

Notes From The Underground

A FREE PUBLICATION

SEEING IS BELIEVING - SO BE SEEN

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Notes from Your President - Lauren Mulvihill

I had spent years uncomfortable with the body I was born into. But not understanding, not knowing what I was. I knew I had to keep it secret. I married, had children, played the role that was expected of me by family, friends, the world I lived in. I didn't know the word for it but the feeling that was in me would not go away.

I finally could not keep myself from looking for an answer. So in January 2000 I walked into my first Gender Mosaic social, terrified of what I was walking into but even more terrified not to know. I found support, comfort and information in Gender Mosaic. Almost every Saturday morning I drove from Montreal to Ottawa where for a weekend I could be the person I was supposed to be. At first I went out to the safe bars, the safe restaurants, stayed in the

safe hotels and kept my secret from family and friends. I listened to all the stories of discrimination, prejudice and the fear directed at us whenever we went outside the safe world. But that safe world was too small.

Within months I knew that my life had to be lived as a woman. So I started to take the first steps into the real world, the world I would have to live in. I found some fear there, some prejudice. But I found even more, people who wanted to know about me, people who wanted to understand. I found strangers who would smile at me on the street when they spotted me, encouraging words from people who told me they admired me. Yes, those who were closest to the man I had been rejected the woman I was becoming. My old world was closed to me but a new world welcomed me. Something had changed while I was hiding in the closet.

Others, like the people I had met at that first G/M social had taken the first courageous steps, had shopped in the malls, gone to the restaurants, taken the bus, walked on the street. They were at every Pride Parade and info fair showing the G/M banner, handing out literature, talking to people, explaining who we are. They were seen and eliminated some of the fear and prejudice so that I would be able to follow them and see smiles. They paid the price so that I wouldn't have to and I thank them.

Now I have a family and friends who have never known me as a man. I live my life completely as a woman and spend my life the same as any other working wife and mother. I have what I am going to cook for dinner tomorrow on my mind more than any worry about someone spotting me or being bothered by me. I don't live as a trans-woman, just as a woman. This is how I expect to be treated and how I am treated. There has been an even greater transition in society. I meet so many transsexuals who took their first steps and fully transitioned without ever having to have a safe haven, cross dressers who have no problem with living two lives. Our money is welcome in any business, most employers help and support our transition at work, family and friends are more sympathetic, more supportive. We have almost made it!

A generation ago we were abused or laughed at. Now we are accepted, tolerated, even sometimes understood. It might be that in another generation we will just be people and that the final barriers will be down. I am of a generation of trans people who have benefited from the work of others. I found my home in Ottawa because Gender Mosaic and the people who opened the doors for me were here and had taken all the steps that I had been afraid to take and I am content with my life. New progress, those final steps will come from another generation, that is not content, that will demand their full rights. Both generations deserve respect and support.

**This Needs to Be Said
by Joanne Law**

I might ruffle a few feathers and I might have a few people not talking to me but I have to do this.

16 years ago a few people got together who had a common interest, crossdressing (word that we used back then). We met at a private residence, watched Star Trek and drank beer. We even became a Tri Ess chapter. We were there for the support and new friendships. We were there for new folks looking for information. A few years later we changed our name to Gender Mosaic got rid of the Tri Ess chapter and started to put our name out there via PTS our only resource back then. (FYI there are only

3 paid members from the original group). Gender Mosaic became a group of transfolk. We didn't isolate any community member whether they were TS, TG, CD or what ever. A Mosaic of people who challenged their birth record. Over the years the group became larger and we had to relocate to a bigger venues. I remember having 45 to 50 people attend a social. Now on a good night may-be 6 or 7.

Gender Mosaic is a halfway house for the trans community, people came and stayed and became part of our executive. Thank you. Other stayed for a few meetings and never to return because Gender Mosaic did not provide the venue they were looking for. I have personally see over 500 people pass through the halls of Gender Mosaic or through our phone line and a meeting for coffee later. Where are they now? We were there to guide people, relate information, and to some start another group. Right On.

Gender Mosaic is not the only voice in the transgender community. There are transfolk who are not members of Gender Mosaic and attending important meeting making the awareness of transfolk a notable entity. Just because we have been around for a long time in name only does not make us the authority.

I have read the emails and the

listened to the bickering of people who want everything now and their way. I am just getting sick of the way people are fighting for their own interest and not the interest of our community. Yet they use Gender Mosaic as a sounding board to vent their anger and not even members. Yes we were there for the first time because we had a phone number and a web sight and there was someone to really talk to. We have received request to do a particular topic and when we do no one shows up. Or the person wanting the request does not want to facilitate that evening. Recently we canceled our annual Casino Night. The coordinator wanting to do the event "a regular to our socials" noticed a decline in participation over several months and canceled. Not because she wanted to do it but because the work involved like renting the equipment setting up the casino tables teaching the rules of each table was not worthe her time for only 6 or 7 people. Who would run the table and who would play the games. The crowd would be awful thin, and the fun would be lost.

Some people have said that I was the anchor in keeping Gender Mosaic alive with active participation and energy and havig fun at the same time. I might also be the fall of the group too. I have lost interest with the constant degrading of the initial concept of Gender

Mosaic. A place to call our own. It is not a place to seperate the crossdressers or Transsexuals. With these terms I don't belong. I identify as A Transgender Woman.

As of the Annual General Meeting this February 2005 the Gender Mosaic phone line 819-770-1945 will either be call forwarded or a new line installed to a new home. I have notified the president of my decission. Its up to the new board now. I have dedicated my time to the phone line over 10 years and I have enjoyed answering the calls. Some times it can become very bussy other times slow. Some of the call came from outside North America looking for a resource. I will also remove my name from all records relating to the Gender Mosaic executive except my membership which I cherish. My last 25 years of my visable outreach will still be there, but my active participation of 16 years with Gender Mosaic is comming to an end. I am not going away because I love my community, It has made me who I am to-day. You will still see me at the meeting just as an interested member with some history of our community. I am just changing directions in my commitment. Ta Ta...Joanne

Samantha Goes to Church

During the winter of 2003/2004 I had the pleasure of spending a few days with Kaitlin Acres and

Barbara at their house. I had travelled there by car, a journey of about four hours, counting a stop for fuel and a bite to eat. Although I had male outer garments in the trunk of the car, I intended that they stay there. I travelled en femme.

It was a bright, sunny Friday afternoon that I left the house, and new-fallen snow had given the countryside a clean, crisp look. It was cold, and the late afternoon breeze added to my discomfort as I stood at the gas pump, filling the tank, at the half way point of my journey. At least my wig kept my head warm. It was so good to be out. I felt so alive – so free!

The trip, itself, was quite uneventful, and I arrived at my destination to a very warm welcome. I was instantly made to feel 'at home.' After unpacking and getting things set up in the guest bedroom, we settled into comfortable chairs in front of the living room fireplace to catching up on the latest happenings. The evening was spent touring the nearby town to view the extensive Christmas decorations and lights. It was quite cold, and a steady breeze added to the chill as we walked along the brightly lit canal. It didn't take long before we turned back, seeking the comfort and shelter of the warm car.

Kait's Saturday morning breakfast was fabulous, to say

the least. The day was spent relaxing, reading and discussing matters which we considered important. By the time the evening meal had finished I was certain that I had put on five pounds. And, of course, by bed time, we had solved all the world's problems.

On Sunday morning I awakened to the smell of fresh brewed coffee and the promise of something delicious cooking on the stove. Kait was busy preparing yet another of her famous breakfasts. And, as I sat there, at the table, in my housecoat and slippers, sipping my coffee and waiting for Kait's fare, I reflected on how good life was. I knew it was going to be another great day. But knowing what was to come next I felt a little uneasy; excited, but uneasy.

We had planned to go to church.

And, we did!

En route I tried to keep my mind on other things, but it didn't work. Could I really pull this off? Horror of horrors, would I be read? If I was, what could I expect? Perhaps this was a foolish idea. What was I thinking? But in my heart of hearts I knew I had to do this. Every book I had read on being transgender had added to my belief that, as a child of God, I was accepted. This was going to be the true test, I thought.

All too soon we were there. My heart was racing as we approached the door. I did my best to appear calm and poised. Oh God! Kait opened the door, and in we went... to a very warm greeting by a woman who turned out to be the church organist. Handed a worship program and an announcement sheet, I was ushered to a pew. Because we were early there were not too many people there, and for the longest while I sat very much by myself. That gave me time to compose myself and to relax a little. But within minutes a very senior gentleman a few rows ahead of me noticed that I was by myself, and that I was not one of the 'regulars'. Immediately he rose from his seat and came back towards me, hand extended in welcome. His friendly smile led me to believe that everything was going to be just fine. But I wondered about the women.

During the service of worship there came a time to greet those around us. I was surrounded by women! I was petrified. "How could I do this?", I wondered. But in God's hands all things are possible, and I passed without incident. As uplifting as the experience was, it wasn't until I knelt at the communion rail that my emotions overwhelmed me. And, as I accepted the bread and wine, tears ran down my cheeks. They came in a flood, and there was nothing I could do to stop them. It's one thing to think about the theory of

acceptance and another to know, and feel, that acceptance. Then and there, at that communion rail, I knew I was acceptable, and accepted, in God's sight. I returned to my seat refreshed and at peace. Never again would I doubt God's love for me, a transgender person.

After the service of worship there was a time of coffee and fellowship. There I met and shook hands with many who welcomed me to their community. I was made to feel quite 'at home.' And, as we departed for a restaurant for lunch I felt so uplifted I almost floated to the car. The rest of the day was spent in quiet reflection, reading, and more delightful conversation with my most gracious hosts. I seemed surrounded by warmth and love.

So it was with great reluctance that I returned home the following Monday. It had been quite an experience. I had spent four complete days *en femme* – four rich, wonderful, fulfilling days – days that have had a profound influence on my self-perception. I have never looked back.

Kaitlin and Barbara, how can I possibly thank you for such a wonderful, uplifting, soul-satisfying weekend? Words alone seem so inadequate. My life has changed as a result of the time spent with you in your home. I am forever in your

debt.

OUR YOUTH ARE DYING HERE & EVERY WHERE

On November 18, Christopher Brownlee found his 15-year-old brother Ben hanging from the garage, a thick black rope that he used to walk his animals tied around his neck. Christopher and his mother had long since accepted Ben as Tesia Samaraa girl who, in her own words, was "trapped in a male body. Suddenly the pressure of being different in the small town of Rockdale, Texas, became too much for her.

Like many stories similar to this, it took a long time before anyone really took notice. Even those of us in the GLBT press didn't hear about until a month after Tesia's suicide. Only now, when her mother has decided to find out what really happened has it become a "story.

Tesia's mom, Karen Johle said Tesia was upbeat on the Tuesday morning of her suicide when she left for school. She had been in counseling for some time and her therapist believed that her thoughts of suicide had lessened in the last few weeks. So it was an even greater shock when Johle came home and could not find Tesia. At first Johle thought Tesia was at the local cemetery where she liked to go to write poetry, listen to music and get away from everything. When she found all of Tesia's shoes in her closet and

her headphones and CDs nearby, Johle knew something was wrong.

Ben grew up in Rockdale, a town of about 4,500 people, 60 miles northeast of Austin, and had lived there all his life. His father left when he was a toddler. When he finally started to dress the way he felt, Tesia emerged. She grew her hair long and started to wear hip-huggers and make-up. Her family accepted her as Tesia, but school was another story.

Johle said Tesia endured the taunts and teasing of her classmates who knew her as a boy for most of her life, but now saw her dressed as a girl on a daily basis. Everyday he was called "gay boy, fag boy, hair girl."

Tesia had recently seen an episode of Oprah about transgenderism and was determined to begin hormone therapy and have a sex-change operation. She was in contact with one of the guests from that show who was helping guide her in the right direction.

She had even written a letter to one of her teachers, trying to explain her situation and asking for the educators help when it came to difficult situations. I mainly run into sticky situations at school, she wrote. For instance, when they separate the females from the females (sic) for the nurses scoliosis testing,

those kinds of things are hell for me. I wanted you to know this so that maybe you can help me to avoid some the hard and embarrassing times I could have. So if you happen to call me her on accident, lets just say that I wouldnt be unhappy."

Tesia was very informed about her situation. She had researched the condition known as gender dysmorphia, which leads to the feeling that a person is in a body of the wrong sex. She knew her options when it came to surgeries to correct the problem and was prepared to undergo the difficult gender reassignment surgery. She had been taking hormones for three months Spirotone and Premarin that she bought off the Internet. While she knew she would never really be accepted 100 percent at school, she had the love of her family and a few good friends who understood her situation and accepted her for who she was.

That is why Johle believes something happened after school that day that led to Tesia taking her own life. There are rumors going around school that some classmates had assaulted and urinated on Tesia after school that day. Police have looked into it and believe it is just a rumor, but Johle feels differently.

Despite the fact the Tesia had attempted suicide twice before (though only once that his

mother was aware of), Johle still believes Tesia was provoked on November 18. The Principal and teachers had all spoken to Tesia in the weeks leading to her death and felt she was adjusting well and was handling the pressure as best she could. She had been doing well in her counseling sessions at Waterloo Counseling Center and Johle believed Tesia was combating her suicidal thoughts well.

Lt. J.D. Newlin of the Rockdale Police Department investigated the rumor of an attack but could find no evidence to support the suspicions. He interviewed a teacher and several students but came to a dead end.

Johle went to Newlin with a copy of the states hate crime law in her hand, but according the Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas (LGRL), currently, there is no state law to protect students from such harassment in Texas schools.

State Representative Garnet Coleman (D-Houston) tried to change that during the most recent legislative session by authoring the Dignity for All Students Act, which would have addressed this type of issue. The bill was referred to the House Committee on Public Education, but Committee Chair Kent Grusendorf refused to give it a hearing.

Students have sought relief

from harassment and discrimination under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, as well as Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972. However, these laws do not specifically protect students from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

In failing to pass the Dignity for All Students Act the leadership of the legislature failed a significant portion of the Texas population, LGRL Field Coordinator Colin Cunliff said. And the consequences are deplorable, such as the loss of Tesia Samaras life.

Johle has refused to give up and will continue to fight to discover the truth behind Tesias death. She had Tesias body cremated and while almost 300 people attended the memorial Service in Rockdale, Johle refuses to have Tesia buried there.

He hated this damn place, Johle told the Austin-American Statesman. I sure as hell wasnt going to bury him in a city he hated so badly.

From the Gender Identity Research and education Society(UK)

http://www.gires.org.uk/Web_Page_Assets/frontframeset.htm

click on Atypical Gender development -A review then click on the "click here link

forwarded to GM by Kathy

Atypical Gender Development - A Review

A group with special knowledge of gender identity, including several who have personally experienced transsexualism and undergone transition, has worked together to produce a comprehensive review of what is currently known in the scientific field about atypical development. The resultant paper, with an appended list of signatories, is available in word format (click here). The group includes: general practitioners, endocrinologists, specialist clinical psychologists, SRS surgeons (MtF & FtM), psychiatrists (paediatric and adult), a gynaecologist/obstetrician, a neuro-anatomist and the chair of the Parliamentary Forum on Transsexualism. These specialists are from the UK, The Netherlands, Belgium, Japan and the USA. The paper has been accepted for publication in the International Journal of Transgenderism. Accordingly, with effect from November 2004, the paper is under limited copyright to The Haworth Press Inc, Binghamton, New York, the Publisher of the Journal. URL:<http://www.HaworthPress.com>. It may be used only by the signatories for oral presentation,

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One Special night.

By Joanne Law

As a transgender person did you ever wonder what it would be like to sit beside a police officer in a public place and enjoy it

The evening was November 20, 2004. We had assembled at the Human Rights Monument on Elgin St in Ottawa Ontario. to remember those transgender folks that had been murdered or committed suicide at our International Day of Remembrance. The service was to include speeches from high profile individuals from the greater community. One of these speakers was to be Deputy Chief Larry Hill. Because of a miss communication he did not make it until one hour later. The gang was cleaning up the area when he and his wife showed up.

When all was over we were to meet at Dunn's famous smoked meet deli across the street.

Some of us arrived early to reserve space for about 20 people. This was the same weekend as the Gray Cup in Ottawa and the place was packed with Gray Cup fans from BC to Quebec. All showing their colours of the team in their home town. It took a while for Dunn's staff to find us space for us to sit. We were lucky as some fans left leaving several tables empty. We filled the tables quite fast.

Now the best part. Deputy Chief Larry Hill and his wife entered the restaurant, Larry in his police uniform walked over to our table and sat down with his wife as if this was a normal thing to do. I went over as they were sitting down and thanked Larry and his wife for being there. Think of what just happened. Here is the second in command of the Ottawa Police force, in a city of just under a million people sitting down with the transgender community. Like I said the place was full of Gray Cup fans shouting their chants preparing for the game on Sunday not realizing the significance of a Deputy Chief of Police, and the transgender community sitting in wonderful conversation in a open public venue. We were not hiding, we were not running away, we were just being who we are. Awesome. What are the chances of this ever happening in any other city in Canada or the USA on a Saturday night?

Understanding Trans Issues

Unions celebrate diversity. This openness to learning about and welcoming the participation of marginalized groups into the movement has made labour strong: we're frontrunners in the struggle for equality. Labour's efforts to eradicate racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and other forms of discrimination continue.

A voice that has for too long been quieted by repression, discrimination and violence is that of our transgender sisters and brothers. This is changing. The trans community is organizing! And unions are stepping up to the plate in support.

Gender, sex and identity

To better understand the transgender issue, it is important to start with understanding a few concepts: biological sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. While each of these applies to us, as the diagram below demonstrates, we fall somewhere between the extremes on the continuum. Each of these concepts is independent of the other.

Biological Sex

male.....
intersex.....
female

Gender Identity

man.....
 two spirit/third gender
woman

Sexual Orientation

attracted to women
...bisexual/asexual.....
.....attracted to men

The following definitions, while not absolute, assist us in understanding the complexity of our gender mosaic.

Transgender individuals are people who are not comfortable with, in whole or in part, their assigned gender. This umbrella term, or “trans”, is used to describe transsexuals, transvestites / cross-dressers, intersex people (formerly referred to as hermaphrodites), drag queens and drag kings.

Crossdressers/transvestites are people who occasionally dress, behave and/or express themselves as the opposite sex for various lengths of time.

Transsexuals are people who have knowledge of a fundamental conflict between their gender identity and their physical body - a sense of being trapped in the wrong body. It is primarily transsexuals who pursue hormonal and surgical treatments in order to reconcile their body with their gender identity.

Gender identity and sexual orientation are established early in life and are highly resistant to change. People who are *different* normally know it at an early age. **Gender expression**, how one physically presents one's gender,

is more fluid and may change over time.

Transition is the act of changing the way one presents themselves to the world so that they live their life in a manner that reflects their true gender identity; in other words a change from man to woman or woman to man.

Transphobia is an irrational fear or hatred of transgender persons. It is based in negative stereotypes, myths, misconceptions and theories that justify and support hatred, exclusion, discrimination, harassment, and violence toward people who are transgender

The medical community previously tried to “cure” transgender persons, just as they did with gays and lesbians, however, it became clear (in both cases) that this approach is inappropriate and ineffective. Transgender persons are now given the assistance of the medical community in order to become fully integrated in body and mind. Some elect to do nothing, some engage in hormonal treatment, while others elect sex reassignment through surgical procedures.

The transgender reality

Imagine waking up one morning, looking in the mirror, and finding yourself in the body of the wrong sex. Imagine waking up with this feeling every day.

Transgender people experience “gender dysphoria”, a profound discomfort in their gender/body relationship. These feelings start early in their lives and often intensify over time. Most experience pressure to conform to their assigned gender, which creates tremendous confusion, stress, unhappiness, and self-loathing. Transitioning, for most, is the way in which these negative and self-destructive feelings are finally brought to an end.

Isolated and ostracized, an estimated 50% of transsexuals die before their 30th birthday - most often due to suicide. For these people, life is too cruel an experience to continue living. Only a change in society's attitudes will end this crisis.

When family, friends and colleagues learn that someone close to them is transgender and is transitioning, they are often surprised, feel disbelief, feel deceived or experience revulsion. There is intense pressure on transgender individuals to conform and to live a lie in order to make those around them feel comfortable. Refusing to do so and leaving behind a life of deception and unhappiness is the transgender journey. It is not an easy journey but the destination is one worth reaching. Becoming an integrated whole in mind and body is the end result, as is peace of mind. Happiness is their goal.

As with women, gays and

lesbians, racially visible persons, Aboriginals, and persons with disabilities, all of whom have made tremendous gains through their demands for fairness and equality, the trans community is demanding the same. The support of unions is key in this battle.

AGM Feburary 2005

Yes it is that time again when we are open to nominations for the Executive of Gender Mosaic. A nomination for will be available through the GM list and at meetings including the Christmas party. To qualify for nomination a member must be a member in good standing for at least 90 days prior to the election in Feburary and have their signature and that of two other members in good standing sign.

All positions are open and this is a great way to influence the direction of your group.

If We Spent Less time Fighting Each Other Just Think What We Could Do by Margo Ross

I first came to Gender Mosaic at the Christmas party in 1996. It was a small gathering of about twenty or so transgender people and their friends and partners.

Yet to me it was the biggest collection of trans people I had ever seen. There were several transsexuals, cross-dressers, full timers, half dressers and several

like me frightened but elated new comers and yes some trans S&M people.

Over the next six years I have come to see just how unusual and rare that gathering was and remains to day.

The need to be acknowledge and to validate one's self has time and time again pushed one transgender person away from another. There are long electronic wars over wording and fears over association and lines in the air that say that I'm not that. In truth there is one simple grouping call it what you want or as many words as you need but in the end we all challenge the standard definition of gender identity and gender expression. So why do we spend so very much time and energy alienating each other and confusing the shit or of those who would be our allies?

The time is long over due to stop this endless self dividing of a category and get on with the task at hand living each and every day as a whole person (your version, others version and even mine) with the full rights and protection that all Canadians have come to expect and exercise.

IT IS Your Mail Box

The Gender Mosaic, PO Box 7421, Vanier Ontario. K1L 8E4 can be used by all members for their packages, delivery of books or magazines.

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