

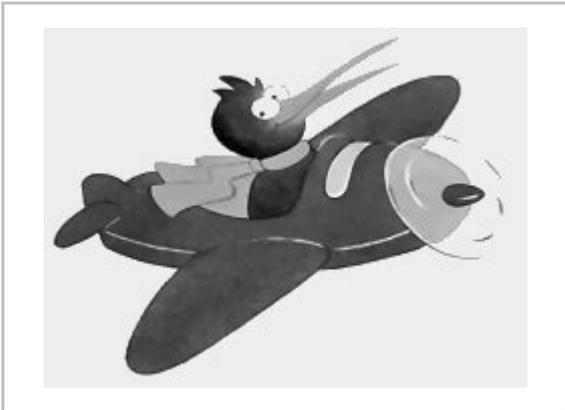
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A Kiwi Takes Flight

... and Lands on Her Feet!

by Juliet Scoble

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My transition began at the end of January 2002. One day I was out and about as a male and the next I was a woman. The only difference in people's attitudes towards me was they seemed friendlier, perhaps because I was now happier living as my true self. I received acceptance, encouragement and support.

Volunteering has done so much for me, especially in establishing my womanhood.

I had begun laying the foundations for this amazing day many years ago. By the mid 1990s my life was collapsing, with severe gender identity issues adding to the problems. After a failed suicide attempt I started on the road to rebuilding my life by changing to a more positive way of thinking.

Through the use of thoughts and imagination we create our lives. This can be good or bad, depending on what thoughts we have. The theory is simple ... good thoughts equals a good life ... but the practice is difficult. Even now, negative thought patterns that I thought I had abandoned can strike without warning. Constant vigilance is needed.

Slowly I started to turn my life around. I had always enjoyed a good relationship with people but these improved, too. Then in August 2001 I reached the point where I could no longer ignore my gender identity issues. I had only two choices - a gender change or death. I chose the former, a decision which changed my life from a bad dream to a fairy tale (well, most of the time). At first I had absolutely no idea where I could get the help I needed, but during the search I was putting my thoughts and imagination to work. By the time I started on hormone treatment at the end of November, I had transformed my mental image of myself to that of a female. I also started to love my body for the first time. This was difficult as it was still male; previously I had hated my body with a vengeance.

A week or so after starting on hormones I began disclosing my gender change, as I intended to live as a woman fulltime. This scared me, as being transsexual was my secret of secrets. The first person whom I told, a friend of many years, accepted my disclosure well, which in turn gave me the courage to tell others. People were surprised ('shocked' might be more accurate) but they only reacted positively.

On 4th January 2002 I legally changed my name. No turning back now; not that this was ever an option. Changing my name on legal documents, such as bank account and tenancy, was easier than expected. People were just so nice to me.

My changeover day was coming closer. By now all fear had vanished and excitement was increasing. All the while I kept imagining people accepting the true me.

Then Friday 25th January dawned. It was a usual Wellington summer morning - wet, cold and windy, but I was too excited to really notice. My clothes and make-up went on really well even though I had never had a full rehearsal. For some reason I never thought I needed to. The big moment had arrived - the beginning of the end of my real life horror of being a woman trapped in a man's body.

When I opened the door of my flat, I felt a nervous twinge. But this vanished as soon as I stepped out the door. The day turned out to be a marvellous day. Everywhere I was accepted as a woman by everyone and received so much support and encouragement. Wellington is full of such wonderful people and I'm so lucky and privileged to have so many in my life (as it was to turn out, this was to apply equally to other parts of New Zealand).

During the first week of my transition I received more compliments about my appearance than I'd had in my entire life. As an example ... new houses were being built next to the driveway to my flat ... "You're gorgeous," said the builder when he first saw me.

But of course my transition did not solve all my problems, in particular long-term employment and living in a sub-standard council flat. Getting up-to-date experience doing volunteer work might be a solution, so about three weeks after my changeover I visited Volunteer Wellington. This is a non-profit organisation which provides a volunteer referral service to similar organisations.

I was referred to a couple of organisations but ended up with a position at Volunteer Wellington itself.

Living as my true self I found a self-confidence I never had before. Working at Volunteer Wellington gave me a way of putting that self-

confidence into practical use. With each successful accomplishment my confidence grew, both in my work and as a woman.

My volunteer work has transformed my life. The people at Volunteer Wellington are absolutely marvellous and accepted me straight away. Only once before in my working life have I enjoyed my work so much. A number of friendships have developed, with one in particular becoming very special (although strictly platonic).

On 25th July a number of the women in the office accepted my invitation to celebrate my having lived in role for six months.

Some of my work has been mundane but most is very challenging. Old skills have been renewed and new ones developed. My contribution to Volunteer Wellington is giving me a lot of satisfaction.

One developing skill I'm particularly pleased about is the way I'm communicating with people whose native language is not English. Many people from non-English-speaking countries are here on students' and visitors' permits and cannot legally accept paid work. But they can do volunteer work and do so to improve their English skills and learn about the New Zealand way of life.

I have to listen very carefully to what many of these people are saying in order to understand them, and choose the words I use when speaking with them very carefully. These new communication skills are bound to help me in all areas of my life.

Volunteer Wellington holds lunchtime forums as part of the advice and training on volunteer management it offers to its member organisations. At the first forum I attended, shortly after starting, I was flitting about introducing myself and talking to the participants as they arrived. As my false self I only dreamed about being able to do such things and instead usually sat in a corner trying to blend into the wallpaper.

Volunteering has done so much for me, especially in establishing my womanhood. I used to sit on the edge of society but now I have etched a good little spot for me in it. No pay in terms of money but I have received rewards no amount of money can buy.

I'm not saying money isn't important - it is. I need and want more money - living in poverty and slum accommodation ain't no fun. This is why I would like other unemployed transsexual people in transition or about to transition to consider volunteer work. It has transformed my life, it may do so for others.

Working at Volunteer Wellington has also given me the confidence to start my own business, so that I can finally get off the dole and have a better lifestyle (and afford my surgery).

Things haven't gone as well as I expected on this front, which has knocked me a bit, but somehow, some way, I will succeed. And that will be a matter of having the right thoughts.

After all, I am now living as my true self. I have become a successful woman with the confidence to go after what she wants.

And get it!

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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.