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# Amazon Trail: Dancing Girls in Red, White and Blue

**S**ometimes I feel like an alien. That's aside from the times people treat me like an alien because I am gay.

When the local internet cable company offered me cheap basic cable TV if I went for their high-speed internet deal, I accepted. My friend the handy dyke came over and did something magical with a cord that looked like an octopus with tentacle piercings. I turned on the TV I've been hauling with me, unused except for rented videotapes, through my last five moves – the heavy-as-a-boulder Hitachi I inherited when Mean Norma Jean died – and I got a really good picture on a channel that scrolled through an endless list of arts and craft shows, Christmas bazaars and piano recitals by people under the age of nine.

The next day I mentioned this to the handy dyke and her partner, the pianist. They arrived soon after with their backup TV as a loaner, so I attached a "free" sign to the Hitachi and managed to carry the old behemoth out to the street where, within the hour, it was adopted by a Mormon woman who didn't have a TV at all. When I turned on the small loaner, I soared right past the scrolling station – who watches this stuff? – and into a sea of crystal-clear channels of endless variety.

My new toy put me in mind of the old alien saying, "Be careful what you wish for." Apparently the Hitachi had only been set up to receive seven or eight of the channels we get on the Oregon coast. This loaner has a channel selling jewelry and another channel – selling jewelry. It has cop shows, soap operas, talk shows, good music, bad music, old movies, new movies, British comedies – I think they're comedies – news programs, constant weather programs, pay-per-view channels and lawyer shows, doctor shows, true crime shows, fake crime shows, cartoons, emergency medical shows, sports games, a series about a woman

lee  
lynch

president and another about a man president. And ads. Ubiquitous ads. Ads for everything and for every one, long ads that send me channel surfing so that I never, ever finish watching a show. Except for the weather channel – and apparently no one finishes watching that.

I walk by houses in the neighborhood after dark and see the glow of TV sets flicker. What are they watching? How can they sustain their interest when the ads blare on? But most of all, how do they find a program again once they have lost it?

My friends suggested I go to the cable company and ask for a channel guide. That's when I found out that, although I am being billed at the "basic" 23-channel rate, I have some other plan that includes close to 100 channels. Now I could match up channel numbers with call letters. Ever helpful, the pianist started saving me TV guides from the local paper. I look at them and feel like a complete alien when I read: FNC, FSN, FX, TBS, TLC, WGN. DSN, Leased Access, Univision and OXYGEN. OXYGEN? All I want to do is find The Ellen Show! How come the community college doesn't offer courses like, "Finding the Shows You Want to Watch Before They Are Over." No wonder ratings are low; no one can decipher the darned guides.

So I surf. I never thought I'd be like one of those pot-bellied guys in the cartoons, tilted all the way back on a recliner, beer in hand, chip bag

handy and remote hand the only moving part. That's me, except no beer, no chips, no pot belly and I'm on a futon couch, not a recliner. I probably stop at different destinations, too, but maybe not.

So far I've managed to watch Harrison Ford on a submarine long enough to be as embarrassed by his Russian accent as he looked. I've watched several exciting episodes of the weather in every part of the country but where I live. I've seen accidents and murder scenes, not in series shows, but on the news while waiting for the local weather. And I watched in fascination while a TV preacher frightened and teased a crowd into donating thousands and thousands of dollars with promises that God would help them resolve their financial problems as soon as they made their pledges. It dawned on me that these were the people who elected "It," as one enraged friend calls him, to the presidency. I came to the dispiriting realization that Democrats and liberals are being far too kind (and enabling) when we excuse 51% of American voters for their gullibility when electing politicians like "It." There was not a lot of cheating at the polls; his voters weren't fooled by him. He spoke the language of the TV preacher. They were used to false promises as entertainment.

I could go into the concept of government by remote control, voting with your channel changer, ballots built right into political ads with dancing girls in red, white and blue, but, really, I have no problem operating the remote control. I just cross the room and turn off the power button on the front of the TV ▼

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>.