



Grace & Lace
Letter
International
Fall 1998

A Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

And the angel came in unto her, and said, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women."

And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

And the angel said unto her, "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

Then said Mary unto the angel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"

And the angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee. Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible."

And Mary said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word." And the angel departed from her. ¹

Luke 1:26-38

In the Fall of the year, as we observe the change of seasons and the shortening of days, we are tempted to ask again that age-old question of WHY. Why am I this way? Why am I transgendered? Why has God brought this unwanted complication into my life, a complication that has cost me so much, perhaps even the loss of loved ones, livelihood, social status and health? And why, when I begged Him so, has He not seen fit to remove it?

The passage we have just read holds not only the answer to the WHY but also the model for the HOW of our lives. The most striking aspect of Mary's response to the angel's announcement is that she does not even ask WHY. She simply accepts God's plan for her, "as is."

She does ask HOW, another question we debate endlessly. The angel's answer, which satisfied Mary, amounted to this: GOD HAS A PLAN, AND YOU ARE PART OF IT. That answer should also satisfy us. God loves each of us and has a plan for our lives. His plan for Mary involved her incurring the social stigma of a pregnancy outside of marriage, with the further risk of physical harassment and even criminal penalty. Our transgendered status often confers on us much the same thing.

Yet for us, as for Mary, comes the message of hope: "For with God nothing shall be impossible." When we accept God's Plan, we also have His Promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." While we see no angels around us, rescuing us OUT of our trouble, we can be sure He is with us, coming alongside us THROUGH each situation. As we accept His leading and follow His plan, we channel His love and mercy to others, as Mary did in bringing to birth Jesus, God's love in human flesh. Amen!

Fall 1998

LET THE WALLS FALL DOWN

BY RACHEL (RICHARD) MILLER

The bedrock of the United States' governing system affirms that all men are created equal and have certain God-granted rights. It is a nation with a strong spiritual heritage and the dual principles of loving God and loving your neighbor are widely espoused. Many settlers fled religious oppression and came to the U.S. in pursuit of their own personal vision of freedom of spiritual expression. Curiously, even with that backdrop, various groups of citizens, all of them God's children, find themselves treated decidedly unequally by much of society and frequently shunned by many religious organizations.

I have a permanent membership in one of those ill-treated groups and have considerable experience with the pain, guilt and shame inflicted by repeated rejection. The person that I allow everyone to see in public is perfectly acceptable and enables me to move about society freely without causing a ripple. Yet, I feel compelled to continue to hide some of the truth about myself knowing how others would likely react if they knew.

In mid-1991, after spending fifty years in hiding, I embarked on a journey to confront the fear and end my hiding. What is this fearful, secret burden that I have dragged with me? Terror of terrors, I am a man who sometimes likes to wear a dress. That's it! It may not seem like much, but it causes significant repercussions. People label me a transvestite or cross-dresser and many times something far worse. Mostly I'm surprisingly like any other person you know. We hide so deeply in our closets that no one, even our closest loved ones, suspects our secret. Even though you almost certainly know one of us, you don't know that you know.

Once I understood and accepted the cross-dressing part of me, I felt a strong compulsion to share that news with my family and friends, the people I love and care about. I simply had to end the pretending and hypocrisy that had overshadowed so much of my life. Remarkably, after sharing the truth with nearly sixty loved ones, they have all continued our relationships. They saw that I was still the same

person they had known and loved over the years and accepted the news as part of my total person. Many relationships have actually deepened. Since I had become vulnerable by telling my story, they felt secure enough to tell their secrets, and these exchanges have resulted in an unexpected mutual easing of burdens.

Even after telling those closest to me, I have continued to withhold that information from most of my daily life. I have considered the corporate workplace out of bounds for fear of losing my job. Stores and restaurants have been avoided for fear of recognition and for my safety. Although I bristle at those restrictions, I have been able to rationalize them with one exception -- church!

I am a spiritual person and strongly desire an accepting church home. For many years I have struggled with the question of how Richard could show the truth about his more feminine side at church. Not being able to show has continued to hammer at my sense of self-worth and has fanned the belief that I am not acceptable. In late August I wrote a letter (Keyword to: <http://members.aol.com/rachemill/spirit03.htm>) to the pastors of nine local churches of different denominations, telling my story and asking if I would be welcome at their churches. I included a copy of a poem from my book, *The Bliss of Becoming One* (Keyword to: <http://members.aol.com/rachemill/bobo.htm>), that describes my overall character and places cross-dressing in a balanced perspective. I included an extract of an article that I had written several years ago that addresses Biblical concerns.

I have been encouraged that two of the pastors wrote personal notes inviting me to attend. My wife Marsha and I, dressed traditionally, have visited both churches to see how well they fit my needs and how well we fit in. I am continuing to attend services at one church, still in traditional male attire, and have enrolled in a class for prospective new members. I am taking my time before deciding how to proceed.

It is discouraging that in the past month, seven of the pastors have failed to respond -- they haven't said yes, they haven't said no, they haven't said anything. Perhaps the lack of response can be partially attributed to the prejudice towards cross-dressers that stems from negative stereotypical views and there is good reason for many of those views. Most of us try to blend unnoticed into society so only a small percentage is visible. Those who are visible tend to be more flamboyant personalities who often wear gaudy costumes and engage in attention-attracting behavior. Many of us complain that the outrageousness of a few ruins our reputation, still we continue to hide so you don't see the less ostentatious, garden-variety cross-dresser.

Some people believe that cross-dressers are simply getting what we deserve. They consider us sinners and violators of God's word and that justifies ostracizing us and even restricting our civil rights. That point of view is incompatible with the principles of the governing system and with the spiritual principle of love and acceptance and needs to be changed!

The primary obligation for initiating this change resides within the gender community, a general term used to embrace cross-dressers, transsexuals and other people who consider themselves transgendered. We must reduce the degree of hiding and let others see us as we are. Lacking that exposure, attitudes will continue to be based on the few who flaunt themselves in public. If you are transgendered, consider coming a bit further out of your closet and, without taking excessive risks, working for your spiritual freedom and the spiritual freedom of others.

The next most important step rests within the religious community. Religious organizations, churches, ministers and members can exert leadership to change the existing attitudes. Consider demonstrating the love exemplified in this song that I learned last week at a local church.

Let The Walls Fall Down

One by one we're drawn together,
One by one to Jesus' side,
One in Him we'll live forever,
Strangers He has reconciled.

In His love no walls between us,
In His love a common ground.
Kneeling at the cross of Jesus,
All our pride comes tumbling down.

(Chorus)

Let the walls fall down,
Let the walls fall down;
Let the walls fall down,
By His love let the walls fall down.

*Bill Batstone, Anne Barbour &
John Barbour
(c)1993 Maranatha! Music*

Governing officials have another crucial role in changing conditions. Only a handful of jurisdictions prohibits discrimination against transgendered people and even the Federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) is not designed to protect us. While we haven't yet wielded significant political clout, all citizens deserve legal protection. If you are a legislator, consider how to help transgendered people to achieve equal status in society.

To change views, active media participation is essential. The July 20 issue of *Time* ran a constructive story, "Trans Across America," describing the efforts of transgendered people working for equality. The Arts & Entertainment Channel will air "Transgender Revolution" a ground-breaking documentary on October 5. The program moves beyond sensationalism and freak show images and treats us as real people fighting for our civil rights. If you are a member of the media, consider portraying a factual, non-emotional account of transgendered people or issues to dispel some of the negative stereotypes.

The medical community is needed to heal the existing pain and suffering. Most transgendered people function extremely well in society in spite of the difficulties they face, but many have developed significant emotional problems. They have been forced to compartmentalize their lives into a society-acceptable piece while hiding the true-self piece and this disassociation has had dreadful repercussions. The problems are exacerbated by the low level of involvement by the medical profession. If you are a health care professional, consider helping these people to break through their emotional barriers and integrate their lives.

Grace and Lace Letter International
While we have differing beliefs and value systems, we must find ways to demonstrate real love and concern towards real people with real problems. Together we can achieve freedom of spiritual expression by making the transgendered walls fall down.

When we allow freedom to ring,
when we let it ring from every village
and every hamlet,
from every state and every city,
we will be able to speed up that day
when all of God's children,
black men and white men,
Jews and Gentiles,
Protestants and Catholics,
will be able to join hands
and sing in the words of the old
Negro spiritual,
'Free at last!
Free at last!
Thank God almighty,
we are free at last!'

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

%Opportunities for Improvement
P.O. Box 31475
Oakland, CA 94604, U.S.A.
(925) 935-9594
<http://members.aol.com/rachelmill> (Keyword
to: <http://members.aol.com/rachelmill>)

Grace & Lace Letter International

A Christian publication serving spiritual needs of all crossdressers, transgendereds, transsexuals, new women, new men, significant others and family members. Your articles, letters and love offerings welcomed.

MAILING ADDRESS: 8880 Bellaire B2 #104, Houston TX 77036

E-Mail: JEFTRIS@aol.com

Web: <http://www.geocities.com/SouthBeach/Sands/7777/>

and <http://members.aol.com/GnLNews/index1.html>

Other sites for Transgendered Christians:

<http://www.geocities.com/~terrimain/inspire.htm>

<http://www.geocities.com/hotsprings/2776/>

<http://www.engr.ucdavis.edu/~jsdevlin/jadecath.html>

and for all GLBT Christians: 'Whosoever' Christian Magazine

DO NOT FEAR

My Lord God,
I do not see the road ahead of me,
I cannot know for certain
where it will end...
I know that you will lead me
by the right road,
though I may know
nothing about it.

Therefore I trust You always.
I will not fear,
for you are with me,
and You will never leave me
to face my perils alone.

-Thomas Merton

On-Line Support Group for Christian Transsexuals

A weekly chat session for Christian Transsexuals is being held every Friday at 6:00 p.m. Pacific Time. The Web Address for the javachat room is <http://members.tripod.com/~terrim/tschat1.htm>. The chat is moderated by Terri Main, who describes herself as a Webservant for the Emergence Web Site (<http://members.tripod.com/~terrim/TSCHRIST.HTM>).

"We've been having 3-5 people a week show up. We've been able to share the word of God, comfort and support each other, even pray on line with each other. Distance isn't a barrier on the internet," says Main.

The room is a 24 hour room so you can drop in anytime, but during the chat times you can be sure someone is there. Main says anyone with an interest in the subject and respect for the participants is welcome.

Is Transgenderism Wrong?

by Rev. Lauren René Hotchkiss

During the course of our lives many of us in the gender community have experienced a great deal of guilt around the issue of crossdressing. Beyond the usual fears most of us had growing up, wondering if it meant we were gay or wanted a sex change, we have also had to confront our feelings regarding whether it was morally "right."

The Bible actually says very little on the subject other than a brief reference in Deuteronomy 22:5 which states: "No woman shall wear an article of man's clothing nor shall a man put on a woman's dress; for those that do these things are abominable to the Lord your God." It is a quotation, however, that has been mistranslated and taken out of context from the original Aramaic text of the Torah, which in more literal translation reads: "No man shall put on a dress to enter the women's tent (fear of rape), nor shall a woman wear an article of man's clothing for the purposes of entering the holy temple (from which women were prohibited by ancient Judaic law)." It's change from a conditional to an absolute is reflective of both the political and moral climate of the times and of the biases of the translating body.

Some Biblical scholars believe that early Hebrew scripture passages such as this and a similar one which appears in Leviticus may have been a response to the Jewish people's experience during their exile into Babylonia in the sixth century B.C. Throughout the Near East at that time, priests in so-called "pagan" religions tried to emulate the preeminent mother-goddess figures by becoming effeminate and often dressing as women. Judaism, which depicted a God who was indisputably and exclusively male, had no place for such mother-goddess worship. The priests of Jehovah, therefore, outlawed the practice of men dressing as women to keep the captive Jews from participating in these "heathen" rituals.

The Bible, ever contradictory, also contains an interesting passage in Genesis 1:27-31: "God created humanity in God's own image; in the image of God they were each created male and female. And God blessed them.... And God saw that everything God had made was very good."

Paul seems to address the issue of polarity from the opposite perspective in his letter to the Galatians (Galatians 3:28): "There is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus."

A.C.I.M., not surprisingly, given its non-behavioral perspective and exclusive use of masculine gender, has nothing whatever to say about crossdressing. Just out of curiosity, I did a reference check of gender-related words with my A Course In Miracles computer program and came up with the following stats: the word "he," (and this includes the big HE), is mentioned 4240 times; "him/Him" 3045 times; his/His, 3959; man, 18; and man's, 1. On the flip side, "woman," "female," "she," "girl", "feminine," "daughter," and even "gender" scored zip. There is only one mention of "her," (M 78/82): "This terrible mistake about yourself the miracle corrects as gently as a loving mother sings her child to rest."

Somewhere during the course of the last three or four thousand years the whole subject of transgenderism was blown out of proportion and transformed into a societal taboo. The issue is not really one of what clothing we choose to wear upon our bodies, however, nor of the gender role we adopt -- I mean c'mon, God "couldn't care less," -- but of how we have been taught to feel about it. Objectively, then, it must be as "right" for us to express ourselves in one gender presentation as in another.

Human history is full of examples of those who chose to live in the opposite gender to the one in which they were born, but perhaps the spiritual aspect of transgenderism is best typified by the Native American transgenderists known as Berdaches. The Berdache were often respected spiritual leaders and healers thought to possess supernatural powers. They were revered for their ambigender status, and had the unique permission by tribal society to adopt the social roles of women, men, or both, by their own choice. Their greatest contribution to their culture, however, came from utilizing their special cross-gender insights to mediate disputes between men and women of the tribe. Similar

traditions can also be found in the Shamanistic cultures of the Ural-Altic peoples of northern Asia and Europe.

The societal separation of male and female is an interesting phenomenon, as it was very much an act of humanity rather than of God. The Almighty never decreed, as far as I'm aware, that things in life be segregated from each other as being either male or female behaviors. The fact that we accord certain rights and respect only to one "sex" while denying it the expression of emotion and display of more gentle behavior that we allow in the other seems of little value in any real sense.

In our culture, we are all brought up to believe that there are only two gender presentations allowed to us, and that they are inextricably tied to the genetic sex into which we are born. We come into this world as either "little boys" or "little girls" and are expected to live the rest of our lives in strict accordance to the narrowly defined gender roles that society has "assigned" to each sex. This is fine, in theory, were it not for the reality that for some of us it just doesn't work.

There is no one definitive reason why transgenderism occurs. Opinion is divided in the medical community as to whether the cause is hereditary, environmental, or due to physiological or psychological factors. In any case, most tend to agree that there is nothing psychiatry can do to "cure" transgendered behavior as it is not a mental illness. Studies have shown that it is not something that will go away with time, nor have efforts to give it up ever proven to be successful.

Although the COURSE tells us that the body is not real, a few medical "facts" about human reproduction are most revealing:

A new fetus has no sex characteristics during the first eight weeks of a pregnancy. Following this, we go through a stage where we are all essentially female fetuses, producing both male and female hormones. It is the predominance of estrogen or testosterone that make us male or female in anatomical structure. Chemically the difference between these

two compounds is very slight; a matter of four atoms of hydrogen and one of carbon. The difference then between "male" and "female" is far more delicate than we have been conditioned to believe.

Sexual development in the fetus is always biased toward female unless an extremely complex process of gender differentiation is imposed on the growth process. This gender differentiation process will normally be initiated only if the fetal cells have "y" chromosomes with fully functioning "SRY" segments.

Perhaps the clearest proof of this female bias is that both males and females have breast nipples. During and after puberty, elevated levels of estrogen will cause breast and nipple growth, in men as well as in women. Similarly, elevated levels of testosterone will cause beard and body hair growth and a lowering of the voice pitch in females as well as in males.

Fetal development reverts to female during any period when the gender differentiation process is interrupted. These interruptions can be caused by stress, poor nutrition, drugs, and even by deficiencies or abnormalities present within the mother's body. It is this gender differentiation process that produces, within all of us, physiological and psychological characteristics that are a blend of male and female traits. If the push of this differentiation process is strong, but not sufficiently strong to be completely accomplished, physical and/or psychological transgenderism or ambigenderism results.

When a child is born, the first question usually asked is "Is it a boy or a girl." If the answer is not clear, as in the case of physically intersexed individuals, surgery is usually performed so that they can be "assigned" to one sex or the other, so as not to upset the dualistic paradigm.

From birth, this paradigm is continually reinforced through a complex yet largely subliminal program of gender socialization. Although in the case of transgendered individuals, the gender role conditioning didn't quite "take," it was nonetheless apparently assimilated at a deep enough level that many of us feel we need to dress in the clothing of the opposite sex in order to give ourselves permission to display what we have compartmentalized as "feminine" or "masculine" qualities. This seems to indicate that in addition to the biological element, we all have the psycho-

logical and spiritual potential for both the feminine and the masculine within us. This being so, the concepts of male and female are not the "opposites" that we have been taught, but are, rather, compliments: two parts of one complete whole.

The realization for some of us, that we are not like others of our sex, often begins very early in life, manifesting as a sense of innate inappropriateness of being grouped with others of our so-called gender and not allowed behaviors which seem natural to us. Many of us at this age begin "borrowing" parent's or sibling's clothes and dressing up as often as opportunity permitted.

In my own life, though I was born male, I never did feel like a man. I've always felt more comfortable around women than I have around men, and have always had a strong need for feminine expression. Somehow femininity seemed more natural to me; it was masculinity that I had to "learn", and which always seemed forced.

Having both the feminine and the masculine within us, it follows that there must be a vast blending ground between the diametrically opposed concepts of man and woman; and yet the myth persists that there is not. No wonder that the two "sexes" often have such difficulty understanding each other when society has cast them into the role of "opposites." Perhaps its time we question the whole male/female relationship construct. Obviously it is not working when our language, our social and behavioral mores, our entire society with all its movies, books, and television programs is full of instances of the "opposite" sexes unable to relate to one another.

Interestingly, even when someone changes gender, there is still the expectation that they are supposed to trade in one set of behavioral and dress standards for another, rather than in any way integrating masculine and feminine qualities. Beyond the challenge of living a lifestyle for which we have not been trained or conditioned, there comes the further difficulty of integrating a relationship with a significant other into our lives and reconciling it with our transgendered lifestyle.

The desire to be in a relationship with someone with whom we can share our life is a basic human need, and not one which can be repressed without effect. Its lack can often contribute to feelings of loneliness and depression. Along with this often comes a fear of

Grace and Lace Letter International judgment and rejection by prospective partners due to our gender issues. This fear can be particularly intimidating when it involves a person or persons for whom we care a great deal.

Facing the seeming expectations of prospective partners, we often experience the dilemma of either choosing loneliness or being in a relationship where we must pretend to be something that we are not. This often develops into a sense of low self-esteem in regard to relationships, and, feeling that another could not be attracted to us, we keep ourselves from attracting a mate.

Though afraid of not being able to eventually find a relationship, we often come to a time in our lives when we can no longer pretend, realizing that whoever we one day become involved with, will have to be able to love us for who we are. Though we often feel very lonely, many of us feel that it is preferable to living a lie, and that it is better to wait for the right relationship, than to get involved in one that is not.

Perhaps aggravating the situation, is the popular misconception of all transgendered people as gay. Most people don't realize that there is a difference between sex and gender - the former being a biologic fact of birth, while the latter is a choice of presentation. According to a poll taken by the International Foundation for Gender Education, 2/3 to 3/4 of us, including your humble author, are heterosexual with the remaining percentile fairly evenly split between gay, bisexual, and asexual orientations.

Although there are periods when being alone can be a very enriching opportunity for growth and awareness by encouraging inner discovery of self, there are times when the loneliness seems almost too much to bear, and we would just like to have someone to be close to. I know that personally I have felt very sad sometimes when I consider the possibility that I may never again hear a woman say "I love you".

Sometimes it seems that it would be so much easier if we could just forget all this gender stuff, and just be "normal" (if one grants "normality's" existence beyond a societal consensus). Certainly it would remove a barrier that seems to exist between ourselves and others. As many times as we try to suppress our transgenderism, however, it keeps coming back. Most of us eventually realize

Grace and Lace Letter International.
that it is not something we can "give up,"
anymore than we can give up breathing. For
whatever reason, part of our learning and
growth process seems to lie in the exploration,
acceptance and integration of both the ying
and the yang of our being. "you can behave as
you think you should, but without entirely
wanting to do so. This produces consistent
behavior, but entails great strain." (T 25/29)

I have often wondered whether part of
our motivation in crossdressing stems from
the fact that we are perhaps subconsciously
trying to transform ourselves into the part of
our inner being from which we have separated
ourselves. We have been so conditioned to
believe that we must look outside of ourselves
in order to find someone with whom we can
become complete, though constantly disap-
pointed in the attempt, that we have lost sight
of the fact that wholeness comes from within.
Because of this misperception, we have found
it necessary to create this second person within
ourselves, and manifest them externally, in
order to fill a self-perceived void.

As important as a relationship is to most
of us, it is a fallacy to think that it, of itself,
will bring us happiness or a sense of completion.
A relationship, to be a positive expression of
love needs to not only be with someone with
whom we genuinely love, but who loves us for
who we truly are, not in spite of who we are.
It is what, in the COURSE, is referred to as the
difference between a special and a holy rela-
tionship -- i.e. two persons who are complete
unto themselves seeking further growth
through their commitment to one another rather
than "needing" or seeking "completion" from
one another. "And as the unholy relationship
is a continuing hymn of hate in praise of its
maker, so is the holy relationship a happy song
of praise to the Redeemer of relationships." (T
337/362)

One thing that I have noticed that has
shifted in me is the desperate "need" I once felt
around "having" to be in a relationship in
order to be happy. Though I sometimes feel
lonely, I don't ever again want to be in a
situation of having a partner with whom I must
pretend to be something that I am not, nor to
get into a relationship that is not right, out of
desperation.

Although it's true that the gender presen-
tation that many of us in the transgender
community adopt may not be consistent with
the accepted role for our anatomical sex, it is
equally true that the role that we have been
Fall 1998

conditioned to accept for ourselves is often
not in harmony with our spiritual truth. As
paradoxical as it may seem, it is a situation in
which one must live a lie, as others would term
it, in order to live one's own personal truth.
What this suggests to me is that rather than
being considered a losing proposition, trans-
genderism or ambigenderism can be seen in
the more positive light of expanding the
entire gamut of gender and sexual identity,
and opening the door to the forward path of
spiritual growth through the integration and
balancing of the masculine and the feminine
within us. "Healing always produces har-
mony, because it proceeds from integration."
(T 112/121)

Following this line of reasoning, it be-
comes clear that it takes as much rationaliza-
tion, albeit on a more subliminal or uncon-
scious level, to decide to live according to the
dictates of one's biological gender, as it does
to transition from one gender to the other. It
just appears easier to do so because it is
condoned and continually reinforced by soci-
ety, and so never questioned.

There is a tendency with the labels we use
to separate from each other, to see things in
terms of black and white. The reality, how-
ever, is that there is a wide continuum that
exists between such polarized extremes of gay
and straight; transsexual and transvestite; or
masculine and feminine. Within each such
label there is so much diversity and individu-
ality, so many individuals that do not neatly fit
the constructs of the definition, as to render it
useless. Even among the non-transgendered
there is such variety of supposedly gender-
specific behavior that there is little validity to
the viewpoint that "real women" or "real men"
don't do this or that. "The fact they have no
meaning in themselves is demonstrated by the
ease with which these labels change with
other judgments, made on different aspects of
experience." (T 596/641)

Beyond whatever stereotypes we use to
separate from one another, we are all one, and
neither the clothes we wear, our gender or
sexual preferences, nor the color of our skin,
are really of any importance. What is impor-
tant is that we are all here for a purpose; to
discover the unity of all people, and realize the
connectedness we all share.

The label of "crossdresser" or "transves-
tite," seems to be a particularly powerful but-
ton for some people, even inciting certain
individuals to acts of aggression or violence.

Though it's convenient to place the cause of
the problem outside of ourselves, until we are
willing to see how much has to do with
personal responsibility, in deciding to make a
difference by making the conscious decision
to examine our own biases and judgments
with the help of the Holy Spirit and putting
energy into eliminating them, the situation
will not alter.

On the broader scale, the existence of
aggression, violence, and war may have much
to do with the sublimation of the full gamut of
the feminine/masculine balance within each
of us. Perhaps the evolution of the human race
lies in our bringing to peaceful co-existence
the male and female within ourselves. As we
learn to accept that we are both, and begin to
integrate rather than divide the two, possibly
we will find the peace and unity that God
intended as our birthright, and no longer feel
the need to strive against one another. "The
ego always seeks to divide and separate. The
Holy Spirit always seeks to unify and heal." (T
110/118)

It is often said that members of the gender
community are not like other women and
men, as they have neither the socialization,
physiognomy, or conditioning of the one, nor
the psychological compatibility of the other,
but such is often the way of change. Whether
this involves, as it does for many of us, wear-
ing the clothing of the opposite sex, or in just
learning to see from others' perspectives, it is
all a part of our growth as extensions of God.
Possibly, in time, the whole concept of mascu-
line and feminine will no longer be necessary.
As we develop in spirit, perhaps we will get
closer and closer to the unity of ourselves and
a schism will no longer exist between the male
and female essences of our being.

We are now entering a changing age, a
time when long venerated sex roles are being
challenged. For the first time in recorded
history we are afforded the rare opportunity to
integrate our hitherto separate halves into a
cohesive oneness; to explore, man and woman,
the balancing of our male and female energy
and to experience, what has, up until now,
been considered the exclusive domain of the
"opposite" sex. Perhaps, for those of us who
live a transgendered or androgynous exist-
ence, there is a reason why we were born as we
were: to explore gender integration on both an
outer and inner manifestational level. In the
process of doing this, we learn to become true
to who we are, more at peace with ourselves,
and more able to be of service to others. "To

heal or to make joyous is therefore the same as to integrate and to make one." (T 66/72)

Transgenderism is not always an easy path to follow. It is often fraught with challenges of self-acceptance and the perceived judgments of others, as well as difficulties in finding and maintaining relationships. Though some may regard it as a choice of loneliness, however, I feel that for those of us who feel guided to this lifestyle, it is a choice for freedom.

Perhaps, one day, the time will come when anatomy is no longer the arbiter of permissible dress and behavior, and it will no longer matter what we choose to wear, nor how we wish to behave, as long as we do no harm to others; when we will no longer have to think in terms of crossdressing or of expressing the appropriate gender, but of just being ourselves

I have always had a deep appreciation of spirituality and reverence for God, which has deepened in recent years with my study of A COURSE IN MIRACLES. I feel, also, that there is a connection between my spiritual faith and my gender journey. Though initially identifying as a transvestite and briefly going

through a stage when I wondered if I was becoming transsexual, I now realize that I was born into the body that I have for a purpose: to accept and integrate the male and the female within myself and to be a teacher and learner concerning inner balance.

I believe that I have grown as a person and in my ability to love, through the acceptance of who I am. I was much less at peace when I did not allow myself to express the true spirit of who I was. It interfered with my ability to connect with others from the heart. Once I began to open myself up to the totality of my being, however, I felt myself becoming a more complete and open person.

Whether we believe in God, the power of the universe, or the Great Goombah is of little importance. It is faith that is important. Faith in ourselves and in the path that God has given us. Isn't it time that we accepted ourselves and respected each other for whatever personal spiritual truth we are called upon to follow?

Am I advocating a transgendered lifestyle? Absolutely not. It adds a difficulty and a complexity to life that I would not wish on anybody. If there is anything that I hope you take away from this article, however, it is

Grace and Lace Letter International an awareness that for those of us that are transgendered, it is no more a choice than being born male or female, or straight or gay. Perhaps you might even find yourself experiencing a little more understanding, empathy and sense of oneness the next time you encounter a transgendered person. And if that's the case then this article has been worthwhile.

©1995, Rev. Lauren René Hotchkiss, Albany, CA [Reprinted by permission.]

[This article appeared in the March 1995 (Vol.9, No.1) issue of *MIRACLES MONTHLY*. It is 4,247 words long (~28 K). It is copyrighted by Rev. Lauren René Hotchkiss and can not be reprinted without advanced written permission. *MIRACLES MONTHLY* is published by the Community Miracles Center in San Francisco, CA. The C.M.C. is supported solely by people just like you who give donations and purchase books and tapes through us. We invite your support of this A COURSE IN MIRACLES healing center. PHONE: (415)621-2556, URL: <http://www.miracles-course.org>

[Rev. Lauren René Hotchkiss c/o Community Miracles Center, 2269 Market St., San Francisco, CA, 94114]

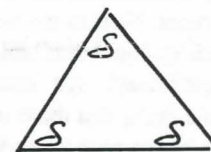
Send e-mail: miracles@earthlink.net



Editorial Statement

The Grace and Lace Letter is a Christian publication for transgendered persons. Our motto is "Where Charity and Love Prevail..." In keeping with our motto, we will not publish material bashing any transgendered or Christian person or group, nor will we publish any ad hominem argument. We hope to bring the message of God's unconditional love and forgiveness, as shown to us once and for all by the saving life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to our transgendered brothers and sisters. We welcome personal testimonies, teachings from God's Holy Scriptures, prayers and poems and hymns, cartoons and humorous stories, accounts of events affecting Christian transgendered persons, and messages of hope and inspiration. Our goal is to praise and worship God and bring His healing love to His children.

CROSSDRESSERS... You are not alone!



the Society for the Second Self, inc.

- *An educational and social support organization for heterosexual crossdressers, spouses and families
- *Quarterly journal
- *Local chapters with monthly newsletters
- *MailForwarding Service and Membership Directory
- *Quarterly newsletter for spouses and partners
- *Big Sister Program for individual support
- *Online forums for crossdressers and spouses

For information write:

Tri-Ess, 8880 Bellaire B2 #104, Houston TX 77036
Telephone: 713-349-8969
E-Mail: TRIESSINFO@aol.com

Dear Frances

Recently I experienced a few months of fear and hate that I had forgotten existed. During this time I shared my fear and confusion with several friends. One of these people was my Minister. After this all had passed, and I told her about it's passing she asked me to write an article for the church newsletter. The following is the article as it will appear in "Heart Lines," the newsletter for The Center For Creative And Conscious Living (a United Church of Religious Science). This will also be published in "Alpha-Bits" in October. Oh, the photos are in the mail.

--- Janyne

Answered Prayer

by Janyne

Why am I surprised when it works? I have known it works for some time now but when the power of directed prayer is clearly visible it still is a bit of a shock to my system. A shock I gladly accept and look forward to. But still there is that little part of me that says, "Wow, it really worked!"

Several years ago I came to terms with being transgendered. If you don't know me or don't know what transgendered means, I will give you a brief lesson. I am a genetic male who is blessed with a feminine spirit, and I choose to honor that spirit in dress and manner. In short, I live most of my life as a woman. In doing that I know that I am expressing the joy and beauty of my gift from GOD. For the last several years I have lived in this manner and have enjoyed a level of acceptance that is almost unbelievable even to me.

I live in a mostly quiet Long Beach neighborhood, a little crowded but friendly and filled with the voices of children of many races and cultures playing together free from the prejudices and fear they may learn as they get older. Next to my home is an apartment building. The type of building referred to, here in Long Beach, as a "cracker box unit". It has all the faults that these units have: too many people, not enough parking, too much turn over and not enough room for the children to play. But in spite of these drawbacks, the people that live there do the best they can and for the most part remain upbeat hard working friendly folks. I have lived in my place for just over two years now and have blended into my neighborhood. I come and go freely and am accepted by the shop keepers and residents.

But to this world of peace and tolerance there recently came a dose of fear and prejudice that I had come close to forgetting existed. A family moved into the apartment building next to me, and within a week or two

of their arrival my life was threatened, my car was vandalized and my mail box was filled with garbage and vile substances. My first reaction was fear. I went to the police and explained the circumstances to them. They were unable to and seemed unwilling to help. I called my lawyer and was advised to move. On two separate occasions the husband and father in this family threatened to beat me up and then to kill me. The wife and mother verbally assaulted me at every chance she got.

Their children took up the call and would stand outside my door and shout vile threats and curses. They took to following me and I genuinely feared for my safety. I attempted to talk to these people but it was to no avail. The best effort I achieved was that the husband took a swing at me. I was able to step out of his reach and miss out on the experience of street fighting in front of my own house. These people in a short period of time had brought me back to a place of doubt and low self worth that I thought was forever gone.

With no where to look I called Reverend Betsy Elliot, just to talk and to hear a friendly voice. In the next few days I spoke with many friendly voices, Reverend Diane, Rose Genterman and several of my friends at our church. Betsy and I treated for understanding and clarity, Diane and Rose treated for me and helped me stay clear. I attempted to see these neighbors in the light of God. Prayer went out for me and my neighbors. I continued to walk my path, to live my life as whatever example of spirit that I am.

Then the children seemed to get used to me, they learned my name and said hello when they saw me. They asked intelligent questions and we shared conversations. One day a boy came to my door and apologized for putting spoiled fruit in my mail box. Then one afternoon the woman in this family said hello, and

we had a small conversation. About a week later we met on the street. She stopped me and asked if she could speak with me. I said of course, we talked about easy things for a few minutes, my dress, my car and my approaching wedding. I then asked her what had caused her change of heart about me. She said, "If you never spoke to me again, I would understand. I am so sorry for the way I treated you. You are a good neighbor and a nice person. You never did anything to us and you are so brave and quiet as you just go about your business." She went on to tell me she had talked to the women where she works about me, and they said to her, "Have you ever given this person a chance? Have you gotten to know her, to see what she is like?" And of course she hadn't, yet. We talked for a little more. I was able to tell her a small amount about me and learn a little about her. The father still doesn't speak to me, but he does give a small nod or wave in response to my smile and hello.

There are several explanations for the change these folks went through: they just got used to me, they were afraid of a law suit, they saw that I wasn't going to change just for them, or whatever. But I know what it was. Prayer Treatment, the power of God doing good in this mostly quiet Long Beach Neighborhood.

When we deal with fear in any form be it prejudice, anger or hate, and that fear in turn puts us in our own fear state, go back to the source, God. With the help of your Minister, Practitioner and friends that share your spiritual path, treat and pray and hold Love in your heart. Love is the only answer to fear. With Love you can continue your path, be the real you and know that you are safe in a world surrounded by God. And don't be surprised when it works.

GOD DON'T MAKE NO JUNK

BY BECKY ALLISON

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.

--Jeremiah 1: 5

I know I'm somebody 'Cause God don't make no junk.

--Ethel Waters

Is biology destiny?

Transsexual Christians often hear the argument raised against changing their bodies: "God created you to be a man [or a woman] and that is how you will always be; how you should remain."

Prior to my transition, I was in counseling with a Christian psychologist. He had known me for years; we had taught classes together, and he knew I was sincere in my faith and my desire to follow God's will. But here I was, telling him how I had the mind and identity of a woman. It was difficult for him to accept.

"I just can't believe," he told me, "that God would make such a mistake."

I was ready for this. It was a concept I had struggled with already. "What would you say," I answered him, "if I told you I don't think it is a mistake."

He was speechless for a moment as this idea sank in. He had never considered that God would create a person with the body of one sex and the mind of the other. The understanding of this idea allowed him to accept the reality of my transsexualism. God does not make mistakes, but people have always tried to explain those persons who are different from the norm. Sometimes the explanations involve punishment for sin.

His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus said, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

--John 9: 2-3

"Birth defects" are very familiar to me as a physician. I see persons who were born with abnormal openings between the chambers of

the heart. Other persons have clefts in the upper lip and palate, or other severe facial deformities. They are not due to sin, and neither are the group of abnormalities seen in persons who are physically intersexed.

We live in a time when surgical correction is possible for all these defects. No one who examines the facts in a loving spirit would prohibit any of these persons from obtaining surgery. Modern medical knowledge is one of God's gifts to our age.

Why is transsexualism not regarded in the same way? I suspect it is because the defect with which we are born is not visible, and because it involves the greatest subject of taboo in Western civilization - the subject of sex.

There is strong evidence from current research which indicates differences in male and female brain structure, and some studies are showing that transsexual persons often have brain structure resembling the sex with which they identify. This physical evidence confirms what we have known all our lives - that our transsexualism is not a choice, it is a biologic trait we cannot "cure."

Since the structure of the brain cannot be changed, the only way to achieve congruity is to change the body. In our age these changes are possible with medical and surgical advances.

But as Christians, are we free to pursue these changes? Or must we remain as we were born?

I can find nothing to indicate that we must remain so - neither in Scripture (Jesus did heal the blind man, after all) or in the parallel experiences of other medical conditions.

A Christian transsexual person who has made life decisions which involve other persons - marriage and children - faces the decision whether to pursue change or to remain in the family relationship. Perhaps God will give this person the strength to remain in the relationship. Many persons have done so during the years their children are young.

But this choice is made for the sake of one's family, not because God wills us to remain forever unfulfilled. For most of us there comes a time, years later, when the decision must be faced again.

The "work of God can be displayed" (John 9:3) in our lives as we deal with this decision. We can trust God and rely on His grace to sustain us through the difficulties of a transition few people ever have to face. God has not promised to remove the difficulties, but to be with us through them.

When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

--Isaiah 43:2

He is with us. But we will pass through the waters; we will walk through the fire.

Jeremiah knew that God had created him and had a plan for his life. It must have been hard to see sometimes. Jeremiah preached God's message to Judah for forty years, and no one paid any attention to him. He was rejected by the prosperous, "religious" ruling class. He was imprisoned and placed in solitary confinement. Despite despair and depression, he maintained his faith in God to deliver him.

By today's standards, Jeremiah would have been a nuisance and a failure. We may feel the same way about our lives. I believe that by accepting our transsexualism as God's plan for our lives, and acting appropriately to resolve the dilemma, we can show the work of God in our lives and receive His blessings and grace.

Sayings from the Sibylet*

"TG Christians in England (and increasingly in Wales) Is There Something in the Water?" - very much a personal view from Caroline

The Sibyls have been having a lively time of it over the last few months. Three of our number have had gender reassignment surgery, one (moi) has transitioned to present full time as a woman, we've got into the newspapers, several Sibyl meetings have happened, and there have been the continuing struggles and joys that accompany our lives. It is good at such times to have a support network, and that, more than anything, is what the Sibyls aim to provide. I find that many TG groups are bedevilled by fractious argument; we are often an angry and strong willed (no, let's be honest - stubborn is the better word!) group of people. One only needs to read through the various internet forums for TG people to see this anger coming through. To date the Sibyls have managed to be different; there is a unity, humility and love that covers many differences. Please pray that as we become a larger group, and therefore more formal, that we manage to maintain this spirit; it offers a real witness to other members of the TG community.

We have given more details of the newspaper story elsewhere. The news, such as it was - for it really was an abuse of an interview and bore little resemblance to anything that I could recognise as fact - broke on the Sunday that my church was told of my impending change of presentation. I remember feeling worried: What would people think? Answer: They hardly noticed! Virtually nobody has commented to me about this article. I wonder if transgendered people are becoming less newsworthy? In a way this would, I think, be good for us. Transgendered people could take their place as part of the rich tapestry that is human life, and not be considered as freaks.

On a personal note, my own story this summer has been one of helping family, friends, and colleagues through my own change. I have been struck by two things. First, how supportive have been people to whom I have managed to speak. Secondly, how reticent are others are to question something that troubles them. Additionally, it seems that the more "apparently" secure in their faith some are the less able they are to

handle differences. Apart from my friends, it has been some "problem" members of my church who have made me feel welcome. I wonder if there is a lesson here for us. Paul told the Phillippians to consider others better than themselves. I have been challenged as to who that means for me.

The next formal meeting of the Sibyls will be over the weekend of 24/26 October, when we will be gathering at St. Katherine's, a retreat house in the East End of London. This will be a time of talk, prayer, talk, worship, eating and wine and . . . oh have I mentioned talk? It goes without saying that any TG Christians visiting the UK at that time would be very welcome to join us. Cost is about 75GBP for the weekend with reductions for shorter stays. If you could come, then do contact us via:

BM Sibyls
London, WC1N 3XX

Dear All,

Well, what a time we've had since the last newsletter! We made headlines in The Sunday Times, two Sibyls have had surgery (see Jay's thoughts on the process later in the newsletter) and you have a new editor! Whilst Jay is out of action I have agreed to produce the Sibyls' newsletter. How long for? That depends upon how much Jay enjoys her new-found freedom! If you can think of a better name for the newsletter then just send it in. The Sibylet is a play on our name and The Tablet, a Roman Catholic paper. I'm sure that we can do better. Please have a go...

We need more contributors to the newsletter. They are coming but Jay has again done more than her fair share of the writing. I'm not sure that I can keep up with her, so let me encourage you all to write something. A newsletter is pretty dull if it only contains news and views from the 'centre'. This is how we can all keep each other in touch with our lives, which is crucial if we are to pray for and support each other.

So what is it for? Essentially it's about sharing our strengths, weaknesses (do be careful here, confidences are lost once you're in print!), the good and bad things that are happening. The newsletter keeps us in touch with each other, the group activities and offers a lift as it plonks through the letterbox.

So what to write about? Here are a few headings as hints:

- Church involvement, have you any stories of acceptance or rejection by churches?

- How do we get involved and accepted (other than looking like Dana International, the winner of the Eurovision song contest-huh! Anyone with a waist that thin should be force-fed chocolate and cake for years!)

- Any particular spiritual insights that arise from our transgenderedness? I already have a couple of moving pieces from Abigail and Deirdre.

- Spiritual props: What's meant a great deal to you over a period of time or just recently? Perhaps a song, a bible verse, a quiet place, anything.

- What excites you at the moment - good or bad? This may have nothing to do with transgender issues, for that is not the only issue in our lives! For example, I'm getting involved in a series of conversations about creating community within the church. What strikes me is how large some of the implications are. What excites me is the possibility for Christian witness through change of lifestyle and values.

- Lest we get too serious, what silly things have happened to us that made us laugh, at least once we had got over the embarrassment?! I once filled a large shopping bag, one of those that fill the trolley, and took it to the car. The Androcur had done its job, I was no longer as strong as I had been and couldn't lift it out of the trolley. A strapping 6-foot 'bloke' looking for a granny to help lift the shopping!

- Anything else that gets our pens, typewriters or word processors buzzing!

BM Sibyls, London, WC1N 3XX
I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

With love
Caroline Ramsey

The Sibyls by Jay

First, let me give a big welcome to Caroline, who is editing the Newsletter for the first time. I really look forward to this. It's going to be fun to read and there is no doubt in my mind that she will do a first class job. (Editorial blush!) I do wish her well and every success.

It is a joy that people are coming forward to help in the various thing that need doing to keep the Sibyls on the road. As a group, we are steadily growing and our numbers now exceed fifty. This is a long way from the original idea when we thought we would be lucky if we had a dozen or so. We are at the point when we will have to organise a little more formally, involving more people in the various jobs, perhaps a constitution, perhaps officers....

This is more pressing in that I am still hoping to move to Pembrokeshire. Whilst it won't stop me being very involved in Sibyls' affairs, it will restrict me, and others will have to step into the breach. It will also mean that meetings in Surrey will stop, unless anyone else feels able to take over.

So now is your chance! If you want to be involved in the running of the group, step forward! If you have any ideas for doing so or for the way forward, now is the time to speak.

We have one piece of excellent news. Thanks to the good offices of Rev Malcolm Johnson, the Delamere Trust have made us a grant of £500 to use in helping those who cannot afford to attend meetings. We intend to set up a tiny committee to supervise this money and subsidise those who find it difficult to come to St Katherine's for financial reasons. If you do need help, to fund - partially or fully - attendance, please let me know. We will have to eke the fund out, but it is there to be used. Although this gift is very generous, we should be looking after our own and should be raising money within the group to help those less fortunate.

Again, we need to think about the introductions of subscriptions, including keeping the fund going. Whatever happens, the future is looking good. We have a strong and enthusiastic membership and, with God's help, we will go forward. What other TG group made it to the front page of The Sunday Times?

The Sunday Times Article Comments by Jay, Val and David

We made it to the front page of The Sunday Times earlier this summer and into the middle of the "People" and "News of the World". I was suitably impressed with the quality of the reporting in what is supposed to be a quality paper. You may be able to do better than me, but I managed to find four errors in the title alone! "Secret Sect of Transsexual Priests shakes Church" Well, the Sibyls is not a sect, we're not secret, we are not full of priests, except in the sense of the priesthood of all believers - but I don't think that the journalist was into Luther - and finally the notion that our little group could shake the church is akin to the idea of an ice cube shaking an ocean going liner! I was aghast that a supposedly reputable paper as the The Sunday Times should be so slovenly in their editorial check up of a front-page article. Any way there is more to be said about the aftershock of this piece, so I'll leave that to Val and David.

**"Sibyls lose their virginity"
(or something like that!) - Val**

Where were you on Sunday 31 May, the day this 'secret sect' of ours was splashed all across the front of the Sunday Times? I was in Leeds, visiting relatives, and that's where Kate Bishop tracked me down. Observer-reader that I am, I hadn't seen the piece, so Kate read it over to me, word by word.

Sibyls always had potential as a media story - we discussed this at a meeting a year ago. I said then that, as an experienced media consultant, I would always be available if help were needed. So, action stations. First priority - involving me, Jay, Suzanne and Kate - was to agree on a position. Our aims were:

- protect any vulnerable individuals
- defend Sibyls
- project a positive message about transgendered Christians.

Over the next 24 hours, I spoke with journalists from the The Times, The Daily Mail and The Guardian, plus a researcher from BBC TV's Heart of the Matter. The Times & The Daily Mail wanted names, places - no deal. The Guardian asked for some background, so I wrote a 1000-word feature. After two weeks, they decided not to use it. As I write, it's with The Independent. Their religious affairs correspondent may follow it up, depending on what, if anything, comes out of the Lambeth Conference.

Last week I had a meeting with the television researcher. We talked for a long time and he could well be the right person to project that positive message. He would like to look at a longer format programme, part of a different series. It will be a long road and we must tread carefully. The process of creating good broadcast television can be both seductive and divisive. We must understand at all times what we're doing and why. Sibyls has my commitment to help in any way possible, but particularly in respect of any media opportunity or crisis.

**"From the other end of the
Investigative report.." - David**

One of the ways in which I try to repay the support that I have received from the Diocese in my search for transgender truth is to make myself available to anyone seeking information in this field from a Christian perspective. Mostly that means theological students, and clergy seeking to understand more about a particular parishioner. Occasionally however it is a media contact. I was turned down for an 'Esther' when they discovered I wasn't a Bible-bashing anti (unfair to Bibles) but when The Sunday Times approached me it wasn't unique.

What was unique was the degree of interest shown. In the end I suppose we spent around an hour talking, and of course that means a large amount of information was transmitted, including some outline information about Sibyls. I remember mentioning that we didn't advertise in the general press, which appeared in print as a 'secret sect'. I said I was in contact from time to time with around forty transgendered ministers and monks, of whom the seventeen Anglicans were picked on. I said there were ministers in Sibyls from which we were turned into a clerically dominated group. I said I had received a draft submission to the Lambeth Conference, which they later told me had not been used by the Lambeth Conference, and then printed otherwise. Finally I have heard a story from a senior Churchman that there were two TS post-op priests in sector ministries. I said I couldn't confirm it, and the more I think about it the less plausible it seems, but it was the lead point. Ah, well...

God uses fire to separate the wheat from the chaff. Fire also tempers steel. Sometimes when we are in the midst of fire it is hard to remember God's purpose and control in our lives. I thought you might find this of value. The message is from Terri Main of Evangel Tabernacle Assembly of God Church in Fresno, California.
...Kori

When you've been through the fire, the sparks don't hurt so much!

One of my favorite Old Testament stories is that of the Hebrew Children and the fiery furnace. Certainly, this is a grand story of God's deliverance. Just as a review, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were three Hebrews who worked in the palace of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. They were sort of civil servants.

Well, the King decided that he would impose on all his people sort of a state-ordered religious practice. He set up a huge idol (some historians believe it was of himself) to be worshipped when he had musicians play a certain tune. Our trio were the only ones who would not bow to the idol. Just as an aside, there were probably other Jews working for the king, but only Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had the courage not to bow. The king gave them a second chance saying, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, do ye not worship my gods, nor worship the golden image I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery and dulcimer and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace: and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

Because Nebuchadnezzar knew his gods were incapable of such a feat he assumed Jehovah to be equally incapable. The Hebrew Children, though, stood their ground saying, "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; but if not, be it known unto thee, O king that we will not serve thy gods, nor

worship the golden image which thou has set up." Well, we all know the story from there. The music sounds. Our boys remain standing. The king throws them into the furnace.

The only thing that is burned is their bonds. They are joined by Jesus in the fire. (There is a lesson in and of itself). The king calls them out and gives them each promotions. We never hear from them again. They go back to their jobs and live simple ordinary lives after that. And yet, such an experience could not have left them unchanged.

I like to imagine a scene about six months after this miracle. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are working at the palace and Shadrach groans and throws down his quill and says, "It's impossible. We need that shipment of grain from the southern provinces by this winter, but those governors down there are trying to push the price up. The king says nothing doing. And I'm supposed to figure this whole thing out!" But I see Meshach smile and say, "Shad, remember the fire." Then all three of them have a good laugh and get back to work.

The word for Salvation in the Greek means both saved and delivered. We certainly are saved out of our sins, and we are saved from Hell. But we are also constantly being delivered from our own fiery furnaces. We all face problems. Some of us face things we don't see any way out of. We face illness, family difficulties, financial problems, persecution, emotional or physical pain.

Most of us who have been saved for a significant length of time can look back and see many times that God has delivered us from problems that have crossed our paths. Some of us are fortunate enough to be able to look back

and see places where we have faced extraordinary difficulties, problems which had the potential of destroying us physically, emotionally or spiritually, and where God intervened and brought us through those difficulties. Why we are fortunate is that, like our imaginary conversation in the Babylonian counting room, we can remember the fire when the ordinary challenges of living arise. When you've been through the fire, the sparks don't hurt so much!

So, when my car breaks down or I'm having trouble paying bills or I'm fighting a cold or I think somebody doesn't like me, I can just recall some of the major difficulties I've faced in the past and see the hand of God in them and realize that my God who delivered me out of those things is capable of delivering me out of what is facing me today.

Indeed, I can begin seeing the problems as opportunities to see miracles happen in my life. Off hand, I can think of no great miracle in the Bible which wasn't in response to a problem. If you want to see miracles in your life, you have to face problems. Otherwise, you will live a comfortable life devoid of the miraculous. As the old saying goes, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity."

Each time you face a difficulty, each time Satan launches an attack, each time you turn back the assault with the help of God you become stronger. You trust more and more to God's deliverance in times past. At times our armor takes some hits. It gets battle scarred. It gets dented and scratched. At times that shield of faith seems like it is about to crack in two. That's the very time when Jehovah Shua — God our Salvation rides in on a white horse and delivers us out of the situation. And those in the world see this salvation and our testimony is strengthened. Because in spite of the dents and scars and cracks, the armor holds and at the end of the battle we "stand ready for the next battle."

Inspiration On-Line is a ministry of Evangel Tabernacle Assembly of God Church, Fresno, California.



LORD...
we thank you.