# TRANS

Monthly Magazine of the Transgender Independence Club

June. 1998

# **My Transition**

--Vicky E. , special to the Transgenderist

How do you get a great transition? I have no generic advice, and can only say that my own transition has been wildly successful, and suggest that you study it for clues to your own situation. Even for those not transition-bound, it gives you enough vicarious experience to keep you satisfied in your present condition.

# 1. Transition

Nothing frightens transsexuals and non-TSs more than the thought of transition. Just imagine (and those of you post-transition know exactly what I am talking about) telling everybody you know that you are TS, and that you are going to transition, and then you do that and you just have to live with the consequences. That is exactly what transition is like.

If you are a discerning TS, you realize that you are going to get exactly one chance to do this. If you do it right, you will probably have a glorious transition and life. And if you do it wrong, it will probably haunt you for the rest of your days, both economically and socially. It is a poker game where you play one hand for the pot, which is your own life, winner takes all, loser takes nothing.

I won big. My transition was described by more than one key gender player as "the best transition ever seen." My co-workers were very supportive, some wildly so. After I gave my coming-out speech to fifty totally unaware people in a room, they applauded. That applause

never stopped. I received flowers, a coffee mug, a scarf, jewelry, perfume, lotions, four complete bags of clothes in my size, shoes in my size, cards of support, over fifty e-mail letters of support, phone calls of support, offers to shop, offers to play golf, offers to come and chat, you name it. On the other side, I had one born-again Christian who questioned one comment I made. and I quoted scripture at him until he went away.

My major at-risk all-male hobby was a daily bridge club of management and technical people at work, and today, for the first time ever, there were three men and one woman at that bridge table. We had a great game, and just like always, I lost and we all laughed about it (I'm not that good a player). But in the bigger scheme of life, I won huge today, and we all knew it, and there was a sort of wonderful glow around that table. Vicky, the kind and sensitive woman, was recognized today as a special case in just about every instance of life.

What did it take to win? As with everything in life, it took a lot of careful and meticulous planning, and the best team available. In my case, it took seventeen months of planning and the constant and brilliant advice of Hawk the supportive practical transition advice of , plus one wildly lucky break in the Robin form of a comment received out of the blue. But even that was luck that was invited to happen.

I had worked on my transition for a total of fourteen months when it came time to tell my immediate supervisor in the beginning of April. Ten of those months were with Hawk, and I frequently would float drafts of a transition plan by Hawk for comment and ideas. But the time was drawing close to begin the telling process.

## 2. Preparing to tell.

I began my serious work by preparing a detailed study of the psychology of my supervisors, what made each one tick, and details of the office environment and the social structure of the office. Hawk provided psychological comments and suggestions. Sessions which had been therapeutic before rapidly went to strategic, then down to tactical and a month before, operational. I realized that the key to winning was to establish management trust, and to do that I had to not only cooperate with management, but also win their trust as a manager. In essence, I had to out-manage these trained managers.

It was a risky stratagem, to retain total leadership and total control of this process without alienating them and still making them feel each and all as major players in the drama that was to unfold. But my last college degree was to prove the most critical piece of that puzzle, my Master's Degree in Public Management. Even though I had been perceived as a technical person by management, I had the best education in management, and a large part of that education was training in how to think on your feet.

By far. though, my introduction to management came from my parents. Dad was an excellent manager, becoming President of the New York State Postmaster's Association and in charge of a first-class post office. But mom, mom was not only a manager, but a leader. During World War Two she was a nurse, stationed on a red cross ship taking the wounded out of the North African campaign. While full of wounded, sailing out of the Mediterranean at Gibralter and with huge red crosses painted over the entire hull, her ship was torpedoed by a submarine, a submarine that was ultimately sunk by another torpedo.

Mom not only helped the wounded into the lifeboats, she took over command of one and directed rescue efforts to pull the drowning out of the water and into the safety of the boat. For those of you who saw "Titanic," you begin to understand the dynamics of that decision, the sense of complete and utter panic, the exercise of raw power and leadership in one person, and the responsibility of leadership as my mom-to-be not only saved some, but had to be her own triage officer and let others who were doomed drown in the water, and she had to live until the end of her days with their dying voices in her memory. To be a leader is to do what has to be done, no matter what the personal cost. It is little wonder that her face was on the front page of the New York Times, and she was highlydecorated for service under fire.

A good part of my own journey was spent just sitting alone and thinking about that event, what it was like for my mom, what she felt like, and how she controlled the situation totally. It was also a chance for me to realize that if it came down to the life-or-death, win-or-lose situation, I was going to have to do whatever it took to win, including some things I found personally repulsive. I had to finally grow up; no more nice Don now, I had to become the highly effective and powerful Vicky.

With E, my immediate supervisor, all I had to do was introduce him to the subject, answer any questions in a factual way, and lead him in proceeding. I asked him to clear his schedule for one hour for me, a twenty-year plus employee, no phone calls, closed door, so he knew this was important. When the time came I walked in, closed the door, sat down, and we began.

That meeting was pretty simple, just the facts. I gave him my TS literature pack and introductory letters and then set him to telling his supervisor, the division director T. That happened the same afternoon, and T was on the phone to Employee Relations. Within a day, the entire team was in place: T and E, supervisors from our division, C, the administrative assistant for our division, and G and J from Employee Relations. I immediately set up the one ground rule we never violated, total and absolute secrecy. The six of us would have to keep the biggest secret of our lives to ourself, a closed society for five weeks. I met with T and E and C early the next morning, and they handed me the department's earlier decision that I had to use the men's room. Instead of taking the bait, I merely said, "We'll discuss that part when it is appropriate." This was no point to get mad, this was the point to play it utterly cool, and that strategy was not lost on anyone present. All three got literature packs, and the first meeting with the entire transition team was set for the next Monday.

One additional broadside remained, though. I then wrote letters to T and E, thanking them for meeting with me. I paid no attention to their legal opinion memo in my memo, but the last name on the CC list of those thank you letters was that of my lawyer, Debbie Sheehan. My trump card was played, quietly, but the message was clear: if we do this wrong, we end up in court, and I was already building that case, bit by bit. And it was equally obvious what my strategy was: smile and build consensus in the meetings, but have all of the legal ammunition on my side, quietly and efficiently. Now we waited.

# 3. The First Transition Team Meeting; Time to Meet Vicky

A meeting site was picked which was outside of our division. We each snuck down separately to the meeting site actually totally surrounded by another division, and for the first time the six of us met in a small conference room. I was there with a shirt and tie, and said hi to each one of them in my boy voice.

T was the meeting caller, and he basically introduced each one of us, and turned over the meeting to me. I had the floor, and I moved to never turn it back over. In shirt and tie, I suddenly shifted to Vicky voice, that soft but mesmerizing voice I had spent so many decades working on, and said, "My name is Vicky Steele, and I want to thank you for serving on my transition team. We have a great opportunity here to show that this department can do a transition well, sensitive to the needs of every employee. If we do our job well, we shall have established a wonderful precedent and everyone will point at this team with words of praise. But if we do our work poorly, we shall probably, like so many other transitions, end up in court. Neither one of us wants that, so let us resolve to do our jobs well, and we shall all win, and indeed, this entire department will win." On and on I went, covering the basics of transition until G interrupted and tried to shove the legal opinion document in front of me again.

And again, I ducked the entry by simply saying to her, "When it is time for that, we'll cover it. Right now you have to get it, the basic concept of transsexuality, and once you get it in your heart, the bathroom issue and what we have to do will be a lot easier and self-evident. Do you know what the difference between gender and sex is?" And they all admitted that they didn't, so I talked gender 101 with them. maintaining my carefully-crafted control of the process and educating them. When we left that first meeting, they were more or less in shock and all promised to read the literature. The minute the door was open. I went right away back to boy mode, and we all made our way back to our work areas.

All was "normal," except the three transition team members would pass me with knowing looks in the hall, but I tried to appear oblivious. And again, to increase their nervousness, I wrote the thank-you letter, discussing everything that was covered in the meeting, but this time acknowledging the "legal opinion" letter but again explaining the need for basic education on gender before we considered it, and again CCing my lawyer.

Although they never discussed it directly, I knew I had them in total panic by this time. I still retained control of the process, and I still had all of the knowledge on my side, and they had nothing except a piece of paper with some meaningless opinion which would never stand a court test; it was based on Renee Richards 1977 decision, sort of like arguing a Civil Rights case using 1929 law as precedent. I knew it was totally and prima facie bogus from my study of the case law involved. But by never discussing the specifics of their legal opinion, I never let on what was wrong with it so they could fix the flaws, and I never cracked open the vault of knowledge I had. Meanwhile, Hawk and my shadow lawyer team were chuckling to themself about it, relishing the thought of fighting this one. But I knew that this fight would not take place in a courtroom, but was rather a battle for the heart that would be fought on my turf, a small meeting room in my department.

# 4. Transition Team Meeting Two; Blood on the Floor

In meeting two, the empire struck back. Early on, T let G speak, and she basically insisted that I accept the department's legal opinion and precedent as outlined in their legal opinion, and suddenly it was time to stop their game cold with the most deadly and vicious premeditated attack I could muster. I cold-heartedly set out to kill G's soul. I became the female preying mantis, and I set out to eat her for breakfast.

The minute she mentioned precedent, I looked her straight in the eyes and said, let me tell you about <name>, and I was very specific. Of course G, being ever the careful manager, had never mentioned anyone by name, but then I bored into everything the department had done. how it affected <name>, how she felt, and what the final outcome of the case was. I put flesh and blood on that person, made them feel her story and her pain as if it were their own. I talked about how I loved to listen to <name> at TGIC meetings, and how it felt for me to see the pain in her eyes. Finally I looked G cold and unblinking with my eyes and said in a chilling fury, "G, you killed that woman just as coldbloodedly as if you had personally cut her throat and watched her slowly and painfully bleed to death." And then I stared G down in silence. It was horrible, it was soul murder, but I understood that until she and all the team felt an overwhelming corporate and personal sense of guilt, they could not feel the overwhelming urge

to atone for that guilt, so I did it. It was devastating. G knew I was right, and soon she shuddered and looked away. And then they all knew I was right.

And I thought of my mom, who understood so very well that to do the greatest good you sometimes had to very hard things. For me, that time had come: G had to die inside. And I did it for <name> as well; no woman should ever have had to go through what she went through and God willing, no woman would ever have to go through that again, not if I had any say in it. G had to admit to herself that she didn't have a clue, she had implemented a policy that was destructive to the max, and that she would forever have to hear the sound of <name> drowning in her ears. I waited and watched; by now G was self-imploding, almost writhing in her chair, so it was time for me to act quickly. My cold steel gaze modified to compassion and understanding.

I began the cleansing process immediately, ever in control. "Of course, what is past is past, and we cannot undo it. We do the best we can at any moment in time with the tools and knowledge we have available. Now we have the knowledge and tools to do the job right. We also have a golden opportunity to do this right, a chance to show everyone that this department can be sensitive to everyone's needs. More than that, we can educate and pave the way for those sisters and brothers who are out there watching us, the ones who will transition here in the future...." From murder to atonement. I orchestrated the guilt and then the cleansing away of that guilt. As one member finally commented later after the pain was over and the telling was done, "Vicky, did you ever consider the ministry?" I smiled and said why yes, of course....

But for now, I had another memo to write, and this one said the department's legal opinion was, "in my humble opinion, without legal foundation, and the solution proposed was totally unacceptable." I took great pains to never mention why their opinion was bogus, never giving them enough information to correct the BREAK THROU

flaws. And again I CC-ed my lawyer plainly and openly on the bottom. The pressure from my side was inexorable now.

Of course, their perception of depth on my team was illusion. I simply told my lawyer I was accumulating memos; if I needed her, I would give her the stack, but for right now there was no reason to even involve her. This fight was mine to win or lose.

# 5. Transition Team Meeting Three; the War is Won

Management had nowhere to turn. By meeting three. I had attended courses on the Americans with Disabilities Act and had contacted the New York State Human Resources Division, which stated flat out there was absolutely no way I could use the men's room after transition, and the entire war was won. Suddenly, at the beginning of the third meeting, the managers were suggesting what I had wanted all along without my even having to tell them, and I just praised them for their excellent sensitivity and process. I was the leader, and they were now my team. And from that point on, they worked for me and I in turn worked for each of them and built them into a cohesive group. Issues which before would have never been solved were now taken care of in a few sentences, and the team was showing a depth and breadth of knowledge that astounded even me. G was not present at this meeting, excusing herself for "a needed vacation." At first I was scared that I had lost her, but it turned out she was more relieved than anything else, and not hurt at all. Amazingly enough, G became my very close friend and supporter, perhaps the strongest on the team. And in turn, I offered to personally help her in any other transitions she might encounter and also helped her work out her own guilt issues.

The bathroom issue had them worried. They opened the third meeting with the welcome words, "OK Vicky, we understand that you can't use the men's room and thus you have to use the women's room, and we agree. We just see problems. Do you have a plan on how we can do this?" I praised them for their sensitivity and suggested that we bypass the issue for several weeks by creating a temporary single-use transition bathroom, which would allow the women of this department to meet me before I went and invaded their sacred space, and give us all a chance to cosider this post-transition. And we always treat everything as an opportunity, never a problem, a chance to celebrate the wonderful diversity and strength of our department serving a wonderfully diverse people called the State of New York. The team immediately liked the idea, and we brainstormed out a way to make that happen, and then when the meeting was done this talented team of middle managers set out to make it so.

At this third meeting the women of the team became a working subgroup, myself included, and we were laughing and sharing in ways I had never dreamed possible. I had not only won the transition, but I had become a woman in their eyes as well, and a very powerful and persuasive one to boot. And for the first time I felt that this was all going to work. We broke up, each with our list of tasks to make happen before the next meeting, our fourth and basically a complete runthrough of the speeches I had scripted for each of us. At that point we would have little time for changes, since the last meeting was on the Friday before Telling Day.

Telling day was set for May 11th, the day after Mother's Day and, coincidently, the day after my birthday (I was born on Mother's Day also). Telling Day was coming within two weeks. And the blinding intensity of my transition journey so far was only a prelude to what was to come.

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To be continued, as it is written.

--Vix

# BREAKTHROUGH

News from Copenhagen, Denmark, Dr. Bjorn Hagenshnork has been working with hair eating mites and has developed an intriguing and totaly new alternative to both shaving (growth control) and permanent removal (electrolysis) of facial hair or other specified hair. This may be a distressing thought to some of us, but it is a medical fact that mites live and thrive in your eyebrows. Their staple food is the dead flesh that constantly sloughs off our bodies. They find refuge in the pores of our skin when we wash or shower. Mites raise families and continue generation after generation living in your eyebrows! One tiny flake of dead skin would keep several mites alive for days, the mites being so small.

There are those mites that also eat hair. Indeed, keeping your face clean of hair would require a prodigious army of mites. Application of a specially formulated mite repellent would confine them to a controlled area. "Hair Control by Mite" centers would be created where mite armies are deployed upon your face by professional mite handlers. Regular visits would ensure mite population control (and give the hair mite people job security!) You would never have to shave ever again, and this would be cheaper than electrolysis, being lower tech. and not dependent on the very highly skilled electrologist. Eventually, as genetic engineering progresses, mites could be developed that would eat hair roots, thereby making this process a one or two shot operation. Then it could truly be called "Hair by Mite, Gone Tomorrow".

Eve

1927 - 1998

Jina

Eve the known to members of TGIC as Mother Eve, died on April 7, 1998 at her home after a short illness. Born in Vermont, she came to Schenectady in the 1960's and worked in several restaurants and clubs. She was co-owner of the 145 Club on Barrett Street where TGIC held monthly meetings in the 1980's and renamed it Mother Eve's when she became sole owner. Retiring in 1992 because of poor health, she sold it to the present owners who changed the name to YOURS, where the local Tri-Ess chapter held meetings last year.

We are greatly saddened by her passing - Eve was a compassionate good friend to gay and transgendered people. Memorial contributions may be made to the local AIDS Foundation, for which she worked vigorously to raise funds before she retired. My name is April and I am a GG (genetic girl). It has been my privilege and pleasure to attend TGIC meetings on Thursday nights. I look forward to this evening all week. I attend with my partner Carol. We have been welcomed warmly and have made many new friends. Every week I learn something new about myself and life in general. I have been treated with the greatest of respect at all times.

However, I find that I am unique in that I am the only one of my kind (GG) to attend meetings and while I find this unique role to be very fulfilling I feel that it would be selfish of me to keep this circle of "girlfriends" all to myself! So come on ladies; open your minds and hearts and take your partners hand and join me on Thursday nights. I'm sure that we will have a lot to share. Don't be afraid to take a step that will enhance your life. Acceptance of your partner will open the door to a greater intimacy and a lot of fun.

Carol is not only my partner in life but also my best friend. We live a regular everyday life just like you do. We have kids, pets, responsible jobs and the bills that go with it. We spend our time at home with our kids; riding our horses, hiking, swimming, boating and riding the jet ski. Carol and I also love to go shopping for clothes together. She has better a better fashion sense than I do. Happiness and a good life is what you make it. So go for it! See you on Thursday.



#### Vanessa's Journal

#### Three Cheers for the Red, White and Blue

Add the Scrimshaw Lounge at The Desmond to the list of comfortable places to patronize in the Capital area. Having a couple micro-brewed beers, Spanish Peaks Porter (Montana) and Old Slugger Pale Ale (Cooperstown) was a good way to relax after a hard day's work in Albany. The party mix was tasty, the hot hors d'oeuvres the waitress served were delicious, and the service was friendly, if a little slow.

Shopping is a favorite activity. Near my home are Marshalls, Filene's, and Burlington Coat Factory, three stores at which I've purchased well-fitting, inexpensive, stylish clothing. The Burlington store last month had a marvelous selection of just the items I was looking for to add to my wardrobe. On a clearance rack I found a lovely peach two-piece dress and a navy suit. The sales lady complimented me on the look and fit of the peach dress and asked if it was especially for Easter. Returning a few days later to buy a white purse to go with the dress, I found not only the perfect purse but also a short red skirt, and a white and black check suit with matching black and white scarf. The red skirt goes well with the suit jacket. I especially like the fitting rooms in this store. No surly, burly guards count the items upon entering. A few steps from the individual fitting rooms, a mirrored alcove enables viewing your fit from all angles. A soft bench is provided to check the fit when sitting.

Attired in my best evening dress, a rose-print black chiffon long-sleeve number, and black high heels, I joined the parishioners of Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church in Dix Hills as they packed the Easter week Holy Thursday evening Mass. I've been to Mass before but never with hundreds in attendance. Driving rain soaked my hair and coat but not my spirits. After Mass, I relaxed in the Hilton Hotel lounge on Route 110 for a nightcap. The waitresses had already called it quits for the night but the bartender noticing this lady at a table in need of a drink courteously came over to serve me. This Hilton has an extraordinarily convenient ladies room a few steps away from the rear parking lot entrance, a plus for a lady recently buffeted by gale force winds and torrential rain.

A brilliantly sunny day in Philadelphia, home of the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, and Betsy Ross, inspired a patriotic dress. Red, white and blue was my choice. Red earrings, short straight red dress, white blouse, sheer white pantyhose, white purse, navy blue blazer, and navy blue high heels. While strolling through Center City, one happy denizen smiled and said, "how can you walk in those things without falling over?" I bought some wines of Delaware Valley and viewed the pretty fountains at Logan Circle. I had a beer at Bob & Barbara's, a neighborhood bar at 15th and South. I was a day early for the Thursday evening drag show. Head House Square and the end of South Street swarmed with locals and tourists. After checking menus at several restaurants in the area, I decided to return to Panorama Ristorante with its great wine bar. Having been their just a month before gave me more assurance that my evening would be a pleasant one. With a warm smile the hostess greeted me as I entered. The restaurant was packed. I felt much more comfortable in this crowded place than I did on a previous visit when only a few other people were dining. "I can move over so that the lady can sit here," the gentleman said to the hostess who was trying to find a place for me at the bar. Bar fly Vanessa found the five-glass (1.5 oz/glass) Zinfandel flight went well with the broiled calamari with capers and peppers. Dessert was chocolate mouse cake, good coffee and Sandeman Founder's Port. Later, a young woman who entered the ladies room in great need of relieving herself found that the room had but one toilet and that was occupied by me. Eager to take my place at the toilet, she ran water in the sink saying she was helping me with my shy bladder. Then, trading places. I ran the tap for her. We giggled about such things as I touched up my make-up. I highly recommend this elegant restaurant for a memorable evening of fine dining.

Mail order tips on shoes and wigs -- I've had excellent luck with the Sears Woman's View shoe selection. Shoes sizes to 15-wide in fashionable styles are available without breaking the bank. Paula Young's wigs are nice. I especially like Paige, a shoulder-length style with feather bangs and softly tapered sides in a wide selection of hair colors. I have an assortment of styles and colors, browns, blondes, reds and frosteds, for the best match to my attire.

Girls, go shopping! Wear your fine clothing! Dine out! Have fun!



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Transgenderist's Independence Club PO Box 13604, Albany, NY 12212-3604 (518) 436-4513 (live Thurs.7:30-10 PM)

Transgenderist's Independence Club (TGIC) is a nonprofit, educational, non-sexual social support group for persons wishing to explore beyond the conventional boundaries of gender, including crossdressers, transsexuals and their friends.

#### **TGIC Officers**

or

President Vice President Secretary Treasurer Newsletter Editor



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Readers are invited to submit articles relevant to the Transgendered Community for consideration. You may bring or mail typed pages for publication to the TGIC clubroom. Format should follow that shown in the current newsletter. You may also e-mail the articles to

Regular Meetings are held every Thursday at the TGIC Club Room on Central Avenue in Albany, 7:30 PM to 10 PM. Some come earlier and stay later, but it is wise to call if you are not a Keyholder or if it is your first visit. Come dressed either way, meet and talk with friends. Many continue to socialize at one of the local night spots after the meetings.

## **BECOME AN IFGE MEMBER**

The International Foundation for Gender Education is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Basic membership is \$25 per year. Subscriptions to Transgender Tapestry are \$40. Brochures and forms are available in the TGIC Club Room. Call or write to: IFGE (617) 899-2212 PO Box 229 Waltham, MA 02154-0229

## ANONYMOUS HIV ANTIBODY TESTING

Your regional HIV Counseling and Testing Program provides free HIV counseling and antibody testing, support and referral. No names will be asked.

(NYS Health Department)

Call: (518) 486-1595 or 1-800-962-5065.

### **CLOSETS AVAILABLE FOR RENT**

Two closets in the TGIC Club Room are now available for rent at \$30-\$40 per month, including a key to the room. If you are interested in a closet or becoming a Key Club member (\$10 per month) please call, write, or come to a meeting.

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## REFLECTIONS

It was another dream I had about life on the farm I used to own before I got brainwashed by born again christians and sold it 'cause I thought God made me do it. Families lived on my reclaimed farm with me in this dream. There were single men too. And they had to follow two rules rigorously. They could wear nothing but women's clothing. And all their conversation had to be totaly sensless and absurd. Otherwise they couldn't stay. I woke up and reflected on this. Women, though second class citizens manage to get what they want and be subtle though powerful. While men weilding what they think is power with their old boy networks and religion and politics muck up everything royaly and make life absurd and senseless Inevitably, like the Holy Roman Empire the Patriarchy falls. I couldn't be just a man anymore, There's no room to breath or fly.



MOONHAWK RIVER STONE, B.S. Ph.D. Candidate

10 Colvin Avenue • P.O. Box 6370 • Albany, NY 12206 (518) 446-1261

## **TGIC On-Line**

All transgendered people are invited to join TGIC On-Line, an informal e-mail network sponsored by Transgenderist Independence Club (TGIC) . Messages exchanged on TGIC On-Line focus on events of interest to transgendered people in a region from Lake Placid to Newburg. If you are interested in joining the network, or want more information about TGIC, send an e mail message to: TGIC-request@hartebeest.com with any subject line and in the message body, the text:

#### JOIN TGIC STOP

(Please note: JOIN TGIC must be on line 1. STOP must be on line 2) You will receive an automated acknowledgment (Journal) of your request, which must be approved with the list moderator.

Calendar and Events TGIC meetings are held Thursdays at 7:30-10:00 in the Club house.

June 13 Twenty Club, Hartford CT

June 10-14 16th Annual Be All You Can Be Weekend

June 27 Twenty Club July 15-19 SPICE VI for CDs and Spouses, Atlanta, GA Sept. 27-Albany Pride Week

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