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Alice in Wonderland

... and through the Cyber Glass

by Jenny Lovelace

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Once upon a time there was a little girl called Alice. Well she could have been called Alice, but she was called something else because she was not the little girl she so often longed to be. For this little girl, who was actually a little boy, it all began when she was four. She used to think she was five but now she has been thinking about it, the dates do not match so she must have been four. She is pretty sure her mother desperately wanted a girl to replace a daughter who had died. She remembers as if she was out of her body, watching herself putting on her nanny's frilly underwear.

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When her nanny found her, she (Nanny), was shocked. Jenny, for that is what she came to call herself, remembered saying to Nanny that she wanted to be a girl. Nanny told Jenny never to do it again and she did not - at least not until she was about thirteen. Jenny cannot remember having any deep feelings, in fact any feelings at all that first time, though with other earlier and later childhood memories she did. Perhaps she suppressed her feelings - or perhaps she really was having an 'out of body' experience and was truly in a realm beyond all earthly emotions.

In her early-teens the agony began. Furtiveness, denial, fear, shame and almost unbearable pain threatened to destroy her whole life. It nearly did and it went on for decades. She felt so alone. Now, at last, she knows how much her story is shared by so many others.

As time went by, Jenny built for herself a very challenging but satisfying male life, that she now does not want to lose. But Jenny was always there, crying, cajoling, seducing and loving her way into recognition. At last Jenny has come-out.

Jenny got dressed, drove and appeared in both 'protected' and 'open' public for the first time. She went to meet with people who understood, at the 2003 Brisbane Seahorse Club Christmas party and a few of them went out to a cafe afterwards. The other Seahorses were all so wonderful. The experience has lifted so much of a lifelong burden from Jenny's opening, blossoming, heart. The continuous, powerfully quiet, euphoria she now carries is blissful! She is now able to think much more clearly about who and what she is, what she wants to be and what she wants to do with her life from now on.

This is my story - I am Jennifer Susan Lovelace, Jenny-Sue in some chat rooms, but just Jenny most of the time. At last it all feels so right. 'Not-Jenny', her other side, is more at home with his life now that he has fully admitted (to himself) who his whole self is. He has dropped one large life burden - and all his other burdens are now easier and more pleasant to carry.

The highlight of my big night out came early when a truly beautiful 'girl-like-us', who has helped me so much to prepare to come-out, kissed me on the cheek, woman to woman, and I loved it. I felt such a girlish thrill! That was when I knew I was home at last.

So where am I and where am I going? I have no partner to share this with and I may now be too old to find the 'significant other' of my dreams because other things in my life have been absorbing my passions and I have no regrets. However, I am free of all my past agonies. The memories remain, of course, but they no longer frighten me or hurt enough to overwhelm me. I know who and what I am, and I am so happy with my knowing. Loneliness has always been my deep and ever present challenge, but even that is now easier to live with. I know, and I am happy to accept, that it is up to me to create the complete lifestyle that will best enable me to fulfil all my dreams.

What I have suffered has been awful but it is nothing to what some gender challenged people have had to endure. Some haven't made it. They've killed themselves - or been murdered. Others have succumbed to self-mutilation and other responses to mental disintegration. I have some understanding of these traumas that can invade all parts of our lives because I have been a somewhat unorthodox, trauma counsellor for most of my adult life. You know, I have been so lucky!

Alice Through the Cyber Glass

I too have been mentally challenged. Having met and been with countless people in many countries who, in so many different ways, were suffering with a variety of traumas, I reckon I am qualified to know that I too have been close to losing it. I have been very fortunate. I have useful training and experience and my life circumstances have, on the whole, been wonderfully love-filled and nurturing.

I still am somewhat emotionally challenged by my gender struggles but the overwhelming relief and joy of taking my first steps to come-out has changed everything. I have a long journey still to go but I am on my way.

My desire to do something to help girls and boys like us to find fulfilment in our being rather than despair is deep. This is not something to be rushed into. There are already many clinical and social support services and organisations out there and many of them are doing a wonderful job. But the tragedies continue at a terrible rate. The public is coming closer to accepting gays and lesbians but, although the law is moving somewhat towards protecting people like us from bigotry and assault, we are still trapped in a world that has to remain too secret and too vulnerable. If not-Jenny came-out to everyone, not just to people like us and others who understand, his career would probably be ruined. He is not exactly unique!

So what can we do to support the best of help we are already getting? What can we do to tell people that despair can be beaten - that we are not alone and that there are safe places and people out there for us who will love and understand us for what and who we are? We can be active companions for each other.

I do hope there are people who will give me constructive feedback on what I am about to say. I may not like what you say but with courtesy and respect for all people we can say anything constructive we like about their thoughts and actions - and get listened to!

These are my views alone and I am responsible for them - whether you share any or all of them yourself.

Professional Help

Sometimes we need professional help because we have lost our minds. Sometimes professional helpers can be competent, caring gifts from heaven. Unfortunately this is not always the case. However, wonderful people are out there. We as a community need to identify them by their results. We counsellors do not always find it easy to demonstrate our competence because client confidentiality must be respected before all else. If we do a good job, often enough word gets out - because our clients recommend us!

However, it is my professional view that what we most need is companionship. We need more of us to be competently there for each other and we need to be more out there telling the world we are here for those who need us. Professional help can always be there as well if we need it.

Support Structures and Significant Others

However, most of the time, in my view, it is not professional help that we need. We especially need peers, people-like-us and others who understand to be there for us. Feeling at home can release many, if not all, of the inner horrors that can drive us mad. People-like-us and some others can make us feel at home - because with them, we are at home! We need more publicity, subtle but obvious, that tells people we are there for them. We need to protect those who contact us and make sure they are put in contact with the people and organisations who can help them most.

It is vital for us to realise that our gender identity, our sex and our sexual orientation, though all inter-connected and mutually influencing are not the same things. Gender identity is what we feel we are. Sexual orientation is which sex we are sexually attracted to. Both of these can be variables according to current mood and the influence of experience over time. Sex is either biologically male, female or not totally one or the other - 'intersex' or what used to be called 'hermaphrodite'. Gender identity is about discovering our true feelings not about what society thinks we should feel. Most of the problems that people like us have are because we are socially chained to other peoples' opinions!

S.O.s, or 'Significant Others', are a vital factor in what choices we make. We need to support S.O.s just as much as we need to support ourselves. Partners to people like us can be more or less rejecting, tolerating, accepting or supportive.

Rejecting partners are probably going to leave us - and that can be very hard for those of us who love them deeply. Too often partners are frightened. They just cannot understand. Having a gender challenged partner is too much for them to bear. We need to be there especially for people with rejecting S.O.s - not intruding but obviously available on call.

Tolerating partners may have been together a long time. Leaving could seem worse than losing the familiar things shared. Tolerating partners need our most special care if we are to retain, or create, loving relationships with them! Both partners could benefit from our help. We could include experienced supportive S.O.s, but they could be as close to being people like us as anyone else could be!

Accepting partners may not be totally happy with the situation but they will at least have a measure of true understanding and they probably care deeply for their gender challenged partners. We are all fortunate if someone we love in this most misunderstanding world also loves us! Being good people by example could be helpful here.

Supportive partners may even rejoice in the gender being of the person they love and share life-building in so many mutually satisfying ways. Loving friends and companions who are also people-like-us can be a great blessing when we need them, especially if we do not have accepting or supportive S.O.s.

Finally we need a place where people-like-us who are isolated can go to find out, in safety, what their options are. One way is for them to have a place to go in cyberspace.

I feel that Cyberspace, for all its many pitfalls, is often a good place for people to start to explore their gender identity. Chatting with all kinds of people around the world has given me considerable insight into the vast variety of people who enter our gender variable world.

Occasionally we will meet unbalanced and obnoxious people in cyberspace. We will need to learn how to recognise and deal with them in the most gentle but firm way. However, the many more genuine people who we will meet in cyberspace always compensate for our bad cyber encounters. This is because they are busy getting on with creating their own journeys not nurturing their own brand of sickness. We soon get to know who is for real and who is ... sick! Intelligent cyber chatting can greatly relieve the sense of loneliness we all share to some degree.

But there is much more to cyberspace than chat rooms! We can, in greater privacy, email about all kinds of personal things in the anonymity of cyberspace. And cyberspace is only useful if it is a stepping stone into the real world.

In cyberspace, real people seldom ask to meet us in person, especially if they are not in our area - or in our part of the world! They may like, and like talking about sex and sexy clothes, but they have many other, often deeper, interests.

When we are ready to meet face-to-face it will be in a safe place like at a Seahorse meeting or through an established support group or a known safe venue. We could, perhaps, meet at transgender-friendly gay nightclubs though this is not necessarily safe especially if we do not know the scene.

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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.