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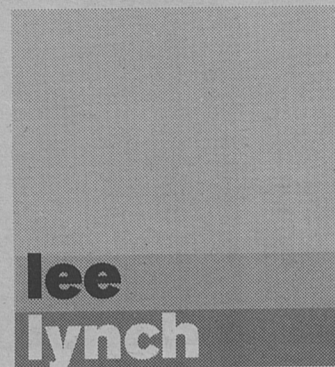
# Amazon Trail: Straight People

**S**traight people aren't all bad. They'll never completely understand us, but most of them seem to have good intentions. Of course, we know that one bad apple can spread its fear and hatred to many others. We also know that most of the bad apples are closet cases, so afraid of their own sexuality they lash out at ours. That's a very small comfort.

When I moved to this coastal town, tolerance was not a lesson I expected to learn. Marcia was already established here and had managed to find a half dozen gay people because she knew I was going to miss my gay family. As it turned out, we didn't see much of the gays, or much of anyone. Since Marcia died, our lesbian friends have been right there for me, but incredibly, so have Marcia's non-gay friends. They made it their business to keep tabs on me, spend time with me and get me through the worst early days.

For the first time in years, I found myself hanging out with straight people. Although it's been like traveling in a foreign land at times, our languages are similar enough that we communicate well. To my delight, I found out that Marcia's rock enthusiast pal and I had birthdays one day apart. We are so similar we trip over each other's shared opinions, common backgrounds and mirror-image neuroses as well as our rock collections. Who knew that behind that neat, short-haired exterior and carefully styled, slightly offbeat clothing there lurked a sixties kid, an ex-hippie graduate of Haight-Ashbury. We walk together a couple of times a week, and she introduces me to lakes and trails that are achingly beautiful.

Then there's the retired elementary school teacher. One of the most accepting, least judgmental people I have ever known, we mostly talk by phone, but go on and on, babbling about our days and ups



and downs, offering and taking one another's advice, giving comfort. She has just started attending computer classes and lets me play expert to her novice.

Both of these women are obviously glad to have my friendship, as I am theirs, and are sad that I am moving back north. Neither has ever said anything that made me feel patronized or inferior or weird or hit on as an experiment. Both are single, so there are no men in the picture to feel threatened by our attachments. The rock hound makes a point of having single women friends, straight and gay, like some sort of feminist. She takes my lesbian chauvinism in stride and announces the arrival of every new dyke, or newly out dyke, in town.

In this same period of time, my college roommate tracked me down through a gay paper. We are somehow both thrilled to be in each other's lives again, despite our very different lifestyles: Manhattan het and West Coast gay. We are also both button-bursting proud of each other's accomplishments in the decades since we've been out of touch — she is an artist. I remember, way back when, how we'd lie across our darkened room dreaming our creative dreams aloud. The artist lives with a guy, but seldom mentions him. She is much more discreet about her lifestyle than I am about mine. Once again, our lives are more alike than not: the artist works and longs for more time to paint; I work and long for more time

to write. She sent prints of her work to hang by Marcia's hospital bed.

Are these new connections typical for post-menopausal women? Are we now secure enough about our identities that non-gay women don't worry that having a lesbian friend makes them lesbian, and lesbians don't confuse passionate friendship with sexual attraction? Have I come to appreciate friendship more, having seen so many come and go, and have I learned to respect and treasure these bonds even when they stray from the culture where I am most comfortable?

I actually just had lunch with a straight couple. I thought I might be nervous and have nothing to say. I thought they might be self-conscious dining downtown with a butchy dyke. Instead, it felt very natural. The woman is a major liberal who once, on the subject of gay marriage, angrily sputtered, "It's none of their business, who marries who!" She and her husband raised four children, with whom they are very close. Their lives are a world away from mine — or are they? We are neighbors, Democrats, work all the time, complain of high gas prices and town planning and medical costs. We are there for one another in emergencies, in political despair, in lending a helping hand. Although they've lived here almost thirty years, we're all transplants from back east. We hate war. They loved Marcia.

What's straight got to do with it? ▼

*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://leelynych6.tripod.com>.*

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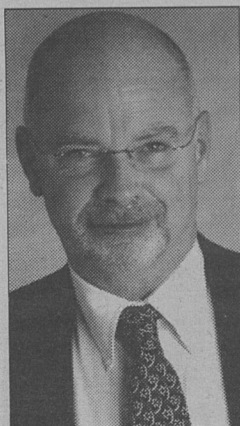
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