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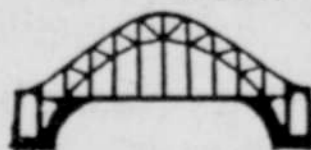


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Lesbianville

Gay men have their Castro, and we've claimed our little New England valley

by Lee Lynch

In April, the *National Enquirer* ran a piece called "Strange Town Where Men Aren't Wanted." Many of us have been aware of Northampton, Mass., for years. The *Enquirer* editors dubbed it "Lesbianville, U.S.A." and bashed it as a lesbian bastion. Their nastiness clearly demonstrates the level of primitive terror we dykes strike in the hearts of male bigots. The tone of the article is that of a blurb for a '50s pulp novel that might have been called *Sultry Greenwich Village Vixens in One Another's Arms—A True Story of Rabid Lust and Helpless Illicit Surrender*.

AMAZON TRAIL

Northampton is called "bizarre." Gay women live a "sicko lifestyle," and "you can even find them kissing and cuddling on Main Street!" (exclamation point the *Enquirer's*). Kissing and cuddling? Sounds like truly dangerous behavior to me. I can't wait till they discover our music festivals. We do even more radical stuff at those. Like stand in line for meals and go to workshops.

What's the big fuss? Why the threatened feelings? The idea of lesbians settling an area in vast numbers is a fantastic one! Gay men have their Castro, and we've claimed our little New England valley.

The approximately 10,000 dykes who live in the whole of the Pioneer Valley, as Northampton and its environs are called, (1) are visible, and (2) live without men. This isn't cricket. There are rules, you know. The random acts of violence that rocked Northampton a few years ago didn't work—maybe exposure will. Or maybe, 10,000 strong, nothing will drive them out. Maybe, in the face of this patriarchy that just lives on and on, getting more and more boring, we're triumphing!

A local resident tells me that the first article about Northampton was syndicated from the *Los Angeles Times*. It was left to the *Enquirer* to sensationalize the issue. That the male-dominated media created a mini-furor in the brains of good family men isn't such bad news. On the upside, local women-loving women are pleased that a new flood of dykes has been checking out the area as a place to settle.

Even individually we scare people. When I was younger I had frequent encounters of the third kind. Though not limited to ladies' rooms, it was in those bastions of femininity that my butch mannerisms and bearing most often incited horror. Can it be true that stray little dykes like I was—dressed all wrong, acting all wrong, with our hands firmly in other women's—will never have to suffer again? Just think of all the baby-dyke grocery baggers stuffing *Enquirers* in with someone's groceries, who'll stop in mid-act and read that headline. Then quit and climb in their little red dyke trucks with their cats, dogs and signs: "Lesbianville or Bust!"

Horried by a Northampton book shop that sells "Just Say No to Men" buttons, the *Enquirer* revealed, with sinister implications, that the store

has a lesbian fiction section. How gratifying to think that my books might be found there along with all the other stories of gentle love between women. The 28 *Enquirer* editors may not have intended to pass the glad word through a defaming broadside that preys on its readers' fears and weaknesses, but Lesbian Nation owes them one standing ovation for their work.

Even that cutesy appellation "Lesbianville" tickles me. Doesn't it sound like a great board game from your youth? Candy Land was one of my favorites. It was decorated with gumdrops and candy canes—Lesbianville will be adorned with strong-looking women and the symbols of our culture: labrys, potluck paraphernalia, two-steppin', booted dyke couples.

When non-gay men spot women who are obviously dykes, the reaction can escalate to name-calling, violence or vilification in print. As for women claiming space to live without men? Illegal! Isn't it? Not yet. And the political power of a community as large as this one unearthed by the media ought to be scary. Peacefully, and in great numbers, we are claiming our power.

My Pioneer Valley contact told me that what she's hearing from lesbians is a complaint that all the journalists are approaching the story of Lesbianville as bad news, as if the very mention of women who live without men is akin to reporting that Uzi-wielding terrorists are loose in America. One Northampton man, the resident said, wrote a letter to the editor complaining that the media weren't concentrating on the more positive aspects of the city. Looks like he's either going to have to move—or open his eyes to see that we're no blight on the land.

The key to the unease of traditional straight males seems to be the perceived unavailability of women. I mean, we are created to be their property, aren't we? Other than the sight of gay men, nothing scares these guys so much as the sight of women enjoying one another. That must be why the *Enquirer* finds it such an affront that the lesbian fiction section of that book shop has "a sign telling men to browse elsewhere." What if all those 10,000 sultry village vixens actually started living what their "Just Say No to Men" buttons preach?

Pioneer Valley is not an anomaly. Practically every city has its lesbian neighborhood now. Whole ZIP codes are coming to be known as good places for us to live. This is no militant homosexual agenda, either. If we are claiming our space, it's simply because that space has been denied us way too long.

What I'm doing to fight the OCA:

Paul Revere, with his simple act of mounting a horse and spreading an alarm, contributed to the defense of the foundations of our country. I have a computer, not a horse, but I use my words as warning shouts. Gay publications are the lanterns during this new assault on our basic freedoms.

As often as I feel strong enough, I wear an anti-OCA button on the streets of Southern Oregon. People ask what it means. I tell them. Join me. Simple communication is powerful!

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