

NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

Ottawa, Canada

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No. 5

My Débutante Soirée

As I write this two days later, I wonder why I made such a fuss of going out to dinner with a few friends. A lot ado over nothing, til I remember my very, very rocky road to September 2, 1989. To put it all into perspective, we have to go back to our meeting of April 1 at Judy's.

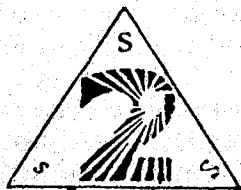
I arrived excited and nervous: excited at being there, nervous as I was still shy at meeting everyone and feeling a bit inadequate around such seemingly at ease people who seemed to treat the meetings like an everyday occurrence. Plus, a few seemed to know one another quite well and had an easy rapport with one another.

That night, if I recall correct-

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An accredited chapter of the Society for the Second Self under the name Nu Omicron Phi.



"The bad old days they came
and went,
Giving way to fruitful years."

Ian Anderson
from "Times we Used to Know"
by Jethro Tull.

ly, was the first or second time that I dressed up, as I had been too nervous to do so earlier. As soon as I came in, I saw Barbara, imperious and dignified, talking and seemingly controlling the conversation. I was awed and tried not to draw attention to myself but I envied her for her self assurance and her acceptance of who she was. So I mostly sat and spoke to Karen til everyone started talking about celebrating the group's first anniversary at a restaurant. I was bursting to tell everyone about my friend's café, but I was too shy to mention it. I know, I know, you don't believe I'm shy but I am, really, sort of. I did manage to blurt it out as I was leaving and Jim mentioned that he'd been there and had liked it.

A few days later, I went to George's and began to broach the subject of some friends of mine, a group actually, renting the café for supper. As we talked and he told me how he could make money to make it worth his while and yet still keep the cost reasonable, I began to realize that I'd have to tell him that we'd be "en femme" for this meal. I began by trying to infer it and then trying two or three different ways before coming right out and telling him. He looked and shrugged and I stared mouth agape. Why wasn't he freaking out and calling me all kinds of names? So I asked him if he truly accepted it or was he trying to be cool? He became annoyed and told me not to tell him what he'd said. Then



he told me a quiet and reasonable truth. If someone liked me, they'd eventually accept it; but if they disliked me, this would be just another reason not to like me.

I was on a natural high. This was my first old friend I'd told, and he'd accepted it. I've known George since 1966 and it felt good that, without being overjoyed by it, he was open and actually couldn't care less either way. On Saturday I told his girlfriend Lucie about me and she accepted it totally. She teased me all day, but in a way that had me in tears of laughter. She kept insisting that I'd become tired of being a short man and so had become a tall woman instead. This was great, two for two, and both had accepted. I phoned Judy to tell her the good news and was floored by her declaration that a restaurant had already been reserved.

I wasn't angry, I was terrified. How was I to go "en femme" by bus to the restaurant and come back the same way? I couldn't do it. I was in a panic, terrified, having daydreams of being beaten up on my way to the bus, on the bus, at the restaurant and/or on my way back. I just couldn't do it and phoned Judy to lie and tell her that I'd be otherwise occupied that night. I felt terrible. I hadn't wanted to lie, but I thought everyone would go to the supper and think nothing of it, so I felt a bit ashamed. Tells you how much I knew all of you, doesn't it?

When I found out the party had been at Judy's and not at a restaurant, I felt even more stupid and childish, but no one seemed to mind that I hadn't been there. To explain a bit: for some crazy reason, I thought I was the newest member and everyone else had done it all and I did feel a bit in-

adequate. I guess I really should have been more open and asked more questions. I felt like sulking, telling myself I could have done it and told a few members why I hadn't gone.

One or two meetings later, Ted gave me a ride home and I mentioned again my friend's restaurant, secure in the thought that we'd never go out as a group. Unfortunately, Ted seemed inspired by the idea and began to bring it up at every meeting as I watched in growing horror, praying it wouldn't attract much interest. Of course, I couldn't speak of my fears aloud, for hadn't I been the one to so cavalierly suggest that my friend's restaurant would be ideal. I began to understand the old dictum "hoisted on one's own



pétard". It was too late. I felt honour bound to tell everyone that yes, George had okayed it and would be glad if we held our supper there, but I did specify that we needed 20 persons to rent the café outright. This I knew was my graceful way out.

As summer progressed and the target date of early September crawled ever closer, I felt more and more secure that no way would we get 20 persons together. That would have been the end of it if my conscience hadn't pricked me into putting my other foot in my mouth. We could, I mentioned, rent the smaller, west-side room, with only 10 to 12 persons. Suddenly, everyone jumped at it, and my fears had a double attack. I know, I know, for a reputedly intelligent person, I sometimes say and do pretty stupid things. As they told me to go to George to formalize our reservations, I sat there and nodded blankly while my heart beat out a wild tattoo and my brain suddenly went blank.

Now in case this sounds like a

My débutante soiree (continued)

devious plan from a devious mind, let me point out that going out in public terrified me. No way was I going to do it. I'd never pass, I didn't look enough like Raquel Welch. In short, I would have found any excuse not to go out while still desperately wanting to go out. A paradox we all recognize, I'm sure.

When I finally went to see George, I found out to my great shock that he wouldn't be there; that Holly would be the one I'd have to deal with. I've known Holly for 18 years, although we'd just recently seen each other again after 10 years. I'd made another famous faux pas telling her how much she'd aged then trying to save myself by explaining that she'd gotten character over the years. Holly let me drown on that one. It seemed that luck would smile on me when Lucie came in and gave me the basic options we could have, how much it would cost, etc. and George would tell Holly about us. I'd just come back late that afternoon for a 2 minute chat.

Unfortunately, life seems to delight in sticking a branch between my legs to surprise me once in awhile. When I returned to confirm it all with Holly, the first thing she asked

was if it was true that the supper was for a cross-dressing support group. It caught me totally off guard. I looked at the other waitress, an 18 year old whose eyes were as round as dollar coins. I finally got Holly to go to the other side so we could talk away from people having afternoon coffee and who seemed to me to have heard every word so far. I tried to stick to the menu and costs but all she wanted to talk about was where I knew this group from, had I known them long, had I worked with one of them...? I finally admitted that I belonged to the group and that seemed to quiet her down. I then gave all the pertinent data to Ted and assumed that everything was taken care of.

Unfortunately, the soap opera wasn't finished yet. A few nights later, I went for coffee at the café to talk to my favourite waitress Kym. She asked if I'd told Holly we were going to be there "en femme". I said yes. She then suggested that I have another chat with Holly and I suddenly felt too old for this. Life should be getting easier not harder.

So the next day I returned to the café with some trepidation. Holly had seemed to me to be wary of the idea, how would she react to this? I asked

Your humble
editor Alison T.
and the
inimitable
Rachel at the
débutante soirée



her if she knew that the group would be in dresses and I could tell by the look of astonishment on her face that I'd forgotten to tell her. The funny thing is that she'd just told me how pleasant Ted had been and how she thought she might like to meet him in a different setting. I tried very hard to allay her fears saying it was a heterosexual group, that we had a doctor in the group, that most had good jobs and were well respected by their peers etc...So I lied a bit, it was for a good cause.

Now all I had to do was talk to Mimi and Sheryl to see if they had any problems with it, but Mimi told me she'd known a few transsexuals and had almost shared an apartment with one so she thought it was a great idea. Sh Sheryl said she knew I'd acted too perfect, too straight to be true. They were both looking forward to it and hoping we'd have a good time. The supper was never in jeopardy, but I wanted the staff on our side, or at least neutral and open minded. Now all that was left was for Saturday night to arrive. What could go wrong?

Actually, a lot could. The closer it got, the tenser I became. I lived on coffee and cigarettes for the last three days alternating between going "en femme" or in jeans or not going at all. Why had I mentioned this café? I was now going to have to appear as a woman in front of three real women I knew. What if one of the café regulars showed up?

On Saturday I worked till 4 pm helping George paint walls, clean up, finish the men's washroom and feeling more and more like I couldn't do it; but Holly and Mimi kept telling me that tomorrow I'd hate myself if I didn't do it tonight.

I went home, showered and forced myself to bring my clothes to Ted's. There I must have driven Laura and Alison to distraction by having running arguments with myself. I thought it a bit ridiculous going out in public to a place I hang out at when most people tend to go where they're sure not to

meet an acquaintance. At 7 pm I got dressed, but then felt like sitting down and watching television all night. Finally we drove to the café. I was so scared that Ted hadn't even turned off the engine before I was out of the car and in the café, where it suddenly hit me that there might be other diners there. But once I was sitting down with my friends, all of the doubts and all the anguish disappeared and I knew I'd done the right thing.

I think it helped to know that Karen, Barb and Leigh had also gone through some of the same things as this too was their "débutante soirée". The evening was perfect. I felt great and the feeling got better, as the service and the food were excellent and everyone loved Mimi. When I think of it now, I believe that this night will always be special for me.

In the next few days, I talked to Mimi, who told me she loved us and had a fantastic time. Of course she's only 22 years old (ha-ha). Holly loved it and was happy when I told her that some people mentioned that if we have one for Christmas, we should return here. I also nosily asked how she felt about Ted now. She said that at least she knew before hand and not a year down the road. If they do go out, I think I should get a match maker fee of \$25 from each. I think it is fair.

To finish this, I would personally like to thank each lady who came and helped make my "débutante soirée" such a success. THANK YOU to Judy, Barb, Karen, Sharon, Alison, Rachel, Laura and Leigh for being there for me and more importantly, for being yourselves.

Mitsook

P.S. I think Barb had the nicest top but Laura and Leigh outdressed us all, the bitches!

A License for Prejudice

A few evenings ago, I attended a business related dinner and the subject of prejudice was raised among the people I was with. My boss put forth the statement that people should not have any prejudices towards anyone else. The conversation shifted to a discussion about people of other races and of how unfortunate it is that so many people hold so many negative opinions about these people.

As I listened to the conversation, I couldn't help but notice a blatant demonstration of hypocrisy on the part of my boss. My employer knows of my female gender, but views my feelings as being disgusting, and he most certainly has no willingness to try and understand my predicament. To many, transvestism and transsexuality provide a license to be prejudiced.

Although I likely have a biased opinion, I still cannot understand why anyone should look upon those such as ourselves so negatively, and frankly I am fed up with the attitudes of others. No one should be forced to live in a way that is totally contrary to their own needs and desires, and to have an opposite set of rules and conditions forced upon them is to me the most inconsiderate treatment anyone can be made to endure short of physical torture. I am not a murderer, a thief or dishonest. My actions do not hurt anyone and I am not trying to gain attention. I am just struggling to live the way I most desire, and the only way I feel comfortable.

What really gets me is how people try and force their beliefs - based on their own feelings - of how they think we should be. I know some people who are really trying to make me be a man, and they keep telling me that my desire to be female is just a silly whim and that one day I'll wake up and realize the error of my ways. I once sought the advice of a minister, thinking that surely such a person would be understanding, only to be



beaten and clubbed black and blue with a bible, under the threat of spending at least one eternity in the fires of hell unless I stopped doing what I'm doing.

I wish that somehow I could put these people in my shoes for one day. Maybe then they would understand. I have gained one thing from all of this and that is that I have become much more understanding and accepting of those who are different than me. I still can't be accepting of those who won't accept me. I can learn to be tolerant of their negative attitudes, but I wonder if they can do the same. It is unfortunate that often those who are the most understanding are often persecuted the most by others.

Sharon

Debutante Soiree: Another View



Laura and Leigh: the meal may be over, but the evening just started.

Dear Diary,

We went to Rosie Lee's for a splendid Saturday night dinner with the girls. Judy and I drove downtown arriving too late to get the parking spot Alison took right in front of the restaurant. We had to park a long, long block away and walk among people (!) to get to the restaurant. I started walking so fast that if I had cleats on my heels I'm sure I would have looked like I was on fire. Well, Judy (God bless her) restrained me and held my marching step down to a casual walk. After furtive glances ("try not to look suspicious"), and playing with my hair, and looking down, I realized the sky was not falling and we were not being watched. We were just two girls strolling down Laurier Avenue: one casually dressed and walking casually, the other probably just off work, still dressed in her suit, which is why she seems spaced out. We finally got to the restaurant and were asked if we wanted a table for two. When Judy shook her head, we were

asked if we were with the Ross party. (We passed!) I looked around a little bit dazed to see who was watching us: just a few eyes checking out the commotion by the front door. And then we were led to our room: nine of the girls were there! Alison, Rachel, Laura, Leigh, Sharon, Ross, Barbara, Judy and me (Karen).

We passed a delightful evening together. There should be awards for these categories: For avoiding anything green, nominees are Laura and Judy. And the winner is... Laura. For consuming the most Red Stripe: Judy (no other contenders). Alison gets the award for conspicuous dexterity with numbers while under duress (threatened cash shortage).

Alison also gets the award for creative body contortions in response to photography aversion. Her prize is a new set of Foster-Grants. (Those are sun glasses Alison, not Australian beer).

Leigh and Karen (me!) were the photographers. We are being nominated for perseverance. The winner will be served a three course meal of photo supplies.

The most dignified (quiet) was Sharon (aside from me). The award for most frequent visits to the kitchen goes to Ross, without whom this whole escapade would not be possible, and to whom we all are very grateful. An award also goes to Ross for cheerfully recounting innumerable times how the evening came about. Many thanks Ross, (Rosie?), and to the staff at Rosie Lee's whose picture will be cherished in our archives.

Too soon the evening came to a close. After Alison dazzled us with New Math, Judy (the Red Stripe winner) tried out her legs and we headed back to the car. I enjoyed our walk back, the cool summer breeze wafting softly past, soothing my legs with reassuring caresses while occasionally blowing my silk scarf up into my face. I luxuriated in the sensuality of a walk: I should have parked miles away! Another quiet ride home to Judy's and the summer-nite's dream came to a peaceful ending. But there will be others: today Rosie Lee's, tomorrow the world!

Karen

TO ALL MEMBERS

Our Christmas dinner is coming. We're hoping to set a date for sometime in early December at the Rosie Lee Café on Laurier Avenue East. Those who attended the last (first) supper in September had a thoroughly good time with good food and drinks and excellent company (ourselves).

As Christmas is a busy season for any restaurant, it behooves us to plan ahead and ask the members to make a decision on whether they can attend or not and to let us know as soon as possible. Also, if I may, a deposit with the reservation would greatly be appreciated to cover the cost of putting a deposit and assuring the presence of all who say they'll come (of course last minute emergencies do occur).

For those who weren't in attendance at the other supper, we partook of a hot asparagus and red pepper soup, a caesar salad with house seasoning, a vegetarian lasagna, chicken marinated in wine, rice plus two different cakes plus coffee and the manager gave us some wine free of charge.

The owner and staff are sympathetic and sensitive to us and will provide a safe, pleasant environment, so let's have wives, girlfriends, significant others and friends come along to make it even more of a success. So please respond early and if you can please let us know what date would be most acceptable.

Ross

THE BACK PAGE

TRANSITIONS

In a cocoon for year after year
The world beyond is what I fear.

Remaining hidden is to danger my health
Struggling with longing to announce true self.

The desire to be unconfined and fly about
Few comprehend what it's really all about.

From the cocoon I painfully crawl
Fear and hurting an appalling shawl.

Transition is slow but we shall see
With comfort from others just like me.

With knowledge and love along with the dawn
The fears in loved ones will soon be gone.

From the cocoon finely breaking free
I bare my wings for all to see.

Gone from the cocoon and feeling free
Just to be a butterfly, that is me.

LEIGH

RACHEL'S FOLLIES

BY JIM

