

## Polare Edition 17

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Edition seventeen of *Polare* magazine published in February 1997 contained more than the two feature articles that appear on the left. The other articles were the then new anti-discrimination laws on transgender discrimination, a fact sheet that appears elsewhere on this website, and an article about a now defunct organisation called "Transgender Liberation and Care", a group that, along with another now defunct group called "Transgender Action Group" were highly active in the mid to late 1990's. It is the Gender Centre's intention to publish an article that covers the events of this period, including these two groups and the Gender Centre at a later date.

### Editorial

by Jasper Laybutt, Polare Editor

**W**ith the new year has come many changes within the Gender Centre. A perusal of this edition of *Polare* will reveal that several activities are being brought to fruition, in and outside of our premises. In terms of services, the Gender Centre is definitely making headway with its computer skilling goal, having purchased a number of second-hand computer systems for the community to use. We're also building a gym, and have started with an all-in-one piece of machinery with bench press, "pec dec" etc. Now this isn't just for the boys, you girls are encouraged to tone up and keep fit too.

I'd like to extend a thank you to those of you who attended the Gender Centre's first convention, helping to make it a success, along with those who organised and gave workshops at the event. By now you would have read about it all in our new newsletter, "*The Source*", If not, call us and we'll send you a copy.

### President's Report

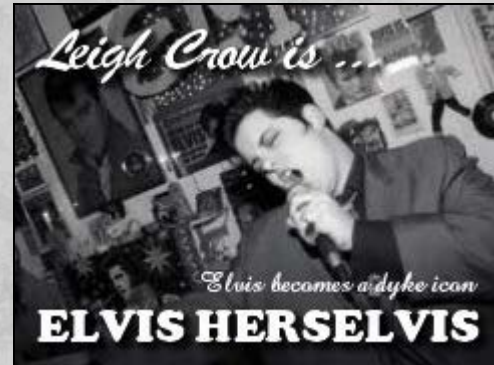
by Roberta Perkins, Management Committee President

**T**he present management committee is halfway through its term in office and in looking back we have come a long way in a remarkably short time. When we came into the Gender Centre it and the community were driven by mistrust, conflict and confrontation. Our two day conference seems to have brought an end to a major disjunction that had existed between the previous Gender Centre management, the Centre's Project Manager and members of the T.L.C. Group. The conference was also effective in discussing a number of issues that concern us all at some stage or other, such as discrimination, sex reassignment surgery, terminology, drug use, sexual relations, health and employment.

People came to these workshops with differing opinions but common experiences, which is a basis for unification, and unity is what we all want, don't we? The transgender community is such a small community compared to other oppressed groups, such as women, blacks, gays and lesbians, yet we seem to suffer with as much, if not greater, divisions within our ranks. These other communities are large enough to absorb division and dissent, from which may emerge quite positive sub-groups with their own agenda. Our oppression is deeper and more individualised than any of these and we need all the strength we can muster collectively to combat the sources of our oppression.

For us, as a community of oppressed people, division is self-destructive. To turn on one another, which a few of us seem hell bent on doing, is mass suicide. You can just imagine what our oppressors are saying when they see the kind of recent mendacious nonsense published in the gay press's letters to the editor, in the street sheets that have been abroad of late, and, more recently, stickers with hate and false messages on them. Those guilty of such activities are self-hating individuals who wish to drag our entire community down to their own level of low self-esteem. Unfortunately, such individuals are too full of their own self-doubts to be able to put the energy they expend spreading gossip and lies to positive use serving our community.

### Feature Articles



And this is no mumbling, enigmatic troubadour from Memphis but an articulate, gregarious dyke from San Francisco.

#### Elvis Herselvis Part 2

Leigh Crow, a.k.a. Elvis Herselvis, has been evoking the King of Rock and Roll and wooing audiences for over three years now, however a dyke taking to the stage in drag is not a common sight, as cross-dressing is still considered a contentious issue among some lesbians.

#### Successful Transition while Working Full-time

Kerry transitioned from male-to-female while working full-time with a Commonwealth government department. She considers that her transition was notable for it's total lack of problems and hopes to help others by sharing her workplace transition experience with us.

If you know individuals responsible for these odious actions you should remind them that if they want to take us back to the dark ages before sex reassignment operations, passports in our chosen gender, anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws, and funding for transgender specific services then they are going the right way about it.

Now to more pleasant matters. As you know, the present management committee was elected on a mandate to employ more transgender people at the Gender Centre. Well, I am pleased to report that the majority of the staff are now transgender who are well trained to meet your needs and service our community with their individual professional expertise. There will be more jobs advertised in the future, so if you feel qualified in any of the positions offered send in your applications.

Lastly, the management committee is here to serve you the community. So, if you have any ideas, suggestions or criticisms put these in a letter addressed to the Management Committee, The Gender Centre Inc., and we will do our utmost to act on these.

## News in Brief

from the pages of Polare Number Seventeen

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### Northern Territory Success

**Darwin, Australia:** The Northern Territory has become the third jurisdiction in Australia, and one of only a handful in the world, which allows transsexuals to alter their birth certificates to reflect their reassigned gender. According to the Sunday *Canberra Times*, a spokesperson for the Northern Territory Attorney-General was quoted as saying that watching the movie *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* raised his awareness of transgender issues.

### DiversiTV

**Sydney, Australia:** A new group has formed in Sydney called DiversiTV. Over 50 people attended the first A.G.M. of the new community group. Subtitled "Gay, Lesbian, Transgender and Bisexual Visual Communications Incorporated", the group focuses upon video, television and multimedia. Co-Presidents, Rick Lansley and Jodie Vale, said "the new group will provide an umbrella for people with a variety of interests to support each other and advance together" Anyone is encouraged to join and to become involved.

### Queer Film

**Sydney, Australia:** *Sexing the Label* is a provocative, cutting edge documentary into the identity politics currently raging in the queerer pockets of Sydney's sexual underground. Director Anna Broinowski questions the restrictive practice of labelling sexualities by inviting the viewer inside the daily experiences and fantasies of the film's central characters. these characters include a female-to-male transsexual and a transgendered self-identified "eunuch", The film appeared as part of this year's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival.

### London Murder

**London, U.K.:** The body of a 23 year-old transvestite prostitute was discovered in his West End flat in London this month. A post-mortem showed death by multiple stabbing, and the identity of the victim has not yet been released. The crime has been described by the leading detective as "a vicious and brutal murder". The police are seeking help from the gay and transgender community.

### Change in Council

**Bankstown, Australia:** Thanks to lobbying from Shona-Marie Wilson, the Bankstown City Council has now updated their Equal Employment Policy to include transgendered people, in keeping with recent changes in N.S.W. legislation. A memo from the Human Resources Coordinator, Kylie Hogarth, spelling out the changes, and rights of transgenders under the amended Anti-Discrimination Act, was sent to all managers and team leaders to "ensure that they are aware of the amendment to the Anti-Discrimination Act and what this means to council." This was in direct response to proactive discussions with Shona-Marie. Congratulations, it's good to see transsexuals making a difference.

### Argentina Hope

**Buenos Aires, Argentina:** The civil rights of sexual minorities were recently acknowledged in Argentina when the city of Buenos Aires repealed the infamous "Police Edicts" which were used for years to detain transsexuals, transvestites, gays and lesbians, prostitutes and other "undesirables". Some estimates state that four hundred arrests occurred every day under these laws, which saw victims held for around twelve hours in a police station, abused, blackmailed and threatened. Those arrested were never taken to court. Over the past four years, over 40 transvestites were murdered, while some transsexual sex workers maintain many spend an average of three nights a week at the police station. Under the new law, arrests for being "suspicious" or to check an individual's police records will be forbidden. Other arrests will go before a judge. It is thought, however, that police will still continue to harass transsexuals as millions of dollars are taken through bribery and blackmail each week.

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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.

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## Elvis Herselvis

### Not a Mumbling, Enigmatic Troubadour from Memphis but an Articulate, Gregarious Dyke from San Francisco

by Kerry Bashford

Article appeared in Polare magazine: April 1997 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Leigh Crow does not play Presley but Elvis Herselvis, a lesbian Elvis impersonator.

Standing in the doorway, I have a vision. I find myself in the 1950s in what appears to be an underground bomb shelter. Sitting across from me to a row of sequined suits is Elvis Presley. I blink and realise this is no Cold War bunker but the bleak subterranean dressing rooms of Kinselas Nightclub in Sydney. And this is no mumbling, enigmatic troubadour from Memphis but an articulate, gregarious dyke from San Francisco.

*... since Elvis' death, there's been such an increase in Elvis impersonators that by the year 2000, one in every five Americans will be an Elvis impersonator.*

Leigh Crow, a.k.a. Elvis Herselvis, has been evoking the King of Rock and Roll for three years now. Her uncanny portrayal has made her a popular entertainer in queer clubs and the alternative cabaret circuit in America. While in Australia

she played exhilarating sets with her band 'Tear it Up', recalling the King with her sensuous vibrato, while wiping the sweat from her brow with the panties of devoted fans.

Crow believes that Presley and the idols of his age occupy an important place among lesbian icons. She explains, "men had a little more glamour then. Elvis was very primped and had a definite feminine side. The 1950s and '60s teen idol works for dykes because they were the sensitive rebels, the little boy lost. It works into a not really butch image but a very dreamy one. Elvis is going to become the dyke icon like Marilyn is for the boys. Like K.D. Lang, the whole image that she's got, I think that's where it came from".

As for Crow, she realised that the Presley posturing that so amused her friends could be interpreted on stage as well. When she took to the boards as Elvis Herselvis, "it was at a dyke rock 'n roll club and they really went crazy for it. It was a chance for them to really get silly which, in the dyke community, is not really a common experience".

A dyke taking to the stage in drag is not a common sight either as cross-dressing is still a contentious issue among some lesbians. Leigh Crow did not devise her Elvis exclusively as a political statement but she has found the experience politically invigorating nonetheless. "Drag is great, it's a great way to express yourself. I don't just mean boys doing girl drag, I mean leather and uniform and stuff. It can really free you. It can be an empowering experience, definitely." And what better way to be a 'drag king' than by impersonating the King himself.

In her willingness to challenge correctness, Elvis Herselvis is not unlike her role model. When Presley wriggled his pelvic muscles in a manner not befitting a white boy, the white picket fences of America trembled as well. This is a fact often obscured by the imposing figure of his later years, the bloated and burnt-out 'whalevis', his sequined suits barely holding the sweating obesity. The original Presley prototype however was more of a cultural terrorist - dangerous boy who was crossing the race barrier, the sex barrier and scaring all the people.

Consequently this is the Elvis that Crow prefers to interpret. However her interpretation has an interesting twist. While other impersonators mimic the man, never letting go of the illusion, Leigh Crow does not play Presley but Elvis Herselvis, a lesbian Elvis impersonator. This allows her to recreate him not only in song but in story as well, sharing anecdotes about the man that not only illustrate his life but also examine the cult of the King.

A favourite story deals with his encounter with Richard Nixon which Crow believes shows Presley "could get away with anything ... he wrote Nixon a letter to say how he was very concerned about the youth of America getting into the drug music and drug culture of the late-1960s. He had Nixon convinced that he needed a drug enforcement badge to promote a different image in rock 'n roll and had Nixon completely bullshitted ... no-one except federal drug agents were allowed to have them. I mean, it gave him the legal right to have drugs and transport them across state lines. The hysterical thing is if you've ever seen the picture, he was so (drug) fucked when he went to get the badge. Just bizarre." Crow claims he already had a huge collection of badges, some given to him by sheriffs making him an honorary deputy, proving "he was practically a uniform queen".

Leigh Crow's irreverence puts Elvis Herselvis out of step with her peers. "I've tried to steer clear of the 'jumpsuit contingent'. I don't know if they'd appreciate the camp values I bring to the act. A lot of them are very serious. Some are completely out of control, like, Elvis comes to them in spirit and chooses them. I've heard this from more than one. They believe that they have been chosen to carry on his words and music; it's a very bizarre phenomenon.

While many of the impersonators claim inspiration from the King himself, Crow has had other callings. In the past she has had the opportunity to add other characters to her camp ensemble and hopes to include even more in the future. "What I'd like to do is do a set of Marilyn drag and something else in between and then come out and do Elvis. I've done a couple of things beside Elvis. I did a Wayne Neuter thing, a cheesy lounge singer, who was a lot of fun. I've done a Lesley Gore drag thing. And I'd love to do a conceptual piece, a story of Connie Francis, which would be just too hysterical. Like 'Where the Boys Are' is my favourite karaoke song. When I go to do karaoke I never do Elvis. Connie's camp because of the over the top sentimentality. It's like Elvis where you can really camp out on the stuff because it's so over the top already."

Crow will be able to 'camp out' in a major way if she realises one particular dream for Elvis. She hopes to undertake an ambitious project that would show the King in his three most famous incarnations - the Young Elvis, the Hollywood Elvis and the White Jumpsuit Elvis.

This would certainly confirm Elvis Herselvis' unique position among the legions of Presley practitioners that inhabit the American landscape. Clearly, no other entertainer in history has been emulated so often and so fanatically. The statistics are certainly scary. According to Crow, "since Elvis' death, there's been such an increase in Elvis impersonators that by the year 2000, one in every five Americans will be an Elvis impersonator".

As I stand at the door of the dressing room and prepare to leave I have another vision. It is the turn of the century and I am watching the inauguration of a new president. In a lame suit and an improbable pompadour, an Elvis impersonator excepts the mandate of the nation, ruffles falling from an upraised hand. The audience of sequins and sideburns eagerly receive their new leader. So, I think, the rumours of the last twenty years were true. Elvis is alive and well. Looking closer, I notice they just left out one detail. Elvis is alive and ... well ... lesbian.

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# Successful Transition while Working Fulltime

## Waiting for the Wheels to Fall Off, But They Didn't!

by Kerry

Article appeared in Polare magazine: April 1997 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

**H**il! My name is Kerry. I am a male-to-female transgender, and I have just completed a successful transition while working full-time with a Commonwealth Government Department. This transition has been notable for it's total lack of problems - for a time I was waiting for the wheels to fall off, but they didn't. I don't think they ever will now.

The major reason for this is that I work with several hundred extremely tolerant and accepting people - they are that way due to the nature of our business. I don't think that there are many other places in Australia in which I would have had the same response. Despite the fact that I seem to have gone about it the right way, without them it would not have been so smooth. I owe them more than I could ever repay.

I would like to share my experience with you - maybe it could be of help in your transition.

In many ways, I am lucky. I am only 168cm (5ft. 6in.) tall, and I don't have strongly masculine features. My face is acceptable (I am a young looking forty-seven-year-old woman), and my hands and feet, although definitely not feminine, are not too big. I had lost much of my hair years ago, so I have to wear a wig. I have several, but the one I use at work is layered close to the head, is appropriate for my age, and suits me perfectly. This is one of the biggest regrets I have - like most women, my hair is one of the most important aspects of my appearance, but I am resigned to wearing wigs for the rest of my life. However, in general my appearance is appropriate, I am naturally feminine, and I am healthy. I am difficult to "pick", so I must have a lot going for me.

I left my transition until later in life, as I was unable to deal fully with my feelings until now. I have had many problems with self-confidence over the years, and I have struggled for most of my life with guilt as a result of being "different". I have never been able to accept that I was doing or feeling anything wrong, so I persisted and finally reached a satisfactory resolution.

Although I had tried unsuccessfully to do a transition ten years ago, and have been working towards this attempt for the last three or four years, I did not start my final preparations until August 1996, when I finally came to terms with the last part of me that I had been denying. By this time I had been on hormones for over a year (this time around), and I was physically ready. The last of my preparations was to tweeze my face, and I still have to spend several hours on it every day to maintain my appearance. However it is early days yet and the growth is showing signs of softening, although I may be forced to have laser treatment to resolve it for good.

A large part of my success is due to the fact that I now have the confidence and poise I had been lacking for so long. I was ready, and I took what was probably my last chance. I had also decided that I could not fool all the people all the time, so I no longer worry about it - the result was to increase my self-confidence and make me even harder to pick.

It is an interesting fact that people see what they want to see. Give them an acceptable, "normal" appearance, and they won't question some anomalies. For example, although my voice is not feminine, I soften it and raise the pitch a little, so no-one has ever changed their mind about me because of it. They see an ordinary woman, and they accept me as that. Mind you, although some anomalies won't be noticed, that doesn't mean that a glaringly appropriate mannerism will be accepted. By and large, if your appearance is appropriate, and your mannerisms natural, that will swing the balance. The key word here is natural - if your behaviour is forced, it will show.

I take great care to dress appropriately, and I tend to wear predominantly casual clothes. My job is such that jeans are appropriate, so I often wear them - most women doing the same job dress the same way. However, I am a feminine woman and prefer skirts, so I make a point of wearing one regularly. I don't want anyone to think that I will be avoiding that particular statement.

Over the years, I have given a lot of thought to my transition, and the correct way to approach my workmates. Until recently, I didn't think I could do it at my current workplace (Commonwealth Government) but my mind was to change. I was telling a lot of people about myself - probably a fundamental need for acceptance - and everyone I told at work was highly supportive. Over the six and a half years I have worked there, I have made many friends and gained the respect of most of the staff due largely to my good nature and helpful disposition. All my "support group" at work were encouraging me to do my transition there, so I changed my mind and decided to go for it.

That was the best decision I have made for a long time - until then, I had assumed that I would be self-employed for the rest of my life. I was intending to work from home, doing word processing, desktop publishing and multimedia presentations. I wasn't looking forward to being financially secure for a long time, if ever. This decision changed all that, and its importance cannot be overrated - work is the hardest issue to resolve in our lives. Yes, it was extremely difficult to do the transition so openly in front of hundreds of people, but it

*it was extremely difficult to do the transition so openly in front of hundreds of people, but it would be so much harder to find other work.*

would be so much harder to find other work.

The decision made, all that was left was to implement it. As I worked in the public service, there is a well established approach to the dissemination of information, In my case, I presented an open letter to all staff to all the Branch Heads. I gave it to them personally, and they had the opportunity to ask questions and make comments. I am lucky in that my workplace is very tolerant due to the nature of our business, and I expected it to be well received by the staff - numbering in excess of 350 at this time, over several sites. The Branch Heads were asked to pass it on to their Section Heads, and from them it was to be distributed to all staff.

I gave the letter to the Branch Heads on 5th November 1996, and immediately went on sick leave. This was to give the staff time to talk about it without my presence, and to allow me to complete my preparations. I had urged staff to call me with their feelings, and although not a lot did, there was a strong response from a significant number of people. They were unanimous in praising my courage, and the integrity and power displayed by my letter, but it is courage when you have no options left?

Unfortunately there was a breakdown in communications in one branch, and not all staff received the letter when they should have - a situation I had deliberately tried to avoid by using this approach. However, in general it worked very well.

My intention was to visit the workplace after two weeks to show people that I am quite normal in appearance, and to break the ice for me. I did this, and visited on 20th November for lunch in the cafeteria. I was terrified - I have never been so scared. It was far worse than the first time I went public over ten years ago and was probably the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. The reason was, of course, the fact that there were over 200 people there, all of whom I know very well, and all of whom would be eager to see me (although I didn't expect many to come up to me and welcome me back yet).

Most of my "support group" knew I was coming in, and I think they were almost as nervous as I was - they had no idea what I would look like. Of course, I looked quite normal, but despite all my assurances they weren't to know that. I was careful to wear something neutral - styled jeans and a knitted top - so as not to give them too much to deal with at one time.

I arrived just before noon. The first person I met was one of my support group, who passed me in the corridor without recognising me, or seeing me as other than a normal visitor (we get a lot). She smiled as she walked past, and then I spoke to her. She spun around, and the joy in her face was wonderful - she was so pleased to see me back, and so excited that she must have been on the phone within seconds to spread the news. My immediate workmates were overjoyed to see me, and relieved to see that I did, after all, look quite normal and "unpickable".

Over lunch in the café (I could only drink a coffee) and for a further three hours, I was seen by a lot of people (many of whom didn't recognise me at first), and spoke to over thirty. As people met me, their reaction was always one of amazement that I look so good as a woman. I had told them this, but they had to see it to believe it. They couldn't help staring at this attractive woman called Kerry, who looked so different, and was so natural as a woman, but was otherwise the same Kerry they had worked with for years. I felt naked being the centre of attention, but it was also a good feeling that they were so happy with what they were seeing. I knew that I was not "pickable", but it was nice to be reassured and accepted. This was also the day I went full-time, and I was out as much as possible from then until my return to work.

I then went away to complete my preparations, and to allow the news to get around. I returned to full-time work on 2nd December and although I was nervous walking into the building, my earlier visit had served to make my return far less traumatic. Many people thought I was just another temp in the Registry, and the look in their faces when they realised it was me was great.

It is now 7th December, and I have been back at work for a week. In that week, I have not had one problem. Prior to my transition, I had arranged that I would only use a specified women's toilet for a short time - it was cleared with those affected while I was away, and has been very satisfactory in practice. The only thing I was firm on was that I would not use a man's toilet under any circumstance, but it has not proven to be a problem.

For my first four days back, I was careful not to give them too much to come to terms with at one time. I wore jeans and casual tops, and I did all the work that was expected of me - the same as if I had not done a transition. I work in a registry, so I was doing the internal mail runs twice a day, and I also did the external courier run in the van. I felt it was important to be seen to be doing all the normal things, and although it was difficult to do the internal deliveries right from the start, it was the right thing to do.

On the fifth day - Friday - I was determined to show them that I was a normal feminine women, so I wore a calf length casual skirt and top. I was again nervous (I had overcome the nerves early in the week), but it broke the ice for them. I had nothing but good comments on my dress sense, and the fact that I look so normal. This was what most impressed everyone - the fact that I look quite normal, and that my behaviour is naturally feminine and convincing. Until they saw it, they didn't know what to expect - was I going to turn up in a mini and stilettos?

After a week they now know that I am a normal attractive women. By the very fact that I was so up front with my transition, and so normal after it, I left them with nothing to question or criticise. As a result there has been nothing but good feeling, and I am now starting to be treated like any other women. In particular the other women are starting to see me as a woman now, and talking to me about normal things. I have had more questions about how I stop the lippie bleeding, and where I bought the skirt, than I have about the practical aspects of changing from a male to a female role. In fact, those sort of questions have so far been notable by their absence.

I now consider that I have completed my transition. Life to me feels quite ordinary, and although I have been looking forward to this time for more years that I care to remember, it is almost an anti-climax. There is just so much "interesting life" one can cope with, and I simply want an ordinary life now. I am looking forward to a quiet life as a woman, with a normal job and friends. I want surgical reassignment as soon as possible, and the fact that I have transitioned successfully in my job will be a very positive influence.

## Summary:

One month ago I circulated a letter to all the staff, In it, I stated that I had been suffering from an identity crisis all my life. So I went, did what I had to do, and returned as a perfectly normal woman - I took the challenge I had set myself and faced up to it. I was careful not to confront them or offend them.

All the staff seem to have responded to my honesty and integrity, and to my openness, despite the extreme difficulty of my actions. I have had many comments on the integrity of my open letter, and the powerful emotions it raised. On my return to work, I immediately went around the building on the internal deliveries (I work in a registry) - that showed them the strength of my commitment. They have therefore accepted me without any apparent reservations, and have a lot of respect for the way I went about it.

I believe that is why I have been so successful in my transition - I told them openly what I was going to do, and then did it just as I said I would. I have not hidden away, and I have not asked for any concessions. Basically I have given no one any ground for criticism. I have their respect - that is the recipe for a successful transition!

## My advice to anyone:

In your private life:

- » Remember that much of what makes a person is not visible - it is in your attitudes and concepts.
- » Get as much honest feedback as possible - preferably from the broader community. Ask your friends to be totally honest with their opinions of you and your appearance.
- » Use self-affirmation techniques regularly - stand in front of the mirror often and praise yourself. It works!
- » Observe people carefully. See just what is the normal dress and behaviour of your chosen gender. You will find that it varies enormously, and that there are many anomalies.
- » Always dress and make up appropriately for the circumstances and your age. Try not to "dress up" - over dressed people draw attention.
- » Never try to force your behaviour - it will look unnatural. Instead, be aware of yourself, and let the inappropriate behaviour die out. Ask friends to tell you honestly if they see any inappropriate behaviour.
- » Practise walking and standing properly, but don't exaggerate. Don't try to be a perfect member of your chosen gender leave that to professional models (and even they don't see themselves as perfect!)
- » Don't be afraid to ask your friends about proper dress sense and presentation.
- » Get out in public as much as possible, and don't avoid daylight. It will be very difficult at first, but the only way to become "natural" is to live the life you want. It will improve your confidence, and as a result, your general wellbeing.
- » You will find that people see what they want to - they don't want to have to question. The first impression (usually visual) they get of you will be the lasting one. If they see a few anomalies later, they will tend to ignore them if they are not too obvious.
- » If you have a voice problem, do get professional help. Speech pathology can be very useful. One of the hardest things is to convince someone you have never met, on the phone. Try a little harder than usual - it is possible to get success here too.
- » Be aware that human behaviour is very varied. Not all women like to watch the *Midday Show*, and not all men like going to the pub. You don't have to become a totally different person to succeed in your chosen gender. In fact, a transition will be easier when people realise that you are still the same person you always were.
- » People will definitely have difficulties if you suddenly change your behaviour - work on changing things slowly so they can get used to it, and above all, don't exaggerate.

In your transition, both in your private life and at work:

- » Be open and honest.
- » Make it clear exactly what you intend doing, and why.
- » Give people the chance to come to terms with your decision - they have their rights too.
- » Do the transition exactly as you said you would.
- » Don't confront them - give them the opportunity to decide for themselves - but don't hide away.
- » Always show the strength of your commitment.
- » Continue your life in your chosen gender normally.
- » Dress and make-up appropriately.
- » Don't avoid difficult situations.
- » Be committed to your new life, no matter what the difficulties, and
- » Don't ask for any concessions not afforded anyone else.

Remember that it is up to you to convince those around to accept you. Tolerance may or may not be a legal requirement, but acceptance is another matter. You may have the right to live your life the way you want, but so do they. You could well find that you are a bit unlucky with some physical aspects. The trick is to make the most of everything you can, and you will find that you can often get away with some problems. Behave appropriately, live normally, and show the strength of your commitment to your new life.

The main aim is to gain the respect of those around you - once you have this, their acceptance should follow. You will give yourself the



best chance of success if you can get, and keep their respect.

Everyone who has completed a successful transition will have their own story and suggestions. They all vary - no two situations are the same - but there will be common threads running through them all. Take note of the advice we offer and adapt it to your situation. I consider that if I can help only one person with one aspect of their transition, I would be very happy.

## Update: January 1997

I took a couple of weeks recreation leave at Christmas, after a little more than three weeks back. My feeling is that everything is back to normal, and I have been accepted totally and without reservation - one of my male friends at work even gave me a friendly hug and kiss publicly when I left on Christmas Eve. He was one of the "support group" I had in place at the start, but he would not dream of doing that to someone he saw as a man. That is indicative of the support and acceptance I have received from everyone, both at work and outside.

Everyone finds that the hardest thing to get right is that very small word "she". Gender is so integral with your identity that they will keep referring to you as "he" for a long time. Maybe when you no longer hear "he" in reference to yourself, that will be the sign that you have made it!

I consider that I have now completed a totally successful transition. I am completely comfortable in the workplace as well as outside, and I am being treated normally by everyone. They will eventually see me only as a woman, but for the time being many will continue to have a strong memory of who I was. In time that will fade away, and while at the moment I am totally accepted as "Kerry, who is now living as a woman", I will eventually be simply "a woman called Kerry". That will happen without being noticed " one day I will come to the realisation that it is a fact. I look forward to that day!

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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.