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The History of Seahorse

The Seahorse Society of N.S.W.

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Picture if you will, a scene twenty-one years ago. A world without Seahorse, where going out dressed in public would lead to police action and the purchase of any of those 'special' items was best accomplished through a clandestine mail order house. TVs, of course, still exist, but they sit in isolation. Possibly they will have come across others with like inclination but, like ships in the night, they have separated and become memories.

To protect their image, no reputable newspaper would accept our advertising.

This is what faced Pauline back in 1967, when the lack of companionship finally helped her to decide to try and contact some other cross-dressers. But how to do it? To protect their image, no reputable newspaper would accept our advertising. So Pauline wrote to a mail order house and was eventually contacted by Joan. Well, Joan knew Rosemary in Melbourne and Carole, a ship's officer who appeared on occasions from the U.K. This led to correspondence, but it was not until 1968 that they all met. Then, during dinner, they discussed the hypothetical number who could be sharing their meal and they decided to do something.

Their first newspaper advertisement was as explicit as possible: "TV enthusiast would like to meet people with similar views and interests". Most of about thirty replies were genuine watchers of Coronation Street, but some talent was found which encouraged them to try again in 1969, when the Kings Cross Whisper winkled out the nucleus of a club. After much discussion, a framework of security and confidentiality was laid and they set out to meet some new friends.

The official inaugural meeting of the club took place in Sydney in 1970 when the name Seahorse was adopted and the club was really born.

Pauline's work allowed her to travel around Australia so she was able to contact the interstate people who had replied and embryo branches were formed in Melbourne, then Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth. Meanwhile, Sydney was growing slowly though the meetings were still very sporadic. During 1971 and early 1972, meetings were held at Mona Vale. A constitution was drafted during this time and the first committee elected, with Rosemary as foundation President. Trina and Wendy also joined the Society at this stage.

1973 and 1974 were years of consolidation. New members continued to join, meetings became more regular and the newsletter was started. The pressure of work overseas caused both Rosemary and Pauline to drop out, and Jill became the second President with Trina as her Secretary. Times were changing and society was taking a more liberal view of people regarded as 'different'. The media also became less restrictive and increased advertising resulted in greater membership. The work of the club grew, and with the advent of more sophisticated members, some with understanding wives, together with the growing self-confidence of the longer standing members, they became more daring and in doing so, grew more determined to claim an accepted place in society.

During 1974, Wendy became the third President and in the adventurous hands of Trina, the newsletter turned into *Feminique* and took on a national flavour. The magazine was well received by all states and was used as an organ for publicity. Late in 1974 a breakthrough was made when Jill, Wendy and Trina appeared on the Mike Walsh Show. TVs on TV! This was followed by an article in *Cleo* magazine and suddenly membership enquiries ran hot all over the country. Further television, and numerous radio interviews followed, and links were formed with universities, hospitals and social guidance groups. Seahorse also took part in a government funded psychiatric study into transvestism.

To further place the club squarely in the public eye, a seminar 'Transeminar 76' maintained the spate of publicity. By now the public libraries in both Sydney and Melbourne had a standing order for *Feminique* to be displayed on the shelves, and the club was listed in the Directory of Public Services as a self-help counselling group. So well known did they become that in 1978, *Feminique's* editor, Trina was forced to change her name by a namesake who was not into cross-dressing.

But it was difficult to maintain such dizzy heights. By 1979, the doldrums were beginning to set in, although in September, the first meeting of Seahorse New South Wales was held in Marrickville where meetings have since been held, much to the relief of wives, tired of having to clean up their homes after each meeting. By the end of 1980, the original organisers had departed and the national force disintegrated leaving independent clubs in each state. The New South Wales club continued its outings, to restaurants, theatres, shopping and discos but no more irregular, and with Trina's departure in 1981, lay dormant for several years.

Each new leader does a great job, but all the others tend to stand around and watch until that person disappears from exhaustion. At the end of 1983, when Secretary Helen disappeared, New South Wales dropped to a mere four members until Edwina managed to regenerate it. Caroline started an enthusiastic recovery in 1984/85 publishing *Feminique 25*, but a similar event happened when Caroline suddenly disappeared early in 1985. Luckily, Dorothy, Kim and Joyce were on hand to keep us together. Since then we have spread the load and duplicated the records, so if it should happen again, the club would at least still have a list of its own members. We are currently re-establishing the links which faded during the doldrums and beginning to make more outside outings. Invitations from television still come in from time to time, so I'm sure that a period of expansion will again be possible.

Today we have an active committee who have taken office while the society is still thriving, so the future looks better than it has for years. We have had further articles in *Cleo* and *Australasian Post*. We now have our own telephone line with people available to talk to anyone interested in the subject of cross-dressing. Times and circumstance could change. As with most other things in life, what you get out of it depends on what you are prepared to put into it. Unfortunately, during our early days of cross-dressing, what you get out of it often depends on what other people put into it. Those of us who are established in the society put a lot of effort into helping those who are still trying to get out of their closets. Many members are still firmly in the closet and this makes the planning and holding of meetings difficult. The hosting of such meetings has tended to fall on the same people each time. Now, thanks to the Gender Centre, Seahorse now has headquarters in which to meet and plan the next moves. This should make the future much easier.

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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.