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A Transsexual's View of Adelaide

It's Time to Get Out of Dodge City

Teri Louise Kelly

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A former migrant, I guess I am still a foreigner, maybe not in language or dialect, but certainly in appearance. I have lived in Victoria and Tasmania (as a male) and in South Australia as a male and as my true self, a female.

... a lesbian already being treated prejudicially in her workplace and a pre-operative transsexual being incorrectly stereotyped by the general public - a fascinating combination for Adelaide to grasp.

I began my transition in a quiet town on the Fleurieu Peninsula and after the initial hoo-ha I was pretty much left alone and generally supported. Things were, I assumed, pretty straightforward for transsexuals, at least in my case. I was (and am) easy to get along with. I was outgoing, funny and I guess most importantly, non-threatening. In other words I wasn't what people expected when they met me, no high-heels, no tight skirt, no garish make-up, no scary hairpiece. I was just, well, ordinary. I think, in the main I disappointed those coming in the hope of seeing a freak.

I was a chef back then, and a good one, and changing gender does not affect the skills required to perform a chosen occupation, especially one practised for fifteen years before transition.

I had a little flirt with publicity, both local and state-wide, which gave me more exposure but generally produced only favourable comments and support. I remember being stopped in Marion shopping centre three weeks after appearing on television, by two ladies who told me I was "so courageous". I hadn't always felt like that, most days I was terrified, but the publicity had, in my eyes, lifted the burden of explanation from my shoulders, and I thought that if almost everyone in the State had already seen me - well, what else was there to know?

Transsexuals often possess traits which are given them (unbeknown) to compensate for the years they live in the gender role of their physical body. Stamina, unlimited patience, tolerance ... they are often intellectual, artistic and outgoing. Thus, through the difficult months of decision and psychiatric evaluation and through the 'Real Life Test', they have the qualities they will need to draw on.

As I said, I hadn't really needed them. I was in a virtually all-female environment and intentionally or not on their part they shielded me from prying onlookers and moronic comments. I remember a busy summer night in my open kitchen where I was a drawcard. A couple unseen by me sent in a message by the waitress which said something like "Don't worry about small town mentality. Stick to your guns".

As I have stated, I never suffered any adverse reaction in my small town, only ignorance of my situation, mainly taking the form of assuming I was a homosexual male, which I wasn't and had never been.

I had never even considered taking a new partner in my new life. Oh, I had flirted with the idea, but I was sensible enough to realise that transsexuals find it difficult to find a new life partner, for many reasons. Maybe because many males see it as a sexual conquest ... chicks with dicks, she-males and all of that macho invented garbage that is offensive to transsexuals other than the silicone transplanted boys you can pay to view on the internet. Transsexuals are divided in their sexual preference, some preferring males, and others preferring females. Whichever they choose they are often scorned and rejected by their close sexual partners, often on the grounds that they are not 'real' women.

Generally my view is that I don't care and have no inclination to be drawn into debate because it is pointless and worthless. It is one group stereotyping another, even though the group being stereotyped is itself anti-stereotyping. Very strange.

I have never cared whether genetic women accept me as a woman. Of course I like it when they do, but I cannot argue for or against the opinions which are always going to be a sideshow to the actual event. Why bother? It's a free country isn't it? I do know that I don't stereotype them, that I accept them and their preferences openly without prejudice and the fact that they cannot accept me in return leaves me thinking that maybe they are unsure of themselves and their identity.

I digress, however. I had not seriously entertained the idea of having a steady partner in my life. Perhaps transsexuals have enough emotional and physical stress in their lives, and many have doubtless left relationships and suffered hurt and pain as a result. In my case it was an eighteen-year marriage, so even considering a new partner who might cause me to become vulnerable again and suffer anguish was difficult.

And yet, like many of my ilk, I found after nearly two years and a recently formalised divorce that testing the water to see if anyone would like or even love the new me (the real me) was intriguing.

Would this partner, who would certainly be female see me as a woman and thus as a lesbian? I felt more confident within myself, more contented with my looks and feminine self, more able to hold my own in a female-to-female relationship, so, like an angler learning the craft, I threw the line in once or twice clumsily, never seriously considering that I would catch anything. Much to my surprise however, I did, and it wasn't a sprat I had caught. With beginner's luck I had caught a great white.

This intelligent, attractive and alluring female and I fell in love immediately, something I had vowed I would not allow. I was fragile emotionally and the risk of finding and then losing a love was far too hard to consider. True love, however, is a strange thing and within days I realised I had never truly been in love and had never been truly loved.

Everything was strange ... surreal almost. I could not believe that this woman was in love with me and saw me wholly as a woman, but undoubtedly she did. Her attitude, her feelings and her words were not hard to interpret. That one singular event, meeting her for the first time over a rushed meal in town, was to change both her life and mine forever. Despite all the reservations and self-doubt transsexuals possess, I was for the first time in my life allowing myself to be guided by feminine intuition. There was no apparent sexual lust, this relationship was based upon a thing I had believed to be merely a myth from Mills and Boon novellas - true love.

Our relationship grew at an alarming rate, like a beanstalk, but neither of us shirked the fact or avoided the obvious. Life was difficult enough for us singly, a lesbian already being treated prejudicially in her workplace and a pre-operative transsexual being incorrectly stereotyped by the general public - a fascinating combination for Adelaide to grasp.

We had a problem, the first of many we did and still do encounter. This was the tyranny of distance. She lived way north and I lived way south. She worked when I was off and vice versa. This was never a stereotypical heterosexual relationship ... boy meets girl, boy and girl fall in love, date for three years, save for house, blah, blah, blah. This was more like a Sid and Nancy relationship, intense, possessive, a freight train that was impossible to derail and gaining momentum each day. Despite the apprehension of those who knew us individually, nothing was going to prevent our being together on a permanent basis.

Obviously she could not find work in Fleurieu, yet she was willing to come. The preferred solution was for me to head for the little country town that thought it was the big city ... Adelaide.

Almost everyone I knew, including my shrink, advised me that this would be a catastrophic move. I was assured that in South Australia, transitioning transsexuals did it more easily in the 'bush'. I found this ludicrous. In Britain a transsexual heads straight for London or Manchester. Doing it out in the sticks would be far too difficult. Besides, I considered Adelaide (to a limited extent) to be liberated and forward thinking (as it proclaims).

Doesn't it have a L.G.B.T. festival? What city would do that for gays and lesbians and transgendered people if the city itself and its 'straight' population didn't provide support? Foolishly I thought that finishing my transition, finding alternative employment and generally being the darling of the thriving gay and lesbian scene with my beautiful partner would be a breeze, especially after the loneliness, isolation and long nights crying myself to sleep I had already endured. How wrong can a person be? Very, would be an apt choice.

Maybe I should have realised that being yelled at on Melbourne Street by a group of moronic idiots, or being spat at on O'Connell Street were sound indicators that transsexuals weren't and aren't welcomed or tolerated in the city of churches.

Here was a city I had praised to potential migrants in London six years earlier as a safe, progressive and tolerant haven, yet the simple truth is that you can be ethnic in Adelaide, you can look foreign, you can speak no English, but you cannot be different.

Potential employers treated me as if I were a leper. Maybe they thought I had AIDS. Who knows what they thought, but each and every ignorant idiot who interviewed me showed the same lack of respect, the same look of disgust and the same attitude. I was finally finding out what prejudice was about. My partner was also discovering what it was like to date a transsexual, both in her workplace where she was overlooked for promotion and in public where we were unfailingly the free entertainment in Rundle Mall each Saturday. Neither of us buckled, and we still don't. Financial hardship beset us. Being a transsexual takes vast amounts of money and without my income we started to struggle. Regardless of this our relationship only blossomed more, our determination grew stronger and when her work started to eat into our relationship, money or not she gave it away.

No doubt you may find this strange, after all, doesn't heterosexual society cling to mundane jobs to buy rabbit hutches of houses in the suburbs? None of this impressed us. If you're going to be different, be different and stop acting like them. Be proud and strong, Christ, we haven't even seen another gay couple out in daylight holding hands. Actually, we don't see many couples holding hands, full stop. Adelaide progressive? Bring on Beijing.

Transsexuals of course crave mostly heterosexual environment. They tend to blend and try to disappear in suburbia. Those that decide to become lesbians face the more difficult choice for their playground is the gay and lesbian scene. This never bothered me as I had always regarded this community as more open, tolerant and supportive than most, and I still believe that to be true.

Drive down Main South Road and South Australia becomes more liberal and tolerant, drive north and you encounter more prejudice and criticism ... a strange anomaly in the city versus country debate. Most of the meetings and clubs for lesbians are down south and as a transitioning transsexual I can walk around Collonades or Marion without attracting much attention ... why wasn't this equality true

in the heart of the city?

I had already learned, like many transsexuals, that the price for reaching my goal was high. I had forsaken a marriage, children, home, possessions, friends.

After meeting my partner I was experiencing more loss, superficial maybe but loss nonetheless ... job, friends, social standing. Our commitment to each other cost us both dearly. She lost friends and family. I had to enter voluntary bankruptcy. These are things other people, whether straight or queer, might consider too high a price to pay.

We adjust every day to this hostile environment and in Adelaide we find the gay scene to be pretty closeted, with the notable exception of Adelaide's gay and lesbian hotel on Currie Street, a veritable oasis in a gay and lesbian desert. Whether you are local or visiting, this is a must for you, the only place in town where we are treated normally by staff and customers alike.

I always knew I was a woman and I always knew that one day I was going to be able to adjust my physical persona. I never knew I was going to become a lesbian. I don't want to be spat or stared at, I just want to be left alone. I thought this might happen in an enlightened progressive city but unfortunately the reverse is true.

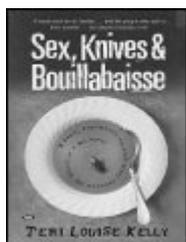
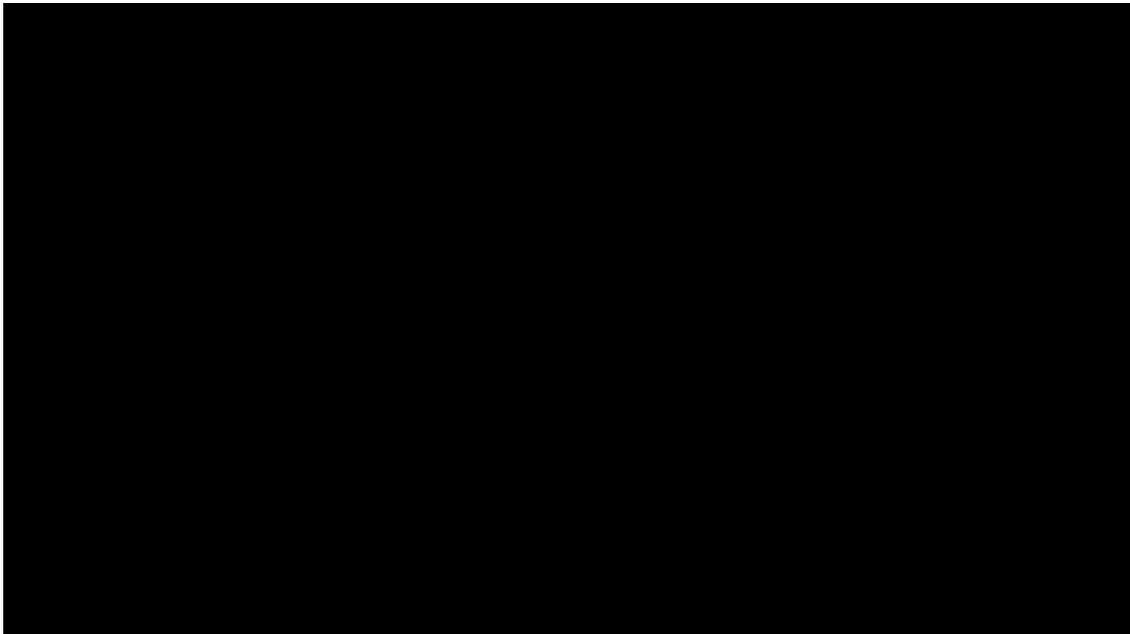
Maybe I (we) will always be stared at no matter where we go, our next stop is Sydney, then later on next year London and Amsterdam (to live). All we know is that it's time to get out of Dodge City. This Cinderella and her Prince(ss) Charming are going to the ball, one way or another.

Teri Louise Kelly

From Amazon Books:  Teri Louise Kelly is the self-taught, genre & gender-crossing author of three memoirs and one poetry collection. Originally from Brighton, U.K. she now lives in Adelaide. Her work has appeared in innumerable worldwide journals and she regularly reads her poetry live. Also having released a spoken word C.D. in 2010 she is known variously as "The Acid Queen", "The Ice Pick Chick", "Bukowski with Boobs" and "The Punk Rock Poet". Currently working on her second poetry anthology "Dead With Its Legs Spread on an Unmade Bed" she also plays bass guitar and paints serial killer art. The co-founder of Blunt Trauma Press she is also writing a speculative fiction novel entitled *The Ferrous Wheel* Teri Louise Kelly is something of an enigma in the otherwise stoic world of literature - the kind of writer one either loves or loathes as one international reviewer noted. She is always available for unlicensed psychoanalysis sessions and tarot readings.



You Tube features many of Teri's poetry readings, including this short video.



Sex, Knives & Bouillabaisse
Author: Teri Louise Kelly
Publisher: Wakefield Press (2010)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1862547568

From Amazon Books:  It all started in 1975. I was fifteen years, 344 days old, nothing but a kid, albeit a kid they'd highlighted in *The Year Book* as a "hard case". I was four months out of juvey, give or take, and I had a swagger, an edge, abrasion ... So begins the hilarious, often vexed, and constantly twisted life story of Teri Louise Kelly in this first volume of her memoirs. Writing as the boy she once was, Teri takes us into the cloistered world of swanky hotels in England and Paris. As a chef, Teri Louise Kelly strutted the line in big kitchens with a cocky impudence and girlish hips; as a writer, she brings to the page a furnace-like blast of candidness coupled with an eye for detail sharp as a sniper's. "Reading *Sex Knives*

and Bouillabaisse will cure anybody of their delusions of glamour around a career in cooking; also possibly of ever eating out again". - Kerri Jackson, the New Zealand Herald.



Last Bed On Earth
Author: Teri Louise Kelly
Publisher: Wakefield Press (2010)
I.S.B.N. -13 978 1862548220

From Amazon Books: 📖 Even the free whisky had gone, and the mini-bar gins. What else were a couple of girls down on their luck supposed to do? Teri Louise Kelly and her partner in crime, Jo Buck, arrive penniless in New Zealand from the U.K, on the hunt for a "better way of life". Instead they find a situation vacant ad, and become managers of a 100-bed backpacking hostel, attending the peculiar whims of the budget travelling army as it descends through the long white clouds

bearing rucksacks, innumerable contagious diseases and too little in the way of good sense. *Last Bed on Earth* tells the story of those six months of mayhem in the adventure capital of the world as viewed from behind a wire mesh cage - and from the unique perspective of a man who became a woman acting the role of a man. "A wonderful novel full of dark humour". - Debbie Phillips, *Chronicle*.



American Blow Job
Author: Teri Louise Kelly
Publisher: Open Books (2010)
I.S.B.N. Not Applicable

From Amazon Books: 📖 America 1984: Ronald Reagan, bad hair, shoulder pads and Gremlins. Enter a quick witted and very horny British boy, Luiz by name, a blue-eyed bastard son of Queen Elizabeth who is en route to New England. Visa in hand, and wearing a Maggie Thatcher t-shirt, he is sucked into the American vacuum. *American Blow Job* is an animated, hilarious account of an English boy's quest to experience Lady Liberty's novelty and promise. If you think you have read

every conceivable take on the great American experience, *American Blow Job* offers a new and unique take on the befuddled and often disenchanting immigrant. And best of all, you just might laugh yourself right off your chair!

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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.