I visited Relay For Life, hoping to feel Marcia's spirit and find some peace for myself in the midst of the cancer survivors, their supporters and caretakers. Marcia went every year and tire-

lessly gave chair massages to raise money for the American Cancer Society. I walked the track alone, thinking bitter and hopeless thoughts about cures that would be too late and organizations that hadn't saved Marcia. Every effort — to write a story, end a war, cure this disease no one calls an epidemic — seemed futile, even ridiculous.

I ran into Marcia's chemo nurse. Despite her frequent exposure to loss, the nurse had cried in my arms when I told her Marcia was gone. Last night we stood talking in front of the Monday Club booth. Marcia, who had

received her chemo treatments on Mondays, had been a member. After my bitter walk around the track, her friend and I cried together. Drying my eyes, I bought raffle tickets that the Monday Club was selling, knowing it was just a donation, that I'd never win the prize — a spirit-lifting quilt decorated with hearts of different fabrics. I've probably bought enough quilt-raffle tickets over the years to pay retail for one. Today I got a call from the Monday Club. I won the quilt.

How am I doing? Still in limbo, but I'm beginning to believe that there may be some prizes left in 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>.