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Book Review: Katherine's Diary

The Story of a Transsexual, Revamped, Updated, Uncut

Reviewed by Dr. Tracie O'Keefe D.C.H.

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Katherine's Diary: The Story of a Transsexual, Revamped, Updated, Uncut

Katherine's Diary: The Story of a Transsexual, Revamped, Updated, Uncut

by Katherine Cummings
Published by Beaujon Press (2008)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 098036530

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This is an updated, expanded and uncensored version of a previous autobiography published in 1992 that won an Australian Human Rights Non-Fiction Award. Kate, as she is known to close friends (and there seem to be a profusion of them in her book) tells all. The title of this edition is *Katherine's Diary, the Story of a Transsexual, Revamped, Updated, Uncut*. As a highly qualified librarian by profession she seems to have kept notes of practically every day of her life. For 400 pages she rattles off endless adventures, people she met including Clive James, Edward de Bono and Madame Lash, places she went and her ultimate journey from husband and father of three to matron of seventy-three with a continuing consummate thirst for life, even after open-heart surgery and demonisation by the Catholic Church.

This book is very well written and honest with the reader getting a sense of being on life's adventure with the author through the highs, lows and at times bizarre detours, almost as if

one were in a road movie.

There are also many pictures taken over seventy years illuminating Katherine's perpetual experimentation and reinvention of what John/Katherine was, fantasised about becoming and eventually became. It is written in digestible chapters which makes it great bedtime reading, but don't count on getting any sleep, and the fainthearted and puritans should keep large supplies of holy water by the bed. Her prose is indeed deliciously characteristic of her personality as she turns her phrases soulfully, never playing to the stalls but giving the reader the full colour of her experiences and anecdotes.

The author digs deep as the reader witnesses her relentless seeking out of what at times is a difficult journey, her path to transition at fifty-plus years old. The loss of her wife and daughters is explored and mourned as Katherine berates herself about what she might have done differently to stay close to them; reeling from the divorce from her wife who seems to have been one of the major loves of her life. This work does explore the dilemma faced by families when one partner, apparently a part-time transvestite develops into full-blown transsexualism, (though Katherine prefers to describe herself as transgendered).

Many people like John have another gendered alter personality in a suitcase for half a century, only to discover the more they try to repress their other self the more the other self takes over. For Katherine there seem to have been no real regrets about having been John, fallen in love with the wife and fathered three daughters. Katherine might, however, have given any descendants with a nautical bent, lots to think about with pictures of her astride a cabin cruiser in shiny stilettos with five-inch heels. The secret lives of librarians it seems are far more spectacular than the popular image of bespectacled, reserved, custodians imposing noise restrictions in a university reading room. It is difficult to know where to start (or stop!) a review of a work as deep and broad as this book, so I'm just going to dive right in.

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.



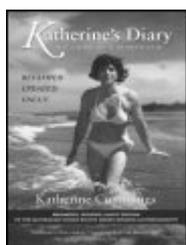
The Life and Loves of a Transgendered Lesbian Librarian

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.