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AMAZON TRAIL

Ellen backlash

It's hard to imagine that gentle comedian scaring anyone, but her bold stance has pushed more than a few buttons

by Lee Lynch

Not an hour passed after Lover and I watched the 20/20 interview of Ellen DeGeneres, when the answering machine for my straight job recorded a nasty anti-gay threat.

I thought Ellen was impressively articulate, composed and clear as she responded to questions. It was both a degrading and an ennobling interview. Degrading that any one of us needs to share details of her or his life that are nobody's business. Ennobling because this honest, open, engaging woman had the courage and personal strength to do so.

In the next days, as I lived my own version of a common lesbian life—earning money, working on a short story, snuggling with Lover, preparing our home for sale, labelling, cleaning, pricing and stuffing my car with donations for a wildlife fundraiser—I wrote dozens of thank-you notes to

got home. Then I passed the tape on to my pal Mean Norma Jean, who doesn't stay up that late. A couple of other friends who raise emus and horses so far out in the sticks they can't get Ellen's channel, went over to Norma's for a belated *Ellen* viewing.

All this hoopla over Ellen DeGeneres and k.d. lang and Melissa Etheridge has encouraged me to think we really may be gaining acceptance. I know the other end of the seesaw is weighted down by the gay-marriage and domestic partnership furors and the uphill battle for nondiscrimination bills. But prime-time television, for better or worse, has a lot of power in this country, and Ellen is grabbing some for us. It's great. She's great. Thank you, Ellen.

When I picked up the messages on my work machine there was one from the typist who hadn't gotten the reports I'd posted her. And then there



Ellen in my head. I worried about her safety. I rejoiced in her decision. I hoped a host of celebrities would follow suit.

At this point I have to confess that my interest in Ellen is not as a viewer, but as another gay woman. I hear that Ellen's show is wonderfully entertaining and funny. Television just isn't part of my life. I'm not being a snob, I'd simply rather read a book—Anne Tyler or even Tom Clancy.

Still, when messages came over the Net to call Ellen's advertisers I dutifully dialed to thank or reprimand them as the case might be.

The whole phenomenon reminds me of the Princess Di parties heterosexuals held for the wedding of the century. Women and men, dressed as if attending the royal wedding, gathered in front of televisions to drink champagne and shed a sentimental tear. I'll bet there was no corporate slinking away from that event.

Lover set up the VCR (yes, this is a femme job in our household) so I could tape the show and the next interview. We watched together when she

was that slimy, raspy voice, threatening, calling me lesbian, ending with a sinister laugh.

I'm trying to move, to get away from this county which I can confidently predict will boost Chrysler sales this year, which will certainly not tune in to *Ellen*.

Remember when the cartoon "For Better or Worse" depicted a gay kid coming out to his best friend? Our newspaper ran it on the editorial page to protect local children. Someone had to tape *Tales of the City* for us because the local public TV station didn't have Ellen's courage.

It's been a long time since we've had graffiti in our driveway or hostile incidents on the street. Was my phone call an expression of Ellen backlash? Did Ellen's humor and pride rankle some poor sick androgynous-voiced person so much that s/he needed to reach out and attack someone?

Apparently. As Ellen pointed out, "It comes from fear." Can you imagine that gentle comedian scaring anyone? Why, she looks just like anyone else. She even looks a little like Princess Di.