

# Polare Edition 25

Published: August 1998 Last Update: June 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

## Editorial

by Craig Andrews

**W**e have a very full issue this time 'round.

So, first of all, an apology to you if you wanted stuff in this issue but haven't made it. *Polare 26* is already nearly laid out such is the demand for space.

Elizabeth gives another transparent and informative report on her efforts on the behalf of the transgender communities.

I encourage you to read the "Management Committee Report" regarding her efforts at the Centre. You don't need me to tell you (but I will) that, should the Gender Centre see another year out, the status and opportunities for transgender/transsexual people will benefit in no small way from her efforts. Having worked day in and day out with this lady, she has a heart for this community and a passion for this work that deserves your full and compassionate support.

Katherine Cummings invites your comments and suggestions on page 7. We welcome the Seahorse Society's presence back in these pages on page 6 - great to hear from you again ladies. norrie mAy-welby makes some encouraging comments on page 19.

Finally, guys, check out "Transmen" and Phinn also has some interesting information for the guys.

## President's Report

by Col Eglinton

**I** must confess to feelings of despair about internal division and animosities at present within our community.

It is with deep pain I see people who are working to their full capacity in all sorts of ways: — paid, voluntary, as activists — all concerned people — coming under attack and counter-attack. We are such a small and marginalised community that I do not believe this is healthy or helpful.

Rather, I would wish to see our energy and anger directed at our true enemies — the bashers and perpetrators of all forms of violence against transgender people and the people, organisations and institutions that support and condone oppression and discrimination.

I do not have a problem with healthy debate, inquiry and criticism. I do have a problem with any form of dishonesty, defamation and personal attacks.

I see people's time being wasted on trying to survive emotionally and in other ways when their effort should be spent on improving and extending our services, activities, political actions and our lives.

Currently, we are witnessing the rise of conservatism in Australian society — and this rise has a domino effect. It's

## Feature Articles



... "This means we'll all have to come-out," said my friend and teacher Joanna Macy ...

### Coming-Out Whole

Caitriona has been out among friends for about 20 years, but to truly come-out has always meant coming out to her Buddhist community of students and fellow teachers. Only now does she realise how incomplete she had been because she hadn't had the courage to do that.

### Westpac faces Transgender Issues

Westpac is exploring ways in which they can strategically align their business with their customer base and more creatively pursue their diversity program. Part of the solution was employing a transgender woman in one of their branches in the eastern suburbs of Sydney.

### The Seahorse Society

The moves to form an association for heterosexual transvestites began in 1969, and culminated in the formation of the Seahorse Club in 1971. Nowadays the Seahorse Society of N.S.W. welcomes those who cross-dress infrequently to those that identify as transsexual.

### Kate Cummings: Democrat Candidate For Grayndler

Katherine Cummings, who had gender reassignment surgery in early 1989, has recently been endorsed as the Australian Democrats' candidate for the federal seat of Grayndler at the upcoming election and intends to make services to the transgender community a priority.

### What it Means to be a Man

Michael has always been a man, thought like one, walked like one, spoken like one. The only trouble was that since puberty he's had breasts and menstruated every month, which made hiding harder yet everyone still expected him to stop being a tomboy and act like a lady.

### Toleration

"Toleration" by Amy Lewis. Don't tolerate me. Tolerate is keep

not only welfare recipients, Aboriginal services or young people receiving benefits who are being targeted. All forms of social service, funding and what is seen often as "special treatment" are criticised and support withdrawn.

We are almost as invisible and unpopular a group as inmates — so if our funding were withdrawn I do not believe there would be a mass civil uprising to support us. What we have in funding and resources has taken many years of hard work and battling to obtain and maintain. If it were lost, then in the current economic and political climate, it would never be regained.

Yet there has been a public declaration by one member that if the Gender Centre does not go in the direction they want they would make every effort through their political and Health Department contacts to have our funding withdrawn or diverted elsewhere.

I cannot ignore such threats and am making you all aware that this is what is going on.

Almost every member would, I imagine, be horrified that such threats and coercion are being applied to us.

I am sure you all understand fully the consequences — loss of our Centre, housing, staff, services, support, information, political influence, social and information activities, public information, support and information for partners, friends and family, youth support, AIDS-prevention strategies, lobbying of employers and advocacy of transgender people for inclusion in their workforce, improving information on and access to surgery and other medicine procedures, monitoring of and improving psychiatric, medical/health services, advocacy for transgender inmates, representation, training to employer groups and their staff, input into departmental and organisational policies and procedures with special emphasis on E.E.O. — the list goes on. People's very lives and well-being can depend on the presence or absence of appropriate services.

Let's all work together to try and achieve the most we can for the maximum number of people, but also not forget those in most need (who might be a minority).

The management committee and the staff are the Centre, trying to do our best (probably not perfectly). We need your support.

## Management Committee Report

by Leslie Finlay

**R**ecently we have become aware of attacks upon the coordinator of the Gender Centre, Elizabeth Riley. The management committee wishes to make it clear that Elizabeth has the full support of the entire committee. Furthermore the management committee would like all members to be aware that there is appropriate procedure for bringing complaints to our notice, and that is by writing to the management committee.

Members should also be aware that it is the management committee which runs the Gender Centre, and that approval for major initiatives must be given by the management committee, before they can proceed. While the day to day running of the Gender Centre is entrusted to the co-ordinator, she works in close liaison with the management committee, to ensure that full knowledge of the Centre's activities is known to the committee.

The goals and objectives of the Gender Centre, as laid down in the constitution are as follows:

1. To provide temporary accommodation, in a safe and supportive environment, to people with gender issues who are homeless, distressed or otherwise in need of such accommodation;
2. to provide accurate information and referral services for people with gender issues in relation to legal, education, health, housing, welfare and employment services;
3. to liaise closely with other legal, health, housing, welfare and employment services which may be of assistance to people with gender issues; and
4. to encourage community understanding of the interests, concerns and needs of people with gender issues.

In the time that Elizabeth has been the coordinator at the Gender Centre, the following are some of the areas and activities that she has engaged in, on behalf of the transgender community.

- » Training to the N.S.W. Department of Education and Training;
- » training to 22 health related agencies;
- » training to 6 employers/employer groups;
- » networking with over 50 employer groups/agencies; and

very quiet. Tolerate is the closet. Tolerate is the weapon of fear. Tolerate is what you accept from your family. Tolerate isn't a boot to the head, only the threat of it. Tolerate is slow strangulation.

### The Joy of Belonging

Invited to a women's retreat in the Blue Mountains, Alison, who has only been living as a woman for six months found the prospect of a weekend of communal living with 20 other women daunting, however instead, she experienced the indescribable joy of belonging.

### The Hermaphrodite Soul

Ib writes that Yin is the masculine force and signifies the earth, death and the darkness of night. Yang is the feminine force and signifies the sky, birth and the light of day. Maintaining harmony within the body and soul is to maintain the balances of the Yin and Yang.

» Sitting on the A.D.B. Transgender Consultative Committee, the Transgender Prisons Policy Sub-Committee, the Department for Women Working Party, and the H.C.C.C. Consultation.

Elizabeth has been in consultation with the N.S.W. Health Department, Women's Community Health Centre's, and the N.S.W. Department of Education and Training, in their development of policies. She has also provided advocacy on behalf of four transgenders in the process of transitioning while employed.

Elizabeth has been working with specific employers on behalf of transgender folk and has had success, specifically with Westpac, Manpower and the Body Shop. She has been interviewed by the print media, the *Illawarra Mercury* running a story about someone who transitioned, had an excellent support story by Elizabeth. She has given four radio interviews and one television interview, and has had articles printed in two major industry magazines, and in L.O.T.L.

Elizabeth has given advocacy at all levels of society on behalf of the transgender community. She is currently a member of the Australian Businesswomen's Network, and the Employment Equity Specialist Association, and while she has been achieving this she has also maintained full responsibility as coordinator of the Gender Centre.

I doubt that any fair-minded person could find much to complain about at this level of activity. We are very lucky to have her working at the Gender Centre.

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# Coming Out Whole

## A Buddhist Teacher Gives Up Hiding

by Caitriona Reed

Article appeared in Polare magazine: August 1998 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Caitriona Reed, Senior Teacher in Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Inner-Being at Manzanita Village Retreat Centre in San Diego County, California, U.S.A.

**T**his past April I gave up hiding. The energy I had been using to maintain a life of secrecy was exhausted. I could no longer bear to live with the fear and shame that had haunted me. I let it be known that I am a transgendered person, a transsexual. I came-out of the closet!

***Where does this leave me? I've spoken the words, declaring myself to be a transgendered person. I have painted my nails and painted my face. Every day I move a little further into this newfound freedom.***

For about sixteen years I have taught Buddhism and Buddhist meditation. For the last eight years or so it has been my main occupation, my job description. Although I have been 'out' among certain friends for about twenty years, to truly come-out of the closet has always meant coming-out within my community of students and fellow teachers. Only now do I realise how incomplete I have been because I have not had the courage to do that. The whole process of my transition, whatever that might turn out to be, has been on hold.

I, like all of us, have been afraid. Fear makes us lie. It cripples us, even though we may get comfortable enough to move around within the confines of our deceptions. Then we end up inhabiting them, and they become an invisible shell that we drag around with us. I wandered, lost in obsession and fantasy, not knowing where my secret would lead me. I couldn't imagine it would lead anywhere but to more shame and to rejection by the people I cared for. I started to come-out once, over ten years ago, and began to make a transition. My fear quickly drove me back into the closet.

I assumed that an apparently intelligent male person, a literate person, a spiritual person (a Buddhist teacher, for goodness sake!) could hardly be taken seriously in a dress. After all, wasn't I supposed to have smoothed out all the rough edges and transcend desires altogether? Perhaps if there were some demon desires still lingering, I should simply go away and meditate some more!

The assumptions we have about our gender are reinforced on a daily basis. We have layers of social, cultural and emotional conditioning, supporting our ideas of what it means to be masculine or feminine. For most of us, our designated gender is at the very core of who we think we are and goes largely unquestioned. We would question our race, cultural or economic station, religion, politics and just about everything else, before questioning our assumed gender.

The common assumption is that what you have between your legs is your gender, but there is a constellation of other factors, hormonal and behavioural, that make us masculine or feminine. What you have between your legs is sex (male or female). Gender (masculine or feminine) is between your ears; it is the whole of your life, your emotional and mental make-up, the way you present yourself in society, the way you interact with others, your imagination, the theatre of your being.

Sex is the American obsession, so it's not surprising that almost everything gets sexualized. The first thing people wonder about a transgendered person is how they have sex and who they have it with; but being transgendered may have as much to do with sex as riding a bike or baking cookies. Some of us are born male and feel we are women, some of us are born female and feel we are men. Some of us are gay, some straight, some asexual, some bisexual. We should avoid generalisations.

In recent years, the term transgendered has allowed a community, which includes cross-dressers, drag queens and transsexuals, to describe ourselves and to unite to gain recognition and civil rights. There is an increasing movement away from stereotyping and there is also an increasing demand that we be de-medicalised. The society that has confused gender identity with reproductive organs has little tolerance for variation. It's hardly surprising that someone not fitting the stereotypes is rejected as a freak. Personally, I would like to question the paradigm that insists I must be unmistakably either a man or a woman.

My earliest memories have to do with understanding myself to be a girl rather than, or perhaps as well as, a boy. I still have a scar from the brick that was thrown at me in kindergarten because I always played with the girls. It was, of course, the boys who objected and came to get me, bricks and sticks in hand.

Boarding school was a strange ordeal. Looking back at the ways I managed to compensate, I am amazed and saddened. For me, to be a man was to be afraid, angry and alone. I once wrote a poem titled 'I'd Rather be a Woman than Have to be Right'. There's something

about the burden of the stereotypical masculine role that always remained extremely uncomfortable, a barrier between myself and the world.

The Dharma, the practice of Buddhism, has been my refuge. For a while it was a way to be safe behind my wall. I never meant it to happen that way, but now my life, my heart, insist that I be honest. As the barriers disintegrate, I step out from behind them, just as I am. Of course, I have always been aware of the puritanism, homophobia and intolerance that lurk within Buddhism and within institutionalised spirituality in general, especially in America. The pomposity and posturing, the reluctance to come clean and be simple, honest and human is astonishing and utterly sad; and it still frightens me. Buddhism is not always the Dharma; just as the Church is not always Christian. Despite that, because of that, I step out anyway.

I still don't know where this road will lead. I have now resumed the use of hormones under medical supervision, after erratic self-medication for a number of years. If I end up undergoing sex reassignment surgery, it is not so much to cure the malady of Gender Identity Disorder, as it is to continue the celebration of life.

I am in a monogamous relationship with a woman, with whom I teach and to whom I am married. Michele and I are best friends. She has known who I am since we first came together seventeen years ago. I feel blessed that Michele and I have something much more akin to a partnership, in which we are strengthened by a mutual and ongoing determination to question all stereotypes.

Four months have gone by since my April coming-out. I could never have guessed the response I would get from friends in our community and now also from strangers as I teach around the world. "Thank you for coming-out. I feel I now have permission to be who I am", was a response I received from more than one person. "Thanks for challenging our expectations. That is your job, isn't it?" said one of my students. "This means we'll all have to come-out," said my friend and teacher Joanna Macy, with whom I had shared my secret years ago, but who had tears in her voice when I spoke to her on the phone about my coming-out. She was expecting the birth of her grandchild within the next day or two. She said, "Now I can celebrate two births." When I saw my teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, he simply asked, "Do we call you 'Caitriona' now?"

Where does this leave me? I've spoken the words, declaring myself to be a transgendered person. I have painted my nails and painted my face. Every day I move a little further into this newfound freedom. I am undergoing intensive electrolysis to eliminate my beard. When I go out for the evening, it feels fine to put on my face and dress up. It doesn't feel like it's such a big deal anymore. So, what do I do now? Is my life doomed to become no more than a series of fashion statements? A little experiment in performance art? The first Buddhist teacher in America (that I know of) to be a transsexual? I don't pass as a woman, many transsexuals don't - but that is not the issue. Passing may mean going back into another closet, that same closet of unquestioning stereotypical identity. Even so, I am delighted to be called 'ma'am', especially when I'm not even trying to pass.

A part of my motivation in coming-out was to stand up and be counted. Knowing what it's like to hide, I hope to make it a little easier, by my example, for others to reveal themselves. Moreover, I wish to challenge the rigidity of gender stereotypes, which makes hiding necessary for the transgendered person in the first place, often for reasons of physical safety. If by not passing, by sticking out like a sore thumb even.

I have helped save the life of one transgendered suicidal teenager, who thought he was alone; or if one gender-phobic, homophobic thug is stopped in his tracks (because, after all, I am six foot two); or if one stranger, put at ease because I am at ease, catches my eye, and we smile and all fear is dissolved, for an instant, for both of us; then my life is being well spent.

There is still fear. Perhaps I will ultimately find myself lonely and despised. Perhaps this is proof, after all, that my 'spiritual' life has no validity, nor any real meaning. Perhaps, if I had attained successful insight into the nature of self, I would know that all this business about male and female, masculine and feminine, is just a dance of shadows.

Well, perhaps this is precisely what I do know, having devoted most of my life to exploring such things. Perhaps it is because that is what I know best, know in my bones, that I have the strength to come-out. Perhaps it is because I have come to an appreciation of impermanence and the breathtaking inter-connectedness of things that I have come to value the precious particularity of every detail of my being. I may lose a lot, I may even lose you as my friend, but I have reclaimed my life. Arrogant as it may sound, that is my gift for both of us.

How strange that organised religion has always aspired to express a certain androgyny of spirit yet insists on absolute physiological gender differentiation. To realise androgyny in our bodies is to challenge the status quo to its core. It is called the work of the Devil, or of Mara (a Buddhist counterpart). Why is desire considered so dangerous? Why is the body despised? Why do we give up the authenticity of our life to realise an invented God or a contrived Enlightenment? Is the fear of death so great that we must bargain away our natural wisdom, our sensuality and passion, our celebration and joy?

Is what I am doing skilful, is it harmful? Am I a fool to imagine anyone will take me seriously anymore? I am beyond caring. The soft echo of this moment is enough; the softness I feel in my body, the sweetness and energy inside me. Thanks to my teachers, thanks to life, thanks to my friends, thanks to the silver light of afternoon on the delicate leaves of the trees of the chaparral forest behind our house.


Life is given to us for free. How can we repay such a gift except with the fullness of our own life? What could be better than to return life entirely to itself? I can't hesitate any longer, nor delay my own freedom. I have chosen to be whole.

## Caitriona Reed

**From the Manzanita Lodge website: Caitriona Reed (formerly Christopher Reed) has studied with teachers in Asia, England and the United States since 1970 and has led retreats since 1981. She is a senior teacher**

in Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Inner-Being and received formal authorisation as a teacher from him in 1992. With her partner Michele Benzamin-Masuda, she founded Ordinary Dharma in Santa Monica, California and Manzanita Village Retreat Centre in San Diego County, California. Their teaching is informed by the tradition of Engaged Buddhism and the deep ecology movement. Together they have developed a unique way of teaching, integrating the timeless practice of meditation, mindfulness practice and truth-telling, with contemporary environmental and social realities.



Caitriona, pronounced "Katrina", is the Irish/Celtic name her mother was to have given her. Visit Caitriona's [Five Changes](#)  website for more information

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## Westpac Faces Transgender Issues

### Aligning Business with Customer Base

From "Diversity Matters" Issue 7, the newsletter of the Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment  
Article appeared in Polare magazine: August 1998 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



A transgender person may well emerge from any level of your organisation or client base.

**W**estpac is exploring ways in which they can strategically align their business need with their customer base and more creatively pursue their diversity program. Part of the solution was employing a transgender woman in one of their branches in the eastern suburbs of Sydney.

The person was recruited through the mainstream recruiting process after briefing their employment providers on the need to include transgender people in their employment pool.

The woman is an outstanding candidate with excellent customer service skills. Westpac is able to demonstrate its commitment to employing a workforce which reflects the general population and achieves its business objectives.

***Westpac is able to demonstrate its commitment to employing a workforce which reflects the general population and achieves its business objectives.***

Transgender is an emerging area of interest for a number of C.E.O.E. Ltd. members. Elizabeth Riley from the Gender Centre outlines below some of the issues involved in employing transgender individuals in the workplace.

Whose toilet is it?

Not a particularly contentious issue you might say. After all the sign/symbol on the door says it all. No room for confusion here. Or is there?

- » Are you aware of recent anti-discrimination legislation protecting the rights of transgender (transsexual) people?
- » Who is transgender? How is this defined?
- » What would you do if someone decided to "transition" in your workplace? What does "transition" mean?
- » What if the best applicant for a position in your organisation was transgender? How would you deal with concerns amongst staff?
- » How would you deal with concerns amongst clients? What if any of your clients are transgender?
- » What are your rights and responsibilities? What are the rights of transgender employees/clients?
- » What if the person responsible for answering these questions turns out to be transgender?
- » As for the toilets?

While transgender people (those adopting a gender role opposite to their birth gender) represent only a small percentage of society, more and more people are deciding to declare their transgender status.

This is probably due to an improvement in attitudes within the community and the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation

Many others continue to suppress their sexuality from fear of social condemnation.

This means that employer groups, as well as the wider community, are increasingly likely to find themselves in contact with transgender people and as a consequence need to address some of these questions raised above.

A transgender person may well emerge from any level of your organisation or client base.

It is better to be informed of the legal and social issues facing your organisation in its dealings with transgender people, in anticipation, rather than after the event when discriminatory treatment could prove costly.

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# The Seahorse Society

## Welcoming those who Cross-Dress Infrequently to those who Identify as Transsexual

by Leslie, Seahorse Society President

Article appeared in Polare magazine: August 1998 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



**A**lthough many, if not most, of the readers of *Polare* will have heard of the Seahorse Society, it is apparent that there are a number of misconceptions about Seahorse. Rather than try and address the various ideas that are about, let me just give you a brief run-down on the history of Seahorse, and where we are today.

***Seahorse still believe that one of its main functions is as a 'first-step-out' for those with enhanced gender feelings.***

The moves to form an association for heterosexual transvestites began in 1969, and culminated in the formation of the Seahorse Club in 1971. The early meetings were held in the members' homes and at restaurants. By advertising in the newspapers, Australia-wide, and by appearing on the television, the club

was large enough by 1976 to hold a conference which took place in Newport, on Sydney's Northern Beaches. A second conference was held the following year. These were basically three day events, and by all accounts were quite successful

Soon after this, there developed a schism in the club, probably caused by distance and personality clashes and the various states set up their own clubs. When I joined Seahorse in the early 1980s, the term heterosexual transvestite was still being used, although there were at least three members who had undergone, or were undergoing, hormone therapy and S.R.S.

By the late 1980s, it was apparent that it was inappropriate for the club to maintain such a strict limitation on membership, but as in all associations the need to change the underlying philosophy has to be member-driven, and it took a couple of years of reasoning, plus a talk from a solicitor attached to the Redfern Legal Service, before we could adapt.

At the same time, a decision was made to incorporate the club and in 1990 it become the Seahorse Society of N.S.W., Inc. And at the same time the requirements to be specifically anything were dropped and Seahorse welcomed anyone with enhanced gender feelings. However, it would be fair to say that Seahorse still believe that one of its main functions is as a 'first-step-out' for those with enhanced gender feelings. And as such we welcome anyone, whether they wish to dress infrequently in clothes of the opposite gender, live fulltime in the same way, who are on hormone therapy, or who have identified as transsexual or intersex.

In our membership application form there is no requirement for anyone to state their sexuality, or their genetic intentions. We do, however, ask our members and their quests to behave in a manner which wouldn't cause offence to anyone, member, partner or guest, so that those just coming out into the community, who very often have a partner who has pre-conceived ideas about the situation, find that the meetings are very low-key indeed.

We have had a couple of recent incidents where persons who have obviously identified themselves closely with a specific group, have made the comment that, "They're just men wearing dresses!". I find it ironic that these same people will no doubt insist on total acquiescence of their own lifestyle. We cannot force individuals to hold specific views, but the committee of Seahorse is trying to reduce the 'pigeonholing' of people, and to work in a complementary way with the Gender Centre.

Our meetings are held on the last Friday of each month, except for December, which is the second Friday and may be completely social, or we may have a presentation of clothes, or shoes, or make-up etc. There is no alcohol supplied at the meetings, and members are not encouraged to bring any, because we would require a liquor license. So we make do with tea, coffee and soft drinks, and some small nibbly things to eat. The evening runs from 7:30pm to close to midnight, and there is a \$5.00 meeting fee to cover the cost of hall hire and catering.

Each month we also have a restaurant night, where those members who wish to come along can do so. We try and vary the restaurants, although if we find one we like we do make return visits. Again we try and keep the cost down to about \$25.00 for two courses and most of the time, we succeed.

If any member of the community feels that they might enjoy coming along to either of these meetings just call our phone line, on 9807 7395 and have a chat.

Shortly with the agreement of the Gender Centre Management Committee, we will put up a poster bringing Seahorse to your notice.

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## Kate Cummings, Preselected As ...

### Australian Democrat Candidate for Grayndler

by Katherine Cummings

Article appeared in Polare magazine: August 1998 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



**Katherine Cummings ... has recently been endorsed as the Australian Democrats' candidate for the Federal seat of Grayndler**

**K**atherine Cummings, who had gender reassignment surgery early in 1989, has recently been endorsed as the Australian Democrats' candidate for the Federal seat of Grayndler which covers Newtown, Stanmore, Lewisham, Summer Hill, Ashbury, Ashfield, Marrickville, Hurlstone Park, Camperdown, Enmore, Sydenham, Tempe and Petersham.

***Katherine intends make service to the transgender community one of her priorities.***

This means that the Gender Centre falls within Grayndler and Katherine intends make service to the transgender community one of her priorities.

"There has been a lot of progress made in the last year or so," said Katherine, "in the field of anti-discrimination and anti-vilification laws and the revision of birth documentation for those fortunate enough to have been born in this State."

"There is, however, a lot more that can be done, including recognition of the rights of same-sex couples and acceptance of the fact that transgendered people should be allowed to marry in their gender of choice."

"Another area that needs revision is the treatment of transgender procedures by Medicare. I have been in correspondence with Medicare over their funding for transgender procedures ever since 1989 and have made very little progress. If I am elected I may have a better chance to achieve something in this area. When I had my operation, Medicare was

operating under the stupid assumption that the first half of the operation (removal of my male genitalia) was therapeutic, and could be covered by Medicare, but the construction of female genitalia was cosmetic and therefore not covered. This meant that all Medibank benefits also cut out halfway through the operation. There is no doubt in my mind that the whole procedure should be covered and I will continue my campaign for this, whether or not I am elected."

Katherine admits she seldom takes part in public demonstrations, as she doubts their effectiveness. "Politicians are used to being shouted and chanted at and having placards waved at them and usually dismiss public demonstrations with some glib comment like "Rent-a-Crowd". I prefer to write letters and seek interviews with politicians and their advisers. So far I have had two significant successes ... the acceptance by the Tax Office that electrolysis expenses are therapeutic, not cosmetic, for male-to-female transsexuals and therefore claimable and the agreement by the Department of Immigration to change the names on Naturalisation Certificates to the adopted name of post-operative transgenders. Both these achievements took a lot of letter writing and argument but in time the people I was writing to were persuaded. After four years of claiming electrolysis expenses and being knocked back I was suddenly successful in the fifth year and the Tax Office even back-paid me for the previous four years. I was able to pay for a trip to the United States on the proceeds!"

"When my friend Carol Abrahams committed suicide and the Attorney-General was making noises about tightening procedures to make it more difficult for transsexuals to obtain surgery, I wrote to both the Attorney-General and the Minister for Health, asking for the chance to talk with them concerning Carol's case. Some side-kick of the A.G. wrote a silly reply showing that he had not understood my concern, but Dr. Refshauge invited me to speak with him and I made the case that tightening procedures would almost certainly lead to more suicides, not fewer, and pointed out that Carol's suicide had been caused by a variety of causes, none of which was regret for having undergone the operation, despite the findings of the Coroner. I speak with authority in this area, as Carol is one of the seven transsexuals who recovered in my home after their reassignment and she often talked to me at great length during her convalescence.

Katherine is a professional librarian and a freelance writer. Her autobiography, "Katherine's Diary; the story of a transsexual", won the Australian Human Rights Award for non-fiction in 1992. Since then she has written an epilogue of sorts, "The Life and Loves of an XY Woman", which appeared in an anthology of women's writing (No Thanks Or Regrets, published in 1996). She was made redundant in a downsizing at Macquarie University at the beginning of 1998 and is enjoying the feeling that she has more time to devote to her causes and her interests, but she keeps her hand in as a reference librarian by answering reference questions on the internet.

"Why the Democrats?" she asked. "Well, for a start they are the only party which can be trusted with the balance of power. Both the major parties have moved to the right and although I was a Labor voter for many years I do not like their policies for education, health

care and tax reform and even their foreign policy is suspect. Only the Democrats have held the line that East Timor should have the right to self-determination and only the Democrats support the abandoned Labor policy of free education. We have moved in my lifetime from being a nation of *laissez-faire* humanists to being a profit oriented nation of economic rationalists. With the rise of the execrable One Nation and its simplistic and stupid solutions to its invented problems it is time for anyone who thinks at all to think seriously of supporting the Democrats. And very recently Liz Kirkby presented a Bill to the N.S.W. Upper House, advocating equal rights for same-sex relationships."

## Katherine Cummings

Katherine Cummings is a writer and transgender activist, currently working at the N.S.W. Gender Centre as Librarian and Information Worker. Her autobiography, *Katherine's Diary*, based on a two-year series of radio talks she gave on Radio National's "Health Report", won the Australian Human Rights Award for Non-Fiction in 1992. It has since been expanded and updated and was re-issued at the end of 2007.



Katherine edits *Polare*, the quarterly magazine of the Gender Centre and writes for it. She is currently putting together a collection of her essays, short stories, poems and book reviews to be published in mid-2013 under the title *The Life and Loves of a Transgender Woman*.

Katherine transitioned in 1986 at the age of fifty-one.



The Life and Loves of a Transgendered Lesbian Librarian

Author: Katherine Cummings

Publisher: Beaujon Press (2014)

I.S.B.N.-13: 978-098036535X

**From Polare Magazine Review:** The publication of this collection is a timely reminder that there is still a lot to learn about gender identity, its causes, aetiology and expression. To redress common misconceptions, prejudices, and targeted violence, ethically focussed education is critical. Of overriding importance is the acknowledgment of the truth of all 'real-life' experiences and within this framework Katherine's lifetime experience, retold through cleverly assembled vignettes (essays,

book reviews, verses and poems), is central. The book's content is varied and provides the reader with decisive personal viewpoints centred on the paramount issue of gender identity.



Katherine's Diary: Revamped, Updated, Uncut Edition

Author: Katherine Cummings

Publisher: BookSurge Publishing (2008)

I.S.B.N.-13: 978-1439215456

**From Bookpod Book Store website:** "I think that I was irrational, even insane, at the time. My transsexualism had taken hold of me with such obsessive force that I could not concentrate on anything else. There I was, a fifty-year-old professional academic librarian who had desperately wanted to be female ever since memories began ..." In 1986 John Cummings became Katherine Cummings and a whole life changed. In this painfully honest account of John's transformation into

a woman, Katherine tells of years of fantasising behind locked doors, of the betrayal felt by her family and the final relief of surgery. Katherine's Diary covers a lifetime of self-discovery and self-destruction told with acerbic wit and crisp observation.

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## What it Means to be a Man

I've always been a man, thought like one, walked like one, spoken like one

by Michael

Article appeared in Polare magazine: August 1998 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



... I want facial hair, a moustache, beard, sideburns, the lot.

**I**'ve always been a man, thought like one, walked like one, spoken like one. Only trouble was, since puberty, I had breasts that I couldn't hide and everyone expected me to stop being a tomboy and act like a lady.

***The hormonal treatment has helped my voice to deepen but my ovaries are mounting a rear-guard action and won't stop ovulating and off-setting the testosterone.***

When I was thirteen, a visitor to our house asked me what I was going to be when I grew up, and I said, "a lady". Everyone laughed at this but it was no laughing matter, because I never grew up to be a lady, I stayed being a man.

As a teenager, I wanted to take girls out but never did because they didn't see me as a man. With breasts and menstruation I lost sight of my man and stopped

doing anything once a month, there was so much pain. My mother kept saying that she had the same monthly trouble and when she had me, she was okay. But I didn't want any kids and I didn't want to be sexual with guys (or girls but that was later) until I left the convent.

I think I liked it "inside" because I could hide behind my habit and no-one expected to see a lady there. My novice mistress harangued me about my deportment and my speech but I didn't know how to change it because I'm a man. Then Vatican II came along and nuns had to show more of themselves. I didn't like this because then I was back to wearing ladies' stuff and it didn't fit my manliness to dress like that.

So, after five years, I walked away and tried sex with over thirty guys over ten years before I "fell" for a woman. She was straight and she didn't see me as a man so I was turned away. I liked being around this woman. For the first time in my life (at the age of thirty-four) I knew what "being in love" was all about. It was both painful and joyous but more painful when she turned me out.

So I got into the dyke scene but over ten years I slowly got disenchanted with dykes. Then I met a transgendered lesbian/bisexual woman who wasn't too sure of herself. I knew I wanted to spend time with her but we couldn't relate the same way as I had with previous women. So we became friends and I decided to show the world that I'm a man.

My breasts disappear soon. Then I will feel comfortable going to bars and meeting people. "I'll lose the few hairs" I have on my chest in the reconstruction operation, but they'll grow back. The hormonal treatment has helped my voice to deepen but my ovaries are mounting a rear-guard action and won't stop ovulating and off-setting the testosterone.

There's a little dark fuzz above my belly button and hairs on my inner thighs. but I want facial hair, a moustache, beard, sideburns, the lot.

My gender map is a man's and I want the rest of the world to see this man. My love map is bisexual I think and both top and bottom. For now, I don't fit into any neat box as a man either anatomically or sexually.

I am me, a he-she, who now plays the waiting game to get a penis. It's a dangerous move, this phalloplasty, but a prosthesis is not enough for this boy. He wants it all.

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# Toleration

## Don't Tolerate Me

by Amy Lewis

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I have to go on a business trip, early tomorrow morning - today, in a few hours I guess - to a city where I have no friends and I can hope for no more than toleration, with a colleague who tolerates me. So I can't sleep of course. And so I'm afraid I'm going to write a sermon on toleration, which has something to do with M.W.M.F., and more generally with how transsexuals are treated in the lesbian community, and still more generally with how all of us are treated by society at large.

***"Tolerate" is what you accept from your family, because you're in them and they're in you and it's better than rejection, isn't it?***

Tolerate.

"Tolerate."

Don't tolerate me.

"Tolerate" is "As long as you don't make waves, I'm not going to hurt you."

"Tolerate" is keep very quiet, I'm trying to restrain these others, but if you're outrageous, you bring it on yourself."

"Tolerate" is the closet. It's the worry that someone is going to know, and then what happens? "Tolerate" is the weapon of fear, of oppression, of "Be good if you know what's good for you," of veiled threats.

"Tolerate" is history rewritten, until Stonewall becomes a polite conference between middle class white (oh! ahem, mumble. err, gay) men in business suits meeting with the authorities to redress the unfortunate lapses in behaviour on the part of duly appointed officials, instead of a bunch of outraged and outrageous drag queens fed up to the hilt with sometimes toleration and knowing that throwing a heel at a cop is damned good therapy, instead of a revolt of the under-classes, and what good does outrageous behaviour do, anyway? What was Stonewall?

"Tolerate" is a transsexual who hadn't quite built up the courage to come-out to her father, dead in an auto accident, buried in a three-piece suit with shorn hair in a funeral for the family only, while her brother frantically clears away any evidence, the wrong name on the tombstone, and no closure, ever, for those who loved her for herself, who never read an obituary for her, who wouldn't have recognised her if they'd been welcome to mourn.

"Tolerate" is what you accept from your family, because you're in them and they're in you and it's better than rejection, isn't it? And you can't imagine your mother saying "My daughter's lover is such an amazing woman" in a voice filled with pride as she gossips with her best friend. "Tolerate" is the terrible, haunted look in your mother's eyes when, together, on a visit home, in the grocery store, run into one of her friends, "oh Sue! You remember my ... child?" and knowing you can never go home, never humiliate them by living in the same city with them ....

"Tolerate" isn't a boot to the head, only the threat of it.

"Tolerate" is slow strangulation, with an immaculately dressed executioner wearing a sorrowing (professional) smile, and "I'm so sorry, but you really, really shouldn't have drawn attention to yourself," as your sight fades to black and the noise of your heart threatens to overwhelm the world.

"Tolerate" is "Omigod, look at them, what they're doing! I hope they don't see me, if they don't see me I can't be hurt, please don't see me!" and the pain of knowing that someone else was hurt and you did nothing.

"Tolerate" is getting married, having babies, a job, the right kind of house, the right kind of car, a spouse for whom you feel nothing except gratitude for the camouflage, a life lived lying, lived doing what's right because if you don't, then why should they tolerate you?

"Tolerate" is acknowledging, however silently, that you're just a freak, not normal, not a real person, that however strongly you feel,

you're just wrong.

From your family, yes. Not from friends; if all they can manage is toleration then you know they're not friends, and they aren't even allies, because they have the power to tolerate and all you have is an attempt to feel grateful till sickly smile, and an upset stomach.

"Celebrate" is your friends, overhearing as you walk in the door, "God, you're gonna love her, she's this completely amazing dyke ..."  
It's "That's so different from how I grew up ... no, you first, I want to hear this!" It's your name in tones of surprised pleasure, on the telephone when you haven't talked for weeks.

"Celebrate" opens doors as "tolerate" builds fences (and electrifies them, and posts warnings in case you don't take the hint).

Me, I'm off to be tolerated for a few days - because I'm awfully good at what I do, even if I'm a freak and hard to ... tolerate. I'd suggest that you, reading this, should find a friend. And celebrate.

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# The Joy Of Belonging

## Alison's Weekend in the Blue Mountains

by Alison Cook

Article appeared in Polare magazine: August 1998 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



**A** couple of weeks ago I was invited to attend a Women's Retreat in the Blue Mountains, being organised by my Church, the Metropolitan Community Church in Darlinghurst. M.C.C. is a non-discriminatory church for Gays, Lesbians, Trannies etc.

***Those trannies ... learn to grit their teeth and accept that life can be an incredibly lonely affair.***

As a tranny, only six months into fulltime transition I found the prospect of a weekend of communal living with twenty biological women a little daunting to say the least. I was scared s\*\*\*less. As I find it difficult lying to a Pastor, and I couldn't find an adequate excuse for not going, I had little choice, I went, this last weekend.

Whilst there we did lots of women type things. The girls made a wall hanging banner for the church. We practised as a women's choir and we talked a lot. We returned about Sunday lunch. And we all attended the church service later that evening.

On arriving home after the service, about 10:00pm, I changed, made a cup of tea, composed myself and wrote the following, which I emailed to the Pastor a few hours later for inclusion in their next newsletter. It is not something that had been mulled over for weeks, changing bits here and there. It was written I believe from the heart and reflects feelings that many trannies experience.

The weekend quite dramatically changed my thoughts about myself. Those constant niggling doubts as to whether what I was doing was right have gone completely. I no longer consider myself in some kind of half way house, neither male nor female. I am a woman, and proud of it.

This weekend I experienced a miracle, the indescribable joy of belonging.

Let me explain. I am an M.T.F. tranny, and I only made the transition, fulltime, early this year. What is an M.T.F. tranny? Well in autopsies on stillborn babies, doctors are now able to tell the sex of the baby by subtle differences in the brain. So when Nature in its wisdom produces a baby that has the brain of one gender and the genitalia of the other, you have the starting point for a tranny. In my case a female brain and male genitalia. So a tranny is a transsexual or what we prefer, a transgendered person. And M.T.F. means male-to-female.

In order to understand the miracle to which I refer one needs to understand also that most friendships and relationships seem to start from an expectation of how the other person reacts. That initial expectation almost always derives from ones outer appearance i.e. male or female. Thus men bonding with men is almost always based on an expectation of common interests. Likewise with women.

Trannies have a major problem here. They have the psyche, thought processes, interests and expectations of one gender but their outward appearance tends to indicate the other. With the net result that friendships and relationships do not even get to first base, especially with those trannies trying to deny to themselves that they are not what their inner voice says.

Those trannies who don't commit suicide learn to grit their teeth and accept that life can be an incredibly lonely affair. As a male before transition, the number of times I played golf on my own or went fishing on my own would be a thousand times the occasions when I played golf or went fishing with company.

So friendships, relationships, the ability to get on with either ones own apparent gender or the other become non-existent. And you just learn to live with it. It is not that society ostracises trannies, it's just that they never seem to fit in anywhere.

So to the miracle of the joy of belonging. This weekend I was invited on a Women's Retreat. I am in my mid-fifties and I do not recollect ever being invited to an event where the invitee has actually wanted me to turn up. Even family occasions like christenings and weddings, I always had the impression that it would have been preferable if had sent a present and not turned up.

I was perceived to be an oddity. I didn't drink large amounts of beer with the men and discuss the football nor did I wander around chatting up the women. I didn't come across as being gay either. And I tried to avoid groups of women in case I accidentally divulged

my inner-most secret. Nor did I appear to have any interest in sex. I just didn't fit in end of story.

At the Women's Retreat this weekend, I DID fit in! I couldn't mention one of the girls without mentioning them all. Each and every one made me welcome. I spent the whole weekend doing what my spirit and soul have always wanted; to be able to spend time in the company of women as a woman. It was an incredible experience.

And then at the evening service back in Sydney, I was able to join them in the women's choir. When I was told that I'd been chosen to help unfurl the banner, I couldn't believe that this was actually happening to me, Later when I joined the group in front of the banner for photographs I could feel the emotion beginning to well up and I left shortly after.

As I drove home the tears began to flow and by the time I arrived they were gushing freely. I had cried all the way home, but they were tears of happiness. I really had experienced a miracle, that of the joy of belonging for the first time in my life. As to a miracle, surely a cure for a mental anguish can be just as miraculous as that for any physical ailment.

I can't find the words that would even come close to describing my gratitude to the girls at the retreat for their kindness and generosity of spirit, other than to say they were part of my miracle.

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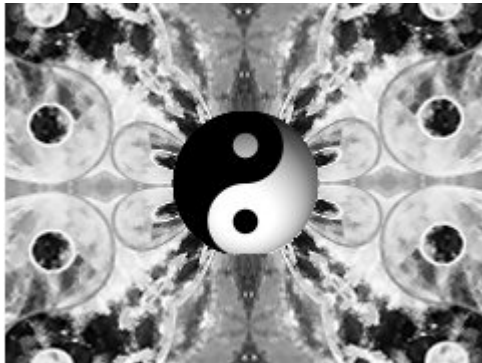
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# The Hermaphrodite Soul

## Maintaining Harmony Within the Body

by Ib

Article appeared in Polare magazine: August 1998 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



The Yin and Yang is referred to as the ultimate principle of all matter.

**O**ur souls are born many times. We strive in each lifetime to achieve a balance of the forces of Yin and Yang that few achieve before having lived many times in the physical state.

***Your soul has had a long and extremely difficult journey through this lifetime, but don't allow everyone else's disharmony disrupt your own.***

When we are reborn our souls are lacking in the balance of the Yin and Yang. The path our life takes depends on the extremes of this imbalance.

Yin is the masculine force and signifies the earth, death and the darkness of night. Yang is the feminine force and signifies the sky, birth and the light of day.

The Yin and Yang is referred to as the ultimate principle of all matter.

To maintain harmony and order, in the Universe, and within the body and soul, is to maintain the delicate balances of the Yin and Yang.

Chaos and disharmony abound when their even balance is disturbed in any way. We spend the whole of our lives trying to achieve this balance within our souls.

In the heterosexual soul, the balance is tipped in one direction. In the homosexual soul, the balance is tipped the other way.

This balance is a changeable fluid thing, apt to flow the other way without notice. This is why souls, who believed they were one way, suddenly wake up to find their lives and desires have changed in a completely different direction.

If we must categorise, then the heterosexual woman finds herself taking in the masculine force of Yin, so finds herself attracted to the Yin of men to balance her soul. A heterosexual man lacking in the feminine Yang, finds himself drawn to the forces of Yang he finds in a woman.

A homosexual man, on the other hand, is over balanced in the feminine Yang, so seeks out the souls of other men to level out his Yin. A homosexual woman is lacking in the forces of Yang, so is attracted to the souls of other women to redress this balance.

The hermaphrodite soul is a very old soul, born to this physical world many, many times, and has spent a multitude of lifetimes striving to achieve this balance. It is a perfect soul, with the forces of Yin and Yang so balanced, that lesser, imperfect, younger and unbalanced or evil souls envy this perfection.

Rather than working toward balancing their own disharmony, they will strive toward unbalancing even destroying, this perfection.

Your soul has had a long and extremely difficult journey through this lifetime, but don't allow everyone else's disharmony disrupt your own.

Your soul has in its last lifetime achieved such a balance of Yin and Yang, and its male and female forces that the only way it could return to this world was as a hermaphrodite.

Anger and bitterness work toward chaos, see this. Work through your anger, learn to forgive. Most of all, open your eyes and see that you, hermaphrodite soul are perfection that nothing comes close to like a perfect water lily in the centre of an immense lake.

Live your life, savour each day, love yourself. Mostly, don't allow less perfect souls to dim the light for you, because they can't do it, unless you let them. No one Can hurt your soul unless you allow them to do it.

Don't allow yourself to think negative thoughts of self-destruction; this is the only form of death your soul will not survive. This is why suicide is called the final solution; because it is final, forever.

Even the name hermaphrodite is steeped in mystery and mythology. Hermaphrodite is the offering of the union between the Greek god Hermes and the Goddess Aphrodite. Their roman mythology counterparts are Mercury and Venus.

Hermes typified speed, agility, truth and beauty. He was the messenger of the gods, which is why had winged feet. The florist "Interflora" use him as their logo.

Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of physical love and beauty and above all femininity.

So, you see, the term Aphrodite soul is special. Very special. Love yourself. You have nothing to lose but your pain and anger.

Forgive and accept your birthright, it is a rare privilege. Stop punishing yourself for perfection.

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