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# Julia

## In Control of Her Life

by Katherine Cummings

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Julia Doulman

**J**ulia is not a big woman but she has amazing strength and a smile which could light up Central Station. She has suffered at the hands of her family, her employers and the bigoted public and she has come through it all with courage and style.

*... she wants people to know that we are not glamorous super models and we are not freaks. We might be the man or woman next door ...*

And now some of this has been recognised by a documentary film maker, who has spent the past two years making a film called *Becoming Julia*. The film will have its world premiere at the International Film Festival, screening at the State Theatre in June 2003. The maker of the film is Ruth Cullen, who has made other documentaries based on the lives of interesting people, notably Vali, a tightrope dancer and Painted Lady who was famous for her tattoos as well as her entertainment skills. Ruth's documentary recorded Vali's life twenty years ago.

And now she has turned her skills to recording the transition of Julia, from a man named Paul who was a farmer and a man among men, through the difficult times of transition as she sought to find her new image, the image which had always been in her mind, but had

never had a form and a shape.

Make no mistake. The film is not about transsexualism ... it is about Julia, Julia the individual and much of the film is in interview format. Julia transitioned formally on 18th October 2001.

Her family have not been accepting and have shown no compassion. Julia's best friend and constant companion is not a relative, nor a lover, but her loving, intelligent Jack Russell named "Muttley". Julia rescued Muttley, who had been abandoned and turned up at Julia's doorstep like a friend in need when Julia's life was difficult and she needed unconditional love.

What does Julia do? She drives anything with wheels and at the moment that means buses. She lost her job driving for the State Transit Authority after abuse from members of the public caused her to retaliate in kind. But she has bounced back and now drives for a private bus company, racking up as much overtime as possible to give her a financial cushion for the "Big Day", whenever it may happen to come.

But back to the documentary. Much of it, as I said, is in interview format, but there are also records of shopping outings and a visit to an image consultant, sequences playing with Muttley and cooking.

Looking at Julia's photos is to see how multi-faceted a person she is. There are photos taken on her farm tractor, photos taken at the wheel of Ian Luff's racing saloon and there are photos of Julia in the street. There are also sexy photos of Julia in a mass of purple tulle, posed by a professional photographer.



Ruth Cullen with Julia Doulman

And what was Julia's motivation in allowing her private life to become public?

She says she wants people to know that we are not glamorous super models and we are not freaks. We might be the man or woman next door and we should be treated with the same compassion and courtesy as any person who starts life with a social handicap and rises above it, by asserting his or her right to respect and understanding.

## Ruth Cullen Has Her Say

When I decided to make a film about a transsexual I contacted the Gender Centre and advertised in *Polare*. A number of people responded and I chose Julia. Over a two year period I followed Julia's progress from the person she used to be, a fellow named Paul, who seemed to me to epitomise the typical Australian male yet had no doubt she was a woman.

As a feminist I have always been interested in issues relating to gender. A sex change is probably the most profound identity crisis that one can go through and the ideal opportunity to really explore what makes us tick. My film is not a "fly on the wall" documentary, it is a process of active engagement between the filmmaker and her subject. It is real life but it is cast, selected, heightened, intensified and constructed real life.

I am interested in the fantastic facets of everyday existence. In these conformist times I believe it is even more important to open up people's humanity where differences and contradictions are not seen as obstacles but rather as things that enrich us all.


## Becoming Julia

Directed by: Ruth Cullen

Starring: Julia Doulman

Producer: Ruth Cullen

Released: 2003

**From Ruth Cullen's website**  You can take the boy out of the girl, but a "rev head" lasts forever. Paul is single, straight and thirty-seven and nothing would suggest he is anything other than the regular, car loving "Aussie" he appears to be at first glance. Underneath it is a different story. Paul is transgendered, and although he still lives as a man and looks like a man, over the next twelve months he will undergo a gender change and live as Julia. Filmed by acclaimed film maker Ruth Cullen over a period of two years, *Becoming Julia* explores the deconstruction and recreation of a person. "Paul's initial appeal to me was that he seemed to epitomize the typical Australian bloke in so many ways yet he had no doubt that she was a woman. I was interested in the contrast between the butch male exterior and her inner feminine world and the point of transition where the man I knew became the woman he really was". - Ruth Cullen.

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The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.