

*The Amazon Trail*  
September 2006  
By Lee Lynch

Tee Corinne  
1943 to 2006

Tee Corinne was a spectacular woman. When she died this August 27, I felt as if a giant redwood had been felled. The earth shook with the event's power, just as Tee shook the lesbian world with her work. I can't begin to encompass all of her achievements – can any of us? Not the least of them was her selfless ability to encourage others, whatever our passions, and to share what she knew, to teach.

I'm not sure even she completely comprehended the importance of her photographs, especially for lesbians and ultimately for the larger society. Pictures of lesbians with disabilities and fat lesbians were the first of their kind, and Tee brought an elegant, ground-breaking dignity to sexual imagery. The *Sinister Wisdom* poster of two women making love is, simply, an immortal work of art, both lovely and iconic, whose presence in lesbian homes is guaranteed. It was the first artwork I had professionally framed. Tee's circle of admirers has preserved and distributed her images worldwide.

"Dream food" was a favorite expression, and she fed dreams to us all. What Tee did with her art, her writing, her life and her charismatic networking was to empower us. By us, I mean not just lesbians, but everyone else she touched too: her art students, her old friends, her neighbors, the people who made prints of her work and the guy who built her garage. I know this because I had the good fortune to be close to Tee for a while. I remember a trip to Crater Lake with our then lovers. Snow lined the road higher than our cars. Tee slipped off her socks and Birkenstocks, leapt from the car and, laughing, frolicking, ran barefoot up a snow mound. Then, of course, we took pictures.

Those were some of the most productive years of my life thus far. Not that anything could stop me from writing stories of lesbian lives, but in Tee's presence, with her interest and support, I branched out from fiction while the fiction tumbled out of me at exhausting speeds.

Ours was a furiously creative household. We were always working. This column was born at the dinner table we shared in those years. While I was churning out stories, Tee was turning from working exclusively in black and white photography and drawings to painting in color and then using the colors to work out her demons, to explore her difficult childhood and difficult family. While she painted large portraits of lesbians important to our culture like Carol Seajay, she never stopped taking photographs. At every conference or visit she would recruit lesbian writers in particular to join her gallery. Every guest was treated to a tour of her work and encouraged to talk about her own. Many sat for Tee's passionate camera – I remember Marilyn Frye, Anna Livia, Elana Dykewoman, Barbara

Grier, Sarah Schulman – sometimes it seemed that all of lesbian nation passed through. Tee certainly knew them all.

She immortalized the linchpins of lesbian culture in her living room or on location. We would not have images of lesbian literary historian Jeannette Foster or the late Valerie Taylor without the fervor for archiving that took Tee to Jeannette's nursing home and to Valerie's tiny house in Tucson. She crafted a treasure trove of lesbian portraits and, whatever else she is remembered for, Tee will be well-represented in the first National Lesbian Museum partly for her art, but also because she led us to understand that what we were doing was important, that we were important, that our work had value.

Art wasn't the whole of it. I remember meeting Tee at Deb Edel and Joan Nestle's Upper West Side apartment, where the Lesbian Herstory Archives was then housed. Philosopher Sarah Hoagland joined Tee for a discussion of lesbian culture, an event that even then I knew was significant. Tee thought a lot about what lesbians had done and could do. She created a theater of possibility in which generations have since acted. She opened up the vocabulary of women's bodies and desire.

Whether at a Women's Studies Conference or the College Art Association, her seductive charm made her an ambassador of lesbian and women's art, beguiling academicians and other mainstream dignitaries with her belief in her own and other lesbians' art. A femme who could pass, Tee never did, and by being out, she legitimized the creative work of all lesbians and sometimes got us a seat at the table.

Of course, I, devoted to lesbian culture, fell in love with this woman I saw as its personification, although she was much more than that. When she asked me to marry her and we had our bonding ceremony, we thought we were a match made in heaven with our similar agendas and creative drives. But love, for the exuberant Tee, was a continuum: her lovers and friends, her subjects, art, writing, music, her dogs and cats, her land, every new morning – Tee celebrated it all. I can only hope that now she is in some sort of hereafter made of the love, beauty and physical delights she embodied, frolicking barefoot in the clouds.

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