## Moving on

## by Lee Lynch

I suppose I should be p posed to any ghetto, to t gay ghetto like the Cas' lage. But when I hear of bedroom near hood" like Portland's, or ever moving in up the road from me, ATION: I'm more comfortable right here in gas station town of mine because I know there are two gay guys up the road, and two dykes, and two more men, and the women coming and going up on the mountain. We're probably well over our 10% quota, but the rednecks haven't caught on because we're spread out. I only have to endure suspicious

Part 1



looks down at the General Store, even though I always wear a shirt and a smile. Could it be my tweed cap that tips them off?

Not that hostile stares are new to me. If New Yorkers do it, could I expect less of rural Oregonians and transplanted Californians? It's my impending move onto my lover's land that has me thinking about lesbian and gay geography, and remembering my own multitude of moves. Why have I wandered so much? Does a search for a place of our own move us on?

My First Apartment was pink. Not the inside walls, but the three-story house itself. Not only that, but the house next door was pink too. Both were owned by Mrs. Lanniman, a majestic boat of a middle-aged woman from the West Indies. Every Saturday morning Mrs. Lanniman would unlock our door and sail in to collect the rent. Which was quite okay before C. and I became lovers. Afterwards ... Well, nothing could undo the charm of that First Apartment. The home to which I brought my First Cats. I might even have stayed, but C. had to return to the dorm for her senior year. I couldn't afford Mrs. Lanniman's prices, anyway, or such invasion of my privacy; nor had it occurred to me to take in a roommate. As far as / knew my lover and me were the only queers in Bridgeport, Connecticut there was no way I could have shared my closet with a straight in those days. So I moved on into the back half of an already meager first floor owned by Nick the grocer. Nick did not appear every Saturday morning. As a matter of fact, he'd been tolerating my bounced checks at his store for years. But there was a problem. This little palace with a view of a gas station, and a barking German Shepherd guard dog for a neighbor, cost me \$110 a month. Cheap? Not on my secretarysalary of \$65 per week! I pooled food money with C. and our unenlightened straight friend Dorothy. The arrangement saved me in two ways: not only couldn't I afford to eat, but I couldn't cook and Dorothy could! When C. finally left the dorm to join me, we moved into my all-time favorite apartment, but lost Dorothy. C. couldn't cook either. We still have giggling fits when we remember our gourmet chicken recipe: place chicken breasts in frying pan; smear with lumps of

butter; salt and pepper. Turn on burner and smooch. If still unthawed when checked, return to smooching. Discuss whether to turn Cut open. Try and recall whether our

s' chickens had ever been red inside. Nice furnisheurs throw out and eat Cheerios able July 29 through usly, some lesbians when tiable. Call SKE at 294 ptent on refusing to learn sage at 284-5292. def future husbands, partners will have

## HELP WANT Street, in the heart was magical to us. row sideyard we affec-

LESBIAN FORUM Garden of Eden. Weekpreters for the heariner drunken man would sit out (about 2 houss the street and sing loud Spaf-4386 and. Our friend Walter lived across the hall wisited frequently with us. He particularly enjoyed my naked manikin Myra Breckinridge whom I'd wheeled home from the Goodwill across town. In broad daylight. We also had Marty and his girlfriend up the alleyway to visit — if we were in the mood for perpetual Rolling Stones, hallucinogenics and black light posters. Wow, man.

Aside from the toilet and shower in the hallway the apartment's main drawback was a no-pet policy. We thought to elude this by referring to our cats only in code. We called them — no, I don't remember why — Christmas Trees. When we were certain the landlord was at work we'd sneak out to walk the Christmas Trees in the Garden of Eden.

It was while we lived in that apartment that we met our first gay compatriots. I'd begun driving lessons, hoping the \$6500 a year from my new state job would allow me to buy the VW of my dreams. (How would I ever meet the payments on the price of a brand new Bug: \$2300 including tax and dealer prep!) My first driving instructor was male and by our second lesson he'd asked me out. I must have looked at him like he'd asked me to cook a chicken dinner, because Jane showed up for my third lesson.

Jane Dow. I was in love at first sight. I mean, she was good-lookin', a gay grown-up, and smooth as instant chocolate pudding (C's and my favorite gourmet dessert). I was so crushed out on her I almost flunked my driving test not because I couldn't parallel park, but because she was in the back seat. She'd explained almost immediately that the other driving teacher was gay, had been sounding me out, and passed me on to Jane when he neighborhood glowed with romance because she was near. We learned, then, that like attracts like, even when the likes don't know...

A classmate of C's moved in downstairs with another woman. Were they? Of course they were. Our excitement was high. We now knew three lesbians. Then a gay man from our school took another apartment in our building. It seemed. I couldn't go out in my new blue VW (which used \$3.50 in gas a week) without bumping into a gay.

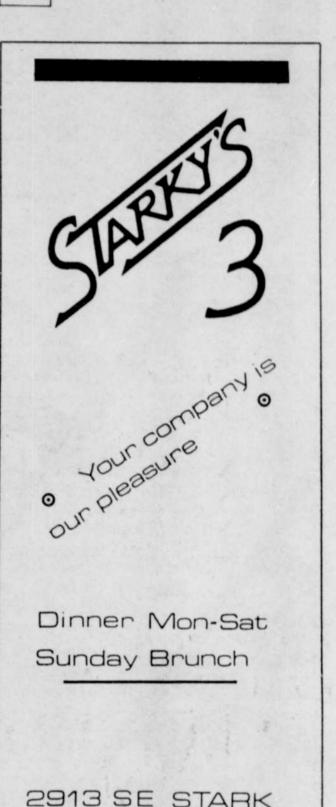
But we had a hard lesson to learn. The presence of queers did not make a community. Though we were separated only by stairways and walls, we remained isolated but for those casual encounters. Our boxlike domiciles were too full of fear. We'd learned to cook a chicken by then, but not to reach out to other people. We'd learned so well to protect ourselves from exposure, and internalized so deeply fear and disdain of ourselves and our kind, that while we sought safety in numbers, it wasn't a feeling of safety we found. We even feared people would notice that we lived in a building full of gays.

Soon after this I moved with C. to the outskirts of New Haven, a city that boasted a gay restaurant and bar. Perhaps here, we thought, we could find friends. Surely where there were more gays we'd have less trouble connecting. Fascintaed, moths drawn to the flame, we'd fled one isolation for another.

We lived in that last apartment together still alone, still lonely for our own, still helpless to give ourselves what we so badly needed. I couldn't figure out why it felt so much better to always watch for signs of gay neighbors, gay co-workers, than to actually get to know them. I didn't understand my ambivalent feelings and continued to listen, for a while, to my fear of running with a telltale crowd.

What a tale of love and fear! Of approach and withdrawal. Of hope and failure. I left the last apartment and my post graduation marriage then. Surely it had been the relationship which kept me wanting, kept me feeling unwhole? I, with thousands of other women and gay men in the early seventies, moved on to explore whole new concepts of shelter and community. And kept on moving from place to place in search of a whole healthy self I needed to see, to reflect, to accept.

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Just Out, July, 1986

was sure I was a dyke.

It wasn't long afterwards that we moved from the Garden of Eden to a four-story older apartment building around the corner from Jane's. Not that we saw her much, but the

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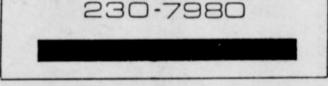
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