

# Polare Edition 30

Published: July 1999 Last Update: June 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

## Editorial

by Craig Andrews, Polare Editor

**T**his edition features the brave new "Salubrious Cafe" owners on the front cover whilst inside it's a mixed bag once again - hopefully with something for everyone.

Elizabeth's report welcomes our newest relief Staff member - Elizabeth Anne - as Counsellor for this service; while if you're a budding or experienced writer please think about letting us know if you'd like to attend the upcoming writers' workshops.

I'm thrilled about the community input coming in lately - some discussion in the letters this time. There are a number of book reviews - four in all - with page 12 listing a number of new Gender Centre library books.

The cross-dressing community may be interested in the article on page 6 followed by a short outline of the Seahorse Society; a lengthy "My Story - a Letter to a Sister" on page 10; and a delightful "Transmen" article on page 17 - all may reach out to families trying to understand differing gender identities.

Our Outreach Worker goes into detail about Gonorrhoea over on page 14; while the Social & Support Worker gears up with some more social events and workshops.

You're always welcome to respond, debate, have a gripe or agree with writers here in *Polare* and these can be mailed in or emailed in.

## Manager's Report

by Elizabeth Riley, Gender Centre Manager

### Counselling

Following our report in last month's issue we are pleased to report that we have engaged the services of qualified counsellor to provide counselling services to the community. The new counsellor is Elizabeth Anne and she is currently available on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Elizabeth is a graduate of The Australian College of Applied Psychology and can provide assistance across a broad spectrum of counselling needs. We have also established referral to a C.S.A.H.S. clinical psychologist/psychotherapist. Clients can access the clinical psychologist through Elizabeth Anne if desired.

### Department of Education & Training

I have received very favourable reports on the video prepared through the Department of Education and Training. The video is due to be released in schools in the new term and is part of a training package dealing with the theme

## Feature Articles



When I described my child and our family's situation, the "human development specialist" laughed reassuringly and said, "Don't worry about a thing, your child has a great imagination".

### Tell Them I'm a Boy

Steve just turned eleven. His life revolves around rocketry, soccer, and improvising stand-up comedy routines in the kitchen. His parents are concerned about the changes puberty will bring, because they know how distressed he will be when breasts begin to develop.

### A Letter To My Sister

Didi has four sisters and a brother, all have been accepting and supportive of her decision to transition in various ways and degrees. She shares this letter to her sister in which she attempts to let her know what being transsexual is actually like for her.

### The Loneliness of Being Happy

About ten years ago Christine asked herself if she was transsexual. She had these feelings all of her life, she knew from an early age that something was different and after many years of humming and haring she decided to talk to someone about her feelings.

### Gonorrhoea

Gonorrhoea bacteria can live on moist, warm parts of the body such as inside the throat, vagina, cervix, penis and anus. It can cause Pelvic Inflammatory Disease or lead to infertility in both males and females. Gonorrhoea causes an infection in the cervix in females.

### Helping Wives of Cross-Dressers to Understand and Cope

So, your partner is a cross-dresser, welcome to the club! Rest assured, there are many, many others in your shoes, cross-dressing is more common than many people realise. This article aims to assist partners of cross-dressers to deal with their loved ones disclosure.

S/he

"Valuing Diversity". The Gender Centre will receive a copy in the near future and we look forward to improved awareness of transgender-identity in mainstream society as a result of this D.E.T. initiative.

### Department for Women

The Transgender Working Party met again recently at the Department for Women and we are expecting to soon launch a poster campaign to increase community awareness of transgender people. Once launched the working party will focus on other key issues. Transgender employment opportunities will be high on the agenda. Members of the community who feel there are pressing issues they would like to see addressed should write to me with details. Be aware that the working party comprises key people in state government departments and therefore has limited capacity to deal with issues outside N.S.W. or federally.

### N.S.W. Police Service

The first meeting of the group addressing police policy in relation to the transgender community met last month. I anticipate a positive outcome and we will produce the policy in full in *Polare* as soon as it is developed, finalised and adopted.

### Writing Workshops

Many of you will be aware of the negative writing that has been directed towards the transgender community from a number of feminist writers over the last two decades.

We believe the time is right for transgender people to begin to write about their own experiences and perceptions of the world. It is appropriate that we should be the ones defining who we are and not leaving this to non-transgender writers. Our writings may well range in content from personal stories to broader academic and philosophical topics. The Gender Centre is exploring the possibility of gathering a collection of writings from the transgender community, perhaps with the possibility of compiling these into a book.

Interested in contributing? If you are an experienced writer, a budding writer or someone who feels you have something to say we would love to hear from you. If you would like to contribute but lack confidence in your writing skills we will look at the possibility of running a series of writer's workshops to get you started.

## News in Brief

### From the Pages of *Polare* Number Thirty

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#### Open Finding on Transsexual Death

**Melbourne, Australia:** A Melbourne coroner has been asked to return an open finding in the inquest into the death of a transsexual prostitute, found at Bonnie Doon four years ago. Counsel assisting the coroner, Jeremy Rapke, said there was insufficient evidence to reach a conclusion on the cause of death of Adele Bailey, who disappeared in 1978. However, he said on the evidence, it could be suggested Ms. Bailey died in circumstances that were potentially incriminating or embarrassing. He said it was also possible to conclude that because of his knowledge of the area, Detective Sergeant Denis Tanner, was involved in the disposal of the body.

#### Section 28 Will Go

**London, U.K.:** Jack Cunningham M.P., Minister for the Cabinet Office, last night gave the clearest indication so far of the government's intention to repeal the homophobic Section 28 of the Local Government Act (1968). In a very encouraging and well-received speech to more than five hundred supporters attending the annual Stonewall Equality Dinner at the Savoy Hotel in London. Dr. Cunningham made it clear that the government believed the discriminatory legislation "serves no useful purpose". To loud cheering he continued, "Section 28 was wrong in 1987. It is wrong in 1999. And it will go."

#### A Real Man's Woman

**Kalgoorlie, Australia:** In the knockabout mining town of Kalgoorlie, the brothel madam, Leigh Vans - a big woman who used to be a big man - has barnstormed the local council. Ms Vans was voted into Kalgoorlie Council in late May, becoming the first madam, let alone the first person to have had a sex-change operation, elected to public office on the goldfields. "The other councillors have taken it quite well," Ms Vans said. "I am able to bring a wealth of knowledge from all walks of life and both sexes. I didn't hide anything from them. They knew I was a working girl and all about my past. In fact, my campaign slogan was: "I dare to be different."

S/he, by Claudine Griggs, is a book that in many respects, is a reflection on the process of transition, both from the experience of the author, and the many others interviewed. It deals with many of the psychological changes that occur during the process of transition.

#### Mirrors

Mirrors is a biography of a transwoman who identifies as lesbian. Geri's story is another of those by women who transitioned in the nineteen-seventies, a graduate of the Stanford gender program, but one whose sexual orientation made her a "questionable fit" for the gatekeepers of the time.

#### An Invisible Procession

A mixture of memory and social commentary on a topic unfamiliar to most. The writer has attempted to draw the reader into a strange place, a place where the writer has been imprisoned for nearly half a century. The bars on her cell made of prejudice and the gaoler is fear.

#### What More is There?

There comes a time after things have settled down following our emergence from hiding, when one has to start believing in self, that is to say, "what more is there?" Deciding what you need from life, then going out and getting it, despite the odds or opposition.

## Transsexual Golfer's Play Amateur not Pro

**Sydney, Australia** A sex-change golfer would be welcome to play in N.S.W. amateur tournaments after she created history and controversy by winning the South Australian women's championship. Under N.S.W. rules, Mianne Bagger, 32, who was born a male in Denmark, can compete because she holds a Women's Golf Australia handicap. After developing a love of golf at the age of eight in Denmark, Ms Bagger continued to play socially in Australia when she moved to Adelaide in 1979 and after her sex-change operation seven years ago. The W.G.A., the national peak amateur body, released a revolutionary policy last month recognising transsexual players. The policy allows Ms Bagger to have the same rights as any other female member of a golf club. W.G.A. executive director Maisie Mooney said players should not be discriminated against because of their sexuality. "Within our sport, strength is not the dominating factor," she said. "Mianne hits no longer off the tee than the other players in South Australia. But the national women's professional golfing body has rejected any moves to introduce the same policy. Australian Ladies Professional Golf General Manager Warren Sevil said the guidelines would not be changed. Membership in the professional ranks was only offered to players who were female at birth. "We follow the guidelines of the U.S.L.P.G.A.", he said. "If we were to allow transgender players to turn professional, tournaments like the Australian Ladies Masters would lose the sanction of the U.S.L.P.G.A. and therefore we would lose the tournament. The U.S. players would refuse to come to Australia."

## N.S.W. Reforms Passed

**Sydney, Australia:** The Property (Relationships) Amendment Bill passed the N.S.W. lower house last night without opposition. The bill, which passed the upper house late last week, confers property rights on same-sex couples, including inheritance rights, access to property settlements when a relationship breaks down, and hospital visiting rights, as well as amending a raft of legislation.

## Spanish Transsexual Can Adopt

**Seville, Spain:** A court in Seville, Spain has ruled that a transsexual can adopt the 11-year-old daughter of her deceased partner, a decision that the Vatican's official newspaper has called "repugnant." The transsexual, identified only as "Eva" lived as a couple with the girl's father for a number of years after his wife died when the child was a year old; Eva has raised the girl alone since the father's death two-and-a-half years ago, except for eighteen days when the child's maternal grandparents took her away. In the ensuing custody battle, the lower courts sided with the grandparents, but an appeal court favoured Eva, who the child accepts as her mother, as the best guardian. The Vatican found the ruling to be an insult to the institution of the family, and its newspaper went on to decry the trend toward such decisions in European Union courts. Eva says she is a devout Catholic, and that her adopted daughter will continue to attend a convent school. "I believe in equality for all," she said. Eva is saving up the money for gender reassignment surgery, but under Spanish law she'll still be "Alfredo" on her legal documents even after her sex-change process is complete. The opposition Socialist Party intends to change that law with a bill introduced 28th June to allow transsexuals to amend their birth certificates and change their names.

## New Jersey Civil Rights Ruling for Fired Transsexual

**New Jersey, U.S.A.:** The New Jersey Division on Civil Rights found "probable cause" for a complaint filed by transsexual Angela Bridgman, who was fired from a temporary agency for making the transition to women's clothes on the job. Bridgman had informed her employers before she was hired, when she was still living as a male, that she had begun counselling and intended to seek sex reassignment surgery. She continued to update them on her progress and they expressed no objections until, after receiving permission from her immediate supervisor, she came to work in full female attire. At that point the temporary agency ordered her to dress as a male until she had undergone surgery, even though the Benjamin Standards of Care require that patients live for a year as their target gender before they can be considered candidates for surgery. Bridgman went back to wearing men's clothing on the job, which caused her to become extremely depressed. Although her work ratings continued to be high, the temporary agency ended her assignment a few days later, "because she didn't seem to be happy there any more." The temporary agency attempted to contest Bridgman's unemployment claim, and when the Pennsylvania Unemployment Commission [Bridgman was a Pennsylvania resident] ruled that there was no just cause for her termination, she decided to file the civil rights complaint.

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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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# Tell Them I'm a Boy

From the Book - *Transforming Families: Real Stories About Transgendered Loved Ones*

by Florence Dillon

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Setting my daughter free meant more than I'd imagined. My husband, James, and I have two sons. Alex, who just turned fourteen, is a classical musician and computer whiz. Steve just turned eleven. His life revolves around rocketry, soccer, and improvising stand-up comedy routines in the kitchen. He's in denial about puberty being just around the corner.

***When I described my child and our family's situation, the "human development specialist" ... laughed reassuringly and said, "Don't worry about a thing, your child has a great imagination."***

As his parents, we're concerned about the changes puberty will bring, because we know how distressing it will be for him to begin to develop breasts in middle school. And we're sure that, unless something is done to postpone or stop it, he will develop breasts and begin to menstruate, because this child - who feels and behaves in every way like an ordinary boy - has a normal female body.

During the first year of life, the baby we named Sarah ate, slept, and watched the world in silence from my arms. Then she began to speak and run.

It was hard to keep up with this toddler who would climb to the top of anything with handholds and, later, the preschooler who loved to jump from the tallest branch of our backyard tree down to the roof of the garage.

We were very proud of Sarah. I had always hoped for a daughter who would define herself, who would grow to be a strong, intelligent, and independent woman. This lively, fierce, thoughtful little girl gave me great joy. As her mother, I wanted to create a safe, warm nest where I could nurture her, then set her free to fly.

Sarah tested my resolve to set her free in a way I had never imagined. On her third birthday, she tore the wrapping paper from one of her grandmother's gifts and discovered a pink velvet dress trimmed in ribbons and white lace. I knew she wouldn't want to wear it - she hadn't voluntarily put on anything but pants since turning two, and this dress was totally impractical for playing the way Sarah played. Nevertheless, I was surprised by her reaction.

She looked up, not unhappy, but puzzled and confused, and asked, "Why is Grandma giving me a dress? Doesn't she know I'm not the kind of girl who wears dresses?" Then, with an air of great satisfaction at finding the solution to a problem, she said, "Just tell Grandma I'm a boy."

Initially I assumed Sarah's announcement was simply an attempt to communicate a clothing preference in language she thought grownups would understand. Then, shortly after her birthday, Sarah said she wanted us to call her "Steve." We thought this an odd request, but tried to remember to say "Steve" from time to time. A few weeks later we received a call from the Sunday School teacher who taught the three-year-olds at our church. She told us our daughter had asked to have the name "Sarah" on her name tag crossed out and replaced with "Steve." We realised then that the name "Steve" must be very important to Sarah, so we told the teacher it would be all right to call her "Steve" for the time being.

At home, we talked to Sarah about the difference between a nickname like "Steve" and her real name. But in our neighbourhood and on the playground at the park, Sarah began to introduce herself only as Steve. Within our family, she became more insistent that she was a boy. She never said, "I want to be a boy," or, "I wish I were a boy," but always, "I am a boy." She demanded we use masculine pronouns when referring to her. When we forgot or refused, her face would screw up in fury and exasperation, and the offending parent was likely to be pinched or kicked by this usually loving child. I stopped using pronouns altogether when Sarah was within earshot.

The teacher at Montessori preschool wasn't as flexible as the Sunday School teacher. The children were learning to write their names, and "Sarah" was evidently the only name the teacher was willing to teach. This became an issue as Christmas approached. Four-year-old Sarah came home one day and asked how to spell "Steve" so she could sign her letter to Santa. When I cautioned that Santa might not be able to find our house if the name on the letter wasn't correct, she looked at me with scorn. "Santa knows where I live, Mommy. He knows my name is Steve."

I decided it was time to seek professional help. I had no idea why Sarah was convinced it was better to be a boy. Surely someone could tell me what I was doing wrong. And it must be something I was doing, or failing to do, because the children were in my care 24 hours a day. No one else had nearly as many opportunities to influence them. My husband was pursuing a corporate career that required his attention eleven or twelve hours a day, and I - very much by choice after fifteen years of work and academia - was a fulltime mom.

My first call for help was to our state university's human development department. When I described my child and our family's situation, the "human development specialist" who took the call laughed reassuringly and said, "Don't worry about a thing. Your child has a great imagination. Lots of bright, creative kids try out different roles at this age. She'll grow out of it."

With relief, I took that advice, stopped worrying, and waited for Sarah to grow out of it. For the next couple of years, I supported my child's wish to be called Steve. I no longer made her unhappy by insisting, "You're a girl." Instead I said, "You have a girl's body, though Mommy and Daddy know you feel like a boy."

But I still felt responsible for my second child's inability to accept that she was a girl, and I set out to correct whatever misapprehensions she might have about becoming a woman. Because being a mother was such a joy for me, I told Sarah the most wonderful thing about being a girl is that girls can grow up and have babies of their own. Hearing this, Sarah's face darkened. She shuddered and said, "I don't want to talk about that." She asked if everyone had to get married and have babies when they grew up.

When told no, of course not, she relaxed and said she was always going to live in our house with Alex.

By age five, Sarah had given all her dresses to a neighbour girl of the same age. She wouldn't put on any item of clothing without first asking if it had been made for a boy or a girl. Only boys' clothes would do. I found myself confessing to sales clerks in boys' departments that I was buying these socks and pants and jackets for my daughter who evidently thought it would be better to be a boy. I felt I owed perfect strangers an explanation of something I couldn't explain to myself.

Still relying on the academic advice we had received when our child was four years old, I believed that Steve would eventually yield to "reality" and find a way to accept growing into a woman. The possibility that my child might be transsexual crossed my mind, but seemed so rare as to be extremely unlikely. The most difficult thing for me at that time was trying to keep all the options open - the ambiguity of not knowing for sure where Sarah/Steve belonged on the gender spectrum. As a woman, I hoped my child would learn that she was unique and that she had the right to define the kind of woman she would become. As a mother, my greatest concern was that my child feel wholly accepted and loved.

James and I searched for information about how and why a child's sense of gender can contradict his or her biological sex. There were very few studies available and none of them were well-designed, in my opinion, because they tended to rely solely on adult impressions and observations of children who were deemed "too masculine" as girls or "too feminine" as boys. It struck me as unhelpful and even harmful to judge children's dress and play as appropriate or inappropriate depending on how closely they approximated sex-role stereotypes from the 1950s. According to the studies, very few of these "masculine girls" or "feminine boys" grew up to be transsexual. Of those adults who did later identify as transsexual or transgendered, nothing had been noted about them as children that differentiated them from the others in the studies.

Those early researchers did not ask the children what they thought or felt about their own gender - whether they believed themselves to be boys or girls despite the contrary shapes of their bodies. The researchers' failure to ask that question clearly limits the value of their work. More recent medical research indicates that gender identity is every person's internal, brain-embedded awareness of being male or female (or somewhere in between). Gender identity determines whether a person feels male or female, not how masculine or feminine that person may appear to others.

What was our child's true gender identity? I didn't want to cause Steve more anguish at his young age by pushing him in either direction. Steve was a very bright, sensitive child who was troubled and confused about having a girl's body. He couldn't understand or explain why he had this body, although he continued to state unequivocally that he was a boy. He told me he knew there was nothing a boy could do that a girl couldn't do, but he was a boy. I wanted to give this child plenty of unpressured time to come to terms with being whoever he was.

After a painful kindergarten year during which our child was officially known as "Sarah," we asked the first-grade teacher to use the name "Steve" and to let Steve handle it if other children wondered whether Steve was a boy or a girl. Because we knew this situation was unusual and would very likely cause stress for the teachers, we offered to pay for a clinical psychologist specializing in gender issues to meet with the school staff.

We wanted to provide an experienced resource to answer their questions about gender identity and help them develop strategies for dealing with a gender variant child in their classrooms.

The school principal accepted our offer. However, one week before the staff gender training was scheduled to occur, the principal called to say she was disturbed because she had overheard children asking whether Steve was a boy or a girl. She perceived this as "harassment" of Steve, and she wasn't going to allow it to continue. Without waiting for input from the professional gender therapist, she had decided to call an all-school assembly meeting for the purpose of announcing to the entire student body at once that Steve was a girl, and to tell them that no one was ever to mention it again.

Nothing would more terrify my child. The single most important concern of Steve's life was to be seen as a boy. His girl's body was a source of deep shame to him. He was so fearful of anyone else finding out about it that he insisted on wearing three layers of clothing to bed at night.

Before the school year began, we had asked permission for Steve to use the unisex staff rest room because the girls' and boys' rooms

are the only places in school where children are routinely identified by sex. The principal had refused our request. Because he saw himself as a boy and knew that boys didn't use the girls' room, our six-year-old was in agony from trying not to go to the bathroom at all until he got home at the end of the day.

When the principal told me her plan to make the all-school announcement, I was stunned. I felt powerless to protect my child. I've since learned that parents have considerable rights when protecting their children's welfare in the public schools, but at that moment all I could manage to say was that her decision would be devastating to Steve. The principal was firm, but offered to take Steve for a walk and "explain it to her."

Later, the principal called back to report what had happened. She had asked Steve if he would like the questions from the other children to stop. Steve said he would. Then the principal told him she was going to make the questions stop by telling everyone that Steve was a girl. Steve looked up at her and said, "Why don't you tell them I'm a boy?"

To her credit, the principal listened to him. Startled by this first-grader's logic and assertiveness, she decided to wait until after the visit from the gender specialist to put her plan into action.

The public announcement never happened. The psychologist who conducted the gender training made it clear to the school staff that gender identity is innate, that it is established at a very early age, that it can differ from an individual's biological sex, and that it's neither appropriate nor possible for teachers to try to change a student's gender identity.

Today, Steve is known as a boy by his classmates. He's been elected president of the fifth grade and holds school records for push-ups and pull-ups. He has changed from a frightened, clingy child who had to be pushed kicking and screaming onto the school bus in first grade into a happy, confident boy who cockily practises muscle-man poses in the mirror.

Steve is the only expert on his own experience. He has never doubted his identity. And, although his parents and older brother find it helpful to use the term "transgendered" to describe him, he doesn't refer to himself that way. As far as Steve is concerned, he's just a boy.

**Florence Dillon is a pseudonym, and the names of Sarah, Steve, and other parties in this story have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals featured.**

**Editor: This piece originally appeared in the book "Transforming Families: Real Stories About Transgendered Loved Ones, by Mary Boenke.**

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# A Letter to My Sister

## Letting Her Know What Life is Like for Me

by Didi

Article appeared in Polare magazine: July 1999 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



He feels like a woman (sometimes) is not the same as recognising that a person's core identity is as female.

**T**his is a letter I sent to one of my sisters. I have four, and a brother, and all have been accepting and supportive of my decision to transition in various ways and degrees. I thought this particular letter might be interesting to others, because it is an attempt to answer some questions my sister had, beyond her being 'accepting'. It is an attempt to let her know a bit what 'being a transsexual' actually is like for me.

*I've generally been seen as effeminate, eccentric, having a strong feminine side, and inevitably that's been taken to mean I'm a queer, faggot, homo, etc.*

**Sister:** It's been a week since I wrote, we have been out of town and life has been generally crazy. I do have a lot of questions. If you don't want to answer just say so. My questions are how I can understand. I think I understand the simplified version of how things are happening medically.

Are there any risks as in dangerous side-effects to you? I hope not.

**Didi:** Sure, but most of them are avoidable. Some of them are risks involved with any major surgery, others are risks specific to this. I won't go into them, but the only thing one can really do to avoid them are to choose a good surgeon, and to make sure one is healthy.

**Sister:** Now for the hard stuff. I know from the things you have said in the past you are or were very much in love with Shrubs. She is obviously in love with you. This is where my confusion lies. This is not meant to sound silly, or to minimise your feelings. If the people you are with and around love you and accept you as you are why do you have to physically change?

**Didi:** Because basically the problem is not about being loved.

Being a transsexual means that one's (my) identity, my sense of self, is as one thing, (female). It's not an idea or a desire, it is part of that very grounded, solid, concrete 'knowing oneself'. It's been that way since I was a kid, and doesn't go away. Current medical theory is that the brain, which differentiates sexually between six and nine weeks after conception, differentiates one way, and the body the other. But it certainly seems to be something that seems 'hardwired' into a person. There's no documented case of that sense of self or identity changing.

At the same time, the body denies what identity says. It denies it to other people, and to me every time I look in the mirror, or look at my body. And on some level, the body represents external reality or just reality.

So, internally, a transsexual feels alien in their body. Not necessarily hating it, though that happens for some, but definitely alien in some way to it. A transsexual may also (frequently does) feel as if their own deepest sense of who and what they are can't be trusted, because it is obviously (materially) wrong. So there is also an alienation from that part of self that knows ourselves. But rejecting any faith in the sense of self doesn't give one a more accurate image, it simply is a rejection. The sense of self continues to say "this is who you are". This is absolutely who you are. The body, and every bit of intentional, social, subconscious and unconscious response from others, continues to deny what the identity says is unquestionably true.

It is simply an intolerable situation, or rather a situation most transsexuals struggle to adjust to, to tolerate, and do tolerate for various lengths of time. It usually means that a lot gets locked away, and unexpressed, because no-one is prepared to believe or can understand.

Most people live life with no conflict between gender identity and their sex. It is internally taken for granted. We're talking about gender here on the basic level, not the social level. We're talking about gender here on the level that lets us look at the short-haired person in a hard-hat and singlet, with bulging arm muscles working on an oil rig, with five o'clock shadow and a masculine demeanour, and lets us still say "That's a very butch looking woman! Probably a lesbian".

And of course we respond to them as female, even a homophobe responding with hate responds to the person as female. And the



woman is likely to see herself as very masculine or butch or even have self-doubts and think she is in some way not a real woman and yet on the basic level, never question that she is, in fact, some kind of a woman. This is the level of gender where the responses and cues and treatment are physical responses to body and smell and so on.

On the most basic level, it isn't a social thing. It is my relationship to my own body. I want my sense of self and my body congruent. But I've found it also is social in many respects.

Jeanne, it's not as if I haven't expressed myself in my life. I've generally been seen as effeminate, eccentric, having a strong feminine side, and inevitably that's been taken to mean I'm a queer, faggot, homo, etc.

That's okay, I'm bisexual, have been so openly since my early-teens, and generally prefer to be around gay and lesbian people, and felt a bit threatened by and definitely 'other than' straight men. But there is something about not having such a basic thing as one's sex (of identity) recognised, having it denied, that doesn't work. And being seen as having a strong feminine side is not the same as being seen as female.

Part of the result of that is that, while lots of things get expressed, in other areas having one's needs met or even speaking or thinking about that, makes no sense if something as basic as sex cannot be seen. And it is difficult to want to talk about or say anything about it, because people take it as a comment or a feeling, rather than a real thing. He feels like a woman (sometimes) is not the same as recognising that a person's core identity is as female.

By the way, Shrubs did know that I identify as female and it meant as little to her as it usually does to anyone, until I said I have to do something about this. The pain of that basic disbelief/incomprehension from others is one reason not to speak about it.

It is a state of walking around and feeling invisible, like I can't be seen. Interacting with others, it is as if one has a huge secret, the key to one's life and action, but it is a secret that can't be shared or spoken, because it can't be heard or understood. One of the great joys of my decision is finding a feeling of visibility. Another is a sense that nothing important about me is withheld in interactions.

On a very deep level, it is about the relation between me and my body, rather than about others' responses, though those response are, I've come to find, very important in terms of validating or denying one's sense of self. I have my sense of self denied by my body. I need some level of congruence. I've tried adjusting to reality for forty-five years, until I can't really go on living that sort of life. I need to adjust reality a bit.

Anyway, that's basically what being a transsexual is. It may result in a decision for having hormones and surgery, but a person is a transsexual generally all their life, even when trying hard to adjust. And of course in some senses, I'll never be female, but will be a close enough approximation that I'll get instinctively treated that way, and will feel enough congruence between my body and identity that I'll be able to get on with things.

**Sister:** If the sex and closeness is great with a female why do you have to change physically? If you told me you wanted men and wanted to be female to enjoy them I understand that. I just don't understand why, if you're accepted as the person you are in a male body but perceiving yourself as female, it matters.

**Didi:** Hopefully I've explained some of that. Basically, people can't really accept that I'm female, if I'm in a male body. Basically I have a hard time with that level of incongruity.

I will say though, that while changing sex does change a person in various ways, it doesn't particularly change one's sexual orientation. I like men, and have done so, and had sex with men, since my early-teens. That's not an issue, and having a male body doesn't change that. I've also always liked women sexually.

Obviously, it will be different relating to both sexes as female rather than male, but it doesn't change the physical level of attraction. While I'm attracted to men, I have enough issues about their behaviour and enough past history that my preference is far and away towards women, particularly for relationships. I don't expect that to change, and if anything its stronger, given male responses to transsexuals.

I won't say it doesn't affect my relationship with Shrubs. It does, in various complex ways, but we're working on it.

**Sister:** My questions sound confused as I write them. They also sound like I am not trying to understand the difficulty I know you had in making the decision. That is not the case. It is simply what I keep coming back to when I think about everything. I think many people are more male or female and it doesn't matter which body they are in. So why do you have to make such a radical change if you were happy with your relationships?

**Didi:** I think this is where cisgendered people just can't understand transgendered ones. As I said above, for cisgendered people sex is taken for granted, regardless of doubts about sexuality, or about social-expectations and being a real woman or real man. There is never a conflict at that basic level about what sex one actually is. The idea that it doesn't matter which body comes from that perspective. It has the perspective that one's sex is taken for granted and body and identity is congruent as a male (or female) and that changing sex is a change to a taken for granted sex and a (new) congruence between body and identity. There is no concept of a conflicted state between sex and identity.

There is also no real understanding of how different being one sex or another might be, on that basic sub-social level. Cisgendered people, with taken for granted sexual identities, see themselves as basically being themselves, and imagine being a different sex would simply be being themselves in a different body.

I think there's little awareness of how the self changes with sex, as well as a fundamental misunderstanding based on not knowing what

it is like to have a non-congruence between sex and identity. I think if you, for example, changed sex and became male, your sense of your own sexual (gender) identity would not actually change, and you would find yourself experiencing what a transsexual does, rather than what a man does, or what you would have if you were born a cisgendered man.

Where does Shrubs fit into everything?

We love each other ... and, it is nearly as big a thing, and requires as many changes of sense of self for her as it does for me. We're hoping to stay partners, and will certainly always be loving friends.

**Sister:** Guess I need to understand better what you are feeling and why the physical change is so important. Why is it better for you to make the change? This is hard for me to understand because despite what you felt like and/or acted like you seemed happy with yourself and the relationships you had. I don't think you ever held back emotions or tried to fool people. You were always you. Is changing sexes going to make things easier? I hope these questions make sense.

**Didi:** I've tried to explain as best I can. The questions make sense, and please feel free to ask more. I do feel I expressed myself, and was honest about my feelings, and of course a lot of people had problems with that. That's fine, rejection by others says as much about them as about me, and however a person is, some people will like it, and some won't. At least being honest, the people who like a person like me will be the ones who like me.

At the same time, as I tried to explain, people just don't get the idea of actually having an identity as one sex, when the body is another. So I didn't try, especially because it gets confused with throwaway lines like (from a man) "I feel like a lesbian in a man's body". I've rarely heard that from anyone who gives any sense of actually feeling like that may mean they need to have their body rearranged to stop the inner pain. As a result, I have to say that there are lots of areas where I simply couldn't be myself. I could have been a 'man in a dress', but the women I identify with don't really wear dresses much, and it's not about clothes for me.

**Sister:** I am happy and I love you a lot. I am sorry you were in such turmoil for so long and I am glad your choice is making things right. I guess my trouble was that I saw you as wonderful person and didn't bother to consider the inner you or that you were battling demands within. I didn't think there could be trouble if the outward appearance seemed fine. I just chalked up your 'differences' as being a rebel and I loved the person you were. That was why I didn't understand the need to change physically.

**Didi:** I don't know ... I think I am/was a wonderful person. I think the inner struggle helped make me that person. I think even my focus on saving the world and trying to make it a better place was given so much energy because it was a way I could be, relatively unaffected by gender. But I'm glad I put that effort in, and I love people and the world, and think they should be saved.

Likewise, I think who I am resulted in learning to be myself, and rebel. I learned that no matter who I am, some people won't like it. I figured out that being myself, a lot less people may like it, but those who do, will like it and be my friends, because of who I am, not in spite of it.

And while gender is very central, it isn't the only thing. Who I am takes gender for granted, but that very taken for granted-ness means that we basically don't think about it. I am a person who likes nature, and is fairly adventurous, intelligent, independent, sexual, sensual, tolerant in some ways, has good and bad habits and qualities, likes green, gets politically involved, is interested in ethics and spiritual things, likes motorcycles, has a certain approach to child raising ... I am those things whether I'm male or female, though the way those things are seen differ, depending on how I'm seen (and how I see myself as seen). I still like the same things in people, the same issues still nark me. I just have more freedom to do things as myself, though in some areas doing them are more difficult (socially) as a woman.

I mean, part of who I've been is someone who decided not to dwell on things that made me feel bad, and who enjoys all the wonderful things in life. That attitude helped me get through, in spite of gender dysphoria, and it still helps me get through. My delight in jumping in the waves, or seeing a movie or having dinner with someone I like/love, or in dancing or walking in wild areas or in a sunset was and is real. My desire to explain (or object and discuss ideas and structures of thought) is the same, still part of me.

So, the outward appearance of being just fine was a real reflection of everything that is (and was) just fine, in my life. Of course, the part that was sometimes moody, sometimes responded a bit weirdly, and the periodic depressions were just part of me too. They, and my inability to really ask for big chunks of what I emotionally needed, were simply the visible tip of the dysphoric iceberg.

Anyone with a major psychological problem, whether it be because of abuse, being adopted and not knowing their real parents, dysphoria, or something else, also has a life, where they might be high-achievers and seem extremely competent, balanced, creative, interesting and complex people. Dealing with that problem usually doesn't detract from who they are.

Transsexuality just seems more extreme because people do attach such significance to gender in who a person is. It is more extreme in that it requires other people to do a major shift in their perceptions, and isn't just an internal process (though real change and growth is rarely just internal). It's just that the only real way of dealing with dysphoria is to change the sexual characteristics of the body, and the social attribution of gender. And that does make one a different person, because of the way people see differently men and women doing same thing (a double standard).

And also, one lives in a different world because of that, and so has different things to respond to. (A woman in jeans, t-shirt and denim vest riding a motorcycle is seen differently than a man doing the same thing, and gets different reactions and resistances.) As well, hormones do have a real effect on our feelings and body.

Different hormones have different effects. So while I'm still much the same person inside in many respects, I'm not. I'm the same person in an entirely different inner and outer circumstance.

Anyway, I wanted to finish this set of thoughts. It's good for me to explain, because it gives me frameworks for thinking about it, and making it clear.

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# The Loneliness Of Being Happy

Christine had these Feelings All of Her Life

by Christine

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**T**hese are just some thoughts I have written down when the time allows. It's not Plato or Aristotle, maybe a bit of Machiavelli.

***In May 1994 I started H.R.T. Wow, what happened. The fog in my brain suddenly lifted ...***

About ten years ago I asked myself, "Am I transsexual?"

I had had these feelings all of my life. I knew from an early age that something was different. I had learnt to live with the problem (well, not really) and lead a relatively "normal" existence. After many years of humming and haring I decided to talk to someone about my feelings.

In May 1994 I started H.R.T. Wow, what happened. The fog in my brain suddenly lifted and I could see forever (I like to call it testosterone poisoning).

Maybe, just maybe, I could transition. But, I have a family, a job and could not live in stealth unless I left the country. Life carried on for a few more years, a lot better but not perfect. In 1996, I had some cosmetic surgery - a bit of lip, nose job, etc. Nothing a man would not have, but who was fooling whom?

It was the nose job in 1997 that did it. My wife asked for a divorce after I was released from hospital. One month later I lost my job. My castle had crumpled around my feet - my life was in shatters.

No job, being sued for divorce, threats of losing the children and losing all my savings. My thinking at the time was what judge would give a man who wants to be a woman, custody of the children. I was not a happy person.

My sister always said I was the type of person who could crawl in a pile of shit and come up smelling like a rose. I guess she was right. I went to my G.P. for a referral to a psychiatrist. She referred me to one who it turns out sees a lot of people with gender issues.

At this time, I also met a person who, if you are lucky, you only meet once in a lifetime. She became confidant, counsellor and mentor; she is a really nice human being. She said to me, "You lucky bastard. (Monty Python phrase). You have been given an opportunity to rebuild your life the way you want it."

I went away and looked at where I wanted to be in two years time. I wanted to be living as a female, I wanted my children, I wanted to keep my assets and I wanted a job. Now, nearly two years later, I have a job, I have my children, I have some of my assets and I have been living as a female of six months. Have I been lucky? I don't think so - I do not believe in luck. I have been focused on where I want to be (a very male attribute) and I have met some good people.

I still look back at the couple of months before I transitioned. I did a cost benefit analysis and a risk assessment. No one in their right mind would have transitioned - it was heavily weighted on cost and risk - the only real benefit was my sanity.

How do I feel now?

Good. My life is back on track. Though I feel I have a debt to pay because I would not be where I am now, if not for the people I have met. Far too numerous to mention here. They go from my mentor to the person who said "You look really good!" when I needed the lift.

Why the reference to Machiavelli? If asked why the chicken crossed the road - his answer would be: The point is that the chicken crossed the road.

Who cares why? The end of the crossing the road justifies whatever motive there was.

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# Gonorrhoea

## Transmission, Symptoms, Treatment, Prevention

by Unknown Author

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Gonorrhoea has many nicknames. 'The Clap', 'A Dip', 'A Dose'. Gonorrhoea bacteria can live on moist, warm parts of the body such as inside the throat, vagina, cervix, penis and anus. It can cause P.I.D. or lead to infertility in both males and females. Gonorrhoea causes an infection in the cervix in females.

***Untreated gonorrhoea left a long time can do serious damage (arthritis, blindness, skin problems and sterility).***

### Transmission:

Any sexually active person can be infected with gonorrhoea. Most often, gonorrhoea is found in younger people (aged fifteen to thirty) who have multiple sex partners through oral, vaginal or anal sex without condoms, sucking and being sucked and rimming. Gonorrhoea can be spread by getting the bacteria on your fingers, then touching other parts of your body.

Rarely it may spread via the bloodstream to cause severe arthritis and other internal infections.

### Signs and Symptoms:

Ten days after the infection: In males, symptoms usually appear two to seven days after infection but it can take as long as thirty days for symptoms to begin. Often, there are no symptoms for people infected with gonorrhoea; 10 to 15 percent of men and about 80 percent of women may have no symptoms.

People with no symptoms are at risk for developing complications to gonorrhoea. These people also spread this infection unknowingly.

**Females:** There is often no sign of infection, but some females may have a green or yellow vaginal discharge, some pain when urinating, low abdominal pain, or irregular menstrual bleeding. Sore throat.

**Males:** In men this infection can cause burning when passing urine and a milky pus-like or yellow discharge from the penis. Some men may have the disease without any symptoms.

A good way to tell if a client has Gonorrhoea is to milk the penis. Gently squeeze the penis along the shaft and if a thick discharge appears then that is a fairly good indication that it may be Gonorrhoea.

### Treatment:

Gonorrhoea is treated with penicillin or other antibiotics in pill form or by injection.

Penicillin Spectinomycin or Ceftriaxone are successful in eliminating this infection.

Untreated gonorrhoea left a long time can do serious damage (arthritis, blindness and sterility). Females frequently suffer from pelvic inflammatory disease (P.I.D.), a painful condition that occurs when the infection spreads throughout the reproductive organs. P.I.D. can lead to sterilisation in females. Males may suffer from swelling of the testicles and penis. Both sexes may suffer from arthritis, skin problems and other organ infections caused by the spread of gonorrhoea within the body.

### Prevention:

A condom, properly worn, is highly effective in preventing infection.

Avoid sex with casual partners and/or reduce your number of partners.

Have an S.T.D. check-up, including gonorrhoea swab tests after sex with a casual partner; immediately if symptoms occur, e.g. discharge, painful urination; or if a sexual partner has gonorrhoea, or symptoms of gonorrhoea.

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# Helping Wives of Cross-Dressers to Understand and Cope

## Acknowledging Concerns and Offering Support

Copyright © 1996 by Phi Epsilon Mu chapter of Tri Ess, by Sandra (with a little help from her friends)  
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**S**o, your husband/significant other is a cross-dresser. Welcome to the club! In your quest for information, you have arrived here. Let me reassure you, there are many, many women in your shoes. (You might also say that there are many husbands in their wives' shoes!)

It has been estimated that as many as eight and a half million adult males in the U.S. alone cross-dress. It may be a secret that society has forced us to keep, but it's more common than anyone realises and it is within the range of human normal activity. It occurs in all societies and in all periods of history. It is not a problem because your husband has a problem, but it is a problem because at this point in our history our society has a problem dealing with it.

Our group is about helping you and your cross-dressing husband or husband-to-be deal with a society that refuses to allow men to experience the full range of their personality. As women, we have made great strides in increasing the range of gender choices available to us in clothing, hair, jobs, and personal demeanour. Men are still not only limited, but also punished, for doing anything that society perceives as being feminine. Men are even limited (or feel they are limited) in colour choices, skin care, and even in the way they relate to their children.

Your husband truly admires and loves women, especially their clothes! By dressing in women's clothing, he may express those feminine feelings which society deems unacceptable for men to feel or to display. He probably doesn't want to become a woman in the literal sense, through surgery. In most instances he is happy with his masculine and feminine sides. If he is a cross-dresser (as opposed to a transsexual), he is not willing to give up all of his male needs and desires.

Despite his 'expanded' wardrobe, you cannot judge a book by its cover. It is the person inside with whom you fell in love, and in all probability, he has had these feelings all his life. He is the same person you fell in love with. Only your understanding of his full situation has changed. Despite the shock, hopefully you will stay in the relationship. This is not an easy decision. Cross-dressing is not something that society has yet to fully accept. There are lots of women who are unable to stay in such a relationship.

As you may have discovered, your husband is not like most other men. He has a warm, caring, sensitive and nurturing side. This is a result of the feminine side of his personality being so strong and playing such an influence on him. He is probably more understanding of you than most men. You may, in fact, not have observed this. Cross-dressing can be a complex condition. Men who are cross-dressers usually begin to feel the 'need' to cross-dress at an early age, often about five or six years, and as they mature, society pressures them to suppress their need and keep it as a deep secret. When the stress of middle age, increased financial responsibility of a growing family, and increasing job responsibilities add to their normal stress of hiding their secret inner femininity, some cross-dressers begin to have difficulties in handling their lives. This can lead to conflicts that mask the inner feminine personality and prevent you from experiencing the good side of his cross-dressing - the loving, caring, nurturing and understanding part.

Wives and partners of cross-dressers often report that when a husband or partner is able to finally 'come-out' to the wife, and the wife begins to accept and understand, the cross-dresser often undergoes a major life change that permits the 'good' side to develop and be expressed. Acceptance by the wife or partner often leads to a whole new outlook on life by the cross-dresser that carries over into the relationship.

Discovering that your husband or partner is a cross-dresser is not the end of the world. Cross-dressing does not hurt anyone and it need not shake the foundation of your marriage. In fact, he is a lot less likely to be unfaithful in your marriage than non-cross-dressing spouses. In some couples, cross-dressing has served to strengthen their relationships. Many wives fear that their husband is homosexual or bisexual because of his desire to cross-dress, or to fear that he is 'changing' into a homosexual, but this is not necessarily the case.

The incidence of homosexuality or bisexuality among cross-dressers is the same as in the population in general, meaning that it is not likely that he has hidden, or is just discovering, his sexual orientation. He probably is what he says he is — straight, and in love with you. It is important to remember that one's sex (one's physical identity as 'man' or 'woman' based on one's reproductive organs, chromosomes, and secondary sex characteristics), one's gender (one's mental perception of one's self as 'masculine' or 'feminine'), and one's sexual orientation (who one wants to mate with) are totally independent of one another. It is entirely possible for a person to think of himself as being feminine but still want to mate with women exclusively. Don't jump to false conclusions in this regard.

You are probably deciding whether or not to accept this 'colourful' part of his personality. Believe me when I say that there are many

***Women have made great strides in ... choices available in clothing, hair, jobs ... Men are still not only limited, but also punished, for doing anything that society perceives as being feminine.***



cross-dressers whose wives know about the cross-dressing but will not accept it in any form. This is a truly sorrowful situation. Your relationship with your husband can be enhanced because he is a cross-dresser. You have more things in common with him and can enjoy a wider variety of activities than most couples. You can benefit from his developing 'softer side' and your acceptance and support will improve the quality of his life. Some cross-dressers report that they are certain that they would not be alive today due to the stress of hiding their secret were it not for the support of their spouse or partner.

A successful relationship with a cross-dresser can be stressful to you. I know. You have many fears. Will he be discovered? Will our families find out? Will this effect his job and our financial security? Will the neighbours learn the secret? Will he be arrested for cross-dressing, bringing public embarrassment? Will it hurt the kids? Will he turn gay? Will he have a sex change? What will become of me?

A relationship with a cross-dresser is about love and trust. You feel betrayed because you shared your deepest secrets and trust with him, but he hid this secret from you. A relationship with a cross-dresser is about setting limits and about regaining trust and about flexibility.

His cross-dressing can affect you and your security so you have a right to negotiate limits with him. If he wants to go out in public, perhaps this can be arranged on business trips to distant cities or on weekend field trips once a month to a local or nearby support group meeting. Or maybe he can attend one of the regional annual cross-dresser conventions. His outings do not have to be to your local mall where discovery is more likely, although some cross-dressers pass so well that this is simply not an issue.

Set limits on who is to know. Some cross-dressers feel the need to tell someone or to come-out to the world completely. You have a right to help decide these major decisions. Cross-dressing per se is not illegal but you have a right to discuss your concerns about this with him and insist that he not put himself in any situation that might lead to an arrest.

A trip to the mall is one thing, but a trip to the ladies room is something entirely different. Being caught in either restroom cross-dressed is not the time to argue constitutional law with a minimum wage security guard who holds your future in his hands and needs to impress his superiors with his efficiency in clearing 'perverts' out of the restrooms. Set rules in advance that are safe, and stick to them.

Agree on whether to tell the kids, and if you are the slightest bit concerned of this, don't tell. Confront the issue of a sex change. He may be confused at first and he may feel pressure to explore this possibility, but the vast majority of cross-dressers who have supportive wives resolve their confusion and accept themselves for what they are - cross-dressers, not transsexuals. Help him find himself. Above all, be flexible. Both the cross-dresser and his wife must honour the limits they set, but there is room for compromise as you both grow.

The issue of the 'secret' he kept from you for decades is difficult to resolve. Many wives feel life-long hurt about this. But when we discuss this issue in our support groups, the cross-dressers almost universally say that they love their spouse so dearly that they could not bring themselves to discuss cross-dressing with them before the stress and pain forced them to, or until they were accidentally discovered by the wife or partner. Think about it. He endured great personal pain, suffering alone in his 'closet' his entire life. His greatest fear was of losing your love and companionship. He endured to assure the continuation of the marriage. Yes, he betrayed your trust. But there are far worse betrayals. Most women should be so fortunate.

If you choose to accept, you can have fun with his cross-dressing. This is a great attitude to have. Cross-dressing can be fun if you want it to be. Think of the things you can do together that you might not be able to do with a 'normal' husband! Laughter is the best way to go through life and to deal with cross-dressing. Experience has shown that those couples who laugh together are among the happiest and most successful in their relationship. You laugh together about many things. Why not about this?

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## Book Review: S/he

### Changing Sex and Changing Clothes

Reviewed by Unknown Author

Article appeared in Polare magazine: July 1999 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



**S/he: Changing Sex and Changing Clothes, by Claudine Griggs, Berg Publishers (1998)**

#### **S/he: Changing Sex and Changing Clothes**

by Claudine Griggs  
Published by Berg Publishers (1998)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1859739113

**S**/he falls outside the normal range of books on transsexuality. It is neither a biography, nor a "study of transsexual" from an external perspective. Nor is it a political/theoretical book on gender along the lines of Bornstein's *Gender Outlaw* or Wilkins *Read My Lips*.

S/he is a book that, in many respects, is a reflection on the process of transition, both from the experience of the author, a transwoman who transitioned in the early 1970s, but did not have S.R.S. until many years after that, and a result of Ms Griggs speaking about their experiences with over a hundred other transmen and transwomen over a two year period in the process of writing the book.

The book is notable in the early sections, for a perspective and a number of distinctions I've rarely seen put so well. In particular, the consideration of the importance of the "gender of attribution", and it's role in the psychology of people in transition. It is also notable in taking "transition" to mean the entire process, from the decision to change sex, to the final acceptance of arriving at some peace between "gender of identity" and "gender of attribution".

The book deals with some of the psychological changes that occur, and how various other factors, such as size and appearance, can make a difference, not only in terms of how "easy" transition is, but also how it can affect the degree of overt hostility we face. For example, Griggs notes that while a short, petite transwoman may find it easier to transition, she may find herself seen as more vulnerable, and subject to more overt hostility than her larger, more imposing-seeming sisters.

Griggs also seems to address many of the incongruities of gender itself, and the psycho-social effect of public attitudes to gender, and our own responses in the process of gender change.

In a brief recounting of an incident from early transition, shortly after it "got out" at the uni where she was studying, that she was a transsexual, the author speaks of overhearing the following conversation in a women's toilet:

**Jane: I was in here a couple of days ago and saw Claudine.**

**Mary: Really? That's sickening.**

**Jane: I know. You can tell she's a fucking guy; she's not fooling anybody.**

**Mary: Yeah. I know. She's soooooo strange.**

Yet she gives this conversation in the context of, and demonstration of, the contradictions of gender. She uses it to demonstrate that people have a basically bipolar view, in which a person seen is psychologically classed as male or female, regardless of what might be known or suspected. In this case, Claudine is seen as female, and "she" is used unconsciously, in spite of the text of the conversation and the conscious knowledge that she is transsexual. Once some line is crossed, it is crossed. The author also speaks of her own contradictory responses, feeling devastated by the text of the conversation, but cheered by the unconscious affirmation of her gender.

She is very good at looking at the psychological changes that go on, as we move from a gender-attribution as one sex, to that of the other; how that affects desire for surgery, how the emphasis can change from "being accepted as male or female" to "being the kind of man or woman we are". She is one of the few authors I know who deal with the changes of mind about the importance of attributed gender, and how that importance changes in our minds through the transition process.


Jacob Hale, professor of the University of California and a transman, at a conference on sexuality, was asked "how long he had been living fulltime", and his response was - "Since the day I was born". Professor Hale's point, and the one Griggs was making in telling of the incident, was that we are all people with a full life history. One that is not abnormal, just unusual. And it is important for ourselves that we claim our whole life, with its contradictions, as our own. It is a marvellous, if often a traumatic and frightening journey, but all the more significant to claim for all that.

## Claudine Griggs

From Rhode Island College, Writing Centre website: Claudine Griggs is the Director of the Writing Centre at the Rhode Island College and also teaches at the University of Massachusetts in the United States of America.




**Journal of a Sex Change: Passage Through Trinidad**  
Author: Claudine Griggs  
Publisher: McFarland & Co. Inc. (1996)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978-0786400881.

**From Fishpond Books:**  *Journal of a Sex Change* is an intimate look at the compelling journey from male to female. Griggs provides us with an inside perspective on one of the most private and complicated transformations possible. She recounts her sex change process in compelling detail, from the emotional decision to pursue the surgery, to the procedure itself, to the long and painful recovery process. How did Griggs' decision affect personal relationships, family life and work? What

was it like in the first few months after the operation? What is it like for her now to experience the world as a transformed woman? Thoughtful and courageous, Griggs chronicles a journey that not only changed her physiology, but her life. Pioneering, it has become a classic firsthand account of the experience of sex reassignment.



**S/He: Changing Sex and Changing Clothes**  
Author: Claudine Griggs  
Publisher: Berg Publishers (1998)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978-1859739112.

**From Fishpond Books:**  Through an examination of the experience of transsexuals, this book enhances understanding of how gender can and does function in powerful, complex and subtle ways. The author, who has herself been surgically reassigned, has conducted extensive interviews with transsexuals from many walks of life. Her personal experiences, which inform this book, have given her an access to her subjects that others would likely be denied. While highlighting how the

gender identity of transsexuals relates to hormonal and surgical changes in the body as well as to changes in dress, the book investigates the pressures and motivations to conform to expected gender roles, and the ways in which these are affected by social, educational, and professional status. Differences in the experiences of those who change from male to female and those who change from female to male are also examined. Sex reassignment has been the focus of considerable media attention recently, as increasing numbers of people feel able to talk frankly about their personal experiences with gender dysphoria. Strides with medical technology have given transsexuals new opportunities in their lives. This book provides unique insights into how these changes are seen by those people most affected them.

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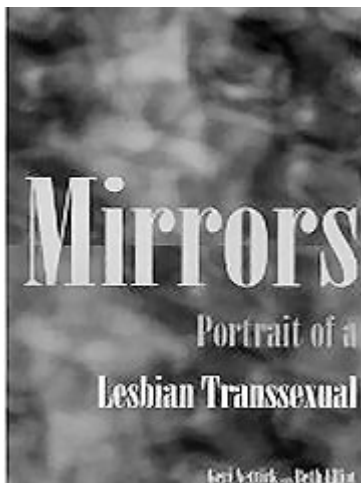
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## Book Review: Mirrors

### Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual

by Geri Nettick and Beth Elliott

Article appeared in Polare magazine: July 1999 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual

#### Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual

by Geri Nettick and Beth Elliott  
Published by Masquerade Books  
(1996)

I.S.B.N.-13 978 1563334356

*this is a book recommended both as a biography of a transsexual and her struggles, and as a slice of history.*

**M**irrors is a biography, as the title indicates, of a transwoman who identifies as lesbian. Geri Nettick's story is another of those by women who transitioned in the 1970s, a "graduate" of the Stanford gender program, and presents some of the difficulties of growing up in that period as a transsexual child, but one whose sexual orientation made her a "questionable fit" for the gatekeepers of the time. Nettick was clear, however, from a fairly young age, about her gender.

I enjoyed this book, not only for its style, but for the recognition of so much of the time and place where I grew up (Nettick is apparently only a couple of years older than I am), and so much that spoke to my own experience. As a slice of history, this book seems important, particularly in terms of Geri's interactions with both the lesbian and feminist communities.

Nettick, in her teens and early-twenties, did seem to manage to find friends and broad acceptance in both communities, and a sense of belonging. It is all the more poignant then as she recounts the politicisation of those communities, and the move from inclusiveness of all women, to a policing of the boundaries of who could be called a "proper" lesbian or feminist, the victimisation's and internal witch hunts. Elliott, while bringing a high level of editorial skill, in the final chapters of the book becomes a "character" in her own right, detailing the growth of the working relationship with Nettick, and her own personal experiences, as a central figure in early feminist circles, with the exclusion and demonisation.

All in all, this is a book recommended both as a biography of a transsexual and her struggles, and as a slice of history, giving context to many of the struggles we still face.

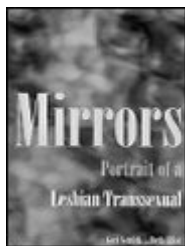
#### Beth Elliott

**From Amazon Books:** Beth Elliott is a San Francisco Bay Area-born writer, musician and activist focused on women's rights issues. In the early 1970s, she served as vice-president of the San Francisco chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis, served on the board of directors of the California Committee for Sexual Law Reform, and was a founding member of the Alice B. Toklas Memorial Democratic Club. The author of the original edition of *Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual* and the satirical lesbian time-travel novel *Don't Call It "Virtual"*, she was a regular contributor to *Telewoman*, *TransSisters*, the *Bay Area Reporter*, and other lesbian, gay and feminist publications. Her essays supporting and advocating for the diversity of woman-loving women were published in the anthologies *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out* and *Closer to Home: Bisexuality and Feminism*. In addition to public relations copywriting for a number of not-for-profit projects, Elliott handled communications for Applied Space Resources, Inc. and HitComedy.com. In 2005, Elliott re-engineered a number of earlier live and studio recordings, and recorded two new songs, for a "checkered career retrospective" *C.D.* titled *Buried Treasure*. Beth Elliott has now lived in Oakland, California U.S.A. for most of her adult life. An avid softball player and hiker, she has travelled the world chasing and photographing solar eclipses. She is the historian and genealogist for her long-time California family, which has welcomed this wayward daughter back to its bosom.



Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual  
Author: Geri Nettick and Beth Elliott  
Publisher: Masquerade Books (1996)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1563334356

**From Amazon Books:** In the Spring after the Stonewall Riots, a California teenager began a journey that shattered the boundaries of sexual identity. When Beth Elliott became the very first to transition from male to female to be an out lesbian, she rocked the newly above-ground L.G.B.T.



world — and it rocked her back. Historians and sexologists now routinely relate how radical dyke feminists drove her out of the nation's first lesbian rights organization, the Daughters of Bilitis, in 1972. Her only chance to tell her own story came a dozen years later, at the urging of a magazine editor who had pulled her off the blacklist. This powerful and stunning personal narrative, disguised as an "as told to" autobiography for safety's sake, became an underground classic. Emerging from the woodwork at the request of pioneering lesbian activists Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, Beth Elliott shared her story for a history of the Daughters of Bilitis (later published as the book *Different Daughters*). This time, her standing in her local lesbian community only rose. So now, she reintroduces *Mirrors – Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual*. With a bow to her alter egos Geri Nettick of *Mirrors* and Mustang Sally of *TransSisters: A Journal of Transsexual Feminism*, this courageous queer feminist pioneer once again gives voice to her life's powerful inspirational message: Be true to yourself and keep moving forward to freedom, even when the world says who you are is impossible. Beth Elliott, in which Beth Elliott steps out from behind her pseudonym (Geri Nettick) to claim her place in lesbian/trans activist history.

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# An Invisible Procession

## A Mixture of Memory Interwoven with a Social Commentary on a Topic Unfamiliar to Most

by Veronica

Article appeared in Polare magazine: July 1999 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



**R**eaders of this essay will find perhaps that the style the writer has adopted is unusual, being a mixture of memory, interwoven with a social commentary on a topic unfamiliar to most. The writer has attempted to draw the reader into a strange place, a place where the writer has been imprisoned for nearly half a century. The bars on her cell are made of prejudice and the gaoler is fear.

*Against the black light of prejudice she's stronger now, for she knows she will never again be ashamed, guilty, or afraid, in the face of ignorance.*

As the teacher reads the faces in each class, sometimes a bewilderment is felt, glimpses of talent that shows but briefly, before the flame flickers and dies in unseen winds. The teacher wonders at some students consistent inability to fan talent into success, wonders if these typically quiet students are yet other shadows in an invisible procession she knows so well. Are the unseen winds prejudice and fear?

Prejudice and fear are social animals that have savaged so many educations. Fear that strangles the joy of communication without which, an individual is unable to develop an

identity that gives them a place, that 'is them', within society.

The prejudice that societies construct feed a stifling fear, the teacher knows well what fear will do, for the teacher is transsexual. Having been a part of the invisible procession, having had her education ruined by the usual early onset of gender confusion, (at seven years of age she knew what her trouble was, without having any inkling of what her troubles would be), for the world said she was he, for that's the way she looked.

She began to feel uneasy with the place her society decreed she must fit, and the tourniquet of fear was applied to ensure silence and conformity to its expectations of her.

Transsexual children know earlier than most, the power of prejudice, very few in society have the independence of mind to avoid being mired in prejudice's unthinking grasp, the growing child is taught very early that no-one is likely to stand out from the mainstream on her behalf.

A loneliness developed that grew slowly into a mourning, a mourning for the life that was not allowed her, her feelings, her expressions, her need to communicate her loss, she was continually left behind in her confusion. The teacher remembers a little of her high school experience, mostly as incidents, periods of intense torment, the odd bullying (the students knew she didn't fit, even then they picked upon little things that the system wouldn't see).

Looking back she knows it was hope, only blind desperate hope, that kept the teenage girl going in a sea of males, she longed for a cloak of invisibility from within which she could find some peace, some agreement with the relentless knowledge of being she. She in all of life, in every class, in every distracted failure, she in loneliness.

Her torment at the knowledge that her failures academically were due solely to her gender distress, drove her to make resolution after resolution to reform, switch off the female, to conform to the body not the self, to break the chain of distress and guilt that ruled her life.

But no, 'she' could never be dismissed, made to leave the body to somehow feel as it looked, for if 'she' went, the shell would be empty, for 'she' is 'me', the only 'me' there is.

All through her life, through many occupations that culminated in a return to education and a teaching career, what we know as the dichotomy of gender has decreed that she didn't have the right to the pages of her life. She must live as an endless series of covers each one untrue but not a lie, just forever incomplete.

Not through choice do transsexuals exist, for it is a cruel unreasoning place, their place in the invisible procession. Their frequent prayer "Oh god, why me? Why? Why?". All transsexuals know that prayer and to all transsexuals, comes the day when living a life of denial is just no longer possible.

The teacher sat for three nights in succession on a cliffs edge, crying in utter distress, tossing the question of causing the lesser harm to her family, from the only two choices available to her. To take one step to god? Or to seek help in the sure knowledge of the pain this move would cause.

That blind desperate hope that had been her life-long companion won a very narrow victory, and now the teach will live as the pages relate, the taunting dream of being able to love, to hurt, to share in peace, her inner female self.

Not for one minute will she pretend a bed of roses, for she has long realised that medieval morality demands its victims. Persecutions have forever been part of religious self-righteousness.

Transsexuals are prime targets for modern 'witch hunts', as they reach deep into the minds of society, to burn intelligence and reason at the stake of ignorance. Nearly all the people in the lives of transsexuals are gripped by the fears, grown into them by the ranting of religious leaders who seem to be in love with hate.

Her teaching career in non-government schools is now gone - forever! Institutionalised prejudice have decreed that such a gentle committed person has no right to teach in their schools, for when forced to survive as herself or perish, her rights and values are declared meaningless.

Against the black light of prejudice she's stronger now, for she knows she will never again be ashamed, guilty, or afraid, in the face of ignorance. The faces of classes yet to be taught drift distantly in the haze of possibilities facing her, as the long process of making the cover match the book brings peace, blessed indescribable peace to ease away the tears.

I dream of days when I might revisit the hurts the mind rejects, to hold the candle of acceptance into the tunnel's shadows, and bring a little peace to the lives in the invisible procession. I wish you love and endless hope.

There is very much that I have no space to say in this essay. Perhaps a poem I've written to my love the mother of my children (six sons and one daughter) all adults now, might offer a further vantage point into the life of the teacher.

### Pretty Wings ...

*After winter's night, I knew you first in spring.  
From my cage in me, I saw you pretty wings.  
A dawn I'd never known, rose softly in my life.  
And grew in me a love of you, so warm in the mornings light.  
Each day to soar in vaults of blue, far from sight you'd set me free.  
To share you sky, your life, your love, all from this cage in me.  
And through your eyes I learned to live and leave my bars behind.  
Free to know the wind I'd dreamt, and dream it could be mine.  
Each dream of dawn I'd share your wings, you'd bring the daylight in.  
And dart together through the bars to share our love in spring.  
Love brought to life new ways to feel, new ways to see each day.  
I couldn't help deny my plumes and hid my wings away.  
It might have been you'd never know, but the cage in me grew tight.  
The bars bit deep into my soul with torment from the night.  
I should have told the truth my love, told so many things.  
But the years themselves were won by fears, of losing pretty wings.  
So suddenly ... the cage dissolves, I dart in Autumn's blush.  
To share with you unflown miles, and leave cruel winter's crush.  
As season's flow to make our years I'll always love first spring.  
First hope, and last, tied up in love of you my pretty wings.*

Veronica

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## What More is There

Whatever your heart desires, your mind can imagine, and anything you can dream

by Sarah J. Rutherford

Article appeared in Polare magazine: July 1999 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



People have no power to stop you being yourself, or from living life the way you choose.

**T**here comes a time, after things have settled down following our emergence from hiding, when one has to start believing in self. That is to say, "I am me, what more is there?"

***Let's be honest, if everyone looked the same, dressed the same, had everything equal, someone would find something different to differentiate folks by, so being transsexual is no big deal.***

People have all sorts of ideas about us, regarding the way we are, and most of them are wrong, misrepresented or just plain stupid. The only real opinion that matters is your own. This eventually becomes a realisation when one takes into consideration how much people really care or understand about what we are, and that is simply, for the majority, next to nothing.

Self realisation is the next stage after self-recognition; it is where one decides to make the most of the situation and goes forward, irrespective of all other

opinions and ideas etc. This is the time when you realise your true value, what you need from this new life, and what you hope for and dream of for the future. By no means should this be misconstrued as a selfish thing - for it is not, it is the reality that we all have a life to lead and that life is ours to do with as we please, it belongs to no one else, and if we make mistakes, we alone will be held accountable.

"I am me", begins with a self-belief, a belief that you can exist in this so called 'Normal' world. Trust within yourself gives you the courage to do what has to be done, to get on with life, irrespective of the odds. It is a fact of life that transsexual people will, if they are picked, get flak from all quarters at some stage, ridicule and other rubbish is something we live with. Just because some people cannot cope with who we are though, or they fear our ability to freely express ourselves, doesn't mean to say we should hide away in a corner. The out of sight out of mind attitude is archaic and no longer worth bothering with, for we are very much in sight, and in the minds of many. We are not invisible, and nor should we be forced to be.

Discrimination laws may not protect us from abuse, or even give us much of an avenue of recourse, but that doesn't mean to say we cannot live our version of a 'Normal' life. What you need out of your life is entirely up to you. If you choose to hide, so be it, but if you choose to go back to school, work, or whatever, you are entitled to do that, irrespective of people's opinions.

What do you want and how do you think it can be achieved? I am back at school, I am the only transsexual there, and it isn't easy. The fact that I choose to go to school instead of open learning, is a simple matter of my needing to be out and about, mixing with people, even though I find a few hard to tolerate. I don't see myself as abnormal, a little different yes, but I'm not that different to most people. I am still flesh and blood, and apart from the fact that I wear female clothes and I'm pre-op, what other difference is there?

It doesn't matter if you are transsexual or not, people will always differentiate, always find something to separate each other, to classify people into different groups, it's a human trait I agree it is an annoying trait, but I have been reclassified as I call it, many times. My origin, my language, accent, hair colour, skin colour, dress, attitude, social background, wealth, qualifications, skills, sex, belief, height, weight, interests, choice of friends, workmates, work type, the bloody car I drive, there are so many things people use to judge who in the clique and who isn't, and they are all trivial. Like so much of human nature.

Let's be honest, if everyone looked the same, dressed the same, had everything equal, someone would find something different to differentiate folks by, so being transsexual is no big deal. That's the way I have come to look at it now, it's the way I can deal with my life, and the way I intend to continue to deal with it, because now I can get on with my life and enjoy the future and what it holds for me.

I wrote once before in a poem: "I am me, and with such joyous clarity", and never was that more applicable, and it applies to all, not just me. If you want others to run your life, dictate what you are and feel, then let them, but if you truly want to be free, there comes a time when you have to stand up for yourself. Positive thinking means deciding what you need from life, then going out and getting it, despite the odds or opposition. People have no power to stop you being yourself, or from living life the way you choose. They may think they have, but that's just a simple matter of a little forthright assertive re-educating on their part.

I opened with the question, "What more is there?" The answer is simple. A whole world more, and as difficult as that may seem in the

early stages, no matter how impossible it looks, it is like riding a bike. Once you learn. you never forget and it is so easy to achieve with effort and patience, time and learning.

Confusion and lack of direction is common with us. We probably spent our whole lives in such a state, but there is no need for that when the mind is clear about what the body should be - then the road to mind and body unity begins in earnest. You will only be able to take from life what you put in, no more, no less. "What more is there?" - whatever your heart desires, your mind can imagine. and anything you can dream.

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