

# Polare Edition 61

Published: January 2005 Last Update: June 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

## Editorial

by Katherine Cummings, Polare Editor

**T**his issue, as I foreshadowed in our last, is dedicated to Lee Anderson Brown, who died of cancer in October, 2004. Lee was an admirable man, born intersexed, and with ambiguous genitalia, with all the uncertainty involved in those conditions. He overcame early confusion and worked for understanding and appropriate treatment for people, not only intersexed, but with all forms of gender diversity. Apart from occasional social encounters my only contacts with Lee were through Sex And Gender Education (S.A.G.E.) and I was always impressed by his clear thinking, articulate expression of problems and appropriate strategies of amelioration. Lee was an academic and his doctoral thesis concerned itself with transgendered and intersexed life. He was respected by his academic colleagues and one of his supervisors at the University of New South Wales contributed to the eulogy at the service held for him at the Metropolitan Community Church in Petersham.

Lee was also eulogised by his partner of seven years, Sharon L. Brown, who has provided material for our tribute to Lee in this issue. Both Lee and Sharon found comfort and support in their Christian belief and were members of the Metropolitan Community Church community.

I have included an essay of Lee's in this issue, on the topic of the treatment of intersex members by the general community although for the purposes of this publication I have removed the bibliography and footnotes. If anyone would find these useful I would be glad to supply the unedited text. Sharon has also supplied two poems by Lee, demonstrating another facet of his creative nature.

The photograph on the cover, of Lee and Sharon, was taken shortly before Lee's death, and the ravages of his illness are plain to see on his face. Sharon says, however, that he remained calm and peaceful, on occasions even joyful, to the end. She feels that, for whatever reason, Lee's condition was treated without as much attention as it should have been, until it was too late to achieve significant remission. If so, this has been our loss, as well as hers and his.

Sharon hopes to organise publication of Lee's writings in the future and if this can be achieved they will, I feel, make a significant contribution to the literature of gender studies.

Changing the topic, there has been quite a lot of ink spilt on the topic of Alan Finch, who has, I understand, been given permission to sue the Monash Gender Clinic for malpractice in approving his sex reassignment surgery, surgery which he now feels was inappropriate and the result of bad advice. [Note that Alan is not unique in his crusade ... on page 5 there is the case of Samantha Kane, who is suing her psychiatrist for £186,442 (A\$461,270) because she misses her penis ...]. Quite by chance I found in my files an article from Woman's Day, 19th December 1989, headed "Goodbye Alan, hello Helen ... and happiness" it tells the heart-warming story of Alan Finch who, "because of a chromosome imbalance" spent his early life

## Feature Articles



What makes this book almost unique is that it addresses, through the eyes of both parties, the oft-asked transsexual question "When do I tell?"

### Fascinating Who? Fascinating Aida

With a large following in England, Ireland and Australia. *Fascinating Aida*, the book by Dillie Keane, Nica Burns, and transsexual Adele Anderson, addresses, through the eyes of both parties, the oft-asked transsexual question of When do I tell.

### Fixed For Life

Joining the navy prior to the conclusion of WWII to her S.R.S. in Montreal in 1999, *Fixed For Life: The true saga of how Tom became Sally* by Irene Priess is the story of Tom who became Sally weaving through the years, an inner-drive thwarted by circumstances and pragmatism.

### Fractured Masks

An exploration of how the experiences of intersexuals have been erased in the modern conceptual frameworks which are used to position them in this society today. In other words, how the voices of intersexuals have been silenced in theoretical discourses of gender and sexuality.

### A Tribute to Lee Brown

Sharon's loving partner of over seven years, Lee Brown, passed away in October 2004. many people knew Lee through his work in academia, the Transgender Liberation Coalition, the Gender Centre, Health in Difference Conferences, and the Intersex Network of N.S.W.

### The Amazing Disappearing Chromosome

The Y-chromosome, which carries an essential gene known as S.R.Y. that induces embryonic testis development (and thus the release of male hormones) is self-destructing, having shed 97 percent of its other genes in the 300 million years since it evolved.

and happiness" it tells the heart-warming story of Alan Finch who, "because of a chromosome imbalance" spent his early life

feeling like a girl. At seventeen he read about sex-change and for the "first time understood what was wrong". Blood tests showed that Alan was "missing a male chromosome" [sic] and he was given the option of going on to male hormones immediately or waiting until he was eighteen and going on female hormones. At eighteen he decided he wanted to be a woman and transitioned as Helen. In 1986 he, his mother and sister emigrated to Australia and after saving the S.R.S. fee he had the irreversible operation "which she says she will never regret." In June, 1989 he used his British passport, which had been amended after the operation, to marry illegally. It made Helen angry to discover the marriage was void. "I will fight it. I am going to campaign for the law to be changed. I haven't got a problem anymore. I see it as a problem I had which has been solved."

Yet now, Helen has reverted to being Alan and wants to sue the Monash Clinic, despite admitting to having cheated on the assessment tests and despite the long history of unhappiness in the male gender role and long-standing desire for gender reassignment.

Are we going down the litigious trail marked out by our American cousins, who seem to think that any decision they make can be the subject of court action, as long as there is a specialist with deep pockets involved?

Whatever happened to taking responsibility for one's own actions? Does the word "adult" still have any meaning? Could I conceivably sue the Church for performing a marriage which foundered after a mere 26 years when it was supposed to be a contract "until death us do part"? Let's see. Who has more money, the Presbyterian Church which married me or the Catholic Church which annulled my marriage against my will?

## Manager's Report

by Elizabeth Riley, Gender Centre Manager

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Given the current debate over terminology in this country that has given rise to such phrases as "people who experience transsexualism", "people who experience variation in sexual formation and expression" and "transsexualism and other intersex conditions", all of which seek to distance themselves and their advocates from terms such as transgender, I thought it might be interesting to print the following brief history of the term transgender provided by Susan Stryker.

While the Gender Centre unequivocally supports and respects the right of all people in the sex and gender diverse communities to self-define according to their own terminology, we equally unequivocally reject any notion that one term, and the individuals who embrace it, have a claim to moral superiority over any other.

As the article demonstrates significant gains have been achieved under the banner of transgender activism and all of us, regardless of preferred terminology, have benefited. If transgender is not your preferred terminology then select the term you do prefer. This is not an issue. For most people, post-transition, the preferred terminology is simply "man" or "woman" and, despite my role at the Gender Centre, this is certainly my choice in my private life.

What I do find difficult to comprehend in those who are advocates for the terminology above, is not their personal rejection of the term transgender but their public assertion that the term is offensive. How so? Surely no one can be offended by a term under the banner of which so much has been achieved? Can a woman of the twenty-first century, who has benefited from decades of feminism, be offended by the term "feminist"? One would hope not though if she were one would be justified in questioning her motives.

As a final twist on the whole silly business, I quote Katherine, the sage editor of this magazine when I say "I used to be transsexual but my surgeon cured me". Having been so cured I nonetheless, when donning my activist hat, do so with pride in its transgender label.

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## Book Review: Fascinating Who? Fascinating Aida

When do I tell?

Reviewed by Willow Arune

Article appeared in Polare magazine: January 2005 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



'Fascinating Aida' D.V.D. Cover

### Fascinating Who? Fascinating Aida

by Dillie Keane, Adèle Anderson and  
Nica Burns  
Published by Elm Tree Books  
London (1986)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 0241119251

***What makes this book almost unique is that it addresses, through the eyes of both parties, the oft-asked transsexual question "When do I tell?"***

**W**ith a large following in England, Ireland and Australia. 'Fascinating Aida' is little known in North America. If you remember 'Flanders and Swann', you are close. A very British wit encompassed in music. While 'Flanders and Swann' went on to some fame in America (*Mud, Mud, Glorious Mud* and others) the dry wit and unamplified sound (only a piano and voices) was not exactly pop in North American trends.

Too bad. We missed a lot! The group has been going since the early 1980s, and still performs and records. Three members from the group — Dillie Keane (the founder and the one who does most of the writing), Adèle Anderson and Nica Burns — got together for this book.

Why is this book a 'trans' book? Because one of the long time members of the group — Adèle Anderson is a transsexual woman.

What makes this book almost unique is that it addresses, through the eyes of both parties, the oft-asked transsexual question "When do I tell?". I found this book by reading Liz Hodgkinson's *Bodys shock* from the 1980s. She refers to the group, and the circumstances. That had me intrigued and I was delighted to find the book was still available. Nick (who works for the group) and their manager were most helpful in sending me both the book and the last recording released.

As I said, think of 'Flanders & Swann' or the 'Pirates of Penzance' or British Music Hall music and comedy, and just good fun! They are wonderful! Despite their great popularity in Britain, Ireland and Australia they have yet to be fully recognised for their talents in North America, which is our loss.

Oh, and yes, they write all the songs they perform. Adèle Anderson auditioned for the group in the 1980s. With her great vocal range and other attributes, she was a fit, but there was something Nica asked, "Are you a man?" (It was, after all, an all woman group). Adèle, being post-operative, said "No". Everyone was embarrassed and dropped the question. Adèle joined the group.

Both viewpoints of that meeting, the reasons and whys, are presented in the book. Later, the British tabloid press, noted in the past for their negative treatment of Caroline Cossey and April Ashley, got the scent. Dillie and Marilyn were told by a third party, and were taken aback.

Initially they were angry because they had taken Adèle at her word. Still, they adjusted and thus were able to better understand and help. The impact of that entire media witch hunt on a newly breaking group must have been difficult.

By the time the press was on the scent, the friendship was such that the group's reaction was, "We know. As far as we're concerned, it doesn't matter. What's more, you are a woman and we think you're very brave".

After the B.B.C. released a recording in 1985 the press came closer. 'Whacky Girl Trio in Sex Secret' started it off. Once again, we have the views presented by both sides, from Adèle and from Dillie and Marilyn, a former member of the trio.

With the strength of lions, they were able to counter the attack and continue. Most transsexual readers will go away with no conclusions. "To tell or not to tell" is indeed the question. In this case, Dillie and Marilyn had some advance warning and that might have cushioned the blow, but each of us will find support for his or her own position in the comments by the three. This is not fiction, and follows the feelings and thoughts of the members during a time of crisis. While not directly addressed, this might explain why the group has not broken into certain markets, nor perhaps tried all that hard.

Bad as it may have been, Britain, Ireland and Australia are more forgiving than the United States in such matters. That they continued,

with some limitations on their career, is a testament to their deep friendship. The group has gone through changes — Irish, British, Australians and Canadians have been part of the group at one time or another. Still, they have kept to their original goals and style.

Give them a listen and you, like me, may well be captivated. A good (if short) read, some nice music on the stereo, and what more could you ask for — all from one group! The book is as much fun as listening to their music. While I have one C.D., more are defiantly on my 'Wants' list! If you can contact their website, both are available from Nick, a very nice man who will do all that he can to makes sure you are happy! Thanks to Nick for all his help in making this review possible.

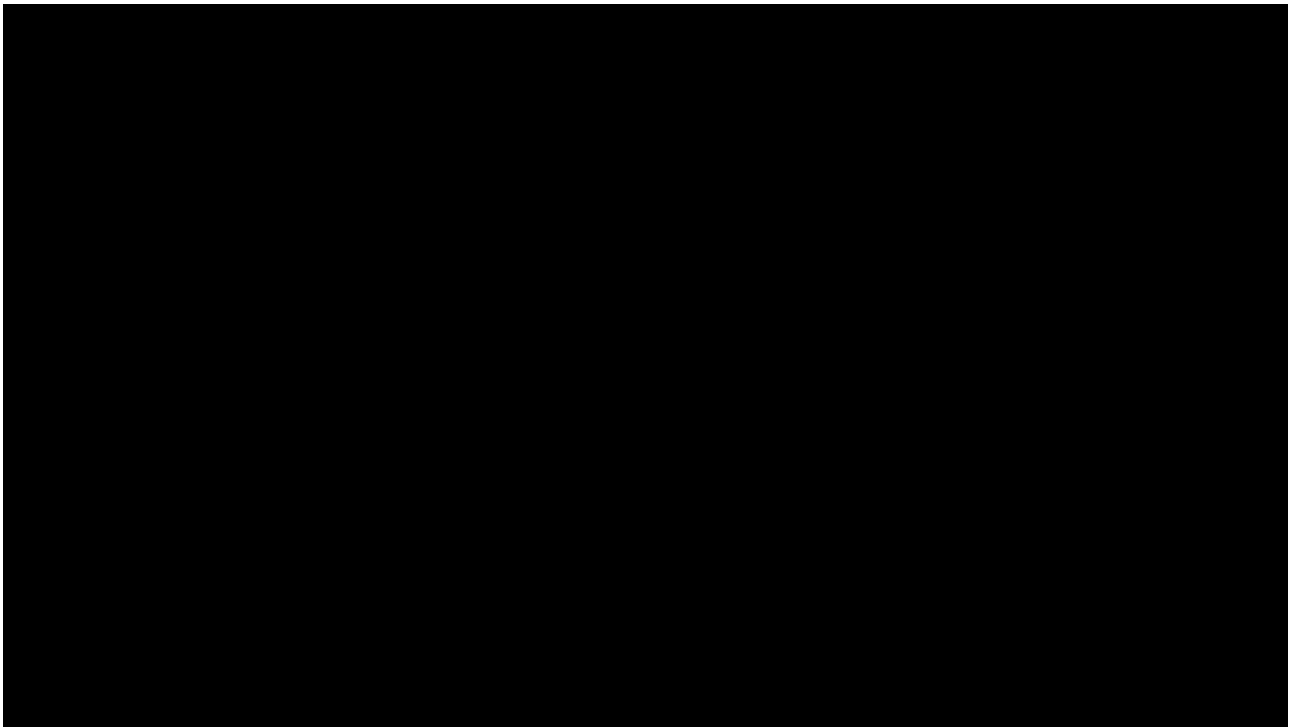
## Fascinating Aïda

Fascinating Aïda was founded in March 1983 by Dillie Keane, Marilyn Cutts and Lizzie Richardson. The members have varied frequently, but the lasting two have been Dillie Keane and Adèle Anderson, who joined the group in 1984. The trio started performing in a West End wine bar, but they soon caught the media's attention, and performed on television for the first time in 1983. Over the years, they gained a growing fan base and national (United Kingdom) popularity, earning three Laurence Olivier Award nominations for Best Entertainment in 1995 and 2000. They were voted Most Popular Act 1985 by *City Limits* magazine and also earned a Perrier Comedy Award nomination. The group broke up in 1989 and was subsequently reformed in 1994, and performed for a further ten years, releasing a number of albums, before breaking up again in 2004.



The group wrote songs for radio and television programmes, some of their most famous songs include "Shattered Illusions", "Herpes Tango", "Lieder" and "Taboo". They were the subject of several B.B.C. documentaries. All the current members are also established actresses, mainly in musical theatre. Dillie Keane is also a writer and has written two books, *The Joy of Sequins* in 1995 and *Fascinating Who?* in 1985.

The following You Tube video documentary is from 1985, at which time the group consisted of Dillie Keane, Adèle Anderson and Marilyn Cutts.



To remain on this website and view parts 2 - 5 of this documentary, wait until each video ends and select the next part from the on-screen options. Otherwise, to watch the remaining parts of this documentary on You Tube, select the next part from the links below

[Part 2](#) | [Part 3](#) | [Part 4](#) | [Part 5](#)

After the death in 2007 of the group's pianist and musical director, Russell Churney, plans for a new show were shelved. It was announced in early March 2008 that they would get together again for a short spell of concerts and possibly a brief tour to celebrate their 25th anniversary, and the show would include new songs. In 2008 they performed at the Jermyn Street Theatre, followed by three British tours. Recently, a [Fascinating Aïda Official You Tube Channel](#) was created, as was the [Official Fascinating Aïda website](#).

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## Book Review: Fixed for Life

### The True Saga of How Tom Became Sally

Reviewed by Willow Arune

Article appeared in Polare magazine: January 2005 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



**Fixed For Life: The True Saga of How Tom Became Sally, by Irene Preiss**

#### Fixed For Life: The True Saga of How Tom Became Sally

by Irene Preiss  
Published by iUniversity Inc.  
Lincoln, Nebraska U.S.A. (2000)  
I.S.B.N.-13 978 158348728X

***That such an excellent writer should be hidden amongst the weeds is sad indeed.***

**T**he largest single grouping of books by or about transsexuals is not the clinical tomes and heavy references. We excel at the art of autobiography. Those seeking reasons might head to Prosser's *Second Skins* for an explanation). There are legions of bios on transsexuals published in one manner or another and even available on the Internet. We are a unique people and each one of us has our own story to tell.

As mainstream publishers limit transsexuals' bios to the very well known or academic, 'Publish on Demand' offered a new way to get your story out, along with 'e-Books', 'Web Publishing' and more. Indeed, if the main chore for a writer is to get the message out; the equally daunting task for the reader is to locate the message in a sea of information.

Irene Preiss wrote her book in 1999. Only now, some five years later, did I find it and in a very roundabout manner. That such an excellent writer should be hidden amongst the

weeds is sad indeed.

From joining the navy just prior to the conclusion of World War Two to her S.R.S. in Montreal in 1999, Tom and Sally's stories weave through the years, an inner drive thwarted by circumstances and pragmatism. It is refreshing to hear how word of Christine Jorgensen affected Tom as it did so many others. What is particularly wonderful about this book, aside from a writing style that draws you further and further into Tom's life, then Sally's, is the matter-of-fact 'navy' presentation. His honesty and her courage triumph over adversity and if the road is long and winding, the happy ending comes eventually.

During the years covered by her book, Tom marries twice. Prior to introducing Sally to the world, he is fixed in his responsibilities, steadfast in his career. Thereafter, good luck and a persistence that is laudable find Tom and Sally switching back and forth, at times on a daily basis, at other times for more protracted periods. In many cases, Sally finds that to work she must become Tom, and Tom finds he cannot live long without becoming Sally. The constant pulling of one against the other lends drama and texture to the story. Tom's many skills keep him financially going, from one short contract to another, from one career to another. Financially he is dependent upon the 'old boy networks' which seem always to make the necessary connections.

This book was released in the same year as McCloskey's *Crossing* and offers a direct contrast between two similar but different lives. McCloskey, as you may recall, abruptly terminated her marriage and proceeded with libertarian zeal. Tom and Sally are more methodical and, lacking tenure, more subject to the demands of the commercial world. Compared to the protected 'ivory towers' of McCloskey, Tom faces a far more challenging commercial world and does so with more compassion and feeling.

There is a sense in Tom's story of passive yet steadfast resistance. He does not expect the world to change to accommodate him. Pragmatically, and with a sense of both fair play and even-handedness, he and Sally deal with the world as it is while at the same time living their lives, as they must, through the bureaucracy of the military and endless forms for security clearance. There is accommodation, not willingly given, but practically necessary. Nor does the long delayed goal suffer for this. Perhaps the wine is better savoured for some after it has aged to the right flavour.

I like Tom and Sally. I have a feeling from this book that we would enjoy a coffee together, getting to know one another better. I would learn a lot from such a meeting, and hopefully gain in both patience and practicality. I am not sure if Geminis are suppose to interact well with the more flighty Sagittarians but suspect that the balance of skills might be an interesting pairing, if given to more stress than a more normal relationship. What we both seem to share is a wonderful serendipitous state of fortune, of things falling into place at the right time and before our world's collapse, having our chestnuts pulled from the fire at just the right moment by a fickle finger of fate. Tom helps the fates along much more deliberately than I do. For me, it is knowing that 'things will turn out for the best', for Tom and Sally, planning matters so that they do.

The navy way ...

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# Fractured Masks

## Voices from the Shards of Language

by Lee Anderson Brown

Article appeared in Polare magazine: January 2005 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



... why are there so many transsexual and so few intersex activists ...

**I**ntersexuality – in the sense or the phenomenon of people being born with ambiguous biological gender presentation – is something which has been recorded

throughout history; and it is something of a cliché to suggest that during that time it has been given a wide variety of meanings. In this paper I want to explore how the experiences of intersexuals have been erased in the modern conceptual frameworks which are used to position them in this society, today. In other words, how the voices of intersexuals have been silenced and continue to be silenced by and in theoretical discourses of gender and sexuality. This endeavour is made more bitter by knowing that in these discourses intersexual people are 'present' in their absence. That is, they are often talked about but in such a way that intersexual people

*... the voices of intersexuals have been silenced and continue to be silenced by and in theoretical discourses of gender and sexuality.*

are not able to read themselves or their stories in these discourses. I will look at how this situation has come about, describe its current effects, and hopefully try to point to some future directions which might help to remedy it.

One question which has preoccupied me, and which was the inspiration for this paper is why are there so many transsexual and so few intersex activists, especially since even the most generous figures on trans incidence in the population — given at 1 in 9,000 for Australia — is significantly less than Intersex incidence (given at 1 in 2,000 by Intersex activist groups) by a factor of four. Such a discrepancy may be the result of some or all of the following reasons:

- » 1 in 2,000 includes many people whose genital ambiguity was slight or includes A.I.S. and Turners Syndrome people who don't necessarily feel outraged by their experience of the medical profession;
- » a number of people do feel 'cured' by early medical intervention (although I've yet to meet one);
- » many people have passed away due to complications of their condition, suicide or some other accident/misadventure.

I find none of these 'explanations' convincing however, and feel we need to look elsewhere to find the reasons for the absence — with a few notable exceptions — of intersexual activists or an activist network. In doing this it may be best to start at a significant moment in the development of modern medical practice, specifically that period when forensic medicine slowly became the discipline of sexology as we know it today.

### Hermaphroditic substitutions

Proto-sexology, like medicine, generally seemed fascinated by intersexual people (the medical journals of the time record medical society meetings where intersexual corpses were dissected, cases were discussed and argued over as to origins and diagnoses). Of course there was nothing new here — intersex people had been studied, commented on and assigned to their 'correct' genders for many centuries previously. Indeed, by the time of the nineteenth century the desire to attribute the true sex of a person was tuned to a fine art and seen as the duty of the medical and legal professions. The example of Adelaide Herculine Barbin is the obvious reference point. At one point in her commentary of Alexina's memoirs Auguste Tardieu, says:

**To be sure, the appearances that are typical of the feminine sex were carried very far in his case, but both science and the law were nevertheless obliged to recognise the error and to recognise the true sex of this young man.**

At another point the doctor who first diagnosed Alexina's condition, Dr. Chesnet, after finding what she considered enough markers of masculinity declares:



**We can now conclude and say: Alexina is a man, hermaphroditic, no doubt, but with an obvious pre-dominance of masculine sexual characteristics.**

Significantly this bracket of quotes shows how there is no hermaphrodite (in the social sense) in modern medicine, only hermaphroditic — what was once a noun is now only an adjective — and the specificity of being born with ambiguous genitalia is subsumed unproblematically into the category of abnormal male or abnormal female. There is no doubt in the mind of the doctors that the person is on a particular side of the gender divide; the trick is to find it.

However while hermaphroditic bodies had to be fixed there was a push to have hermaphroditic behaviour recognised as a form of specificity based on an hermaphroditic essentialism (i.e., neither/both sex/genders), especially through the work of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. In his work as an activist trying to achieve legal recognition for same sex desire Ulrichs coined the term 'a female soul enclosed in a male body' as the definition of a Uranian — his term for homosexual. In other words, Uranism was conceptualised as a type of psychological hermaphroditic condition. Ulrichs' focus was on a psychic gender inversion or a hermaphroditism of the mind.

And if intersexual people were denied a right to a specificity then that right — to be recognised as a third sex — was taken up and demanded from the new wave of homosexual activists of the period. This can be seen most clearly with how the term intersexual itself was used. Coined, according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, by J Grote in 1876 to describe, in what seems to be a metaphysical way — that which the sexes have in common or share, it did not take up its modern endocrinological meaning until R. Goldschmidt used it in a journal publication of 1915 and in the 1917 edition of *Endocrinology*. In the *Endocrinology* entry zie says 'We have proposed the use of the terms intersexe, (sic) intersexual, intersexuality instead of sex-intergrades.'

Several years earlier than Goldschmidt's usage it was taken up as a synonym for 'psychic hermaphrodite' by Xavier Mayne (a pseudonym) in his 1910 book, *the Intersexes*, where zie argues that homosexuals are a third sex positioned psychically between male and female. This formulation of homosexuality — following Hirschfeld and Ulrichs — as gender inversion was very influential and was a common line of argument of the time (Earl Lind also uses the same rationale in his own work).

However while this usage of the term intersexual was soon superseded by 'homosexual' to describe sexual desire and acts between adults of the same gender, its use to describe people born with ambiguous genitalia grew and it became the dominant term. However it was still a pathological label in that one could only be intersexual as the condition a person had but one could not be an intersexual as a personal identity (much less an hermaphrodite except in 'Side-Show Alley' and its successor in the public imagination — the tabloid press). One was either male or female with an underlying condition which made the determination of correct gender 'difficult' but not 'impossible'.

## Jorgensen – thoroughly Modern Hermaphrodite

Now we quickly move to the 1950s and Christine Jorgensen. When news of his sex realignment became public there was some speculation in the media that it was a correction of a 'biological' mistake — in other words that zie was intersexual. When it was revealed that zie had presented with normal male genitalia then the media tide turned against him in a big way. In the public imagination Jorgensen moved into that abject space previously occupied by hermaphrodites — the freak show spectacle of being neither man nor woman but both/neither.

Jorgensen's struggle to move away from this social recognition as transgressive hermaphrodite is important because it defined transsexuality for the next thirty years. Also, it was around this time that early childhood surgical intervention really started to be used to render intersexuals invisible and his story pivots around the way that the concept of hermaphrodite was transferred onto transfolk in the public imagination. If society has rid itself of 'old style' hermaphrodites by consigning them to the medical cabinets then medicine was able to provide new hermaphrodites for public consumption. The publicity surrounding his case borrowed and rewrote the hermaphroditic myth as read through the contemporary medical theories about the nature of gender difference. Indeed Jorgensen set the seeds for the 'classic transsexual story' by writing his story as a rebuttal to this perspective. With the backing of some aspects of the medical profession and because zie was so presentable — a charming, normal, clean-cut, clean-living gal — zie tried to present transsexuality as the 'girl next door' who was tragically and unfortunately trapped in the wrong body. In other words, rewriting and echoing the old formula used to discuss homosexuality.

## Writing the self

Stories are important because it is by the stories we tell, and the way they are received, that we are able to 'write' ourselves into existence. Each of us takes or adapts the available language and, according to how the conceptual meanings of a language or word-set resonate for us, position ourselves within its framework in order to co-exist in a given society. This process is dependent on the language being able to provide or be easily moulded into a conceptual framework which is adequate to describe and express our life situation and feelings. As Seyla Benhabib says:

**The self is both the teller of tales and that about whom tales are told. The individual with a coherent self-identity is the one who succeeds in integrating these tales and perspectives into a meaningful life history. When the story of a life can be told only from the perspective of others, then the self is a victim and sufferer who has lost control over her existence.**

In Jorgensen's case, as well as those trans storytellers who have come after her, this story has flexed and changed to reflect the changing social circumstances of transfolk. Still, what was set down as the classic or canonical transsexual identity provided a framework where one could begin to enter discourses about trans subjectivity. Even now, given all the current debate over the

meanings of a trans identity — i.e., transitional, third gendered, non-gendered or floating gender — the classic story written by Jorgensen and others of that era provide an important starting point of self-definition, even as that point is ultimately written against and rejected by writers such as Kate Bornstein or Ricky Anne Wilchins.

## Re-Writing Intersexual Stories

When we look at the possibilities of writing a 'core' or "classic" intersex story we are confronted with a number of serious difficulties trying to locate a central story by which we can understand our situation.

First is the fact that many intersexual conditions do not necessarily entail genital or gender ambiguity (mild forms of hypospadias associated with a range of conditions, or C.A.H.).

Secondly, the diversity of genital ambiguity possible means that trying to locate a common experience of the body or feelings about the body are made very difficult.

Thirdly, the story given to us by the medical profession — when indeed we are given one — is shrouded in concepts of lack, abnormality, incompleteness and freakishness; if we are to believe the stories told about us then we have to assume the mantle of the abject.

Finally, if we try to reappropriate the social stories of hermaphrodites and androgynes in this society we find those stories alien and strange. Because of the aspects I've discussed in this paper, even this story is no longer our own, it belongs to others and now has different reference points (e.g. the mind rather than the body, or a focus on its transgressive sexual nature).

However, there are some gaps and silences where some intersexuals are able to find common cause and begin the process of writing the self. The most important example has been how we have found parallels with, and adapted, the 'genital mutilation' story. What began as a western commentary and critique of non-western religious cultural practice found resonance with the experience of intersexuals and we have used it as a way to understand our feelings about the childhood medical treatment and surgery that many of us have undergone. In other words, the story of genital mutilation finally gives us one key into the language which can begin to explore our experience.

I believe another important entry point to be found exploring the psychologically traumatic nature of the silences, lies and betrayals which intersexuals have been subjected to by this process. Because we were subjected to these medicalised procedures and therapies, without our consent or even knowledge, at an age when we were too young to do anything but 'trust' those 'looking after' us, and at the time it was 'impossible' to hate them (not being able to understand the reasons for our treatment), we directed that discomfort and hatred inwards towards ourselves. This profound level of trauma and violation during the formative years of childhood not only destabilises our sense of ourselves but also makes it more difficult to recover from those traumas because we've rarely had an unproblematic sense of ourselves — deemed essential by Benhabib — as a reference or even as a starting point.

This leaves the last, probably the most important point. Our stories must focus on the healing processes which we are able to enact in our own lives or are able to borrow from other peoples lives and experiences. The severe nature of the traumas we've faced mean that the healing processes which we are able to implement in our own lives must always have priority over any other aspect. Unless we are able to create a 'safe space' for ourselves as a foundation from which we can venture out into the 'battlefields' of activism then we risk doing more damage to ourselves and not helping the 'cause', those we love, those who love us and ourselves (our true 'cause').

It is these aspects — more than any notion of third or fluid gender identity — which I believe is crucial to the project of writing an 'intersexual self' at this point of time. Maybe at some stage it will be possible for a number of intersexuals to write of the joys of being both sexed/gendered but now it is so important to rewrite those stories which have been written into our bodies, not at birth, but during our infancy and childhoods by others. Until those stories are addressed it is difficult, if not impossible, to be what seems to be expected of intersexuals in this society (not the least by some gender theorists and some transfolk), that is, to be happy hermaphrodites. Indeed the way some transfolk re-read the hermaphroditic story back to intersexuals, ignoring the trauma we've been through, only adds to the trauma and drives intersexual people away.

## Conclusion

Stories about the self are the main way that humans position themselves with regard to others and the way that they rationalise their behaviours, actions and reactions. In this paper I have looked at how one story based on the presence of intersexual people — hermaphroditism — has been taken by others and applied to a range of situations. While some people find comfort in these stories, when they are read back into the lives of intersexuals they seem foreign, strange and for a large number, only tend to confirm our alien-ness. In the face of this I believe intersexual people need to focus and privilege other aspects of their stories. Anyone who wishes to write an Intersex story would be well advised to use the starting points suggested here rather than any utopian notion of gender fluidity.

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# A Tribute to Lee Brown

## An Inspiration in Many Ways

by Sharon L. Brown

Article appeared in Polare magazine: January 2005 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

**L**ee Anderson Brown, my loving partner of seven years and five months, a gift to me from God, an answer to my prayers, passed from this mortal life into eternal life with God in October of this year (2004). I write this tribute for Lee, who many of you know through his work in academia and with the Transgender Liberation Coalition, the Gender Centre, Health In Difference Conferences, and with the Intersex Network of New South Wales.

Lee was born on 27th August 1957 with a body that had a more complex female and male form than most people. Humans are all born with varying degrees of female/male physiology, and Lee was born with what current language describes as intersex, including ambiguous external and internal genitalia.

Lee was diagnosed by doctors as having a hypospadias and Partial Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (P.A.I.S.). Sex karyotype tests and a series of surgical operations were carried out within the first year and later at the age of three and during Lee's primary school years.

Lee was given the gender neutral name 'Lee', because in the first year doctors were still unsure as to which way to go. Throughout Lee's early childhood and adolescence not one person explained to Lee why all the operations, tests, prodding and probing (including digital per-rectal examinations) were being done.

Lee felt abused and violated. In Lee's own words to me he described the events as being child sexual assault. There can be no other way of describing such treatment, regardless of the motives for such treatment. The legacies of such treatment can be found today in the lived experiences told in the personal narratives of many people who underwent such treatment. Not all intersex people are as traumatised by early surgical interventions, although they may have required less invasive surgeries or may have had matters explained appropriately, together with a more holistic and compassionate doctor-patient-family relationship.

Some of the literature on this is sensitive and the organisations concerned would not wish me to break confidence. Lee understood that the doctors' perspectives were formed as a result of believing that little children probably will not remember and they perceive a need to help the child to be 'normal' and to fit into society. Less was known or understood then about human psychological development than is the case today. It was, and still is, very cutting-edge stuff. Lee's parents were probably advised by the doctors at the time not to discuss the issues with Lee.

They also would have felt that they did not know enough to interfere. Lee's mother, like so many others, used a concise medical guide of the times, to try and understand medical matters. For many, the availability of such texts gave them a sense of more control over decision making. This might have helped more if the information had been not only correct but understandable.

Certainly the spread of accurate information has been an important factor in allowing parents of intersex children to be better informed. But this has come at a price.

Lee, along with many colleagues over the years assisted in the education of the medical profession as well as other academics regarding best practice standards in cases of intersex children. There still exists however, a need to continue - as many doctors who think they can second-guess God in such a way as to attempt to render intersex people totally invisible.

As Lee stated, people don't want to be labelled 'freak'. They wish to be 'normal'. In our world, that places the dichotomy of gender at the centre of so much social interaction, to be outside that dichotomy is a lonely and frightening experience. The need to be able to live and express ones own sex, gender and sexuality is important, and to fit into a social gender is also very important. The problem with silencing intersex children or rendering them silent and invisible is that when they grow into adolescents and adults they discover the truth.

If they find out the hard way, as Lee did, the consequences can include a feeling that those who should have cared for and loved these children had, instead, taken their rights away.

A similar experience is found among people who were adopted, and were never told, only to find out later in life. Lee's younger brother, Alan, was never told about Lee's condition and all he knew was that his brother was going off to have operations and that thugs at school picked on Lee because Lee was different. Alan has recently learned a lot more about Lee's life experience. The love between

***Lee was known for his work in academia, with the Transgender Liberation Coalition, the Gender Centre, Health in Difference Conferences, and with the Intersex Network of New South Wales.***

them has never been lost, even through periods of separation.

Parents can often be very confused and put their trust in doctors. Certainly it used to be standard practice in most hospitals to adopt a policy of "we believe we are doing the right thing for the child and her or his parents and it is best if people who would not fully understand be told very little other than the basic information".

Lee's mum and dad probably felt it might be better for Lee not to be told, yet they put their trust in doctors who were also silent on the matter. It wasn't until Lee's mother told him, shortly before dying, some patchy details regarding his birth and treatments that Lee even knew what had been 'wrong'.

Lee went to one of his aunts, with whom he held close relationship, and she told him more of the facts. Lee had by then found some sense of understanding and was able to make some sense of his early childhood experiences and his own feelings of sex/gender 'ambiguity'.

Lee had been born with cryptorchidism (undescended testicles). One 'testicle' was manipulated down the inguinal canal to a relatively normal position by doctors, whilst the other could not be located.

This undescended testicle, which was in a position more appropriate for an ovary, soon found Lee. At twenty years of age it developed into a teratoma the size of a tennis ball and had to be treated with experimental chemotherapy and irradiated with cobalt. Lee survived this although he did not know the whole story until his mother's and aunt's revelations in and after 1989.

Lee had even been to see doctors seeking sex/gender reassignment thinking he might be transsexual, and in consultation with an endocrinologist working in the field of inter/transex was told the results of blood tests indicated an intersex condition called Partial Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome.

P.A.I.S. is a complex condition whereby the receptor cells for active transport and cell nucleus receptors for sex hormones such as testosterone, are either not present or are defective. Genes code for the proteins that are required for cell membrane active transport.

So, a lower degree of masculinisation, and/or a higher degree of feminisation results, in a foetus that is genotype male (i.e. XY sex Chromosome Karyotype) both in pre-natal growth and throughout the lifespan. Blood serum levels of testosterone are made, but cannot be fully utilised by the target cells, because of the absent or incomplete proteins.

Over the years, Lee studied Sociology at the University of New South Wales, completing his B.A. Degree, with first class honours. He worked in factories and drove taxis to earn a living.

He also worked as a part-time tutor and attended many symposiums, conferences and has written a number of papers. With the changes to universities Lee found it harder to get academic work. Also, in this so-called egalitarian society, class structures still exist, and are promoted by both major political parties. At times Lee feared he would be discriminated against because of his working class background. Some of the oligarchy in academia certainly seemed to be using class politics, although Lee also had his supporters, and they encouraged him to try for a teaching position, interstate or overseas.

Lee was a humble person. His humility came from his humanity, and his life experience. Sometimes he struggled to find a way to be heard in his quest to share his experiences and to dignify other intersex and transex people, some of whom have had terrible experiences at the hands of so-called experts in the medical, legal, educational, political and religious disciplines.

It seems that the so-called developed world finds it difficult to accept intersex and transex people, and attempts to deny our very existence, using medical processes of 'normalising' that have involved applying gender norms and looking for compliance from their 'patients'.

Of course we all need and want to fit into the world so we can co-exist with others and each person must find his or her way.

Often though the medical profession expresses an arrogance that suggests some doctors and nurses see themselves as the ones to be the arbiters of 'normal'.

Some seem to go out of their way to deny an individual's truth, and to have the voices of intersex and transex people rendered silent by denigrating personal narratives as fantasy or simply some form of non-expert diagnosis of the pathologised categories of intersex, transsexual or transgender.

I always find the very term 'transsexual' to be a misnomer. When we take the latter part 'sexual' and place it alongside heterosexual and homosexual and when the prefix trans (meaning to cross or change) is placed in front of sexual, one could be forgiven to think that transsexual means to cross or change sexuality. There have been narratives by some doctors and psychiatrists to suggest that on one hand a 'male' who is sexually attracted to the male sex, but is also a female in mind is a homosexual, and if 'he' becomes a 'she' by means of sex-reassignment and is still sexually attracted to males then now she is heterosexually oriented.

The problem with this is that the body seems to be given so much importance in the narratives, rather than the whole person – being, body, mind and soul. As for people who may have 'deformed' bodies, as deemed by human eyes and standards, many of these 'broken temples' are very much filled with the Holy Spirit.

Personal narratives have never purported to be the complete explanation for the occurrence of people with intersex/transex variances. Personal narratives do not define the whole of humanity. Nevertheless the personal body-mind-spirit narratives are often overlooked by western medicine in its attempts to continue with control of the discourse, diagnosis and treatments.

Some doctors and other health professionals have become more enlightened by listening and thus learning better ways to deal with the

issues of intersex/transex people.

There still exist, however, some who see themselves as the guardians of morality and see intersex/transex people as a pathological condition that needs to be rectified.

The scary scenario of gene therapies and gene manipulation to 'correct' sex/gender ambivalence in pre-natal humans may, if some have their way, become a reality.

We already have sex selection and so-called genius or super-athlete gene selection, currently with private funding and tacit support from some governments.

For millennia, humans have sought physical or intellectual perfection.

There is comprehensive research data including psychiatric, physiological, endocrine, and post-mortem studies, indicating a high prevalence of brain-sex variation in human brains, and supporting the assertion that intersex/transex people are indeed born that way.

One interesting observation is that it apparently depends on the levels of androgens that a pre-natal human brain receives that affect the brain sex development.

It would then seem that the primary brain development for humans is closer to female (or perhaps gender/sex neutral).

Enlightenment, tempered by the hand of God, is what Lee was trying to achieve with his many papers and Ph.D thesis. Perhaps these writings will be turned into a book. Work is underway so that his narrative will not be lost.

Lee and I were good for each other. We had our own personalities which challenged and complemented each other. We nurtured each other often through difficult times including Lee's battle with cancer. Lee was the quintessential quiet-achiever. Sometimes he was a little too quiet as he had self-doubts about his work. Some of his fears were founded on fact, as universities are now exposed to the same external global market forces that want to produce more 'user pays' type of students or academics, rather than nurturing those who have a real calling to their fields.

Lee and I shared a passion for social justice. Integrity of personhood was and still is something we both valued. The right for a person to privacy and whether they chose to disclose their intersex/transex status.

Nelson Mandela said, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."

Lee was also a person who struggled to let his light shine at times, particularly when faced with his fear about his academic future. However just as we were trying to see our way clear to where Lee might get into librarianship and finish his Ph.D, he was diagnosed with cancer in April 2004.

He had evidently had the cancer for some time and many a doctor either failed to take his presenting symptoms together with his past history seriously enough or else put him on the Medicare merry-go-round of x-rays rather than something adequate like a C.T. scan.

He did not get the early diagnosis which might have resulted in successfully treated.

One will not know in this life whether Lee could have beaten the cancer or not if it had been picked up earlier, but as a so-called developed nation, Australia could do better for its citizens.

I can only hope that doctors, nurses and other health professionals will diligently exercise their duty of care to those they encounter so that they can look themselves in the mirror and know they have done their best.

For closure on this tribute for Lee, I would like to share part of my Eulogy for Lee which I read at Lee's funeral service held at Metropolitan Community Church - Sydney.

## **A Eulogy for Lee**

**One of Lee's favourite quotes was - "When I get a little money I buy books; and if any is left I buy food and clothes." - Erasmus**

**My memories of Lee are that he was the kind of person who, despite many personal difficulties and struggles in life was a big hearted lover, a romantic at heart.**

**Lee believed in doing what was right and just.**

**Lee was the kind of person who had a passion for knowledge, understanding and wisdom. Lee was thirsty for knowledge and truth and hungry for justice.**

**But what is truth?**

**As Lee would often say, one person's truth may seem true to that person, another person has a truth of his own.**

**If however, we as individuals can come to a point of mutual agreement on the very essence of our humanity then we are on the road to justice and mutual respect for one another.**

**He would also say that humility is the beginning of wisdom and we need to be humble enough to admit that**

we don't know all the answers, we don't know the absolute Truth - for knowledge only grasps truth imperfectly and we see dimly as in a faulty mirror.

Only God, who is Truth, knows absolute Truth and we cannot know the mind of God, we only need to know this which is true "God loves us and will always love us and will not forsake us ever and we are to love God by way of keeping the commandments of Jesus - the child of God".

God loved and continues to always love Lee and Lee strove in life to keep the commandments of Jesus especially that greatest commandment to love God and to love his neighbour as he loved himself.

In such loving Lee came into my life sometime in 1996 when the Transgender Liberation Coalition were holding meetings in Oxford Street cafes.

My first memory of Lee was when I arrived and Lee was talking with another group member and we got to introduce ourselves to the group.

Lee introduced himself saying something like this... "Hi, my name is Lee Brown. I am currently writing my Ph.D thesis for the department of Sociology at University of New South Wales. It's called *The Sequined Fringe*, which is the history of how trannies found a way of living in society and expressing their gender through music hall and vaudeville late last century and early this century and how through the theatre they found a place within society."

From that time on, I saw Lee at various functions and one day when I was out shopping for my homecare client, Lee and I met and exchanged telephone numbers. I was invited for dinner one night to his place at Gladesville. I remember him sitting on the end of his bed playing guitar. Later I invited Lee to 'Hope House' in Woolloomooloo.

Lee and I decided to go out for coffee later that night. We went to Mazz & Eli's on Oxford street and were sitting on a lounge when Lee started kissing me and I didn't resist. We went back to where I was living and we made love together that night. That was the 29th May 1997. The next day Lee went off to go home and to go to University.

Well that's how our relationship began; the rest was a beautiful journey side by side through the ups and downs of life. We had had difficult experiences in life and carried many scars so we were good for each other.

Lee inspired me in many ways, giving me confidence in myself to go off to University to study for a degree in nursing. Lee represented all that is beautiful in this world. Lee was my knight, my boy scout, my music man, my peaceful meadow, my partner and my lover. Lee's name means a sheltered meadow.

So it was fitting that I, Lee's lover, and Alan, Lee's brother should be at his side when he departed this world on Friday 29th October 2004.

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# The Amazing Disappearing Chromosome

## The Y-Chromosome Which Carries an Essential Gene Known as S.R.Y. is Self-Destructing

Article Appeared in Polare Magazine: January 2005 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

Reprinted from the A.N.U. Reporter, Winter 2004

**A** new version of the human male is a distinct possibility, given the genetic erosion of the "junk" sex-determining chromosome that makes men male.

The Y-chromosome, which carries an essential gene known as S.R.Y. that induces embryonic testis development (and thus the release of male hormones) is self-destructing, having shed 97 percent of its other genes in the 300 million years since it evolved.

***"The Y-chromosome has lost 1,393 of the 1,438 genes it began with 300 million years ago. At this rate it would lose the last 45 in just 10 million years"***

The Y-chromosome is running out of time, according to geneticist Professor Jenny Graves, the head of the Comparative Genomics Group in the A.N.U. Research School of Biological Sciences.

"The Y-chromosome has lost 1,393 of the 1,438 genes it began with 300 million years ago. At this rate it would lose the last 45 in just 10 million years," Professor Graves said at a lecture in May, 2004.

"It has saved itself from extinction only by adding bits from another chromosome. Most genes on the human Y have partners on the X from which they evolved.

"Even the sex determining gene S.R.Y. has a partner on the X, the brain-expressed SOX3, from which it derived. This leads to many questions about how a brain-determining gene could take on a new role as a testis-determining gene."

Although it may seem the decline of the Y-chromosome and the essential S.R.Y. gene would lead to the end of the human species, Professor Graves said nature has proved this is not necessarily the case.

"S.R.Y. has been lost in at least two groups of rodents. The mole voles of eastern Europe and the country rats of Japan have no Y-chromosome, and therefore no S.R.Y.

"Somewhere else in their genome, a new sex-determining gene must have taken over the function of S.R.Y. Which gene or genes took over this task, and how they work, are questions we will be investigating in future."

Professor Graves predicts that as the human Y-chromosome deteriorates, one or more sex-determining genes will develop, possibly within different human populations.

"What would happen if different new sex-determining arose in different human populations? Could mole vole man breed with country rat woman? Probably not, so the two populations would ultimately become different hominid species."

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