

NOTES FROM THE *Underground*

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Belinda**

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Education on the Fringe

An ordinary day in the life of Fred Goldhaber, a New York school teacher, goes like this: "A new supervisor shows up to check out one of my lessons. She watches a bit and then she passes me a note: 'The boy in the baseball cap is bothering that girl over there.'"

"So I turn the note over and write: 'That boy in the baseball cap is really a girl and the girl she's bothering is really a boy.' And that was her introduction to the Harvey Milk High School."

As the first teacher in the first gay high school in the world, Goldhaber has learned the first rule of survival: nothing is what it seems. Take the school building itself, two decrepit rooms above a surplus china shop, between a garage and a porn theatre, so far west it is almost in the khaki waters of the Hudson River. But the site on the fringe of Manhattan is oddly appropriate, because the 25 or so pupils have come here from the far reaches of society.

About three or four of the students are crossdressers. Others have been bullied or harassed into truancy at their mainstream schools, the sort of schools which have metal detectors to keep guns out of the classrooms. The rest have been thrown out by their parents on learning of their sexuality. Half the pupils no longer live at home. Out of this morass of psychological damage have come 21 high school diplomas since the school opened in 1985. Not that Goldhaber measures success in diplomas alone; each student who turns up regularly is at least not ending up as a drug addict or a suicide.

A beautiful girl sticks her head round the classroom door. "Hi," she says, tossing long black hair. "Entrez," says Goldhaber, camping it up. She heads for what looks like the ladies room to do her makeup.

"Crossdressers have always had a place

here," says Mr. G, as he is known to the pupils.

"That she was a he. We address students the way they want to be addressed, but sometimes I get my pronouns mixed up and it creates a tremendous explosion."

He is exaggerating. As the owner of 25 different Mickey Mouse ties and a mild manner, he is the most sympathetic of teachers.

"These kids used to get really spooked at their previous schools, always being stared at or harassed. They would end up being referred to a guidance counsellor, who might try to force them to change the way they dress, or declare them educationally subnormal because they are getting behind in their work."

Two teachers and two temporary assistants provide individual tuition for each student. The Board of Education pays their salaries under the alternative high school day program for special needs, although the school, named after a gay San Francisco politician shot by a rival in 1978, is run on less than a shoestring.

Source: The Guardian (Kate Muir)

Short Notes

Golden Damsel Winners

The first winners of the Golden Damsel Shuffleboard Tournament were Lary and Belinda, edging out Sharon and Ted in the final. The tournament is named after the Golden Damsel trophy, emblematic of shuffleboard supremacy within Gender Mosaic. In the spirit of good sportswomanship, the winners generously donated their financial reward back to the organization. Lary was judged to be the most valuable player and thus earned the privilege of being named Golden Damsel for the evening. Congratulations to all the participants, and to Lary and Belinda in particular.

Crossdressers AA

On August 9 I attended my first Crossdressers AA meeting, not as a member, but as an observer. The group consists of crossdressers and transsexuals who have relied upon drugs and alcohol to cope with the pressures of life.

Since I have had the Gender Mosaic phone line, I have received about 20 to 25 callers telling me about the association between alcohol and crossdressing, and I wonder if the two are related in some way. Do people get drunk because they are scared of who they are, or because of the shame involved with crossdressing? I don't know, but bravo for the individuals who have made the step to sobriety. Good luck.

The person who I want to thank is Samantha for starting the TVAA group in Ottawa and for getting the space for the meetings. She has done the leg work, now it's time for action. A job well done Samantha. Thanks.

Joanne

Welcome

We have four new members who have joined recently. Welcome to Robyn, Angela Christina and Celina.

Gay Beer

First it was light beer. Then dry beer. And now, gay beer.

Pride lager accounts for only one percent of production with 400 cases rolling out of Brick Brewing Company in Waterloo, Ontario every month. But homosexuals and lesbians herald the suds - the label features a pink triangle - as a milestone for the gay rights movement.

"We have encountered so much abuse and ignorance and oppression that the first companies that start to recognize us and market to us are going to notice a great swell in loyalty," said Cicely McWilliam of Toronto's Gay and Lesbian Community Appeal.

Brick gives the charity, which provides financial support for the development of gay theatre, art, film and literature, a portion of the profits from the sale of Pride. The all natural, Canadian style beer is a new five percent alcohol recipe sold in bottles and on draft in about 30 gay and lesbian bars across southern Ontario, plus at two beer stores in downtown Toronto neighbourhoods with large gay populations.

"It's a smoother type of beer without heavy hopping," said Brick sales manager Fred Gallagher. "It's not too different from anything else we make." Pride is the brainchild of Bob Amyotte, a Toronto gay bar owner who owns the rights to the name and label design. He approached Brick, a micro brewery in southern Ontario, with his idea last fall that a beer aimed at the gay market could be successful.

The gay and lesbian community is a significant market, but one that is probably too small for Labatt and Molson to go after. Toronto's 25 gay bars sell about 13,000 cases of every kind of beer a month.

Trouble in Saskatchewan

For several weeks in late July, the Saskatchewan legislature was embroiled in a bitter fight over Spandex. That's right, Spandex.

In Saskatchewan, it was no longer welcome, at least in the eyes of the provincial liquor board, which ruled that Spandex could not be worn during shows or displays at licensed establishments. The decision angered businessmen and charity groups and lobbed a political hot potato into the laps of a bewildered NDP government. The board already bars exotic dancers from the province's taverns, and has recently moved to cut off liquor licenses for lingerie shows - even those held to raise money for charity.

Conservative Rick Swenson, who jokingly calls himself the party's Spandex critic, had a field day at the government's expense since the board issued the Spandex ban. The deputy Tory leader sported a bright blue T-shirt around the marbled halls of the legislature with a message that took a poke at Premier Roy Romanow: "Don't let Roy get a grip on your Spandex."

Darrell Cunningham, the minister responsible for the liquor board, has looked like a man who gets a migraine whenever the clingy fabric is mentioned. "Most people are laughing about it," he said with a wince, "And maybe at us, I guess. I think it's good summer entertainment."

Cunningham said he has already read the riot act to board officials and he promises the ban on tights and work out suits won't last.

Name Game

Danny, Taylor, Jamie. Are they boys or girls? Ten years ago, Danny was almost certainly a boy, Jamie was probably a boy and Taylor was more than likely somebody's family name. Today the names all belong to little girls. Gender bending names for girls aren't new, but they're becoming more popular.

"It has to do with the roles of males and females," says Janet Schwegel, author of *The Baby Name Countdown*. "Women now can be a lot more different things. You can give them a name like Taylor, and hope they become a lawyer."

But the same doesn't hold true for boys. In fact, once a name becomes popular for girls, it tends to fall out of favour for boys. It's happened to Ashley, Lindsay and Beverly.

"I presume that it's because we have a sexist society," says Tim Nau, of the Canadian Society for the Study of Names. "Whatever we say, deep down at some level, we think it would be demeaning for a boy to have a girl's name. It would lessen his stature. And the opposite isn't true. I guess we feel at some deep level that a boy's name would add prestige to a girl."

More Bad Publicity

In the scandal that followed the escape of Pablo Escobar from his luxury "prison", the Colombian press reported that police found, aside from the computer, bars, stereo, television and a whirlpool bath, a large selection of women's underwear. This led them to conclude that the prisoners received frequent visits from prostitutes, although one photograph taken at a prison party shows a male trafficker dressed in women's clothing. More evidence to a shocked public of the disgusting morals of crossdressers!

Parallel Contrariness

Dear Editor,

Ref: Your letter, Issue #57 Tapestry

I've had two recent problems with Notes from the Underground (NFTU), and with the crossdressing movement in general. I thought after reading the July issue of NFTU that it was time I got them off my chest.

For one thing, I feel somewhat uneasy about the cozy atmosphere that has developed between the NFTU and the feminist movement. On the one hand, I recognize that many members of our community, particularly TG's, and TS's, see themselves as women and thus require feminist's tacit approval and permission to get to where they're going. On the other hand, I have a deep distrust of a movement based on the ignorance its members have demonstrated towards transvestitism ever since they first discovered that transvestites were indeed men. In fact I'm still waiting for an apology for the opinion that maintained all transvestites were gay, or the feminist plank that suggested that TV's and TS's were patriarchy's subconscious attempt to replace women with men. How many people did feminists "help" with that misinformation?

I recognize that the movement has changed, but the fact remains that feminists, no matter how knowledgeable, will never know what it means to be a transvestite or a transsexual. Consequently, I am dismayed that you give feminist theory free reign to define us, and am disturbed to see the alacrity with which many people in our community accept their conclusions. When I read NFTU, it seems to me that it is the feminists who are influencing us on how we should see ourselves, what clothes we should wear and how much make-up we should apply, and not the other way around. Quite frankly, I'm sick and tired of people telling me what I should wear, who I should have sex with, and what I should be thinking about when I'm having sex. In a way I think I understand how native Indians felt when the Europeans enlightened them on how barbarous they were.

For example, I am aghast at the enthusiasm with which our community seems to have adopted the term "femininity". While this may seem apt for a transsexual, the term has been widely used to describe the end-goal for everyone in our community. As a male transvestite, I don't believe it describes mine at all. In fact "femininity" is a very loaded term which merely reinforces our position outside of society without questioning the basis upon which society makes its decision about an individual's character, ability and morality. I have no problems with my character: it's the narrow fashion options that society has given me that I object to. I guess it really does depend on how you look at it. I am

quite happy expressing my personality, and am not ashamed that I occasionally put on 5" heels and slinky dresses to do so.

This position is outside what I call orthodox militant feminist transvestitism. It's a common-sense position because it recognizes that most so called male and female qualities are in fact stereotypes. It dictates that such qualities as compassion, empathy and understanding are component's of one's character, not gender, and has nothing to do with the fact that you have a vagina instead of a penis. Similarly, such self-described male qualities as strength, courage, and determination are also components of one's character, and have absolutely nothing to do with the size and weight of one's testicles. There is nothing to keep any male or female from incorporating any of these components into their character. This is something that every common sense transvestite understands very clearly. Feminist transvestitism, on the other hand, suggests that the only way to be truly honest while wearing Vogue panties, is to denounce all those qualities in ourselves which someone has arbitrarily decided to label "male". It can be astonishingly sexist, because it stereotypes women in a patronizing, paternalistic manner which induces dependence on the male. It then presumes that the correct way to be a person is to follow this narrow definition. Sorry, but why go through life with one hand tied behind your back? Compassion and tear-filled emotion is simply not enough to propel 200 pound transvestites down city streets in full view of society. It certainly will not be enough to gain respect for our community. It will take self-confidence, courage, and determination of the highest order. It will require bravura performances bordering on arrogance. It requires the willingness and ability to present some very unpleasant facts, and stuff them down some very unwilling throats, and teach them how to enjoy the after-taste.

The recent slant of the movement seems to speak decidedly against trying to incorporate an element of glamour or creative fantasy into our personae. Will reducing ourselves to uniform blandness make us that much easier to digest? I'm offended that there appears to be no shortage of individuals who have set themselves up not only as arbiters of taste for crossdressers, but, by extension for women also. Many women are obviously just that: women. I reckon some don't think much of stylishly dressed women, who take care of their health, who do wear make-up, and who are not afraid to admit that they are indeed sexual beings. It may come as a shock but this does not preclude them from being capable of opening branch plants in Hong Kong, running their own business, flying F-15 fighter jets or being a competent parent. One must also keep in mind that there are many women who are not impressed with men with facial hair and body odour, who walk around wearing jack boots proclaiming themselves to have discovered the inner essence of the female reality. It shouldn't be too difficult to figure

Natalie's Daylight Trip

On Thursday 16 July 1992, on summer's hottest day, I went out for a whole day, the first time in broad daylight for Natalie. On this trip, Joanne was accompanying me. The plan for the day was shopping and a photo session on Parliament Hill. Yes, I was quite sober for this excursion.

I have gone out before, but not as Natalie for a whole day. You may say, what's the big deal! For me the experience was important, not just for how well I can "pass", but more specifically to build my confidence. If I feel comfortable doing it in daylight hours, I can go anywhere I want, shop to my heart's content and enjoy it. As Natalie, I don't say I will fool everybody, but just to be able to go out is definitely an exhilarating experience. Let me tell you, it is not easy for a "part-timer". I dress up maybe three to four times a month; therefore going out certainly creates anxieties. I am an amateur, like everyone else, but maybe luckier than others because I can go wherever I want...well, almost! I try my best not to attract too much attention, and will dress conservatively. I like it this way.

Joanne and I shopped at the Pinecrest Mall for awhile and then went to the Bayshore Shopping Centre. It was a pleasure to roam amongst women's wear, lingerie, shoes, etc. and to be able to shop without getting those funny looks when you are your "regular self", to be treated like any other woman. I usually buy women's clothes with the help of my wife, or when alone I give the excuse that it's for her. Shoes, however, are another matter; you really have to try them on to be sure they fit. At one store (French Shoes), I tried several pairs before finding the "one". The salesgirl was very helpful and did not let on as to who I really was. For sure I'll be back.

We went through all the floors, sometimes getting puzzled looks, but in general people just went about their own business. On this day, there was a sidewalk sale, so we were not alone. What is important here is not on how well you "pass", but on how comfortable you feel. Appearance counts, but if you don't feel comfortable, forget it! Next stop, Parliament Hill.

We drove around to find a parking spot near the government buildings, but none were available for visitors. We had to park on Queen Street (how appropriate!), in one of those expensive lots. We walked from there onto Sparks Street and up to Parliament Hill. When we arrived at the perpetual flame, an RCMP officer got out of his vehicle and walked toward us.

Maybe just curious, he went on answering tourist questions. We took a couple of pictures, and then moved on for a photo session with the new statue of Elizabeth the second. A Japanese tourist took a picture of Liz II and Joanne, two Queens for the price of one. Just kidding Joanne! Beside the new statue a tent was set up. Actors were recreating a scene from the beginning of this century, with women dressed in clothing of the period acting out a speech for their rights, the right to vote. Ironically, the ladies had under their grasp the "Senator" who opposed them, tied up and wearing one of their bonnets; the lighter side of B & D (Not Black and Decker, you know). We watched the show with several of the tourists, our true identity unknown to them. Maybe they thought we were part of the show. Nah!!

Well, the day is almost over. We walked back to the car and drove to Joanne's place to discuss what we were to do that evening. Unfortunately, Joanne received a call asking her to come to work, although we still had time to go to dinner. On leaving the apartment, we drove by a couple with their son on a bicycle. He turned around to look at us, and pointing, remarked: "Look mom, two guys dressed as women". If it had occurred earlier, it would have probably shattered my confidence, but at this stage, who cares! I was enjoying myself.

We ate at the restaurant "Parmesan", Italian cuisine on Boulevard St-Joseph in Hull. The food was excellent and the service beyond reproach. The person who gave us our table sat us away from the other patrons so we could have our privacy, or maybe have us out of the way. Too bad the day had to end this early. I truly enjoyed myself and will always remember the day. Thanks Joanne!

Letters

Continued

out by now that some segment of the women's movement will always feel insulted, no matter what we do. It no longer embarrasses me. Gloria Steinem herself has recently concluded, "Women should feel free to wear whatever the \$%*! they want!" Call me lazy but do we really need to recreate hundreds of years of angst to arrive at this same conclusion for ourselves? Either we've arrived at the Promised Land, are bored stiff and need to recreate old problems...or we're not pushing hard enough.

Sexual stereotyping, practised by people who really should know better, is the reason society has not reached its potential. Maybe if our community put more effort into becoming better people, instead of a better gender; maybe if we read more on how to make the world better for everyone, not just selected segments, maybe if we learn how to bring people together, instead of driving them apart, starting with ourselves, maybe then we would have something to offer to the rest of society. The theory that we are being thwarted by garter belts and Christiane Dior Eyeshadow is laughable.

Belinda Doree
Suburbia Ottawa

where we care enough
to steal from the very best

**Some quotes, by diverse people, worthy of
contemplation, culled from Gloria
Steinem's book *Revolution from Within*.**

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
John Milton

Freedom is what you do with
what's been done to you.
Jean-Paul Sartre

For seasons and seasons and seasons all our movement
has been going against our self, a journey into our killer's desire.
Ayi Kwei Armah

If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth
will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you,
what you do not bring forth will destroy you.
Jesus (The Gnostic Gospels)

I am myself plus my circumstance, and if I do
not save it, I cannot save myself.
Jose Ortega y Gasset

I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live
without my soul!
Heathcliff (Wuthering Heights)

Know the Mystery
that if that which thou seekest
thou findest not within thee,
thou will never find it without thee..
Wiccean (Pagan) Prayer