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Kate Cummings, Preselected As ...

Australian Democrat Candidate for Grayndler

by Katherine Cummings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Katherine Cummings

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



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

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



The Life and Loves of a Transgendered Lesbian Librarian

Author: Katherine Cummings
Publisher: Beaujon Press (2014)
I.S.B.N.-13: 978-098036535X

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

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



Katherine's Diary: Revamped, Updated, Uncut Edition

Author: Katherine Cummings
Publisher: BookSurge Publishing (2008)
I.S.B.N.-13: 978-1439215456

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

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

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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.