

NOTES FROM THE *Underground*

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Missed Opportunities

Because I was younger than most of the kids with whom I kept company, I had on several occasions to make difficult choices between whether I should act like a kid or act like an adolescent. In grade seven, the consensus among most of my male classmates, some of whom were already nurturing meagre moustaches, was that trick-or-treating was out for Halloween and soaping windows was in. I wasn't too sure that I wanted to do this, but the pressure to hang out and be cool was great, and for the weeks leading up to Halloween I was in an agony of indecision over what I should do.

I was so torn on this question that I failed to realize that to make the trick-or-treat option viable I had also to think of a costume. So at 5 PM October 31st when I finally decided to do what I really wanted to do in the first place, I realized to my despair that I had nothing to wear.

Now I know what you're thinking - a classic crossdressing occasion - but the truth is I never for a moment considered wearing girls' clothes. It was too much of a deadly secret for me to even entertain the idea, much as the idea appealed to me.

My sister, seeing my dejection, decided to help me out by suggesting a few commonplace disguises that could be made in moments. You know the type: get an old sheet and be a ghost. Her ideas weren't very promising until she blurted out: "I know! You can go as a girl!"

Suddenly all my senses were on high alert. I could not believe what I was hearing. "A girl!" I repeated.

"Sure! I could lend you a dress and nylons..."

"Nylons!" I said. The more she said the more incredulous I became. I had just begun wearing my sister's nylons recently and thought them wonderful. Now she was telling me I could wear them, and out in public too! I'm sure my jaw was almost to the floor.

Unfortunately, my sister thought this look of dumb incredulity meant, "Are you out of your mind?" because before I could snap out of my stunned state, she said, "Oh, well, if you don't want to..."

I wanted to scream, "No, wait a minute, I do want to!", but I was speechless. Surely, she'd think I was weird. My courage failed me.

I went out to soap windows.

I even tried to get in the mood too. "Yeah," I thought, "this is great, hanging out with the boys." I tried to make myself feel as if I had been saved and not deeply disappointed.

I think it took about an hour of soaping windows and watching my friends smash carefully carved jack-o-lanterns on the street before a crushing depression caught up to me. I hated soaping windows and I hated their stupid vandalism and I hated myself. What made it worse was I couldn't

bring myself to leave them. I felt like I was in too deep and had to play out the string. When I finally got home, I was so tired of everything I simply wanted to go to sleep and forget about what had happened.

Of course, I haven't forgotten. I've often wondered what would have happened that night had I not been so stupidly incredulous or if I'd had the nerve to say "No, I want to". It's one of those missed opportunities that forever haunt you. At the same time, I realize that it probably taught me something too, although I couldn't realize it at the time. More than a missed opportunity, it was also my first vivid and bitter memory of self denial. I went through the whole evening either not saying what I wanted to say, or doing what I didn't want to do and all because I was afraid to admit who I was. It was a taste of life in a closet, and I didn't like it at all.

Having a little freedom early in my life would have made for a pleasant memory, but for all that I still acquired something valuable. I developed a very strong aversion for self denial, and although this caused me some pain in the future - my days of denial were hardly over - it was, in the end, the thing that most convinced me that living in a closet is not really living at all.

Ted

Notes from the Underground

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Short Notes

Gender Mosaic Update

For those of you who missed the June 19 business meeting, or who have been out of touch for awhile, I submit a brief summary.

In the incredible but true department, the pamphlet is going to the printer this week and should - no, *will* - be available at the July 6th meeting. We're printing a thousand copies and hope for wide distribution.

The crossdressers' resource and survival guide is expanding again. Belinda has contacted groups across the country and most are enthusiastic. When the information is collected, Belinda will add it to what she's already put together. The plan now is to print a number of master copies, one for each group that participated. That way each club will be responsible for printing and distributing its own copies. It's turned into an ambitious project, but should be a little easier in subsequent years when the guide will only have to be updated. All in all, I think it's great to have everyone working together like this and I hope it results in a few dollars for each club's treasury. Most of all, thanks to Belinda for taking it on.

At Chris' instigation, we decided to have our business cards printed professionally. The machine printed cards, which proved to be surprisingly popular, looked good and served the purpose, but, like the Jeffersons, we're movin' on up. In the long run, it won't be any more expensive anyway, so may as well go first class.

If you're looking for a book from the library, by the time you read this I fully expect Joanne will have the collection. I give up. Maybe she can create some order out of it and keep track of everything better than I did.

Finally, a few notes about the July meetings. They are both at my place and I'm planning on inviting a make-up lady for the Saturday July 6th social. Don't come expecting a presentation, because frankly presentations bore me; but she's a friend and very easy going, so if you need make up and would like personal service, by all means drop by to buy.

Silly Thought Number One

If drag means **dressing as girls**, when we're wearing male clothes, is it fair to say we're in drab? (**dressing as boys**)

Mistaken Assumptions

Sometimes it seems to me that club members have a few mistaken ideas about Notes from the Underground. Some seem genuinely surprised when I

ask them to write me something to put in it, as if they didn't think that was allowed. They seem to think it's my publication, and everything that's submitted goes through a rigorous editorial review. Trust me, it ain't so. It's true that I edit submissions for grammar and spelling (I'm an English major for god's sake, I can't help it), and because I sometimes run out of space; but you're free to give me anything and I'll print it. That's what a club newsletter is supposed to be. Although I may be opinionated about crossdressing, I really don't like filling up the newsletter with my ramblings. Not only is it too much work, I bore myself. (I've heard it all before, you see.) There is one small point that I insist upon, however, and if you disagree with me, let me know. I insist that what you give me hasn't been published before elsewhere. Fair enough? Good. I fully expect to be swamped in the near future with all the things you were holding back because of the mean old editor.

And I guess I can sharpen up my ol' red pencil now.

Silly Thought Number Two

What do you call a nun that dresses like a man? A transister.

And Now, For Something Completely Different

I received a letter from our friend Karen Hope the other day, and I'm going to pilfer a quote from it. This is by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross.

"I don't want to get to the end of my life and find that I just lived the length of it. I want to have lived the width of it as well.

Our concern must be to live while we are alive...to release our inner selves from the spiritual death that comes from living behind a facade designed to conform to external definitions of who and what we are."

Ted

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Crossdressing and Cultural Standards

This article was entered as part of a term paper by my niece Natalie (her real name) at Ottawa University. She has given me permission to use it in the newsletter.

Joanne

Being different in the eyes of society can cause one to be an outcast, set apart from others, unaccepted. Transvestites are often misunderstood and considered as being part of the black side of society. People tend to set them apart. Cultural dependency, being our understanding of relationships and the communication in them derived from our culture, is not a characteristic of transvestites.

Transvestites, having an uncontrollable urge to dress and act as members of the opposite sex, often have a difficult time being able to fulfill their desires. Crossdressers have had this urge in them since childhood. For instance, when Randy was young, he used to borrow his sister's dresses and try them on when he was alone. He would enjoy this, but he did not know what it would lead to later in life. Randy had to do this when alone since it was not accepted by society for male or female to cross the borders into the realms of the other sex.

As Randy grew up, this urge was still within him, but in order to conform to society he repressed it as much as possible. In his early twenties, Randy married Debbie and fathered two children. At this point, his urges were appeased, although they needed to be fulfilled at times. Due to this, Randy had to inform Debbie of the situation. Debbie was shocked. Randy explained that this was not a case of homosexuality, but simply a need to dress in women's clothing. Debbie agreed that Randy could dress up as long as he did so in the house only, and not in the presence of the children.

If Randy were to go out of the house, this would be deemed inappropriate by our cultural standards. He would be set as an outcast. Debbie accepted the arrangement, but as Randy grew older the need became stronger and more arguments arose between him and Debbie. It reached a point where they could no longer live together. Randy had to be in women's clothing more than he was allowed to be at home. Randy and Debbie separated after almost twenty years of marriage.

Once on his own, Randy decided to reside with his widowed mother. Here he was accepted as is and allowed to dress up whenever he desired. The fact that a middle aged man lived with his mother and dressed differently from other men was not culturally accepted by society. Slowly the crossdresser in Randy began emerging.

Randy communicated with an organization for transvestites and began to learn a bit more about what was within him. In the group, he did not feel like he was from a different culture; he felt

like he belonged and was accepted. While with the group, cultural standards were ignored and only the culture within their organization mattered. They had their own rules and standards. People were welcomed whether they showed up as males or females, and if as females, they would be treated equally even if they were manly looking or not well made up.

By observing the stories, jokes, language, fantasies and rituals, Randy acquired an understanding of the culture of the organization and how to perform his role effectively. He learned that everyone had their story about how they slowly emerged from their shell. This made everyone feel at ease and as if they belonged because they saw that most had similar trials and tribulations.

Also, Randy felt like he belonged because all members understood the terms referring to crossdressing and felt at ease talking about it. Jokes were told and made Randy feel as if he was a member of the organization. Also, members told of their fantasies and how they would like to lead their lives as women. Everyone communicated on the same level.

The group takes part in monthly activities, such as reserving restaurants, getting dressed up and going out for dinner. Members will each take their turn and have the group and their spouses or girlfriends over for a barbecue, dinner or party. This makes the group interact not only with themselves, but with their loved ones as well. The wives and girlfriends accept them as they are and live with the fact that this is an urge within them that can't be subdued. They also know that they are not attracted to the same sex, and can be good fathers and husbands. Within these groups, transvestites feel liked for who they are and not what they are.

However, when a crossdresser makes the step and ventures into different groups and becomes a member of society, he often feels rejected and outcast. Society is not willing to accept a person who varies from the norm, by being a man dressed in women's clothing. It is especially in a social environment, other than the organization, that cultural differences surface. Society has developed their own standards of behaviour and crossdressers do not abide by these.

Transvestites must dress up to look as much as possible like females in order to be able to pass as one and be accepted by society. However, often the transition cannot be fully made and society labels them as "different", "weird", "queers", "strange", etc. They are different, but simply want to be accepted. Cross-cultural conflicts therefore appear.

For example, the first time Randy went out in public as his female self, he felt very uncomfortable and felt that sales people and customers looked at him strangely. He did not belong. But, as his

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Montreal Stories

I'd known about this trip to Montreal, but what I didn't know was whether or not I could afford it. I still don't, but I decided to go anyway. It was to be a dinner at an Italian restaurant with a trip to a tv/ts dance bar called the Pyramid afterward. The trip would be from Saturday morning until Sunday afternoon and we were originally going to stay at a friend of a friend's, but eventually stayed at the Delta. There had been a similar trip about two months earlier, but it wasn't as big an event.

On Friday, I received a call from Belinda and was told to expect to be picked up at around 9:30-9:45. I was logged onto a BBS that I call frequently and didn't start packing until about ten that evening. Earlier in the afternoon, I had gone shopping with a female friend, and we found a dress to wear for the occasion. I had told her a couple of months earlier about being a tv and she was surprisingly enthusiastic about it (alas, she is already seeing someone).

It was only to be an overnight stay in Montreal, so I packed little: the clothes on my back I would wear home the next day, and I only brought my new dress with a second, more conservative double-breasted as backup.

The two hour drive itself was uneventful, although we did pass our friends in a mini-van who were going to meet us at the hotel, and in due course we arrived at the Delta. We checked in and went to our rooms on the 16th floor. I was to stay with Roxi, and Belinda was to stay in another room with two people from Kingston. As a person who doesn't frequent hotels, I can say we had a very nice room with a balcony. It was sizable, and there were two double beds and the furniture was, I believe, mahogany, something rather luxurious for someone more accustomed to Ikea furniture and milk box shelving.

Sharon1, Natalie and Sharon2 checked in only a few minutes after we did. In our group, none of us arrived at the hotel en femme, although we were to learn later that at least Willamina and two others did. Brave. The six of us then decided to go out for lunch and we chose Burger King for its quality and value (joke). Afterwards we went for a walk up Ste-Catherine St. to window shop and basically just look around.

I have never gone shopping en femme and I always felt uncomfortable about shopping for women's things while as my male self and this walk was no exception. I had to keep reminding myself that I didn't know anyone in the city and generally, no one would care anyway. We stopped at the Tramway restaurant for a beer (I had a Coke) and a bit of shooting the breeze and then left.

When we got back, we found out that Lorrain and Lee-Anne had checked in. They were going to stay with Belinda, while Sharon1 and Brooke were in the room next to Belinda's, across the hall from

me and on the same floor. In Belinda's room, about half a dozen people were gathered together talking, drinking, organizing. It was too much activity for me, so I left for the quiet comfort of my room, where Roxi had returned from shopping and was taking a nap. I watched television for awhile with the volume turned off, passing time until about 4:30. We were planning on leaving for the restaurant at about 6:30, so I wanted plenty of time to get prepared. I had pretty much decided what to wear and just had to make sure that I looked okay. As I was to realize later, it was not even May yet, but the sun would still be out at 6:30, and I had never been out en femme during daylight. Hmmm.

Finally, it came time to prepare. I took a shower, did my make up and got dressed pretty much without problems. The dress that I had bought the previous day with my friend was a form-fitting, black cotton/lycra dress. The only shoes that I had were low-heeled, black patent pumps with metal accents on the toes and heels. I had simple accessories: matching necklace, earrings and bracelet with a small satin evening purse. I have never really been taught what to do with regard to make up, but I don't do much compared to others.

When I looked at myself in the mirror after, I was amazed at not only how passable I was, but also how attractive I looked. If I wasn't me, I would have stared at me in a bar or something (yes, my ego is building). I could find little wrong with my appearance, whereas usually I find that my shoulders are too wide or my hips too narrow.

It was about 6:00 and I went across the hall to see how the others were doing. It was not a pretty sight. No one was even near being ready yet and the room was a mess. I did, however, manage to garner my first compliments of the evening. I never get used to people looking at me, whether it's for

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Cultural Standards (from page 4)

make up techniques and style of dressing improved and became more refined, Randy was more accepted by society as a woman and not a "weirdo". Now he ventures out frequently with a lot less hassle. By improving his appearance as a woman, Randy has broken down the cultural barriers imposed by society.

Transvestites feel that the public would accept them more if they were more informed. They know they are different, but they are just normal human beings with different cravings. In order to teach society about themselves, they are presently requesting a grant to publish pamphlets about crossdressers. Shouldn't the general public be more tolerant of different cultures or simply people with different needs?

Continued from previous page

the mustard stain on my collar or the fact that I'm, to others, attractive en femme. They poked their heads around the corner of the wall to ogle. Their being in the state they were in, I decided to visit Sharon¹ and Brooke. I had never met Brooke before, but had learned earlier that she was a ts and wanted to room with another ts because she would feel uncomfortable with a tv; understandable. They were both ready and we all sat down and talked for a bit while waiting for the others.

Six-thirty neared and we finally left for the other floors to pick up everyone for the cab ride to the restaurant. I don't mean to be mean, and this of course has nothing to do with their personalities, but many tv's are usually quite a visual ambiguity. I am still relatively new to all this, having met everyone that I know in the last four or five months, so for me, I can't always look tv/ts's in the face when talking to them, and if I do, I have to concentrate on not reacting to how they look.

Human nature, after all, makes us appreciate beauty, and it is more difficult to appreciate those things that we don't find pleasing to the eye or are oddly new to us.

At this point I met Ingrid. She was an interesting lady of some 60 years from New Brunswick (Europe, originally although I don't know where), who has had an interest in tvism for many years. She was of extremely open mind and has been for years a dominatrix. She wore a matching off-white leather jacket and skirt, a black shoulder length wig, and later at the Pyramid she even went on stage to dance.

The dinner was fine. Despite the fact that the table seated nearly twenty, strange looking "women", I saw no one take notice of us. It was dark but hardly concealing. I have never really had anything resembling a loud voice, so with the conversation as loud as it was, the people with whom I was speaking had a little difficulty hearing me, which in the end was good, since it wouldn't complement the average female appearance. I spoke to Willamina at some length, or rather she related to me some of her experiences and ideas. The only other person that I spoke with, Genny, a ts, told me a great deal about tsism and some of the problems faced by her and others in a similar situation. I asked her if she wanted to come back to the hotel afterwards as some of us had planned to be up until early in the morning talking. She accepted, but in the end cancelled out because of the late hour.

By the time coffee was finished, we were all ready to leave. I had excused myself from the table for a moment and when I returned, I found the

table empty. I panicked slightly, as I hadn't yet received my change from the bill. I ran to the front to get my money (of which I got too much and ended up leaving about a \$1.70 tip on a \$15.30 meal. Oh well.) Fortunately everyone was still waiting outside the front door.

It was about a ten minute drive or so to the Pyramid, and we found a parking spot fairly close by. Not so close, however, to avoid having to walk by about 15 or 20 motorcycles and bikers first. I was worried about myself a bit, but I thought that I might look decent enough, and if there was any danger, it would be one of the others who were in it. Nothing happened fortunately, and we entered the club.

The Pyramid is above a strip bar. There was nothing unique about it, but there were a number of tv's and ts's at the tables. Off to one side was the bar, and at the front was a stage, which was also the elevated dance floor when there were no acts.

"For the most part, the tv/ts performers were convincing, to say the least. It appeared as though at least two of them had had or were undergoing hormone treatment, as they had breasts worth mentioning."

We arrived there shortly before 11 o'clock, when a special two-for-one drinks special was to end. I didn't drink that evening; not only do I feel the effects of alcohol make one's appearance less convincing, I had been staying away from drink for some time and wanted to continue. Besides, I was not in the greatest position financially and wanted to keep within my budget, which I did fair-

ly well.

At 11 o'clock or thereabouts, the first show began. For the most part, the tv/ts performers were convincing, to say the least. It appeared as though at least two of them had had or were undergoing hormone treatment, as they had breasts worth mentioning. I had a critical eye that evening. The hostess was apparently a ts, although her voice was far from ideal.

For the most part, each performer's act consisted simply of lip-synching cabaret-type songs, dancing and carrying themselves in the most convincing way that they could. I grew tired of it after the first show, and by the second, the music grated on my nerves. I sat through it, hoping I would be able to get the nerve to try dancing later in the evening.

I have never been fond of most of the music that dance bars play. Sharon² and I joked about where the clubs found it, because we had never heard the songs before in our lives, and they all sounded the same to us. We did recognize a couple of songs, but they were altered somewhat from the original recordings. One that they did play, which we were glad they didn't ruin was Madonna's Vogue. Even though I finally did dance, I didn't feel entirely comfortable being in full view of

everyone in the bar.

I find my attitudes toward myself polarized; while en femme, I feel as though I am somewhat of a spectacle, not entirely comfortable in my appearance. Yet upon recollecting the times that I've been out, I keep saying that I was attractive and passable, bragging about my appearance to many people I talk to, whether on the BBS or to those who have rarely or never seen me. I have been getting more confident, but I still have a way to go.

Even in the dark there were some tv/ts's that you could see were not really women. There were some exceptions, however. In the end the argument goes something like this: all that really matters about being passable is that unless you are specifically looking for it, you likely won't notice. Belinda had a few good points in her examination of the problem. She said that she would sometimes look at women and pretend that they were tv's. By doing this, she was able to generalize that the average woman doesn't have an extremely shapely figure, and that those points only hold water against the most attractive women. So in real life, a lot of those problems aren't there, or at least are less of a problem.

By the time the bar closed at three, there were more of us from our group left than there were other patrons. They turned on the lights and for the first time that evening we could really see how bad some of us looked; those who had been dancing were perspiring and their makeup looked shiny. Many in the group decided to walk the few blocks back to the hotel, and although there was some resistance to the idea because of the height of some people's heels, we did anyway.

Back at the hotel, I took off my earrings and found that my ears were bleeding slightly. Having had my ears pierced two months earlier, this came as a bit of a surprise, since I thought they had healed. I'm sure that many women know about these things, but I was still learning.

I was looking forward to talking a bit before turning in, but by the time I had cleaned up, everyone was ready for bed or already asleep. I talked for about half an hour with Belinda and Lee-Anne, but it was mostly about the boat cruise in September in Kingston. As an interesting aside, Lorraine and Lee-Anne met in Fantasyland in Owen Sound and found out that they were both from Kingston, and they lived minutes away from each other. Quite a coincidence. They have been close friends since.

I finally got to sleep at about four in the morning and woke up at nine or so. I chatted a bit with Roxi and by noon had washed my hair, packed and was pretty much ready to go. With time to spare, I decided to phone my sister. I had made an attempt to see her before I left, but after making plans the previous night to see Genny, this was not possible. It didn't occur to me that everyone would be up by now. I spent a good half hour talking to my sister and didn't get a chance to say goodbye to anyone.

We checked out of the hotel and met Ingrid, Alison and Willamina's girlfriend at the front desk. Lorraine, Lee-Anne and Alison checked out of the hotel en femme. Alison complimented me on how I looked the night before and I thanked her.

We stopped at a Harvey's restaurant near Genny's place, since we were hungry and didn't want to impose on her when we got there. It was only a couple of minutes to her place. I don't know Montreal very well, but it seems that there are a lot of older houses that have stairways in the front that lead to second floor entrances. I was more used to entrances to other floors being part of the infrastructure, but I see how this concept saves inner space by not necessitating hallways and stairs between apartments. It was in one of these apartments that Genny lived. I later realized that this was Belinda's friend with whom we were originally supposed to stay.

Almost as soon as we arrived, I started talking with Genny. Roxi had a hangover and was in no mood to do anything physical or cerebral; so since Belinda needed a Star Trek fix, that's what the two of them did while Genny and I talked in the kitchen. We talked mostly about tsism. She was a wealth of information, telling me of the games that ts's had to play with the medical establishment if they wanted to go through with an operation. I had felt that it could be a person's choice to choose later in life what sex one wanted to be and have the sex reassignment by choice than innate need, but there had first to be a lot of exploration and confirmation about who the person was. I am presently doing that.

Aside from the drive home, that pretty much was the entire trip. I met someone that I think I will talk with for at least a little while, and I gained a lot of confidence in my appearance as a woman, which I will need, since I have been contemplating going to school this fall as such. I have been told this will be a tall order, but I hope to at least do this over the summer. I don't want to find myself at the end of my life saying that I wish I had lived at least a few months as a woman. Life is too short to not do what you would like to; we must take advantage of the time we have (strangely enough, I don't feel the same way about skydiving, hang gliding, scuba diving or travelling around the world). I have been known to say many things with sincerity, but finally not do the things I say I will. I hope that this isn't the case here.

Chris



1803 was a banner year for the women of Scotland.
Men's hemlines were raised an inch and a half.
And women were allowed to drink Drambuie in public.

