

# OUTREACH



VOLUME VIII NUMBER III

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## MY LIFE AS A WOMAN

by J. Thomas

### Part Two

#### FIRST IMPRESSIONS WERE EXTREMELY COMPELLING

Sally's nursing care (24 hours a day) lasted for over five months. In that time Jay and Jayne were introduced and came to know several registered nurses. Nurses who care for terminal patients are a breed unto themselves. Their dedication and commitment to their patients are unequalled to any other profession. All of these women were marvelous professionals and several became close friends.

When a new nurse came onto the case we would not immediately tell her about Jayne -- we had determined it prudent to wait a few days and see first if she worked out. In a situation such as Sally's, where a person comes into your home on a regular basis and provides such a necessary service, the chemistry has to be just right between nurse and patient. It seemed silly to "air our situation" before first seeing if the person was going to work out.

That being the case, and the fact that I still worked as a man, some nurses would first meet Jay, while others first met Jayne. Later, if they stayed on the case, they would be told Jay and Jayne were the same person. In my situation, an interesting phenomenon occurred. There must have been a dozen nurses on the case over the five month period. Every one felt that the person they first met (Jay or Jayne) was the role I was best suited to live. Even after they experienced the other gender, they would tell me the person they initially met was "the real me".

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## THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG-DISTANCE CROSS DRESSER

by Lady Paula Howard

### Part Two

*Note: Part One of this article was published in the previous issue of the NEWSLETTER, but the author's name was inadvertently omitted from the final copy, due to an editing error. Our sincere apologies to Lady Paula.*

Crossdressing is hardly a social asset in what currently passes for polite society. But trying to justify or glorify it is not likely to make life any easier for either the CD or the "straight" folk among whom he lives and works. The excuses are always unconvincing. Anyway, why explain if you don't have to.

For example, if the boss finds out that his star salesman habitually dresses as a woman in his spare time, he is unlikely to fire him so long as his sales figures are high, and likely to remain that way.

Conversely no amount of assuring that Julius Caesar was a life-long crossdresser will prevent the boss from putting the skids under the CD if his sales output is low or deteriorating.

Similarly at the social level, the CD's close friends who know him only in his male role will seldom cast him off when they find out (or he tells them) that he spends much of his leisure time in dresses, and likes to be called "Sandra"!

In the several years I have spent in Australia, dressed nearly always as a woman by day and by night, I have found that folk are quite relaxed in their attitudes toward me and my necessities. In shops, offices,

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beauty salons, theatre foyers, the member's enclosure at cricket matches or at the races and in my friendly neighborhood wine bar, I am taken at my own evaluation. Happy with that casual acceptance, I carefully avoid pressing my luck.

In the small, quiet apartment block where I had lived for several years I have no real friends, nor do I seek any. On the other hand I am on nodding or greeting terms with most of the other occupants when our paths cross -- in the hall, in the parking lot, at the clothes dryer, or up on the sun roof. New tenants often give the impression of wanting to be friendly, and most find some cooked-up excuse to call during their early residence. At first I used to find this encouraging, but I soon learned that it is no more than understandable curiosity, and that they will quite soon lose all interest. I am just someone rather odd who lives in the place.

But on official community occasions, such as when the drains are blocked or the state of the gardens demands a determined assault on the superintendent, my support is always solicited. On the rare occasions when I am in male attire and encounter my neighbors, they either fail to recognize me, or recognizing, prefer to ignore my male self.

This brings me to some carefully considered broader comment on "Society and the Habitual Crossdresser", as I see it.

I believe that if he/she dresses and makes up well and appropriately for the feminine role chosen, the average citizen will accept him/her in that role. To make this happen it does not seem necessary for that citizen to be wholly convinced that you are in fact a woman. As far as the public at large is concerned, you are dressed as one, you are conducting yourself inoffensively

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as one, and it is obvious that you wish to be accepted as one. So "O.K. mate -- no worries!" seems to represent the public attitude.

In such circumstances, even if detected or suspected, the crossdresser can expect to be treated with civility and ordinary respect, even though outgoing enthusiastic friendliness is withheld!

Naturally this will not apply if you are so unconvincing that you are really pushing your luck just to put your nose outside your own front door. A CD in this unfortunate category, out in public, can expect a reaction ranging from immoderate hilarity to acute embarrassment.

Similarly the CD who misbehaves, asks for trouble at frequent pubs and hotels where the bibulous pot-variants and trouble spinners congregate -- or who goes out dressed like one of the girls who sit in lighted shop windows in Hamburg's Reeperbahn -- can expect to be given a hard time or be interfered with very quickly. The by-product of this can be some degree of involvement, if not in a court of law, at least with the cop on the beat or in the prowler car who needs to make certain that you are really quite harmless.

In their relations with society, most CDs realize all this and accordingly manage to stay out of trouble.

But merely staying out of trouble is, like patriotism, not enough. If one is also to avoid the shattering Loneliness of the Long Distance CD, one must make at least some friends. One must not merely aim to relate broadly to society at large -- one must also aim to relate with some degree of intimacy and understanding to a limited sector of it. "Aye -- there's the rub!"

In this area my gentle cynicisms may be of interest. I can claim to have been over all the jumps, and whenever I have fallen I have taken the trouble, after dusting myself down, to find out why.

For a CD, whether transsexual, homosexual or not, relating satisfactorily to society

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One day I overheard two of the nurses in a lively discussion. Helen had first met me as a man, and Brigette had met me as Jayne. The subject was the gender role for which they felt me to be best suited.

"I don't care how attractive he looks when dressed as a woman, he is still a man," Helen was telling the other. "But I know she is a woman," Brigette countered. "I could never have sat in the backyard, discussing the things Jayne and I talked about, with a man."

Both seemed equally certain that the gender they had assigned to me was the appropriate role. The first impression we have of people seems to have a deep and lasting effect. This point was to be later substantiated when I transitioned to female role in my neighborhood and at work. People that had known me as Jay had much more difficulty in making the adjustment to treating me as a woman, than did persons that met me first as Jayne.

This is not to imply that people one has known before won't change their attitude -- they do, but it takes time. Helen, for example, would later tell me I was better suited for the other role. Several weeks after she came on the case, I returned home in male attire. Helen and Sally were watching television. As I sat across the room at the breakfast bar with a glass of Chablis, I noticed Helen looking my way periodically. Finally she slipped me a cryptic note, "I've changed my mind. You look much better in dresses!"

At work there was Les, an executive that just insisted that I would always be a man. Even after I made the gender change, he continued to use my other name and tell our associates that I would always be a man in his eyes. Les had been to my house for parties and always enjoyed them. But for the first party after my switching roles, he declined the invitation.

Months later he still resisted. When the bank hired Fred as a new vice-president, Fred only knew me in my new role. Les' administrative assistant, Beth, told me

of a meeting of both men after Fred's first month on the job. Les undertook to tell his new associate about me. "Fred, there's something you should know about Dr. Thomas -- she is really a man!"

After a pause Fred replied, "I really don't care to hear any more, Les. I've known Jayne for a month now, and to me she is a woman." Fred then lowered the boom: "What's your problem, Les? Why did you feel it so important to tell me this? It's really irrelevant to any of the work she does. Please let's not discuss it again."

The happy ending to this story is that in due time Les accepted Jayne. Apparently it was just too difficult for him to keep up the battle. To be in the minority when everyone else around you feels differently is difficult. And it is not easy to treat someone who looks and behaves as a woman, permanently as a man. Last year Les invited me to his Xmas party. I attended and had a wonderful time.

Diana, a dear friend of mine, manages a Merle Norman Studio. I first met her when I was learning the basics of proper use of cosmetics. Diana knew I was a transsexual but saw me only as Jayne. One day, long after we had become close friends we were at lunch together, having our salads and a glass of wine. At that time I was living a dual existence, being Jayne only outside of work.

I was frustrated and depressed because on the next day I would return to my job as a man. Apparently I had been belaboring the point with my friend, going on and on about the difficulties of switching back and forth between roles.

As I went on, my attractive friend just looked at me with amazement. "You know when I hear you talk like this, I listen and know that you are telling the truth -- but I have absolutely no conception of what you are saying. Looking at you across the table I see only Jayne, and can't imagine you in men's attire fooling anyone. It would seem as unlikely for you to pass as a man as for me to do so."

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and acquiring real social friends is not quite impossible. But for such friendships to be worth much he/she should be able to mix regularly, if not frequently, with those friends in a range of normal situations -- sport, cocktail parties, backyard swimming pool occasions, the beach and so on. At today's stage of gay and CD lib there are many difficulties and prohibitions to be surmounted -- if indeed you can surmount them!

You find that the "straight" friends who are quite happy to accept your chosen gender role are too often fettered by their own perceived obligations to their own environment. Naturally they have their own "straight" friends, neighbors and business associates who (they assume, even if they don't really know) will be very unaccepting of their association with you. This they cannot just ignore, as a rule.

And then, of course, there are "the children"!

Above cradle age children are usually a major obstruction to the CD's social acceptance across the gender line. Most parents, however swinging, wife-swapping, group-sex-loving and utterly tolerant they may be of other people's fads, are wary of exposing their young to possible contamination by an "Auntie" whom nature designed as an "Uncle". They seldom come right out and tell you so, but you can gather that they fear some nameless and dire damage to the minds and morals of their issue. And so the crossdresser must expect to receive such qualified invitations as

"Oh, DO come up and see us -- just any time! But not until after the kids are asleep, if you don't mind!"

You then suffer a sharp pang of rejection and a fit of ego deflation from which only hard cases (such as the writer) recover quickly.

But recover fast or not, you have come up sharply against one of the bastion defenses of society, and the best you can do while recovering is to comfort yourself with some

largely correct reflection, however bitchy. You can say to yourself that compared with you in your role of "Auntie Carla", you are quite sure that much more permanent, searing damage will be done to Bill and Gloria's junior terrorists by other features in their family life - for example, their exposure to Gloria's genetically-conventional, patronizing, over-weight, denim-wrapped, raucous and neurotic friends and kinsfolk! And with justifiable bitchiness you drive the rejection from your doorstep -- and try again, this time among the childless.

As a crossdresser with a place, however ill-defined and tenuous, in the daily (and nightly) life of a great city, one makes many amusing, though shatteringly non-durable friendships. This is especially so if one is not impenetrably disguised as a woman -- and to a shrewd observer very few CD's are.

Most adults seem to find a crossdresser, out in public and coolly facing the world, intriguing to say the least. Often at parties, especially if you are the only CD present and there largely as a conversation piece for your "straight" friends, they become consumed with curiosity. Inevitably you get cornered and quizzed, especially by uninhibited wives (often urged by husbands) in the powder room:

- Have you had "the operation" (whispered)?
- Don't you have trouble with men?
- Is it true that hormones can give you cancer?
- For God's sake, Luv, what do you wear that doesn't show under a dress like that?

and inevitably, sooner or later, in some form

- o What do you do about SEX?

Still these inquiries come, but they don't bug me any more. I know how to reply -- I think!

Both at parties and on other social levels I have had many talks with psychiatrists, psychologists and marriage counsellors who try to cope with the problems of tortured crossdressers and transsexuals and their worried wives.

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These kinds of experiences taught me patience with the people I encountered during the transitional process. Certainly the transsexual is going through a major adjustment period as he/she transitions to a new role. But if the transition is done openly the others in the transsexual's life are also going through a major adjustment. Tolerance and acceptance are two-way streets. It is only fair that those who have to deal with the new role of their friend/associate/family member be given ample time and space to make their own adjustment.

HONESTY WAS THE BEST POLICY

Being open and direct with regard to my gender dysphoria was the approach to be taken. I decided to face the problems caused by my status change in an "up front manner". For me it was not feasible to drop out of sight, resurface in another town as a woman, and start all over again.

I've been told repeatedly by friends and associates how courageous it was for me to make this change openly -- to "air my private life publicly". I really don't see it as being all that courageous. For me, being able to live the rest of my life honestly was worth some risk. But in taking charge of one's life nothing worthwhile is ever accomplished by playing it safe. By definition, taking a risk includes some hope of succeeding -- and this was part of my thinking.

Having made the decision to live fully as a woman I took six months to plan how I would present my medical situation to my employer. During that time I continued to work as a man, spending all my free time as Jayne. By this time my teenage son knew the truth and this gave him an additional adjustment period.

At work I diligently applied myself so as to make my services indispensable. By and large transsexuals have a difficult time transitioning in the work-place, and staying on their prior jobs. Employers have to have a good reason for keeping such persons on. The successful cases I know of all had one thing in common: The person was good at their job. They performed an important function, and to lose such an employee

would have been a significant loss to the company. And that made a lot of sense. What company would want to go through the aggravation and problems if the person's worth was doubtful or marginal.

During those six months I gave parties and really got to know well some of the people I worked with. I wanted them to come to think of me as a caring, thoughtful person. When I told them of my gender dysphoria I wanted them to know me as a person, not just a clinical case to be easily dismissed.

In my neighborhood there were repercussions too. Being widowed and with only my son and I living together, it became the talk of the town that a blonde lady would come and go frequently. In short order close neighbors put two and two together. One day after picking my son up from his school he informed me that a counselor had called him in to discuss his home situation.

Apparently one of the families in our neighborhood, being concerned for David's well-being had told the school that David lived alone with his father, who was now dressing and living as a woman. As David told me of his conversation with Sister Cheryl, I knew something had to be done to clear the air.

"You don't have to do anything Dad -- it's cool," he told me. "I took care of it. I told Sister Cheryl that it was none of the school's business, that my dad was just doing what he had to do."

However I did do something. A couple of days later after dropping David off at school, I went around the block and parked. I had dressed that day most professionally. Wearing a rich brown corduroy suit with suede patches at the elbows, a light tan silk blouse, and matching burgundy pumps and purse, I made my way back to the school to talk with Sister Cheryl. We met in the hallway outside the administrative offices.

"Sister Cheryl, I am David's parent, and we need to talk." She hadn't recognized who I was -- with such a different appearance. What followed was a long and most-candid discussion. We talked for over an hour. At the end of the session she smilingly patted my arm, wished me good fortune, and

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assured me that the school was no longer concerned about my son's welfare.

After the six-month period, I talked successfully with my employer, and it was decided that I should continue my work as Jayne. At my suggestion it was decided that I should take a two week vacation while the bank did what was necessary to inform the managers and employees that I worked with. After the two weeks I would return to my work as Jayne. I spent the two weeks on a Hawaiian cruise and had a delightful time. To celebrate the success of my talks I went out and had my ears pierced!

Returning to my work was most interesting. My reappearing as a woman caused a mild sensation! There were the expected stares and endless questions. Generally people were kind and considerate. I remember one day an executive and myself were at the elevator on our way to a meeting. A young man, unknown to me, introduced himself. He began

"I just had to tell you how courageous I think you are. What you are doing takes guts, and I want you to know I admire you for that."

When the young man left I told Bill that "I didn't even know that person. I wonder how he knew about me."

Bill just smiled and said, "Everyone within a three-block area knows about you." I had indeed caused a sensation. This notoriety did not fade, however. In a few short weeks there were no longer the looks or stares. People began to treat me as they would any other person. I had given them something to talk about, but after that was over, things were getting back to normal.

A close friend of mine recently told me of her reaction on my return as Jayne. Beth was away on jury duty when I returned. She is a single parent -- divorced and dating. It seems that Beth and a friend at work discussed the eligible men she might date. Jay's name came up as a likely candidate. When Beth called into the office the first day after my return, her friend had some shocking news for her: "About Dr. Thomas, I don't think you should consider him as  
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I enjoy these chats and feel that they contribute to solving a contemporary problem because I have a lot of personal experience to draw upon, and can communicate with blinding clarity when necessary. I tell what I know willingly because I no longer have anything to lose (I hope!) by even the most intimate disclosures.

Perhaps my main contribution may be not so much wisdom as what the dramatists call dramatic relief. I have an unquenchable sense of humor about being a full-time crossdresser, which perhaps lightens the otherwise doleful subject for psychiatrists.

Best of all for them (I imagine) is my not continually invading their consulting rooms demanding surgery or structural modification. Such dire and radical measures produce all the pain, economic disturbance, danger to health and mental stability will produce at best only a greater social anomaly than I already am.

And so we talk ... after the classic couch-oriented opening exchanges, all about my way of life -- how I live happily with myself and act out this developed fantasy without climbing up the wall or upsetting anyone else.

Marriage counselors in particular ask about my "socio-sexual preferences and acquired alignments, ie in what groups do I mix best -- I as a pseudo female feel most at home? In practical terms: How does a life work out for me, looking at the world from the other side of a dark mirror.

To answer such questions I divide Society into

- "Straight" folks
- The Gay/Camp society
- Other crossdressers

In spite of all the problems and obstructions my first preference is for "straight" folks. Until recently all my social friends have been in this category. One of my wives used to insist that this was because I lived in fear of my female self, and was striving to keep a foothold in normality. -- I'm sure that I have never felt such a fear, but perhaps I should have.

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continued

I believe the reason for my preference is that the "straight" world presents a constant and much greater challenge. I suffer from social claustrophobia, and the gay/camp/crossdressing scene is largely an underground or cloistered one.

But my preference-gap between the "straight" and gay/camp worlds is quite narrow, and I find it quite rewarding that I am now widely accepted in the latter society as well. It's blithe, amusing, alive and intellectually satisfying, especially to a writer.

Although crossdressers and practicing homosexuals have little in common except that both are disadvantaged and much misunderstood minorities, I have received good-humored acceptance from both.

What about other crossdressers? ... Well I have found their society generally unrewarding. That's largely my own fault for carving out a way of life that is open to only a small percentage of CD's.

Regrettably most of them, even if able to pass satisfactorily in public when in drag, have severe restrictions on their freedom and capacity to socialize with friends of similar inclination.

So the Long Distance Crossdresser, most of his time in the female role, finds difficulty in having close and satisfying friendships who live in constant fear of exposure to wife, family or employers; whose wardrobe is a suitcase hidden in the trunk of the company's car; who can dress only spasmodically and in such secret that when he does, his mind is entirely taken up with his own fears and troubles. He is simply socially inert. How do you socialize with a friend who cannot visit your home, invite you to his, or meet with you anywhere in public?

As it happens the friend who currently pleases me most is both a crossdresser and a homosexual, and who sees no reason to conceal the fact. In sense of humor and social attitudes we find ourselves broadly in accord.

Our relationship is purely a-sexual, and our behavior at all times is as if we were sisters of an age, sharing experiences.

She is engaged as housekeeper to a respectable older man -- and I as housekeeper to myself. She has an additional 9-to-5 office occupation, whereas I am no better than an indolent and self-indulgent writer.

However, knowing "Lana" and her employer-cum-husband "Lane" has given me a new and crystallized outlook on the relationship between homosexuality and crossdressing because I can examine both phenomena in a single articulate personality. Here's how I view the matter.

Homosexuals are not generally crossdressers -- as you would expect they find the female image unattractive, if not repugnant. Conversely crossdressers are not usually active homosexually -- but both may well stem from some deep and as yet, unidentified source.

As a corollary to this, the crossdresser views the act of dressing as a woman not a means to an end, but as an end in itself -- and there is no urge to go further.

When crossdressers who are not primarily homosexual, do venture into homosexual activities, they do so without any feelings of love for their partners. Such sex acts become only a logical extension of their performance of dressing and behaving as a woman does.

One final thought: Over the years of living as a woman I have been asked by crossdressers in their emergent, guilt-ridden stage of development, fearful, worried and conscience stricken, for advice. When you boil down all their doubts and misgivings, they really only want to talk about themselves to someone they think cannot be censorious. Most significantly of all, they never ask "Is there a road back?" They always ask how best to forge on with building up their female image.

This suggests that crossdressers/transsexuals are hooked on it from earliest childhood -- perhaps even earlier.

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But if they asked, assuming that retreat to normalcy were possible, whether they should get out now while they could, what would I have advised? I'm reminded of the old quip "ADVICE TO THOSE ABOUT TO BE MARRIED -- DON'T!"... meaning "stay out of it if you can. As a life style it's pretty hard to handle and, like witchcraft, you can get into very deep and dangerous waters."

How useful would that be? ... about as much as advising Evel Knievel to quit his high-risk jumps -- he's made that way and likes it !!

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MY LIFE AS A WOMAN  
cont'd

someone you might date." -- "Why not?"  
-- "BECAUSE HE IS A WOMAN."

Did relationships at work change? Was I treated any differently? It's really hard to know. Even though I had worked there as a man, I had always felt closer to a certain group of employees, than to any others. There were two or three ladies who always seemed easier to talk with. Gradually these three became my close friends, and we would often lunch or go out for a drink together after work.

I continue to maintain my friendships with other male colleagues as well. Certainly there have been awkward moments -- times when someone might make an off-color remark in my presence, and then catch himself, look at me and become flustered. Hopefully my own sense of humor and relaxed attitude put most people at ease. More than one person has told me that I made it easy for them.

Another observation regarding the reactions of my co-workers fascinates me. To them Jayne seemed to be a more open person than was Jay. Mary from the Personnel Department told me that when she was informed of the transsexual who would be returning to work, she scarcely recalled who I was. When others tried to describe Jay to her, she recalled working with me on one project. The point is that as Jay I was a round a lot, but not memorable. I always seemed to be in the background. To many I seemed to be a loner. The emergence of Jayne allowed the real me to come out. Unburdened, I was able to express myself. People recognized the genuineness, and relationships could develop. ★

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