

News & views

Vision • Integrity • Quality

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Confident And Candid, McCloskey Returns to U of I After Sex Change

by Charles Bullard, Des Moines Register Staff Writer

Iowa City, IA — Uncle Donald is now Aunt Deirdre. Donald McCloskey, 54, a University of Iowa professor of economics and history, left the school to teach for a year in the Netherlands and returned to Iowa City last week for the start of the spring semester as Deirdre McCloskey.

McCloskey is still a highly regarded, Harvard-educated economist and historian, but she is now a female professor instead of a male professor.

"I am now officially in every way you can name a woman," McCloskey told her economic history class Tuesday. "That's, of course, how I want to be treated." McCloskey has been taking female hormones and living as a woman in the Netherlands since the fall of 1995 and underwent a sex-change operation in Australia last June. "I want you to treat me as you might treat your aunt," McCloskey told her class. "Think of me as your Aunt Deirdre."

Over tea in her antique-filled Victorian home, McCloskey said her students will notice a marked change from Donald's macho teaching methods. "They'll observe a more womanly style. Instead of being Uncle Donald, I'll be Aunt Deirdre."

The class of undergraduate and graduate students sat in silence as McCloskey talked about her transition. "Now, this will be embarrassing at first, but if we're straightforward with each other, it doesn't have to be," she said.

McCloskey said she defines herself as a professor of economics and history, not as a transsexual. But she said she could not change genders in secret, so she felt she needed to be forthright with her students. "I'm appealing to people's best qualities," McCloskey told her class. "I ask you to see a professor here, a female professor who is very anxious to instruct you. It seems to me that appealing to you directly like this is healthier than somehow leaving it to some sort of rumor mill."

McCloskey said she is not ashamed of what she's done. "If there's nothing shameful about being a woman, then there's nothing shameful about becoming one."

McCloskey's decision to become a woman after 30 years of marriage and two children was made public in November 1995, but McCloskey was on a sabbatical then and left soon afterward to teach for a year in Rotterdam. So Tuesday's economic history class was the first exposure U of I students have had to Deirdre McCloskey.

The students seemed to take the news in stride. And university officials also have accepted [the] transformation. "The position that the university is taking is this is an extraordinarily fine faculty member and we're glad she's back," said Ann Rhodes, vice president for university relations.

Said Gary Fethke, dean of the College of Business Administration: "The professor who's returned to Iowa may look different from the one who left, but the essential characteristics are the same. An extremely intelligent, insightful person with a terrific sense of humor left and a person with those same characteristics has returned. From our perspective, that's what counts."

McCloskey is encouraged by the support she's received from U of I administrators and fellow faculty members, especially females. Lola Lopes, a professor and associate dean of business administration, said female faculty members accept McCloskey as one of their own but "it would be awkward to have to pretend that there hasn't been a major change." "We're meeting someone who's new and yet it's someone that we've known for a long time," said Lopes. "It's like meeting someone that you have communicated with for a long time by e-mail or in letters and then you come to meet them face to face. They're someone that you know and yet it's a new face to you."

McCloskey spent tens of thousands of dollars of her own money to make that face look feminine. She endured hundreds of hours of electrolysis to get rid of Donald's beard. She bought an expensive hairpiece to cover Donald's bald spot. She had vocal cord surgery and speech therapy in a largely unsuccessful attempt to raise Donald's voice.

continued page 6

Renaissance

Chapter & Affiliate Information

Chapters

Delaware

Wilmington, Delaware: meets second Saturday of each month. Write for info to: PO Box 5656, Wilmington, DE 19808. Phone: 302-376-1990 or email to: [redacted]@aol.com

Pennsylvania

Greater Philadelphia: Write Renaissance GPC, 987 Old Eagle School Rd., Suite 719, Wayne, Pa. 19087. Meets third Saturday of the month in King of Prussia. Doors open 8 pm all year 'round. Call 610-975-9119 for information.

Lehigh Valley/Pocono area: Renaissance Lehigh Valley, PO Box 3624, Allentown, PA 18106. Meetings on the second Saturday of the month in the Allentown area. Call for directions and more information, 610-821-2955.

Lower Susquehanna Valley: Write Renaissance LSV, Box 2122 Harrisburg, PA 17105. Meets on the first Saturday of the month. Call 717-780-1LSV (780-1578) or send email to: <lsv@ezonline.com>.

Affiliates

California

Orange County: Powder Puffs of California, PO Box 1088, Yorba Linda, CA 92686, or email to <ppoc@aol.com>

Connecticut

Bridgeport/New Haven: connecticutView, c/o Denise Mason, PO Box 2281, Devon, CT 06460. Monthly newsletter and activities.

Georgia

Atlanta: The American Educational Gender Information Service (AEGIS), PO Box 33724, Decatur, GA 30033-0724 or call 770-939-0244, or email to <aegis@mindspring.com>. Information resources & referrals.

Atlanta: Atlanta Gender Explorations (A.G.E.), PO Box 77562, Atlanta, GA 30357, 770-939-2128.

Illinois

Chicago: The Chicago Gender Society, PO Box 578005, Chicago, IL 60657, 708-863-7714.

Louisiana

New Orleans: The Gulf Gender Alliance, PO Box 56836, New Orleans, LA 70156-6836, 504-833-3046.

New Jersey

N. Central Jersey: Monmouth/Ocean Trans Gender, (MOTG), write PO Box 8243, Red Bank, NJ 07701. Call 908-219-9094. Email: [redacted]@aol.com

Titusville: Meetings are 1st Saturday of the month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Washington Crossing. Call Terri [redacted] at 609-[redacted].

New York

Manhattan: Metropolitan Gender Network (MGN), write 561 Hudson St., Box 45, New York, NY 10014, or call 201-794-1665, Ext. 332.

Long Island: New York GIRL & Partners, PO Box 456, Centereach, NY 11720, Call 516-732-5115 for info.

Long Island: Long Island Femme Expression (LIFE), PO Box 3015, Lake Ronkonkoma, NY 11779-0147. Phone: 516-283-1333

Oklahoma

Central Oklahoma: Sooner Diversity, part of the Central Oklahoma Transgender Alliance (COTA). Contact, Rachel [redacted], P.O. Box 575, Norman, OK 73070.

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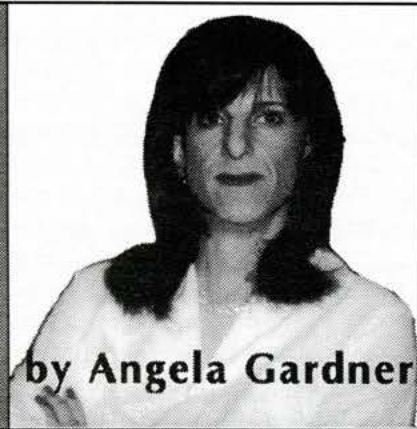
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Local Calendar

March

- 1 Ren. LSV
- 1 NJ Support
- 8 MOTG
- 8 Ren. Lehigh Valley
- 8 Ren. Delaware
- 15 Ren. GPC
- 22 Night of A Thousand Gowns, Imperial Court of New York

News Beat & Reminder



by Angela Gardner

Time marches on and here we are, slogging into March. As the optimistic winds of Spring begin to waft our way I must comment on a disturbing event in the transgender community.

I used to jokingly tell people that if two crossdressers got into a fight and one got killed, the other one would make sure the dead girl was changed back into male clothes before she called the cops and turned herself in. This, while strictly a joke, was illustrative of how the community would respect its members rights to security and keep people's secret safe.

Recently, an Affiliate organization trashed this unwritten law. I'm not naming the group as I don't wish to add to their troubles. It seems the group's leader acted erratically, spent group funds on personal items, drank too much and attended meetings drunk—in general, just causing trouble. The final straw came in the form of a demand that the group pay for a personal computer for the leader.

Objections were raised at a meeting of the group officers and in a democratic organization a no vote by a majority of the ruling body would be the end of the matter. The leader, let's call her Ms. X, decided that wasn't the end of it. She believed that anyone who opposed her was an enemy. Since one person on the board was most adamant in opposing the computer purchase Ms. X decided to attack her enemy. She informed this person's family and employer about their crossdressing. Ms. X outed her enemy! She has threatened to deal with others who oppose her in the same manner.

This is the action of a disturbed individual and it certainly goes against the policies of Renaissance, and against just plain decency. We have always urged, whenever possible, members come out about their crossdressing to those in their life who matter most. It makes life much easier when you don't have to constantly worry about the safety of your secret. For many people it is very hard, if not just plain impossible to even imagine telling anyone about their secret life. To use the threat of exposure to force them to do things is nothing less than blackmail.

How can a group offer support and help to closeted crossdressers when the group's own leader becomes a threat to everyone who joins the group? If you disagree with her, you're "out." This is no longer support. This is no longer a democratic group. This is a dictatorship. The only council I can offer is to head her off at the pass. The members of this group should go to the people that matter to them, and in the right way, gently and with as much information as possible, come out. Then Ms. X will be deprived of her biggest weapon. Then the group can start to control itself again.

Renaissance National does not interfere with any Affiliate's or Chapter's internal policies unless those policies conflict with a national policy. That has been a rule since we first started establishing Chapters and Affiliates. The National Board will have to discuss this problem at its next meeting. In the meantime all I can say to members of the Affiliate in question is good luck.

Can You Get Caned For That?

Dateline Singapore—where you can get caned for crime. Remember that kid who got four or five good whacks for vandalism? Well, it just goes to show that the country is fairly uptight. Who is the person in that humorless country who dares to make fun of the powers that be? A drag queen who works in the Boom Boom Room. That's who. Peter from the U.K. faxed (oh boy, transatlantic fax) me the story of drag artiste Kumar. Kumar says, "My jokes are really about Singaporean life, how frustrated we are, how starved we are of humor and about all the things no one dares say."

Kumar uses his drag to allow him to make fun of things that a comedian in male attire would never get away with. Well, I think it works that way most places. I mean where would I be as a social satirist without my dress and pumps? Stop, it's a rhetorical question.

Interestingly enough, Kumar had to audition for his job as a Singaporean fun poker. Not for the Boom Boom Room, for the police. In order to ascertain that his act was clean enough to be presented in public Kumar was ordered to perform for a room full of stony faced police. He thought that he was heading for a firing squad when no one laughed at his "A" material. Finally one female officer broke up over a particularly tasty one liner and Kumar knew he had them. He found out later that they were under orders not to laugh. I wonder if the female officer got caned? Or canned?

Kumar thinks that perhaps his country is loosening up a bit. Thanks to the efforts of drag queens everywhere, I think that can be said about many place that were thought of as backward and repressed. I know I've tried to do my bit. Keep up the good work Kumar.

Just When You Thought It Was Safe...

They come out of nowhere, the 1996 Renni Awards! Dina Amberle has been the driving force behind the prestigious awards for several years, and a month or so ago she polled the

continued next page

News Beat...

Greater Philadelphia Chapter members to pick the ladies who act as inspiration to us all. And... the envelope please! The 1996 Renni Award winners are **Demi Moore**, **Julia Louis Dreyfus**, and **Madonna**!

The awards are given for the year's "most inspiring feminine images" from the fields of film, television, and news makers, as selected by the members of Renaissance GPC. Demi Moore portrayed the resourceful single mother and exotic dancer in the film, *Strip-tease*. Julia Louis Dreyfus displays her considerable comic acting talent each week on the long-running hit series, *Seinfeld*. Madonna receives the coveted Renni for the latest twist in her ever-changing public persona—that of mother—with the recent birth of her daughter Lourdes.

Other nominees for this year's Renni Awards included Kristin Scott Thomas, Rosie O'Donnell, Carolyn Bessette Kennedy, Pamela Anderson (Lee?), and Madeleine Albright. This year's winners join past recipients Hillary Clinton, Sharon Stone, Gillian Anderson, Princess Diana, and Sandra Bullock.

Speaking of Winners

I had the opportunity to attend the **Miss Gay Pennsylvania U.S. of A.** pageant on February ninth in New Hope, Pennsylvania. This is the state preliminary to the national event. The ladies who compete are all skilled and beautiful, and the production values are high. The thing I really love is where the event unfolds. They hold it in the New Hope fire hall. You mingle with a cross section of the New Hope area population—gay, straight, young, old, glamorous and plain. Everybody shows up for a down home pasta and sausage dinner followed by a night of female impersonation. New Hope, what a town.

Monica Rey, the fabulous babe who hosts the Monday night Drag Wars at the Cartwheel, the top gay nightspot in town, was the pageant

MC. Her opening number was very dramatic, as she lip synched to some of the most theatrical and moving passages from *Evita*. She brought home exactly how great the power of illusion can be when, at the stirring climax, she reduced the tragic and glamorous *Evita* to a shaven headed drag queen by suddenly removing her wig. She still looked pretty good once you got used to the new look.

The contestants were fabulous, the entertainers were great and the judges were wonderful. The reigning Miss Gay U.S. of A., **Natasha Richards**, did some entertaining and some of the MC'ing chores and the oldest queen in New Hope got a special award. (She's 72! Go Josie!) All in all it was a lovely evening. Except for the loud mouthed GG sitting at the table behind my party. She talked and talked and whined and laughed. She was generally obnoxious. She was like one of the characters from *Ab Fab*... funny to watch on television but hell to be near in real life. The gay men at my table were all extremely annoyed, but, it was up to moi to speak to the young lady. I informed her that I hadn't paid \$30 for a ticket just to listen to her rattle on with her pals, some of whom would yell out non sequiturs like, "Rock & Roll!" at the slightest provocation. Yes, I remember my first mixed drink.

Fortunately the young lady and her pals had to get up early in the morning and they left at intermission. We all got to relax and enjoy the rest of the show. And I didn't have to make anymore death threats. My attorney (I never travel without one) cautioned me to stop after the third threat but it took a couple more to get rid of them.

One interesting thing was a short speech given by the reigning Miss Gay U.S. of A.. She said a few words about the prejudice in some parts of the gay community toward transgenderists. The thing was, she didn't use the word "transgenderists." She said she gets a lot of shade from gay guys who think there's something weird about her having breast implants (hubba hubba, does she have breast implants!) and living full time as a woman. She even said that she identifies as a gay man.... but,

I thin she needs a little more information, **Baba Louie**.

This is the big problem in the transgendered community. (Just one straight, drag queen, crossdresser's opinion, mind you.) The common factor of the T Gene exists in many people, across racial, sexual, economic and whatever other differences between people that you can think of. I would see Ms. Richards as a transgenderist, she thinks of herself as a gay male. (Did **not** look like one.) How do we decide what people are? Well, I think it's a matter of having as much information as you can about the nature of the phenomena. If you never hear about things then you can't evaluate yourself by their light. When fully informed it's up to each individual to decide how they want to identify. Then, it's up to the rest of us to treat everyone with respect.

If you want to attend the festivities next year contact the producers of the event, Albacore Productions at 215-862-2709.

See For Yourself

On Saturday April twelfth Miss Gay U.S. of A. will appear at the **Miss Northern States U.S. of A.** contest in the city of Philadelphia. The event will take place on the campus of Drexel University and honey, those queens are gonna work the student body. Come out and see the show. One of the girls works with a snake. For more information call 215-735-6114 or 215-769-0952. The pageant takes over the Mandell Theater at 32nd and Chestnut. It's slated to begin at 7:30PM. Get your sequins shined up and I'll see you there.

A Few Notes

Who has the best legs? We don't really need a contest for that. Me of course, but unfortunately none of the 1000 people surveyed by Hanes hosiery knew that. I guess I'll have to make more house calls. No, they picked **Tina Turner** and **Jean-Claude Van Damme**. Female runners-up were **Jamie Lee Curtis** and **Cindy Crawford** and 1996's No. 1 second guy was man-in-kilt **Mel Gibson**. **John F. Kennedy Jr.** and

Tom Cruise tied for third.

Mel would have got number one if he'd have just shaved those gams. Of course, anyone's legs look better when shaved and properly clothed in sheer stockings. I think that would be a better test. Shave everyone's legs, put them in stockings and pumps and just show the legs to the judges. Maybe Van Damme's would have beat Tina's. It's just an idea. Twisted, but an idea.

So there I was, watching Letterman on January 30th and Dave ran a little skit that was a take off on **Howard Stern's** movie *Private Parts*. Rupert Gee, the intrepid deli man, stood in for Howard and at one point was dressed in a gold lamé gown to appear on a fake *Late Night* with someone portraying Dave. As parodies go it was pretty amusing and Rupert didn't look bad in drag, which is always a plus.

It was some kind of drag week, cause just the night before hard-assed New Orleans judge **Larry Hagman** appeared in drag on his new show *Orleans*. The judge and his friends were all in drag for a party on a boat. Somebody gets kidnapped and wigs get knocked askew. I haven't seen much about that show since, so maybe the sight of Hagman in a frock was too much for his network. If it's still on, keep your eyes open for a rerun.

Funnyman **Jim Carrey** did a photo layout of outrageous characters for *Premier* magazine. Among the strange assortment of wackies and nut buckets, Jim presented a glimpse of his inner beauty by appearing in drag. Of course he yucked it up with big, red plastic lips, but he was in drag and working it.

John Leguizamo's movie *The Pest* was finally released to theaters on February 7th. If I were you I'd drop everything and run out to see it. Because it's so great? No. If you have any hope of seeing it you'd better get there soon. It may be gone to videoland already. This one has "one week wonder" written all over it. It was shot long ago and shelved. Now it's appeared without a great deal of hype. If you wait another week you will have to wait a bit before visiting the video store. Don't worry cause that's where it's headed.

Does he wear a dress in this one? I heard he does but by the time the editor's done, who can tell. It looks like a fun film though and you'll recognize the villain from lots of other flicks. I probably won't get to the theater in time to catch it so let me know if Leguizamo does drag. Heck, I'm still trying to see the re-release of *Star Wars*. I have been told by reliable sources that Lucas put some drag queens in the bar scene. How you would tell with aliens like that is beyond me, but I'm willing to try and pick them out.

The Pen Pal Program remains under the administration of the lovely and organized Georgia [REDACTED]. It was announced last month that Georgia wanted to downsize her involvement and we asked if anyone would like to take over as Pen Pal Administrator. After all, you get a nifty title and the job's not that tough. Is Georgia staying cause she loves keeping the list? No, nobody else wants the stinking job. Georgia has agreed to help us out and administer a list that is distributed less

frequently. We'll also be keeping the prisoner portion of the list in the national office. Thanks to Georgia for hanging in and shame on the rest of you for learning that old army lesson, "never volunteer," all to well.

Must go sweeties. Bargains for all and to all a good night. If you have any comments, tasty dish, or scathing critiques... send them to me at PO Box 530, Bensalem, PA 19020 or by email: <bensalem@bbs.cpcn.com>.



Lifetime Memberships Available

The national board announces Lifetime Memberships are now available for \$500. This will insure that you will always receive *Renaissance News & Views* plus any other membership benefits. A Lifetime Membership is only good at the national level. Chapter dues and fees will still be assessed.

The advantages of Lifetime Membership include insulation from rate increases and no worries about renewing, plus your contribution helps Renaissance continue its educational work. Lifetime Members will be recognized on a plaque in the office and published once a year in *RN&V*.

We regret to inform our readers that the second installment of the article "In Passing" published last month will not be printed at the request of the author.

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NGLTF Plan For 2nd Clinton Term Calls For Action & Leadership

Washington, DC.. February 4, 1996—The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) released a report calling for bolder action and leadership from a second Clinton Administration on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender issues. The report "A Call for Presidential Action: A Blueprint on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues," urges the Administration to ensure that gays are woven into the fabric of our society as equal partners, once and for all.

"We urge bolder action and leadership from the Administration to assure that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons are treated with fairness and compassion," said Kerry

Lobel, Executive Director of NGLTF. While there are a number of issues addressed in the report, Lobel noted civil rights, family and youth issues are of highest priority for the Task Force.

"The lack of legal recognition for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender relationships means parents can and do lose custody of their children because of their sexual orientation or gender identity," said Lobel.

The report calls for White House action to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; increased government action in the face of increasing hate crimes against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people; protection for gay youth, who

are at higher risks for suicide and violence; and ending the continuing witch hunts against gays in the military.

"This Administration must address the attacks on our civil rights, on our youth and on our families," noted Helen Gonzales, NGLTF Public Policy Director and author of the report. "The President should set a high moral tone of fairness and justice for all Americans, both through his actions and his words," said Gonzales.

For copies of the report, please contact Tracey Conaty at 202-332-6483 extension 3303. It is also available at Task Force Online, NGLTF's web site at <<http://www.nglftf.org>>.



Iron City Says YES To TG Inclusion

The City of Pittsburgh has passed legislation which amends their anti-discrimination ordinances to include transgendered people by defining the term "sex." This definition did not exist previously. The definition is as follows: "Sex: the gender of a person, as perceived, presumed or assumed by others, including those who are changing or have changed their gender identification." This change was included in a bill that the Human Relations Commission of Pittsburgh proposed to City Council. The purpose of this bill was to re-codify existing ordinances to meet HUD standards. By making changes to

the ordinances Pittsburgh is now entitled to an additional \$27,000 annually in federal funds. The definition of sex was not actually necessary for this, but it was politically expedient to include this new definition in the bill.

The final vote of the City Council was 8 to 1 in favor with all council persons understanding the significance of the gender language. There was never a call for a public hearing, which the one dissenting vote could have requested. Ten days after the vote the transgender inclusion language automatically took effect.

Pittsburgh resident, and supporter

of the twenty three month effort to pass the legislation, according to Wendi Miller, a Pittsburgh trans-activist. She continued, "We in Pittsburgh are all very proud of our local government officials and their understanding of these human rights issues. We worked with the system and the system worked for us. Now our hope is that others work locally to accomplish this same goal. It's a web of understanding and acceptance of diversity that is slowly growing and eventually will cover everyone of us, but we all have to continue to work for it to happen."



McCloskey...

McCloskey said she hasn't had any second thought. "I've not had a moment of doubt. I thank God I was born to be a woman. I thank God that in this great country I can be a woman for the rest of my life, that I can be who I want to be, who I am."

McCloskey said she encountered no problems in the Netherlands and doesn't expect any in Iowa. "People in Iowa treat each other with respect. I love this state. It's been kind to me. I'm as Iowan as a non-native can be."

McCloskey has been living as a woman only since Thanksgiving of 1995, but Donald already is fading from her memory. "I've started to forget what it's like to be a man and have started to be puzzled by men, by how they act," she said.

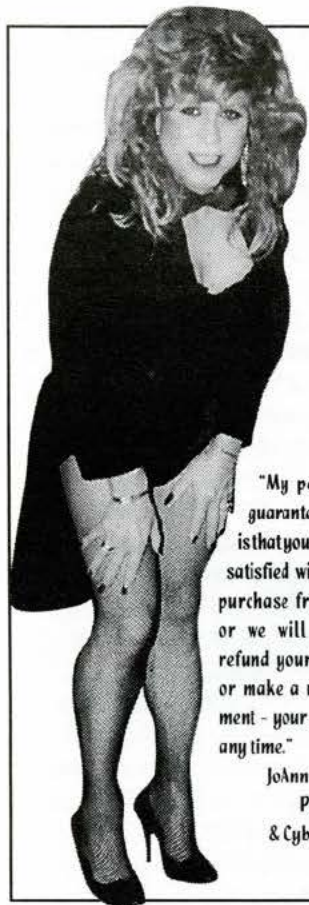
McCloskey is working on a general-audience, non-academic book about her transformation, and publishers are expressing interest. She has been featured in Harper's and the London Times. The New Yorker sent a writer to the Netherlands to interview her.

McCloskey, who labored in relative

anonymity as Donald, is bemused by her newfound fame as Deirdre. "I didn't do this to become famous as a transsexual. I'm interested in becoming famous as an economist and historian." But having been a man for 53 years places McCloskey in a unique position to illuminate the differences between the sexes. "It's like being your own sister, your own twin sister," she said. "I'm not ashamed of having been Donald and I'm not ashamed of that man. He was OK."

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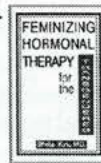
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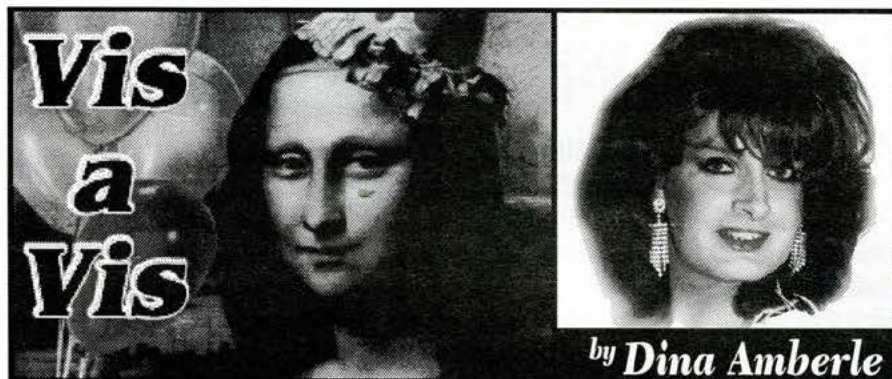
2. The TGForum Resource Center

<http://www.tgfmall.com/>

3. The TGForum Community Center

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operated web presence. Contact us about getting your organization or
business on the WorldWideWeb. [webmaster@tgfmall.com]



The Academy Award nominations came out this week (as I write this) and I was happy to see that all of the nominated pictures dealt with transgender issues. Unfortunately, I've been so busy reading transvestite support group newsletters that I can't afford the time it takes to watch a film. Nevertheless, here are my capsule summaries of the nominated movies.

The English Patient recounts through a series of flashbacks the events leading up to a British soldier's decision to go for sex reassignment surgery. As he lies in bed, the protagonist's less-than-heroic secret is laid bare by the arrival of a mysterious transsexual who lost her thumbs at the hands of a myopic surgeon during her own SRS operation. Filmed in and around the desert mountain landscape near Trinidad, Colorado, site of the famous SRS clinic.

Fargo is the quirky tale of a drag queen who devotes her life and lip-synch routine to impersonate country and western singer Donna Fargo in the unlikely locale of a small town in up-state Minnesota.

Jerry Maguire is the inspirational story of a young FtM transsexual sports agent working in the highly competitive world of women's figure skating. Features lots of cameos by famous transgendered skaters wearing size 13 double-runner skates.

Secrets and Lies is a character study of one married crossdresser's various subterfuges to hide his stash of wigs and high heels from his unsuspecting wife as he sneaks off to support group meetings and drag shows without her knowledge.

And finally, the Australian entry

Shine is the heart wrenching story of a transvestite battling the inevitable emulsion of oil-based foundations. The film's most famous moment comes when our "heroine" rummages through her handbag crying in anguish, "Pressed powder! Where the hell's my pressed powder?!"

On Our Hobby Horse

The editor of the *Emerald City Newsletter* in Seattle, Wash., Anna Haas, wrote her monthly column, *Blossoms*, about the lack of input from the membership of their group.

She says many other types of clubs, from bowling, to model railroading to kites, seem to get more participation from their membership than our cross-dressing organizations. "Excuse me if I am wrong," she says, "but I do believe that what and who we are hardly comes under the flag of being a 'hobby.' What we are is very real and personal. I would think that we would want to be putting in as much effort to the 'cause' as possible." From that point, she urges the group to become more active in the business affairs of their organization and participate more in the social functions of the group.

This is a topic which has confounded many group officers across the country and around the world. Our organizations offer a unique opportunity for members to take advantage of everything we have to offer, yet participation beyond attendance at regular meetings is minimal.

The key can be found in Anna's hypothesis that crossdressing is more than just a "hobby" for the membership. One would certainly think this true. But is it, really? I think that for

the vast majority of members of cross-dressing groups, the activity is more akin to a "hobby" than a "cause."

Dressing up for monthly meetings may be a rare opportunity for most members, but it is little more than a pastime given the demands of their 'normal' lives and the necessary secretiveness of the whole endeavor. And that need for secrecy is also a major inhibiting factor for most members getting too involved in their support groups' affairs.

We can be thankful for those individuals in our community-at-large who get involved with broader issues to advance our "cause." But if we could turn the clock back maybe 15 years, would it have been better to promote cross-dressing as a "hobby" rather than as a deep psychological need we all share? The public understands "hobbies." Getting the public to understand psychological compulsions—and then accept them as normal—takes time. And we are still struggling under that burden, and probably will be for quite some years into the future.

PAC-ing It In

JoAnn Roberts led her *Hot Buzz* column last month with the news that she has "dissociated" herself from the GPAC organization where she served as a Board member and policy advisor. GPAC was designed to be a coalition of transgender organizations working together via representatives for political action on transgender issues. [News of GPAC's formation and mobilization conference were reported in this newsletter previously.]

JoAnn discovered that only two short months after the representatives signed the GPAC Articles of Association, a cabal of Board members attempted an end run around the full Board creating an "Executive Committee" that was not sanctioned by the Articles. JoAnn also reported that despite the large number of organizations that signed on for GPAC at the November "mobilization meeting", only Renaissance fulfilled the requirements for membership verification, and only one other group had even applied formally for membership as of mid-January.

I am shocked and dismayed by this

turn of events but, unfortunately, it seems to follow a too-familiar pattern for large transgender organizations. IFGE and Tri-Ess have had similar controversies (seemingly behind them now) centering on Board executives deciding to run things by personal fiat.

Although I am not well-versed in this topic, I imagine that other movements (e.g. civil rights and gay rights groups) have also labored through this tendency to break down under personal or factional disputes. If CPAC does indeed founder (as JoAnn seems to believe it will—or already has), perhaps our next attempt at this sort of thing should first entail a study of how other established political action organizations have insured their cohesiveness in the early stages of formation.

Nobody's Home

We received a newsletter we've never seen before called *Christian Home* published in Chicago by an organization of the same name, and it is a very strange brew indeed. Purportedly a Christian publication, and featuring several articles of a religious bent, the newsletter promotes the "moral superiority" of women, and carries disturbing personal ads from "submissive" men, as well as some photos and artwork of sexually ambiguous pre-teen children that made me uncomfortable just having the thing in my house.

One article was noteworthy for a reason the author did not intend, I'm sure. Carol M. wrote about the travails of Matthew Stickney, the Vermont high school student who was suspended for crossdressing. She recounts her belief that the furor over the teen's crossdressing was because it threatened the core values of male supremacists. This point of view is defensible and could have been the basis for an interesting essay on what makes crossdressing so threatening to some.

However, the author concludes the article in a bizarre scenario that typifies the twisted philosophy of this organization. Carol M. goes off on a dream of a future where any high school boy who wishes to crossdress at school could do so freely. "There will be enough boys wearing dresses to school

that they will be able to organize Sissy Clubs to discuss fashion and makeup and to go shopping together."

If Renaissance is on the mailing list of Christian Home, I urge whoever is in charge of such things to write a letter and get us the hell off it ASAP.

Happily Married: Aren't They All?

The *Connecticut Outreach Society News* is published in Farmington, Connecticut and carried an interesting item by member Kara [REDACTED]. Kara is the Internet correspondent for COS and she reprinted a piece of email received from a "happily married" man who had never crossdressed because he feared his wife would divorce him if she found out. The writer furthermore hoped to meet a crossdresser for a relationship: "...not just sexual. I've never been with a man before, but I would really like to meet a CD or TV."

Kara wrote her analysis of this "typical" correspondence because it "brings up a few of the 'dark side of transgenderism' issues." She posed three questions for the person who wrote this letter and those of us who have received this type of advance ourselves.

"I always wonder why married people describe themselves as 'happily married' as they cruise for extramarital relationships?"

"Why is crossdressing so bad that a wife would consider divorce, yet a discreet affair with a transgendered person is considered acceptable?"

"I wonder if this person considers an affair with a genetic girl as 'cheating' but would consider a relationship with a TG person somehow less than cheating? And do we encourage that view by our actions?"

I'm sure that many of us have been on the receiving end of pickup lines that reflect the same mindset as noted by Kara. How many times have you heard, "I'm not gay" from some seemingly harmless fellow who is trying to break you down for some hanky-panky? And doesn't it seem that it is assumed we are "easier" than real women by the speed with which they make their moves? It can make you feel superior to brush aside those advances, but it still leaves the disturbing

realization that some people have very poor assumptions about us.

Inns & Outs

One of the most talked about of the Super Bowl commercials this year was one for Holiday Inns where they showed an attractive woman at a class reunion and listed the expensive "improvements" that helped make her so stunning. Then the onlookers are surprised to find out that the "she" was formerly a "he."

The commercial employed a genetic female, not a transsexual. But apparently the fallout was sufficiently negative for Holiday Inns to pull the ad from further rotation. Of all the millions tuned in to the game, only about twenty people called to complain. *USA Today* quoted a spokesperson for the American Conservative Union who said that the ad "attacked" the "cultural norms that so many of us adhere to and value."

That is the complaint from the right and I wonder if we'll hear a complaint from the left, namely the transsexual activists who may be offended that the commercial did not employ a real transsexual person.

Bright Spots In A Sea Of The Bland

One of the nice developments in newsletterland is the growing use of photographs of members at work and play in the various groups.

Some of the correspondents in other newsletters deserve a brief word of thanks and support for lighting up what can be a very bleak landscape with their photos and interesting editorial work.

Darcy [REDACTED] of ETVC in San Francisco is a beautiful blonde who writes a very readable "Out on the Town" column for *The Channel* newsletter. In a recent issue, she was also a model for the Romantasy corset shop advertisement, well worth a look-see for anyone interested in form and figure delightfully displayed.

Elaine Lerner is a very attractive newcomer to the pages of the *Northwest Passages* newsletter of NWGA in

continued on page 24



Gender Reflections Gender Reflections

by **Barbara F. Anderson**
M.S.W., Ph.D.

Shopping For A Mental health Counselor

What considerations arise in shopping for a gender-sensitive therapist? Competence, cost, comfort, and convenience are the crucial issues. Your primary concern will probably be how to locate a competent practitioner. You will want to be sure that the therapist you select is well-trained and experienced as a counselor as well as TG-knowledgeable and friendly.

A psychotherapist qualified to treat transgender individuals must have established counseling credentials such as State licensure in psychology, social work, marriage and family counseling, psychiatry or nursing or certification in sex therapy, as well as training and experience in working with clients with gender concerns. Know that to obtain licensure a therapist does not have to demonstrate any familiarity, let alone competence, with transgender issues. And, certification as a sex therapist does not guarantee counseling competence. Perhaps the best way to identify a TG-sensitive competent therapist is by contacting transgender organizations which distribute resource lists of "tried and true" professionals.

In assessing the competence of a therapist, you will want to inquire about the practitioner's basic credentials (education, supervision, licensure) as well as training and experience with TG issues. The best training and experience is obtained in settings specializing in the treatment of TG clients. Supervisors are usually highly trained themselves, current professional literature on the subject is subscribed to and membership in professional associations focusing on the study and understanding of gender dysphoria is encouraged. There are however, few of these training settings.

The next choice is to locate a counselor who identifies him/herself as a "gender specialist." You will want to know about their familiarity with the wide range of gender concerns that people have as well as with your specific issues. You should also ask in which

professional gender-oriented organizations the provider holds membership.

Or you may wish to consult with your doctor. There is an informal network of health care providers to the transgender community who know each others' work and refer to those professionals who are known to be competent. A less reliable source is the Yellow Pages. Keep in mind that this is a form of self-promotion and accuracy of claims is not guaranteed. In situations in which practitioners who are competent in their field but not experienced in transgender care are available, one who is willing to research the subject of transgenderism and/or obtain consultation or supervision should be considered.

If you seek treatment in an agency or organization where there is a hierarchy of professionals ranging from director through supervisors, clinicians and trainees, be flexible in your expectation of who will be your counselor. You can be treated competently by a trainee or intern in such a setting. The advantages are that such a provider is closely supervised, exposed to the most up-to-date counseling approaches, and has fewer patients to whom more attention can be devoted. If however, you do not feel confident in the clinician assigned you, request a meeting with a supervisor and be prepared to explain your concerns.

Cost of treatment should be presumed to be negotiable until advised otherwise. In your first contact, state your financial limitations up front. It is appropriate to ask if the provider offers a sliding scale based on income, extended payment plan or a brief initial consultation at no charge. If you have any health insurance, make sure that you know what services are covered as well as which are not. This can save embarrassment later on. Should your financial circumstances change once you are in treatment, don't hesitate to tell your counselor.

Once having selected a therapist and at-

tended an initial meeting, consider your level of comfort with him/her, the office setting, and support staff (receptionists, etc.). Be prepared for some sense of uncertainty, but ask yourself if you feel treated with respect, concern, and competence. Is there an air of professionalism, stability and consistency in the office? Are you addressed as you requested? Are your questions answered to satisfaction?

Convenience may seem like a trivial consideration, especially after you have finally found a professional who meets the above requirements. However, if the counselor is not easily accessible you may find it difficult to keep appointments. Is the office convenient to your home or workplace? Is an effort made by the counselor to accommodate appointment times to your schedule? If you have any resistance to pursuing treatment, be aware that lack of convenience may provide an excuse for missing appointments and eventually discontinuing treatment. If it is physically difficult or costly for you to keep appointments, ask if occasional telephone consultations can be substituted for face-to-face visits.

While TG individuals have the same emotional problems that beset the general population, such as addictions, depression, interpersonal difficulties, etc., the fact that these symptoms arise in the context of a transgender orientation is a major consideration in treatment. The experienced therapist knows that the remediation of these symptoms cannot be achieved without attention to gender identity issues as well.

Too often counselors inexperienced in working with the transgendered overlook serious symptoms in the gender dysphoric client because of their obsessive pursuit of a cure for TGism. Other similarly untrained therapists become seduced by a client's request to be cured. There is no evidence indicating that a cure is realistic. In fact, the current thinking is that TGism is not a disease and therefore the issue of cure is irrelevant.

In summary, the search for a counselor begins with you knowing what to look for in terms of competence, cost, comfort and convenience and ends with you finding someone who meets enough of your criteria to allow you to get your mental health concerns met for the present. Do not allow the pursuit of perfection to derail you and delay getting your immediate needs met.



Transgendered... Like Me

The national lesbian and gay magazine, *The Advocate*, had an article about the political activity in the transgender community in their December 10, 1997 issue. I picked up a copy to read that piece but found something of much greater interest on the last page. The following column (reproduced by permission) brings an entirely different perspective to the concept "transgender." Some people are not going to like it, but it sounds like common sense to me. Let us know what you think. (This column ran under Mr. Rotello's photo which shows a rather masculine looking guy. — *Angela Gardner*)

by *Gabriel Rotello*

Take a look at the picture above.

Do I look transgendered? By the standard definition of that term, probably not. Yet I increasingly believe that I am transgendered. What's more, I believe that if you are lesbian or gay or bisexual, you are too. And I believe that an emerging definition of all gay people as transgendered is the wave of the future.

This idea stems in large part from the growing body of research into the "cause" of sexual orientation. The jury is still out on whether that cause is biological or environmental or both or neither, but this much can be said: Researchers have found that the heterosexual majority and gay people differ in a key respect. Most heterosexuals tend to feel and act and desire and respond and present themselves to the world in a fairly "sex-typical" way—pretty much all-male or all-female. Gay people, on the other hand, exhibit a whole range of "sex-atypical" characteristics, meaning characteristics that are most commonly associated with the opposite sex, at least among the heterosexual majority. These traits obviously include our attraction to members of the same sex, but they also include our inner feelings of maleness or femaleness, our outward appearance as butch or femme, the unconscious way we speak and move, even the way we throw a ball or change a tire.

For some reason most gay people exhibit our sex-atypical traits most clearly when we are very young. Many gay boys, for example—the vast majority in some studies—report that they identified strongly with girls when they were very small. Some even thought of themselves as more female than male. The opposite seems true for most lesbians. As we grow older these feelings tend to subside, at least for many of us, so that as adults the only major sex atypical trait that we retain is our sexual orientation.

But not for everybody. Some of us grow up to be mannish women or femme men. Some become occasional crossdressers or drag kings or queens. Some become transgenderists (people who live full-time as the opposite gender without desiring surgery) or pre- or postoperative transsexuals. Researchers now think that this is all connected, that all gay and transgendered people occupy places on a continuum between the two main genders. At one extreme are masculine gay men and feminine lesbians, whose only obvious sex-atypical trait is their sexual orientation. At the other extreme are people who are so gender-atypical in so many ways that some choose to have an operation to bring the body in line with the soul. But what distinguishes us is that we all, to some degree or another, have major traits that place us somewhere between the two primary genders. In that sense we are all transgendered.

Not only does this idea offer a more expansive definition of what we really are, but it also better explains why we are oppressed. Homophobes don't merely hate us because of how we make love. They hate how we make love because it violates our expected gender roles. Really, we are hated for gender transgression. When I was 10 and was taunted for throwing a ball "like a girl" I don't think those schoolyard bullies suspected me of actually sleeping with men. They bashed me for not being boy enough. That goes for almost all of us. Whether we face prejudice for being too butch or too

femme or for being crossdressers or androgynes or for being perceived as gay or lesbian, we are all ultimately disliked for the same basic reason: transgressing our expected gender roles. Sexual transgression in the bedroom is just one aspect of that, although a very important one. So just as all gays are in a basic sense transgendered, all homophobes are first and foremost "transphobes."

This new understanding is revolutionizing researchers' conception of sexual orientation as just one aspect of a larger kind of difference. And I believe that if we're smart, it could revolutionize the way we look at ourselves, both as individuals and as a movement. The modern gay world was born out of a 19th-century psychological concept, namely, that some people—"homosexuals"—are attracted to members of the same sex. We accepted that limited idea and built our identities and our movement around it. We thought of sexual desire as the basis of our identity—a basis that leads to endless fragmentation based upon what, exactly, you desire: Lesbian. Gay. Bi. Trans. Whatever.

Now, however, late-20th-century research has produced a new concept: that the root of our difference is not merely how we make love but the larger fact that we exist between the two genders in a variety of ways, some sexual and some not. This idea has immense implications—because if the ultimate cause of our oppression is gender transgression, then shouldn't it also be the focus of our identities and our movement? Shouldn't we stop being the les-bi-gay-trans-whatever movement, with a new syllable added every few years, and simply become the trans movement?

I think we should. And ultimately, I believe we will. Once we stop thinking of ourselves as oppressed by what we do in bed and start thinking of ourselves as oppressed because we occupy a space between genders, the sexual differences between us will fade into unimportance, and our common humanity will emerge into the light. If that's not a higher form of liberation, I don't know what is.



Hot•Buzz

JoAnn Roberts • CyberQueen



"I will not take 'but' for an answer."
— Langston Hughes

Well, last month's column certainly hit the mark for a lot of people. I can't recall the last time I received so much email and feedback. Thank you all, even the nasty ones. It proves that *someone* reads this column.

First up were the comments about my rift with **GenderPAC**. A lot of people were sympathetic and agreed that it was not worth compromising one's principles to achieve an expedient political end. Others thought I was attacking GPAC. No, I'm not going to do that. I'll continue to report on their activities as the information becomes available. For example, I said last month that GPAC didn't formally exist and may never reach that state. Well, I was wrong. Late in February, the **International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE)**, the **American Educational Gender Information Service (AEGIS)**, and **FtM International**, all provisionally ratified the Articles of Association and are in the process of fulfilling the verification requirements. That makes GPAC a real organization. At the same time, however, Renaissance, one of the GPAC co-founding organizations, adopted a "wait and see" attitude. At the moment, there appear to be more reasons in the "con" column than in the "pro" column to war-

rant Renaissance participation until GPAC demonstrates that it knows how to build consensus, follow its own rules, and has control of its chief executive.

Gender Identity Disorder (GID) is still a hot topic in the community. Seems like everyone has an opinion or a position to push. The **National Gay & Lesbian Task Force** is seeking a meeting with the president of the **American Psychiatric Association** with regard to using GID as a diagnosis for incarcerating queer and gender-questioning youth. Some transgender activists want GID treated as a medical disorder rather than a mental disorder. Others don't want GID deleted from the **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)** because its presence lets them get co-payments from their health insurance. The problem is we've had some posturing by a few activists, but little in the way of community dialogue. One activist claim I've seen is that you will never be able to get medical insurance if you're diagnosed with GID. That's pure nonsense. There will be an opportunity to create a community dialogue on the subject of GID at the **Second International Congress on Sex And Gender Issues** in June. I hope the community takes advantage of it.

The other item that got a good deal of attention from last month was my remark about not hanging onto the **coat-tails** of the **gay/lesbian community**. Apparently I did not make myself clear because most thought I was advocating not working with the gay/lesbian community at all, and one bozo thought I was homophobic. Well, anyone at all familiar with the **history of Renaissance** and the tg community in general over the last 10 years will know that I am a strong advocate for bridge building with the gay and lesbian community. We were doing it here in Philly before most anybody else. So, let me be more explicit. It seems to me this movement to get some of the

national gay/lesbian organizations to add "transgendered" to their names is a ploy to add legitimacy to the tg community. And I think this ploy is misguided. The tg community is probably as large, if not larger, than the gay/lesbian community. We don't need gay/lesbian organizations to add "transgendered" to their names to make us legitimate, although it is nice recognition if they do. We exist as a cohesive (yet sometimes fractious) community apart from the gay and lesbian community. That alone makes us legitimate. What I believe is that we **can and should work** with gay/lesbian organizations, but not depend on them for any political clout because we're not going to earn any respect that way. It's like the old story about fish and fishing: Give me a fish and I'm fed for a day. Teach me to fish and I'm fed for the rest of my life. Which path do we take?

I'm sure **Holiday Inn** is wondering where it went wrong. First, because a focus group responded favorably, the hotel chain ran an ad during the **Super Bowl** that featured a woman who was supposed to be a **transsexual**. The message was "see what a few thousand dollars can do," while the chain is upgrading many of its hotels. Within a day, Holiday Inn announced that it was pulling the ad and had fired the agency that produced it because of negative feedback, mostly from fundamentalist Christians. The next thing they know, they're receiving letters and email from transgendered people, first praising them for running the ad, then berating them for pulling it. Some days you eat the bear...

My good friend **Eve Burchert** from Chicago sent along an interesting article from the Feb. 4, **Chicago Tribune** about the new spate of gender study programs at colleges and universities around the country. The article states that many of these programs have come to the realization that one cannot study women without concurrently studying men, and,

HOT•BUZZ

arguably, variations in gender and sexual orientation. Perhaps the most interesting and relevant of the new programs is at **New York University** where the **Center for Gender and Sexuality Studies** is being formed to cover women, men, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals. According to the article the executive search team hopes to include transsexuals as candidates for the directorship of the new center.

Activists in **Pittsburgh, Pa.** have plenty to celebrate as they completed a successful two year campaign to get transgendered people covered in the city's anti-discrimination laws. According to **Wendy Miller**, this was accomplished by defining the meaning of "sex" which did not exist in the old laws. The new definition is: "Sex: the gender of a person, as perceived, presumed or assumed by others, including those who are changing or have changed their gender identification." The final vote of the City Council was 8 to 1 in favor of the change with all of the councilors understanding the significance of the gender language.

According to **Dana Priesing**, in early February a bill was introduced to Congress, **H.R. 621, the National Mental Health Parity Act of 1997**. Title I of the bill imposes a tax equal to 25% of annual premiums (for health insurance issuers) or 25% of annual covered expenditures (for group plans) upon health insurance issuers or group health plans for any calendar year in which the issuer or plan imposes limitations or financial requirements on the coverage of benefits "with respect to mental illness" if similar limitations or financial requirements are not imposed on benefits with respect to other conditions. "Mental illness" is defined to include specific psychiatric conditions described in the DSM. The bill further states that nothing in the above standard would prohibit an issuer or plan from limiting coverage to "services that are medically necessary." It is this argument that many insurers use to deny coverage of reassignment surgery. If the definition of "medically necessary" can

be altered, Priesing thinks it may be possible to get insurance coverage for SRS.

Okay, onto the fashion news... In survey after survey about cosmetics **mascara** consistently ranks in the top three as "must have" on a daily basis. Here's a quick mascara primer. For thick plump lashes without a lot of gooey buildup, try **Aziza Fat Lash...** Sometimes you just want a hint of color, then try **Cover Girl Natural Lash Darkener...** Want extra glam lashes without the weight and hassle of falsies, then go for **Estée Lauder Pure Velvet** mascara.

There used to be rules for when to wear certain types of clothing. Anyone old enough to remember no white shoes after **Labor Day** or before **Memorial Day**? Those old saws are gone and these days anything goes. Hence some recent advice dispensed in the fashion rags about "seasonless" style. Used to be that only a certain type of wool was considered seasonless. Nowadays one can wear the likes of **suede, corduroy, velvet** and even **leather** almost all year round. With suede, it's a shirt in a **bright color** used as a topper. For corduroy, it's **thin wale**, lightweight in a dress or skirt. For velvet, brilliant color or **soft pastel** in a skirt or even camisole. And leather is now so hot, hot, hot in **wild colors** and a variety cuts that it's cool anytime.

Another old saw was the stock market followed hemlines. Well it still seems to still be doing that, since the market is up one day and down the next. Hemlines for Spring come in multiple lengths; pick one that suits you. For **evening**, the recommendation is just **above** the knee. For **work**, it's right **at the knee** again. And for **casual** attire, we're seeing **mid-calf** skirts that are just horrid.

As I mentioned in another column, everyone is "seeing red" now that **Madonna** has portrayed **Eva Perone** in the movie *Evita*. In the not so distant past, red lips and nails were considered tacky, although most crossdressers in my circle never thought so. Anyway, the "new" look for red red nails or lips have a few ground rules... Choose a **creamy** or sheer lipstick. Avoid matte shades that

look harsh and can dry your lips... Avoid matching lips and nails. Wear **sheer** polish with red lips or vice versa.... Red nails should be **opaque** and **short**.

When preparing your lips, be sure to use a liner and follow these steps. Make sure the liner tip isn't too sharp or the line will be too harsh. Rub the tip against your finger after sharpening. Line your lips, then apply one of the new long-lasting lipsticks. Try **Coty 24 Hour** or **L'Oréal Color Endure** lipsticks and **Prestige 100% Waterproof** lip pencils.

As for your nails, there are new options there as well. Nail polish pens are attempting a comeback on the market. Past attempts weren't so great. Try **Stylo Guerlain** as one of the newest of the crop. **Sally Hansen** has introduced a new topcoat that sounds perfect for the CD on the go. **10 Day Shine** is heat activated. Paint it in then hold your nails up to a desk or reading light for 60 seconds and poof, they're dry.

Normally **marie claire** magazine has some great advice to dispense, but it missed the mark completely when it went to **RuPaul** for beauty advice in its March issue. Here's an example of the less than helpful advice from the queen of media — "Q: How can I prevent lipliner lips? My lipstick wears off so quickly. A: Do what I do. When I'm in drag, I don't smoke drink or eat—and my lipstick never comes off." Well, duh! What the Hell kind of advice is that? I hope the magazine didn't actually pay LaRu for the advice 'cause if they did they were robbed. Meanwhile, Ru keeps popping up in fashion magazines as if he were someone women would actually want to emulate. To wit, Ru appeared in the Feb. issue of **Allure** magazine in a piece titled "How I Got That Look." Meanwhile Ru still hasn't appeared in any transgendered publication. I guess they just don't pay well enough.

So, those are my opinions, but, hey, what do I know? I thought **g/l/b/t** (pronounced glebit) was the sound frogs make. Comments? Write care of this publication or email to [redacted]@cdspub.com>. © 1997 by Creative Design Services.

Ms. Lee Etscovitz, Ed.D.

Making Sense Of It All

Butterflies and Tears

Several years ago, in the midst of some unhappy feelings about myself and about life in general, I wrote a poem called *Butterflies and Tears*. At the time I was not consciously aware of any gender discomfort within me which might have had anything to do with my unhappiness. And yet, as I reread the poem today, I can see a connection between what I said then and the gender struggle I have experienced over the years. Let us look, first, at the poem itself, and then at some of its transgender implications.

When I see butterflies
in sunlit flight
so brief,
I see the fragile beauty
that interrupts
our grief.

When I see people cry
dry tears of discontent,
I see the silent strength
for our predicament.

In butterflies
and tears
I see the hope of Man,
whose beauty
and whose strength
suggest a nobler plan.

As I said at the beginning, these words seem to speak to my gender struggle over the years. For example, especially within the transgender community, a butterfly is a recognized symbol of change, in this case a symbol of the unfolding of the human body as well as of the human spirit. Could I have unconsciously sensed such a potential change in myself as I wrote the poem? Perhaps those of us who do harbor private struggles of one kind or another (which probably includes most of us) are more aware than we realize of what is troubling us. The problem is that we often have difficulty

listening to ourselves, let alone to others. Perhaps it is the accompanying pain which we also hear and which quickly frightens us away from ourselves and thus from the means of personal fulfillment. The "grief" of which I speak might refer not only to the pain of frustrated hopes and dreams but also to the pain of transgender self-recognition and self-acceptance, with all of the accompanying, and difficult, social implications.

Another word in the poem which speaks to my life-long gender struggle is "predicament." I have always seen my feminine wishes as being the source of an ongoing and deepening predicament which I have faced in life. Perhaps that is what I somehow sensed when I wrote the poem, for I was obviously in the midst of some personal pain. In fact, my marriage was weakening, and six years later I was divorced. I was also plagued by sexual fantasies which I was afraid to disclose to anyone, including my wife. Nor did I think of myself as gender-confused, but I was definitely unhappy in some nameless way. I was a prime example of a person with "dry tears of discontent," requiring a "silent strength" in order to survive one day at a time.

Over the years I consulted several psychiatrists in an effort to understand my inner discontent. Perhaps it was those sessions with a psychiatrist which, in retrospect, represented for me my "silent strength." And yet I never really dealt with my sexual fantasies, let alone any gender feelings, which may be an unfortunate commentary on the role of psychiatry in dealing with gender confusion and even sexual issues (at least between 1958 and 1980, in spite of Dr. Harry Benjamin's 1966 publication of "The Transsexual Phenomenon"). The fact is that my "predicament" remained, regardless of how much I did manage to talk with psychiatrists. Apparently, perhaps out of fear, I did not really talk

about my life in any fundamental sense, because my "grief" persisted. Perhaps I was afraid to face life's uncertainties in general and my personal confusion in particular. On the other hand, perhaps my awareness of the possibility of beauty in life gave me the hope I needed to keep me going to psychiatrists in some vague search for answers to the riddle of my own existence.

This notion of a search, with its roots in a sense of hope, points to the phrase, "a nobler plan," with which the poem ends and which also strikes me as having transgender implications. I do not recall what I specifically had in mind when I wrote those words. I think I was dreaming of something better for my life than what I had then, perhaps something possessing the beauty I saw in butterflies. I probably wanted a greater sense of personal fulfillment, a greater sense of well-being, a more "noble" existence. I used the term "Man" in its generic sense, which includes both men and women. The eventual "plan" in my case turned out to be a major shift, both consciously and physically, in my gender identity, as if I were fulfilling God's plan for me, regardless of the form it would take and regardless of the personal and social implications I would have to face.

As I look back on my life, I can see how I have learned not only to listen to my tears but also to accept the butterflies. At last I can hear and believe what I was really telling myself several years ago. Perhaps the truth is inside us more than we realize. It may even be less fragile than we imagine it to be and far more beautiful than we ever thought possible. Our "sunlit flight" may be brief in the total scheme of things, but it may also be fulfilling as a bit of sunshine we can call our own. It might even become more than a pleasant interruption and instead an established part of one's life.





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The Difficulties With GID, And Ourselves...

by Lori Buckwalter, Director, *It's Time, Oregon!*

Within the community of people who have become externally — or self-identified as *queer*, or alternative, respective of traditional sexual, gender and/or affectional orientations, there has arisen an awareness of the uses and abuses of a medical or psychiatric definition now referred to as GID (Gender Identity Disorder). There is at once a call for the elimination of the diagnosis to restrain its abuse, and a call for its retention, to maintain the positive aspects of treatment, medically, legally and socially, which have accrued to its use. *It's Time Oregon!* has a proposal which takes into account the historical and current perspectives of this problem, and which is a theoretical and practical framework for the evolution of solutions to the problems remaining.

There is a current distinction between the uses of the terms *gender* and *sex*, especially within the queer community. In common practice, and for our purposes, *sex* refers to an individual's physiological (genetic, psychological, endocrinological) differentiation. Conventionally, the categorization of *sex* is male or female.

Gender has come to mean something different from *sex*, in light of current understanding, and an expanded cultural perspective which includes historical evidence of great importance. *Gender* refers to an expression of actions, relationships and appearance. It is what people do, as opposed to [what they are].

Gender 'expression signals' are culturally relative. The confusion about *sex* and *gender* has arisen because of restrictive cultural perspectives which have not allowed for nonconformant expressions of sex/gender signals. In the dominant Western culture, there has been a stringent linkage between sexual identity and gender expressions, which are often divided into *masculine* and *feminine*.

As previously stated, current inclusive understanding of these distinctions has led to a new perspective and

terminology about *sex* and *gender*. The term *transgender* has come into use to describe expressions which defy conventional sex/gender linkages. We (ITA) state unequivocally that there is an inalienable right of each individual to affectional preference, gender expression, and sexual identity, but that these are not strictly the same, nor intrinsically linked in any 'proper' configurations. The combinations of these factors is as diverse as there are people who are diverse.

ΩGID has been used in the past to substantiate medical treatment of individuals to bring their physiologies into concurrence with what they see as strictly necessary to the integrity of their sexual identities. Techniques have included hormone and surgical therapies, and have led to the title of *transsexual* for those people whose physiology has been, is being, or will be modified to alleviate their suffering. These therapies have not been universally successful. Great strides in surgery and hormonal management are in progress. This path must be allowed to develop as individuals seek it as informed and responsible adults.

The abuses of GID must be eliminated, however. The failures of proper treatment, we (ITA) feel, are largely due to two factors: immature or experimental techniques, and cultural bias on the part of the medical community, or those to whom they are officially responsive. In addition, GID has acquired a stigma, as it is misunderstood by the public to be debilitating, or the product of a 'sick' mind. This is not intrinsic to its definition.

How can we keep the benefits and progress which has been accomplished, while ridding ourselves of the confusion and abuses of this diagnosis?

The policy suggestions of *It's Time, Oregon!* regarding GID

To further the rightful aspirations of all people for self-determination of their sexual identities, gender expressions and affectional preferences *It's Time, Oregon!* is compelled to explain

its position on GID.

After a thorough consideration of the history and current criticisms of GID, ITO recognizes:

Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis has provided significant benefits for the transgendered community: civil rights protections in some jurisdictions; medical justification for transsexuality; increasing availability of remedial care; potential reimbursement for treatment; a basis for continuing research and refinement of remedial procedures; visibility of long-standing problem of sexual identity; political basis for otherwise controversial legislation.

Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis also imposes significant difficulties upon the transgendered community and others, including: negative stereotyping as recipients of a psychiatric diagnosis; used inappropriately for gender conformity; seen as divisive of the gender community; affective description tends to limit etiological inquiry

Because ITO feels that the benefits of GID diagnosis are important and must be retained, but the incumbent difficulties are significant and must be eliminated, we resolve that:

1. GID should be immediately replaced with a diagnostic category, perhaps SSD (Sexual Somatic Dissonance) which more accurately, exclusively and explicitly defines those people who may require remedial medical treatment to resolve demonstrable or perceived dissonances in their sexual self-identities.

2. Federal civil rights protections should immediately be amended or reinterpreted to include the rights of self-determination of gender expression, affectional preference, and sexual identity. Provisions must be made for individuals' self-determination and documentation of sexual identity which are independent of medical verification or approval.

3. Current standards of medical treatment, availability and reimbursement must be equal to or enhanced

continued page 18

Another Point of View on G/L/B Coattails

by Lynette [REDACTED]

"Personally, I think hanging onto the g/l/b coattails like this is a mistake. Yes, we have a lot to learn from them, but we have to stand on our own. It does us no good to get drowned in a sea of voices where we have to fight just to be heard." — JoAnn Roberts "Hot Buzz" February, 1997

I read with interest the comments in Hot Buzz with respect to alliance with the wider queer community. I found the comment that there was nothing to gain by affiliation between the transgendered and queer communities frankly shocking. I understand that being transgendered does not mean that one is lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), but I firmly believe that the best way ahead for the transgendered community is as a strong partner within the queer community at large.

For a long time I felt that the transgendered community had little to gain from the queer community at large. In particular, the LGB community during the late 1980s seemed to lose their respect for those members who wished to remain closeted, and the fondness in some quarters of the queer community for outing people gave me no confidence in the potential security of those transgendered people who did not wish to be out. When I lived in Toronto I received no signs of welcome from the queer community there, feeling that the dyke component of the community was quite hostile to *wymyn not born wymyn*. When I later became part of the Ottawa gender community, I was a bit surprised to see close cooperation between the communities — transgendered people participating in the Pride March and Pride Fair and that sort of thing. My initial response was surprise — what did we have to gain from including ourselves in this persecuted minority? Since then I have decided that we have much to gain and very little to lose.

It has been traditional among heterosexual transgendered people, especially those who are not primary transsexuals, to reinforce their identification

as heterosexuals. This can be observed in some institutions by insistence on limiting its participation to heterosexuals. This can be observed in representations to the outside world, such as the traditional tranny chat-show guest's insistence that while he likes to wear frocks, he's really a regular guy who wears his frock while watching the football game with a tin of lager in his hand. This can be heard from many transgendered people who for one reason or another insist, "I may be transgendered, but I'm not queer!" This tradition underlies the past separation between the transgendered community and the queer community.

This tradition seeks to negate the natural affinity between the transgendered community on the one hand, and on the other hand the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities. One point of affinity, for example is that group of transgendered people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual. The traditional outlook affixes labels to them, and casts them out of the community. I found an example of this in the materials sent to me by a large American organization of crossdressers when I was first seeking to understand my own transgendered identity. These documents were very clear in saying that homosexual crossdressers can be included under the label "drag queens," very clear in deligitimizing their desire to crossdress as being motivated by a desire to seek homosexual relationships, and explicitly rejecting them as members. It is not hard to understand why such a club, seeking to establish the legitimacy of crossdressing as middle-class American behavior, would push itself away from association with homosexuals as a group, especially in the days when gay culture was much more marginal than it is today. Such a tradition, however, draws a distinction along lines of sexual orientation where no distinction should be.

There is a more philosophical affinity between the communities. Kate Bornstein and others have drawn a wide circle around the transgendered

community, including all those who transgress traditional gender rules. In this broad definition of transgender are included gays, lesbians, bisexuals, crossdressers, transsexuals and even those less stigmatized, who reject the constraints imposed on their genders by customary gender policing. Boys should not wear dresses, but transgendered people do. Boys should not sleep with boys, but transgendered people do. Girls should not sleep with girls, but transgendered people do. Girls should not have grow beards, but transgendered people do. In this philosophical view, the only difference between one segment of the transgendered community and another is the particular sort of behavior that breaks gender rules.

The most obvious natural affinity within the transgendered, gay, lesbian and bisexual community (LGBT) is in the perception of outsiders. Notwithstanding the traditional efforts of heterosexual crossdressers to distance themselves from the other elements of the queer community, the average violent redneck or bigoted personnel officer draws no such distinctions. This is understood instinctively by crossdressers, who have in the past taken pains to deny inclusion with those whom they are glad to consider more socially marginalized than they.

In spite of these natural affinities between the communities, they have to some extent pushed each other apart. The heterosexual majority in the transgendered community has long been avoiding association with gay men. Segments of the lesbian community who mistrust anyone who has ever had a Y chromosome have rejected association with transgendered males, or even former males. The irony is that as these divisions have been continued, the LGB community has become more socially accepted, and the transgendered community has lagged behind. In many Western countries, for example, it is illegal to discriminate

continued page 18

G/L/B/...

against people on the basis of sexual orientation, whereas these laws are silent on matters of gender transition. The ironic result is that in many places a gay man can look an interviewer in the eye and ask about same-sex partner benefits when applying for a job, while a transgendered male has to furtively remove all traces of nail varnish before going to work, and fears to tweeze his eyebrows lest the boss notice.

A concrete example from the same Hot Buzz article: "Transactivists visited members of Congress who supported the gay-positive Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) bill last year. They were told by each member visited that if transgendered people were added to the ENDA language the bill would never pass because some of the moderate supporters would defect." It's going to be illegal in the USA to discriminate against homosexuals in employment, but still open season on transgendered people!

The LGB community, energized by Stonewall, empowered by their own will, and united by threats like AIDS and by the enmity of those who would have delegitimized them, has come forward and demanded its rights. The transgendered community as a whole, on the other hand, has not stopped its quest for legitimation by clinging to the notion that we are not queer, that we may wear frocks, but at least we only have sex with women.

To some extent it amazes me that the LGB community is willing to become the LGBT community to include us. The transgendered people who started the Stonewall riot would not have been allowed through the front door of a Tri-Ess meeting, but maybe the LGB community doesn't know that, or doesn't care. They know we get bashed the same as they do, so maybe they are willing to be more welcoming than we ever have been. When I came to England from Canada, I found the local queer community ready to welcome me. They pointed out to me that London LGB Pride had

just changed its name to LGBT Pride, and suddenly I was being embraced by a welcoming community. I haven't earned this acceptance from the LGB community — transgendered people have been chanting for years the slogan, "we're not queer," yet at this moment, the LGB community, flushed with success, is prepared to be magnanimous.

I think that the moment must be seized. At the moment that the queer community shouts, "The Queers are here!" and dares the world to discriminate against them, the transgendered community must join in. It has become politically and socially unacceptable to discriminate against lesbians, gays or bisexuals throughout most of the civilized world. In a generation, hardened bigots in redneck regions will be afraid to express their homophobic hatred in public. If transgendered people do not step forward at the same time, we might be the beneficiaries of tolerance from a general public which still thinks of us as queer, and therefore acceptable under the new rules. It is far more likely that we will have missed the moment, and we will find that our own community has fragmented further, and the chat shows are still filled with trannies claiming, "I'm not queer!" and praying quietly that their bosses aren't watching daytime television.

JoAnn Roberts responds: Ms.

█ (and others) misunderstood my remarks last month. I agree with her almost 100 percent. I'm all for working with the g/l/b community and I'm very pleased that some g/l/b have taken us in, but I am wary of organizations that too easily slip on the "transgendered" mantle. We're still a fringe on the fringe with them.

What we don't yet have is our own transgender political organization and the present alternatives are unacceptable to the majority of transpeople.

The best bet this community has at an effective, inclusive, political organization is It's Time America!, if only they could get themselves organized.



GID...

under the new SSD diagnosis.

4. The effect upon medical availability, quality, cost and reimbursement for care of transferring SSD from a DSM (psychiatric) to ICD (medical) diagnosis must be thoroughly researched.

5. Research and refinement of remedial medical treatments and technologies must continue to expand and improve, particularly for female-to-male transsexuals. Research into underlying physiological indicators of SSD must be continued and expanded.

6. Review of all applications of this diagnosis must assure that it is not being inappropriately used to enforce conformity of individuals' gender expressions, affectional preferences or sexual self-identities to some presumed or explicit cultural conventions.

7. Mental health professionals must guarantee an elimination of attempts to modify sexual identities or gender expressions unless at the patient's fully informed request. Care must still be available for those who have other diagnosable conditions that may be related to SSD (ie. major depression, dysthymia, etc.).

8. Minors cannot give fully informed consent to remedial medical treatment. The distinct diagnosis of preadolescent SSD should be dropped at this time. SSD should become a strictly medical diagnosis applicable only to those capable of informed legal consent, who are initiating or undergoing medical remedial treatment. Likewise, medical interventions applied to intersexed individuals must be strictly related to preservation of their lives or physical health, in the absence of their informed adult legal consent.

9. When the above conditions have been completed or guaranteed, reclassification of SSD as an ICD diagnosis should occur.



Too Much of a Good Thing

By Vanessa Kay

I believe that it was Mae West who said, "Too much of a good thing is wonderful!" I quite understand what she was saying; yet there are some exceptions.

Linda and I regularly correspond with couples. Usually, these exchanges are initiated by the spouses or partners of crossdressers. They have just recently discovered, by one means or another, that their male partner is a crossdresser. We do our best to explain this phenomenon and how this need can successfully be incorporated in a relationship. Providing that the existing relationship is a good one, this generally works just fine.

The problem comes after the wife or partner has come to terms with this and has accepted the "other woman" into the relationship. The crossdresser seems to feel that they now have carte blanche to do whatever they wish in

order to further their realization of complete transformation into the femme self. They tend to make unilateral decisions without consulting their partners and go at "light speed" to immerse themselves in their new found freedom.

What's wrong with this picture? It's obvious to us, and to the spouse or partner. Unfortunately, the crossdresser can't seem to grasp the idea that there are two people involved in this journey, not just one. From the initial contact, up through the first "meeting" of the now femme partner, all steps were taken gradually, and together. Once the crossdresser believes that she is free to express her inner self, she takes off and tries to make up for a good deal of lost time.

It is at this point that the damage is done. If you are a crossdresser with a spouse or partner, you need to realize that they are trying their very best to

cope with this new idea. Often, it is quite difficult for them to understand that you "need" to wear female clothing and fantasize about being a woman. Generally, in order to save the relationship, they try their very best and make some great steps towards accepting this "femme" self of yours.

It is important to go slowly. Simply because your wife or partner has said, "Okay, why don't you go upstairs, shave, put on your make-up and dress. I'll be up in a little while to see how you look." does not mean, "Dress and prance about as often as you like." Nor does it mean, "Okay, let's go out shopping as girls tomorrow." It means exactly what is said: "Let's try it tonight and see how it goes."

I have a little maxim that I share with others. It is what I refer to as "The Law of Diminishing Returns." In short, this means that the more you experience, the more you will want to do in order to have the same feelings of

continued page 23



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Shopping With Jessica

by Jessica Brandon



Top o' the mornin' to ye, lassies! Faith an' begorra, 'tis a bonnie good day to talk about shoppin' in this, the merry month of the Irish! Aye, and if I were really skilled at communicating with a brogue, I'm sure I would do James "Scotty" Doohan proud! Unfortunately, the closest I ever come to the wonderful Emerald Isle is when I use Irish Spring in the shower, so I think I'll go back to the 'hood and get down wit' dis month's column, know what I'm sayin'? (My Ebonics stink too!)

Anyhoo, let's talk reading, girlfriends and how it relates to shopping. I subscribe to *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Allure*. It's through these magazines I learn about all the new stuff hitting the market: clothing, accessories and above all, cosmetics. *Allure* is especially neat in that it has lots of articles and features on makeup, and I've learned a lot from that mag. Personally, I find no stigma whatsoever for a man to read traditional women's magazines, most of all a man who enjoys crossdressing, as we learn such great things from these publications. Take a little time and check them out.

When it comes to reading and shopping, perhaps the greatest place to go is your local newspaper. Almost every day, you're bound to read about a store having a sale, and having some sort of coupon one can redeem in said store to shave dollars off your purchase. Case in point, while in the process of putting together this very column, Angela Gardner called and told me about a coatdress that had been marked down from \$90 to \$65 at Lord & Taylor. She got it for better than half off

that price after reading about the sale in the paper. Ange even bought that day's paper, just so she could clip out the coupon to take advantage of the tremendous savings. Not bad, eh?

As I've said, the newspaper is an outstanding shopping resource, especially on Sundays and the period before and after any holiday. The Sunday paper is always crammed with sales in department stores on clothing, cosmetics, jewelry, hosiery, etc., most of which have redeemable coupons that you can take right to the store of your choice, and that's not including the huge number of circulars from places like Sears and Penney's. In big cities like New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Chicago and the like, seemingly half the Sunday paper is taken up with such ads, a veritable cornucopia of goodies for the devoted shopper.

Then there are the holiday sales. You name a holiday, anything from the big fish like Christmas, New Year's and Thanksgiving, to the guppies like President's Day and Flag Day, stores have sales and advertise them like crazy. But the really huge sales events are on Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving) and after Christmas when just about everything we need to look our best can be bought at near outlet store prices. Discounts of 25, 30, even 40 percent are not uncommon. And since most stores are open on just about every holiday save Christmas itself, you have 364 days of shopping to take advantage of.

Also, in the course of your daily reading, be on the lookout for store closing sales, which are also well adver-

tised. When a store goes under or has a name change, sharp, almost drastic cuts in prices are made so the stock can be cleared before the doors finally close. I've been to a store closing or two and seen discounts as much as 60 percent. I can't stress the importance of scanning your newspaper for sales and/or special sale events. They'll save you money every time.

This month's local advertiser spotlight is on **Debra's Closet**. Located in Pennsauken, New Jersey, Debra's deals in fashionable consignment clothing. Just about anything you might need can be found here: dresses, skirts, pants, sweaters, blouses, suits (Oooh!), coats and outerwear, evening wear, shoes, handbags, hosiery, lingerie, even jewelry. On a visit there in early February, I was amazed at the large selections and the reasonable prices. I bought three nice dresses for a total of \$30. Is that a deal or what?

Debra and her staff were open, friendly and helpful during my visit. They even offered me the use of a private changing room. Not having been to a consignment shop before, I was greatly impressed by more than a few well-known brand names as I perused the racks. I came away viewing Debra's Closet as a best kept secret for shopping. I highly recommend you visit Debra's; it's a fine store in a nice, quiet community, and Debra is quite accommodating to the community. If you're looking for good clothing at good prices, Debra's is the place to go.

As always, I'm eager to hear from my loyal readers about your favorite places to shop. The information you provide not only helps others, but you also get a chance to see your name in print, and what bigger rush (except a half-off sale) can there be? Well, girls, that's it for now. My electronic ears are always open if you have shopping tips to pass along. I can be reached at

██████████@voicenet.com>.

Until next month, be smart, buy smart and look smart! Happy shopping, sisters!





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Letters to the Editor

Dear Angela,

I read last month's internet version of Dina Amberle's column, *Vis a Vis*, and was glad that she commented on the Virginia Prince column run in the October issue of *Cross-Talk*. I was very insulted by Prince's rambling attack, and attempted to communicate my displeasure that a quality magazine such as *Cross-Talk* would run such hostile, divisive, and stereotyping attack on a particular segment of the gender community. I was told by the magazine's editor that it does not run letters critical of its editorial policies. I guess that's why I haven't found letters in *Cross-Talk*.

Prince's column read like *Mein Kampf*. Her comments that transsexuals will be forever dependent on cross-sex hormones seemed particularly hypocritical coming from someone whose body was shaped by those very same hormones. In addition, she insulted all women by saying that transsexuals could not be women because they do not have reproductive capabilities. This was a very sexist and patriarchal comment. Women who undergo hysterectomies or are otherwise sterile do not lose their identities or place in society as women.

Prince also, like racists judging racial minorities, claims that all transsexuals want to do this, and all transsexuals are like this. If there is one thing I have learned during the past four or five years, it is that no two transsexuals are alike. For instance, she claims that transsexuals are attempting to tear down Tri-Ess and its exclusionary membership policies. I joined a local Tri-Ess chapter eight years ago, while I was still trying to come to terms with who I am. It took me many years to feel comfortable with myself and overcome the fears that prevented me from expressing my true self. Eventually, I realized that I self-identified as a transsexual, and didn't share Tri-Ess goals and aspirations. I quietly

resigned as a member of the chapter, and made a permanent transition to a new gender role. I have maintained contact with several members of the group, whom I consider close friends. I have seen this pattern played out in a number of other Tri-Ess chapters, which contain many members who either have not come to terms with their own transsexual leanings, or are suppressing this information to conform with Tri-Ess National orthodoxy. I was told, after announcing my decision to leave the group, that I was eligible to apply for Tri-Ess membership under its "Friends of Tri-Ess" category. I declined. After reading Prince's column, the category seems hypocritical. Tri-Ess is obviously no friend to me or any other transsexual.

Marsha [redacted]
Albuquerque, N.M.

JoAnn Roberts replies: There's certainly been enough said about this subject of late and I'm not interested in picking scabs off any wounds. However, I would like to point out that Dr. Prince was not speaking in any official capacity for Tri-Ess when she wrote her article in *Cross-Talk*.

Dear Ed(wina)s,

You all have a gem in your (relatively) new reporter, Jessica Brandon! She has a writing style that projects humor and warmth. Her February cover story, "Yeah, I Remember When..." was great. I related to every paragraph. I chuckled at every paragraph!

Thank you and keep up the good work on the *Renaissance News*.

Love
Stella [redacted]

Dear Stella,

We agree with you 100 percent. Jessica is a real gem and we're very proud of her emergence as a writer for *RN&V*. Thank you for taking the time to send her the praise.

The Ed(wina)s

Good Thing...

transformation. While there is nothing wrong with wanting to explore more of your feminine self and develop her, this needs to be done in accordance with your partner's ability to cope with, and share in, your journey.

This journey of femininity should be a shared one. If you go at a pace that your partner is comfortable with, there will be fun, instead of stress. Talk with one another, discuss what the next steps will be and clearly define the current boundaries. Don't exceed the limits of your partner's comfort zone without asking.

All the while that you are exploring your femme self, remember that your spouse or partner cannot feel what you feel. They cannot understand the burning desire that pushes you ever forward. Communication is the way to relate these needs and feelings. It is essential that you share as much of your journey as possible. If you do this, chances are that your relationship will be better than ever and that the two of you will be closer than you imagined possible.

Remember, too much of a good thing can be bad. Make sure it doesn't happen to you.



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I Love LA

from Powder Puffs' Girl Talk

The purpose of this column is to inform the reader of the many places of interest in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area for the transgendered person planning to attend "California Unity" in 1997.

Marlayna's T-Party: "Come Taste the Night" at Tommy Tang's. Since August '95, (wait a minute, wasn't that a couple of months ago?) the community's own Marlayna has started a new event. On the first Tuesday of every month, Marlayna will hostess "Come Taste the Night" at Tommy Tang's, the hip Thai restaurant on Melrose Avenue in West Hollywood. According to an article in the *Los Angeles Times* (July 9th), every Tuesday at Tommy Tang's is drag night where the waiters dress in drag. Owner Sandra Tang, wife of Tommy, states, "Actually, it's not much of a stretch for us. Our audience is the same it's always

been, but in wigs. All my food servers except one have been drag queens, on their days off anyway. "The article goes on to point out that Tang's partner is Patrick Shooting Star. Tang says, "It took Patrick four months to coordinate the films and music and videos. It's all gender bender artists and it's absolutely so much fun. In its fifth week, the evening already has a following. Note: the Tuesday drink menu offers about 20 "Gender Blenders" named after famous drag queens. For example, a RuPaul consists of cranberry juice, grapefruit juice and sake. Gee, I wonder what you get when you ask for a Christine? If you go—

What: "Come Taste the Night" at Tommy Tang's, 7313 Melrose Ave. in West Hollywood. Valet Parking is available.

Time: First Tuesday of the month, cocktails at 8:30 pm, dinner at 9:00 pm.

Call: Please make reservations with Sandy or Patrick at 213-375-5733



Vis A Vis...

Portland, Oregon. Tall and slender with supermodel looks, she uses her public adventures to write with insight about broader issues we face.

Karen is the editor of the *Reflections* newsletter of Neutral Corner in San Diego and adorns her short monthly column with a fetching and leggy pose that may detain you for a few moments before reading.

Donah [redacted] of the *Emerald City* Newsletter in Seattle, Washington has a face that could launch a thousand ships. She writes a saucy monthly titled "Shameless Flaunting." But you know what they say, "If you got it..."

All of these newsletters are on file in our Renaissance Library for those of you who might want to see how the competition looks. Oh, these girls are good, but they put their pantyhose on one leg at a time like the rest of us. Check 'em out.



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