

The Sweetheart Connection

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Winter, 1998

Volume 6, Issue 1

*Attending the
Holiday En-
Femme was
the best
thing I ever
did for
myself*

S.P.I.C.E.

VI

Jul 15-19,

1998

Atlanta

Cruisin' and Dressin'

**A Review
by Onnalee**

The Sovereign of the Seas, flagship of the Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, delayed its departure two hours on Friday, January 16, in order to accommodate two plane-loads of guests whose flights were delayed by rough weather. Subsequent conversations revealed almost all on board had experienced "bumpy" flights to Miami.

Tri-Ess members gathered the night before in the Wyndham Hotel sharing drinks, memories and then a delectable dinner in the hotel's elegant restaurant. Friday morning the cruise line was in a lobby to ensure quick, hassle-free boarding of the ship with a credit-card sized boarding pass that would enable each of us to do ANYthing we wanted when aboard once that pass was backed up with a credit card. My "escort" succeeded in losing his within 90 minutes of receipt, but RCCL was ready for that, too. (The Pier Supervisor invited me to deny him access, if I so chose!)

A buffet lunch was offered to all on the "WindJammer" deck; on the 11th deck!! (That's right--deck eleven!! counting UP from the water line!) Most of us wandered and explored like newly moved cats as we waited for our luggage to appear at our cab-

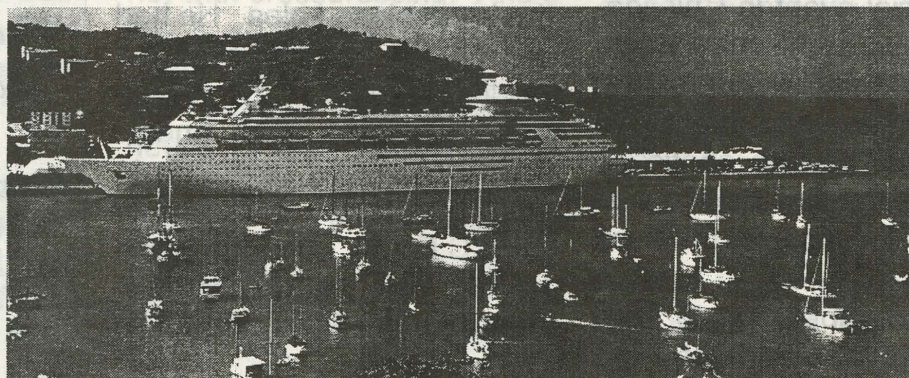
ins (smaller than we thought, experience taught they were roomier than perceived -- GOOD design).

I was the onliest one of our group who was on 11 forward when we left port about seven p.m. v-e-r-y slowly. This ship is HUGE. 75,000 tons displacement, 2200 passengers and 800 crew. There are two pools aft of the WindJammer; a quietly elegant cocktail lounge overlooked the pools from deck 14. [Our experience is a 28 foot sloop; ergo, we had trouble believing the thing actually floated, much less MOVED! But then we have the same problem with 747 aircraft after years of flying light planes. "All illusion, done with mirrors and projectors!"]

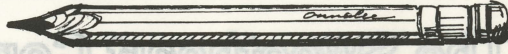
Peggy had our group together in the Kismet dining room for the second seating of meals. The first dinner had an Italian theme; the wait staff was impressive in their courtesy and SPEED of attendance to our every need and desire. This is the way to get spoiled!

Morning found us docked in Nassau harbor, with the whole day to prowl and explore. New Providence Island and Paradise Island form the harbor that will accommodate up to

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Editor's Blue Pencil



Going to and attending the annual Tri-Ess convention, the "Holiday en Femme", was the single most important thing I have EVER done for just me. This statement was delivered by a chapter member at a recent meeting and it took a full three minutes for that person to get it said between strangled sobs and visible tears.

That such a statement was made with so much attached emotion SHOWING would stun to silence almost any group of "guys". But the silence was not so much one of embarrassment as patient compassion for a fellow sufferer of the pain of self-discovery and realization.

I remember the state of determined courage mustered in the face of nearly debilitating fear and anxiety exhibited by more than this one gentleman as preparations to attend the annual Tri-Ess convention were formulated in 1996. More than one member paid the price of the ticket and forsook the pleasure of attending that special event in Chicago. Even I had some misgivings, as I am still not all that fond of touring around with a formidable "maiden auntie"; it would be the first time out of the gate for the two of us as such.

What enabled me to forebear the avowed distaste was

the prospect of seeing the number of truly fine and lovely friends that I have developed over the several years of S.P.I.C.E. attendance. Being with those people was of greater importance and value to me than any imagined discomfort of being with Sofronia Anne. Besides, we had negotiated some boundaries of interaction while AT the convention before we even agreed to send our money. Once we checked into our room, (two bags for me, five for him!) got registered with the convention and had a look around to see whom we knew, the relaxation and joy set in and proceeded to build. As chapter members arrived, we were pleased to introduce them to others. It was as satisfying to me to watch the blossoming of frightened friends as it is to watch a child do well at the school pageant and win genuine applause.

It was the desire to have his "sisters" experience the same liberating Holiday en Femme joy he had that drove the impassioned plea. He had been to the Fair and seen the world beyond. Such expanded vision and understanding will be available to you in Atlanta this July at S.P.I.C.E. VI. See the world beyond your current dilemma. Come to the Fair. Come to S.P.I.C.E. VI.

The Sweetheart Connection is published four times yearly. No boundary trashing. No bashing of any kind.

Our guideline for every issue will be that which shapes productive resolution to many problems:

1. What is going on?
2. Who's in charge?
3. What do you want?
4. Where do we go from here?

Each quarterly issue will deal with all four questions but will focus on one question in turn.

Subscription costs are: \$12 yearly for four issues, or a wife/partner may join Tri-Ess separately from her partner for a cost of \$10. She will receive membership and the Sweetheart Connection. If she chooses to receive The Femme Mirror, her annual cost will be \$25. Letters, comments and articles are encouraged and may be sent to the editor:

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from CDSO/10.15.97

"...I've given some thought to this idea of "gifted". . . Anything that contributed to me living my life better, more compassionately, with more understanding about myself and others or increased my acceptance of myself and others I consider a gift and I appreciate it. When I apply these criteria to my husband being a crossdresser I have to acknowledge that it fulfills all of them."

"I look back at when I didn't think this way and I realize that I was blaming the crossdressing for my hurt and sadness and dissatisfaction when in reality all of that was connected to the secrecy, shame, lies and deceit around his actions. When we cleared all of those up and came up with a way to live clearly and openly, I no longer felt those old feelings. Facing our reality exactly as it is, the truth about the crossdressing, my fear of what others would say, my unhealthy responsibility for his actions, my mistaken view of his behavior being a reflection of me, his fear of being rejected if he told the truth, facing all this and more has freed both of us to focus on who we want to be separately and what kind of relationship we want to create."

"I had always thought of myself as an accepting person, but I discovered that I had conditions on [my] self and other[s] acceptance and since we've faced our truths I have

a whole new level of acceptance in my heart for human beings coming in all kinds of shapes and sizes and clothes! It is very clear to me that it is the shame and the accompanying behaviors of withholding, lying and deceit that are the root causes of hurt in our relationships. Shame will always be at the root of other compulsive behaviors with our sexuality and identity."

There were some questions [on the CDSOlist] about pictures and focus on the CD behaviors. . .

"It reminded me that when we started dealing with S.'s CDing openly, I was struck by the fact that the behaviors he was engaging in, the make-up and dress-up stuff was all being done in the way that I did it as an adolescent. I mentioned this to him and we've had a number of talks from this developmental perspective that he may be going through an adolescent phase with the behavior now being out in the open, no more secrets, no more "need" to hide it. I've observed that people can get stuck in adolescence in a number of areas of life, why not with crossdressing. And if this is so, tell the truth, learn about the needs of the self and balance them with the needs in relationship. Being willing to consciously take responsibility for our maturing process has made a huge difference for us."

Suzanne

from EnFemme, the Beta Gamma Chapter Newsletter, December, 1997

Is crossdressing really a "Gender Gift"? It certainly is about Gender, somehow or other, so that part fits. But is it a Gift? I certainly didn't order it, request it or pay for it but I've got it; therefore I'd say it was a Gift.

Like most gifts, it may or may not be welcome to the recipient or those around him. When the husband receives a longed for stuffed and mounted moose head with full rack as an inheritance, his wife may not appreciate it beyond its monstrosity of size. When she "gifts" him with a Technicolor "hand-knitted" sweater with uneven sleeve lengths, he may not care for his "gift" either.

Most crossdressers are NOT comfortable with the fact that they were born to be feminine men. It doesn't fit the expectations of parents, wives, children, relatives, employers or the guys at the corner bowling alley. Unfortunately, it's the way they are and nobody, but NOBODY can ever change it. The only thing we surely know about crossdressing: It NEVER goes away. It is a part of us as surely as is our eye color. We can change the appearance of our eyes from blue to brown with contact lenses just as we can wear clothing appropriate to a hunting trip in Alaska, but that DOES NOT in any way change who we really are.

Most wives are as happy to learn of their husband's "gift" as they would be to learn he had

some incurable disease, or had permanently lost his employability, or was sterile. When they learn that it is NOT going to go away, things get worse. True, there are some wives who are happy to be married to CDs and even enjoy helping their husbands express their feminine selves at home, in public and even in the bedroom. However, these women are a small minority.

Why? It's quite simple. CDs who do not accept themselves as they really are look for a way to change themselves into "normal" men. The most obvious way to do this is to marry a "real" woman who absolutely WON'T put up with such nonsense. The CD who does not accept himself will NOT look for a wife who will accept his crossdressing. How could he? He wouldn't recognize her if she hit over the head with a shovel. The result can be a marriage between a CD ashamed of himself and a wife who wonders what she did wrong. Of course she did nothing wrong but be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The question is: what are these two going to do about their dilemma? "But that's another show."

As a male, heterosexual crossdresser, I am not always happy about receiving a "Gender Gift". Sometimes I even wish I were NOT a CD, but this NEVER HAPPENS when I am dressed as a woman. Dressed, I am invariably at peace with myself. In skirts, I don't understand how I could EVER have wanted this

to go away. I have insights into myself that I could NEVER

have if I never wore women's clothing.

I used to feel this HAD to go away, WOULD go away, HAD GONE away, on frequent occasions when I was younger and had not yet learned to accept myself as I am. Now, I sometimes think about how my life could be different if I were not a crossdresser. But, in order to live in THAT mode, I would have to suppress my crossdressing. I tried that and found my life became totally unmanageable. I became extremely depressed, barely able to work and unable to relate to other people in a reasonable manner. Bottom line: in order to function as a reasonable person, I MUST crossdress.

Now comes the question, "Is this a Good Gift or a Bad Gift?" Is this an "arrest me" red turbo Porsche or bad cyanide in a Tater Tot? It's not somewhere in between; it's much better than either.

If someone offered me a button to push that would "make it all go away, right now", I would treat him with the same courtesy I would a telephone solicitor trying to sell me a lifetime membership to a Richard Simmons Health Club. Or a "wine-in-a-Box of the Month" club. No. NO. NO !!

I like myself as I am. Granted, I am different from most people, which is fine with me. I learned things about myself and people in general that CANNOT be known by those who are not transgendered. One can try to explain these things but that might be like trying to explain the color red to a

dog. (And dogs are color blind.)

Bottom Line: the Gender Gift has been given to ALL crossdressers. Some accept it, some don't. Their wives, friends and significant others don't really understand it. Some do and some don't, but in either case it is in a very different way from the manner in which their crossdressing spouses do or don't. The unfortunate thing is that ONLY the Gender Gifted can really USE the gift. No one else can really understand it. Other MEN cannot understand it. NO WOMAN can really understand it, since it is a characteristic of a biological man. If you don't have the body and the hormones, you CANT really experience it, any more than a crossdressing man can really understand what it is like to be a biological female.

Should male crossdressers marry? Probably not, but many of them do. By the time they discover who they really are, they are grown, have families, and created relationships that are at direct odds with their true natures. What to do then? That depends on the wives/partners/families and what they are willing to live with. Whether or not crossdressers can work out a livable relationship with their families depends on what they are willing to give up and their families are willing to accept.

If the CD gives up anything of his CD nature, he gives up a part of himself to become less of a person and subtracts irrecoverably from that which is Man.

Steve O.

The following is the third of four articles, written by Julie Freeman, that were first published in Devil Woman, the newsletter of the Diablo Valley Girls. Julie contributed them after SPICE V. Ed.

The Issue of Trust

When I attend conferences or meetings where significant others meet, the issue of trust is usually discussed. Some wives do not really have a problem with trust. They understand why they were not told about their husband's crossdressing: the fear of being rejected, the belief it would go away, etc. Some crossdressers, not understanding the phenomenon themselves, believed the less said the better.

Other wives, however, have much more difficulty trying to understand why they were not told prior to the relationship becoming serious. Being able to trust their partners is very important to them, and they wonder if there are other issues of which they are unaware.

There seems to be no easy answer as to how to help both the crossdresser and his significant other resolve the issue of trust. The crossdresser has to convince his partner that there was a reason for his being reticent, that this does not mean he is incapable of being trusted in the future. The significant other needs to try to understand why her partner was hesitant and allow him the opportunity of proving

he can be trusted again.

Most crossdressers I have met are upstanding members of society. Many hold excellent jobs and provide well for their families. Such individuals certainly are trustworthy, not the opposite.

To help demonstrate their trustworthiness, crossdressers should keep the lines of communication open. Borrowing clothes or make-up without the partners knowledge or buying clothes on the "QT" are not exactly inspiring modes of behavior. Certainly a crossdresser starting electrolysis or hormones without his partners knowledge is going to drive a wedge between them that may be impossible to dislodge.

As difficult as it may be for the crossdresser, particularly one who has just come out of the closet and is experiencing a normal "high" as he realizes he is not alone, he may need to bend over backwards in meeting his partners needs while she learns about crossdressing and put his own needs on the back burner for awhile. Giving her books and other materials about gender issues is a positive step. Participating in activities for couples may help her learn and understand that cross dressing need not be a negative in her life.

Progress at her rate and keep the lines of communication open. This may mean reducing the crossdressing

activity for awhile because that is what she wants. But if it helps her to gain confidence again in the relationship and helps her to accept crossdressing, then by all means do it! Regaining her trust is what it is all about!



Catherine D. sent this on via the CDSO/ist serve

What's In a Name?

A burglar was robbing a house one night. As he was sneaking through the house, flashlight in hand, he heard a voice say, "Jesus is watching you."

The burglar spun around toward where the voice had come from and in the beam of his flashlight, he saw a parrot. Putting his light right in the bird's face, he asked, "What did you say?" The bird again said, "Jesus is watching you." The burglar then asked, "Who do you think you are?" The parrot answered, "My name is 'Moses'." The burglar then asked, quite sarcastically, "What kind of a danged fool names a parrot 'Moses'?" The parrot replied, "The kind that names a Rottweiler 'Jesus'."

copied from a letter by Melissa L. Shaw



Let's Talk

with Marsha and Richard
(aka Rachel) Miller

Richard and I are grateful to Onnalee for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you in a regular column. Whatever expertise we have comes from practical, real-life experiences, not from scholarly pursuits or technically correct, scientific research. We plan to discuss issues we have faced that are similar to those many of you have faced or are facing. We will describe what has worked for us and what hasn't. We know that there are no black and white answers and that each situation is unique so you will have to decide how our experiences apply to you.

You should know something about us so you can better assess what we have to say. This is a second marriage for both of us. We have been married over twelve years and from the very beginning, communication was a major strength in our relationship. We started by becoming very good friends and learned to talk about all kinds of issues. We particularly enjoyed talking about the so-called taboo subjects like money, sex, politics and religion. We discovered that there was much value in discussing difficult topics rather than avoiding them. Our discussions were even positive when we dis-

agreed about the topic because we always respected the other's opinion and tried to understand the other point of view rather than trying to force ours. Over the years we have both learned a lot and altered some of our previous positions.

We ended up falling in love even though I initially had no interest in getting serious. Richard was somehow different from most other men. He was kind and sweet and showed his emotions. He was gentle and romantic and won my heart with his poetry. He seemed to be genuinely happy, and I never guessed his secret that was causing him so much internal turmoil.

We were married for several years when he first told me about his crossdressing. I was upset and angry. We had talked about so many things, how could he not tell me about something so important. My first thought was, "What else was he hiding?" After considerable discussion he convinced me that I should be pleased that he had told me about the biggest secret of his life. He had never told anyone else and he loved and trusted me enough that he felt safe in sharing this momentous news. I began to understand that his eventual telling reflected a

major strength in our relationship, not a weakness.

Richard struggled with many questions about his cross-dressing and feelings and what they meant. We had endless discussions about these subjects and finally began to find some answers. I suggested that he record his thoughts and feelings because they might be helpful to others. It turned out to be prophetic because the notes lead to his book, "The Bliss of Becoming One," writing magazine articles, speaking at gender community events and on college campuses and now to this column.

Some of the key things we have learned and will be discussing in greater detail in the future include:

* Unless you start with a mutually committed loving relationship, it is unlikely that a couple will be able to resolve the cross-dressing issue. Cross-dressing is a perfect excuse to scuttle a relationship that is already in trouble.

* Cross-dressing needs to be handled like any other important marital issue. If it becomes the only or primary issue of a relationship, a balanced perspective is lost. It is one facet of the relationship

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"...he loved and trusted me enough he felt safe in sharing this momentous news."

(Continued from page 6)

and an important one, but it is still only one.

* If both partners apply the Golden Rule to each step and consider how they would like to be treated if on the other side of the table, the likelihood of a positive resolution is greatly increased.

* Both partners must understand and accept that cross-dressing is an integral part of his total personality and needs expression.

* Both partners must understand that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with those tendencies even though they are not generally accepted by society.

* The cross-dresser must recognize that this revelation is a traumatic experience for his partner and make some commitments to alleviate her fears, enhance her feeling of security and build trust. Some that have worked particularly well for us are that Richard committed to:

* Remain my husband, not become my girlfriend.

* Not jeopardize our current life style in order to indulge his gender desires.

* Discuss and agree on the timing and approach before taking any gender related steps.

* Balance my needs and desires with his.

We are in the never-ending process of successfully integrating Richard's cross-

dressing into our lives rather than making it a separate thing that he does on his own. I don't simply tolerate it but accept it and work to keep it in balance with the rest of our life.

The best advice we have received was to take many small reversible steps. The worst advice was to never tell anyone. The thing that has helped us the most over the last six years is that we communicate, communicate and communicate.

That is a basic overview of who we are and where we intend to go in subsequent columns. We look forward to our future interactions. Please feel free to share your views through this newsletter or directly with us. We can be reach at Opportunities for Improvement, P O Box 31475, Oakland CA 94604 e-mail: rachelmill@aol.com

LETTING GO

This item appeared in the Sigma Mu News, January 1998, the newsletter for the Tri-Ess chapter in Springfield, MO. Leslie is married to Judy/Paul who is a Tri-Ess Board member and winner of the Tri-Ess Leader/Servant Award for 1997. Ed.

To let go does not mean to stop caring. It means I cannot do it for someone else.

To let go is not to cut myself off. It is the realization that I can't control another.

To let go is not to enable, but to allow learning from natural consequences.

To let go is not to change or blame another. It is to make the most of myself.

To let go is not to care FOR, but to care ABOUT.

To let go is not to fix, but to be supportive.

To let go is not to judge, but to allow another to be a human being.

To let go is not to be in the middle, arranging all the outcomes.

To let go is not to be protective. It is to permit another to face reality.

To let go is not to deny, but to accept.

To let go is not to nag, scold or argue, but instead to search out my own shortcomings and to correct them.

To let go is not to adjust everything to my desires, but to take each day as it comes and cherish myself in it.

To let go is not to regret the past, but to grow and to live for the future.

To let go is not to criticize, but to try to become what I dream I can be.

To let go is to fear less and love more.

anonymous

This is a little poem that I received from a counselor in 1994, when I was going through the pain of divorce. I came across it recently, and thought how much it pertains to my life today. I think having learned to let go of all the little things and creatively work through the big ones has prepared me to be Judy's wife.

e-mail leslie4@juno.com

Wives Support

by Katharina [CDSO/list posting: 1/25; she has known of her husband's CDing for 24 years and has written for the "Gender Blender". Ed.]

Last January when we first went to a Tri-Ess support group (the only one in our area and a four hour drive for us) I was also the one SO present; [I was] told wives/SO's usually attend. I was there for [my husband's] support and was a little uncomfortable to be the only wife there (I had gone in hopes to find another wife to talk to). I was especially feeling awkward when we went to the restaurant to eat and there were 12 guys dressed up and me.. Half of them were over 6 feet tall and I must say it looked like a parade as we walked to our tables. I wanted to shout at the staring patrons "I'm really a girl!"

Returning for the next two months, there still were no wives. Finally the 4th month, a wife came. We became fast friends and live only an hour from each other. We have reveled in our friendship and do things together all the time and with our husbands sometimes in DRAG and most times in DRAB. We even have the same birthday, spooky.

Another one of the guys has a wife who is aware of his dressing but chooses not to be present when he is dressed. They live about 45 minutes away. He asked me if I'd talk to her and so we go out to lunch or dinner too.

Meanwhile, my husband decided to form a chapter in our area because so many of us live nearby. He got together with a

couple other like minded fellas and, with a lot of work and determination, we finally got our [request for a Tri-Ess] charter approved.

Starting last summer, we decided to have DRAB (dressed as a boy) breakfasts once a month at an area restaurant, one with a breakfast bar so we were comfortable to stay and visit. We did this to enable uneasy wives to feel free to come and meet us all and not feel uncomfortable. It really broke the walls down. As many as 14 people (7 couples) showed up. We all became so at ease with each other. Once we wives get around each other, we see everyone else is just as "normal" as we are.

It took a lot of snail mail, e-mail and phone calls but it worked. Once word got out, more wives started showing up. Some still only come to breakfast and not the actual weekend meetings but that's fine. They feel more at ease knowing the group of people their husband is with.

My husband feels a CD support group without wife support is like a church without a youth group. It will dry up and fade away. So, we are active, involved and busy. But we love it.

The wives have a vote in our chapter on activities. We even got the fellas to agree to give two meetings a year over to us. Which means 2 non-dressing events. Our first is in February. We are having a Valentine's dance and the wives get to be the pretty ones this time and be escorted by our handsome men.

I'm excited about this. [The fellas will get to dress up on Friday night only.] Saturday morning starts with breakfast and they're gonna be drab all day and through the night. A couple of wives who have never been to a meeting or breakfast will be coming for Saturday's events. It's a good start.

We also have a section of the newsletter we write and our own area in the chapter's web page.

I've got some of Mary Frances Fairfax's stuff in there, too. And, of course, links to S.P.I.C.E.

All the men in our group really want the wives there and support us. That's the key. We wholeheartedly support each

other. There you have it. Call, write, e-mail, but contact others and things happen. It's also important to not let people slip away. If you haven't heard from someone in a while, make a call or send a card. It's always nice to know someone is thinking of you and that you haven't been forgotten.

P.S. We always get a kick out of seeing the teenage syndrome in our guys. It's like reliving the teeny bop years. Weren't they so awkward? With the fellas though, some don't seem to get past it!! I went through it in the '60's, then my daughter in the 80's, and THEN my hubby in the 90's!! Hope it's over, I'm getting too old for all this!

"... according to Isaac Mizrahi, the trick is 'not to take this thing that you are obsessed with too seriously or in too large a dose.'"

The New Yorker, Nov. 10 1997

"...a CD support group without wife support...will dry up and fade away."

We said we would not exclude men from this newsletter. The following excerpts are of pertinent interest. Some people understand the value of support groups. Ed.

Reprint from TENNESSEE VALS - Transgender Social and Support Group Newsletter...January 1998

Behind Blue Eyes

by Anne Casebeer

One nice feature of hanging out with transgendered people is the fact that you don't have to hide your feelings; you can give someone a hug, or shed a tear, and nobody will force you to drive your emotions back into their Cancerian shell in a misguided attempt at being macho.

I can't imagine being the shaky 320-ponder in ill-fitting shoes and a huge sequined tent any more, let alone one who sat in the parking lot of the Hilton, listening to Van Halen at maximum volume in an attempt to work up the nerve to strut into that lobby, but... I was.

[Ms. Casebeer is 6' tall, and has since dropped 100 pounds.Ed.]

What makes me become all emotional inside are the amazing people I've met in the transgender world. Nowadays, I don't have to belong to a transgender group to be out in the world crossdressed, we now have a viable group in Kentucky, and I also belong to Cross-Port. Despite this, I am going to remain an active member of this group for as long as it will have me, and the reason is threefold: ONE, I like helping to nurture a living, breathing, growing entity; TWO, I look forward each month to visiting my friends and being ourselves with no pretenses; and THREE, I want to be there for anyone who resembles me a year ago. A bit over a year ago, I made it down to Nashville, knowing that if I didn't find others like me, or come to some kind of peace with the fact that I liked girls and looking like one at the same time, I'd

be flirting with disaster. Disaster has certainly crossed my mind at many times in my past. Thanks to the Tennessee Vals, and others I met thereafter, I not only escaped disaster, but have flourished. This group didn't solve my problems, or cure me of anything; rather, it gave me the tools to fix my own head and do as I please. A support group cannot open the closet door for you, but it can slip the key under the door, and you have to choose to insert it into the lock and turn it for yourself. Once you've made that move, well, don't be surprised if you end up like me, doing things you only wondered if you'd ever do, helping others unlock the door, and perhaps singing "You're So Vain" at a straight karaoke bar in Middletown, Kentucky on a Saturday night while wearing a black dress....Ah, couldn't resist.

Freedom and Mascara!

Anne Casebeer

Early January CDSO post-ings were:

"We've talked about dressing being a sexually stimulating activity, and there have also been some comments about dressing to show the female side of his personality. So here's a question: Do our men want to be attractive to other men when they dress?"

"For whom are they dressing provocatively?"

"The next part of [the] question is, if they are inclined to be attractive to other men, does that make them homosexual?"

"...Just because someone is in a committed relationship doesn't mean they are

hetero, bi, or homo-sexual. Sexual orientation isn't dependent on what type of relationship one is in. Some married men are bisexual, some are homosexual, most are heterosexual...but there is no set pattern;...my personal opinion is that the crossdressing doesn't impact sexual orientation -- it's already there."

"...I think that as in the male population at large, you will find a variety of orientations that really don't have anything to do with the CDing. I have never had a hint that my husband was attracted to men or even was interested in having a man be attracted to him."

LATE January postings showed a concern for the source or reason for this phenomenon; seeking answers to the "why is he like this" question. Slippery slope. Some wives had been told it is "hereditary", others insist it is "trained into" a person. There were a few posting that denied the theory posited that it all happens en utero, or while he is just a fetus. A secondary issue has developed around the area of eroticism in cross-dressing. We will pursue sources of expertise in the coming months and see if an article or two that makes sense will be forthcoming. [This, just in from today's (Jan.29) luncheon fortune cookie..."Many questions are unanswerable. Many answers are questionable."] Stay tuned.

Onnalee's Small Change

It took the better part of two weeks to get all the way through a personal history article in the January 12th issue of The New Yorker entitled *Anatomy of Melancholy*, by Andrew Solomon. The editor subtitles the article with the statement, "Depression afflicts millions of Americans each year, and many don't know where to turn when it strikes. The Author recalls the greatest struggle of his life." As I now seem to be an "old hand" around this community, my own experience and observation of other wives has led me to think some statements made within the body of the article were pertinent to those of us who anxiously cope with apparently unusual moods and behaviors on the part of our spouses attempting to deal with crossdressing.

"It's possible to distinguish between anxiety and depression, but, according to Jim Ballenger, a leading expert on anxiety, 'they're fraternal twins.' George Brown, of the University of London, has said succinctly, 'Depression is usually a response to a current loss. Anxiety is a response to a threat of future loss.'

"Two out of three times, life events are implicated in the onset of panic disorder, and it's always a loss of personal security," Ballenger says.

This seems to be the continuing litany from wives and partners in our group, on the CDSO/ list and at S.P.I.C.E.; an abiding fear of loss of security. Whether its job and finances, family and society or personal and physical, the same skeleton keeps rattling

and saying "what will THEY think?" It is extremely wearing, even exhausting, to be constantly fearful. Fear makes cowards of us all, and that's depressing.

"And what is it like to hope? Hope is the belief in a future without loss; it defends against its oblique cousin dread -- the dread of recurrence."

Again and again, I have offered a little red button which, if pushed, will "make it all go away by next Wednesday"; "it" being the crossdressing and all the concomitant knowledge of it. What many wives/partners find unbelievable is that as many HUSBANDS have agreed to a desire to push that button as wives. What's the surprise is that many wives feel guilt about wanting that button to exist and be operable.

"I suspect that most important function of grief is in the formation of attachment. If you do not fear loss, you cannot love intensely."

There, I disagree and think that statement is backwards. I think if we do not love intensely, we do not fear loss. "Let 'im do what he wants. No skin off my nose." It's the conflict of wants and expectations that abrades relationships. Communication -- meaning talking honestly and LISTENING fully -- is the healing balm.

There has also, unfortunately, been an idea posited that there is some kind of psychologically perfect profile that wives need to fit in order to accommodate a crossdressing husband and keep a marriage functioning. To quote the New Yorker article: "The supermodel has dam-

aged our images of ourselves by setting unrealistic expectations, and the psychological supermodel is even more dangerous than the physical one."

"...there needs to be a recognition that what may well be a rising tide of depression is related to the fact that basic social and psychological needs are not being met." George Brown.

Most of us expect our spouse to somehow provide the needs of our lives. Most of us also expect to do just that for a spouse. An unexpected phenomenon raises the questionability of our "unconditional" love, if we ever had it or gave it.

"You don't defeat depression, you learn to manage it."

One needs to catch on to when the insidious worm of depression is at work; one can only "manage" responsibly one's own life. Only you can make you happy.

"The opposite of depression is not happiness but vitality, and my life, as I write this, is vital, even when it's sad."

Andrew Solomon

This smart remark was found on a Christmas Party cocktail napkin this past season:

**Just Send The
5 Gold Rings
& Cancel The
Rest Of My
True Love's Order**

Telling Your Children

by Jane Ellen and Frances Fairfax

The first principle about telling your children of your gender gift is that there is no principle. To our knowledge, no one has done prospective studies on the consequences of telling, or not telling, children. It does not appear that telling children about crossdressing encourages them to take up the practice. For many years, we have worked with families struggling with this issue. A few observations have occurred:

1. The very worse time to tell a child is adolescence. When a child is struggling with his/her own emerging sexuality and gender expression, the last thing he or she needs is to have a parent's sex and gender issues thrust on him/her.

2. Most people decide to tell their children on a "need to know" basis. If you are going to be involved extensively in the transgender community, and be out and about, it is probably best to tell your child. In this way, you will have control over what he or she is told, and

how. If someone else tells him/her first, you will not only have the crossdressing issue, but also the thornier issue of trust to deal with.

3. Much of the child's reaction depends on whether the parents present a united front. If your wife is encouraging and supportive, this factor will work for you in a big way. Children want first the secure knowledge that any given factor will not disturb the stability of their family. When the father tells them about the crossdressing, their first thought will be, "What does Mom think about this?" Just as with other aspects of parenting, mother and father must present a united front.

4. You may be surprised if you get some sort of non-committal reaction from the child. The news may be overwhelming. You should not push too hard, but you should re-expose him/her in low doses so that she/he does not go into denial.

5. If the child has another supportive relative with whom to talk over these issues, that is all to the good.

6. How the child does in the long run will depend on the fruits crossdressing bears in his/her life.

She/he will need his/her father for a masculine model. Crossdressing should not interfere with her/his social life. The crossdresser's desire to "be everything he is" should not prevent the child from bringing friends and peers home. Nor should the crossdresser try to force his values on his children's friends.

7. If you have any security considerations, we would advise meeting them by stressing to your child the impropriety of "telling other people your business". One doesn't tell peers, teachers, or even other family members, what salary Daddy makes, or what he occasionally likes to wear.

8. Depending on his or her age, a child may or may not have fears that he/she will lose you as a father. If she or he does, reassure the child if you can truthfully do so. You are the child's father, regardless of what you are wearing.

9. Love. Where children get plenty of this commodity, they do not tend to blot it out because of crossdressing.

10. As always, you do well to stress self-expression rather than the superficial clothing.



...is Life's
Magic Name

(Continued from page 1)

12 such visiting ships as ours; six were tied up that Saturday. We were cautioned against renting a car...the vehicles may be American but the driving is British and free form...all on the left side. Engaging a lady with an old Chevy wagon, we visited the historical forts and the top of the water tower. The land is NOT high, but incredibly GREEN, compared to the grim gray scene of 6 below we left in Minnesota. Dating a traveler's check, I was momentarily confused...June? or January! Paradise Island (originally Hog Island) is Las Vegas transplanted with a sea plane port in one bay. Picture a Ficus tree with a 50 foot diameter trunk centered in the town square. Incredible. What a piker my plant is.

The Captain's dinner was formal (men can rent tuxedos from purveyors on boarding), preceded by a cocktail party in the Follies theater, where one could be photographed with the captain. Our crossdressers made a BIG impressive hit with other guests, who asked to be photographed with some of us.

The theme was French in the dining rooms, complete with escargots for a choice of appetizers, vicchyssoise among the soup choices, and several superb gourmet entrees and desserts.

After dinner was when the "magic" happened...the whole ship bloomed. We all gathered in our

splendid finery for a group photograph in the Centrum, the center of the ship that rose for four decks in an open atrium of glass and brass lined with boutiques and shops. A corps of "paparazzi" assembled behind the professional photographer; everyone who could lay hands on a camera or video/cam was eager for their own record of this amazing entourage of men and women, all in elegant dresses. Immediately afterwards, came the questions and curious, every one with smiles of pleasure and amazement and words of admiration and encouragement. As one lady said, we had been observed since boarding and the topic of conversation; the group "shoot" demonstrated that it was NOT some kind of weird "hell week" stunt, but a statement of who we really were.

During the night, the ship removed to Coco Cay, a large sized private "sand box" with palms, where everyone could play at being kids for the day. Those of us engaged in a Tri-Ess board meeting were only slightly delayed in joining the fun. NO body got a sun burn...just enough clouds to avert that. Our suggestion that a search for the mechanism that triggered the "Ground Hog Day" cycle should be instituted with the purpose of repeating this Sunday a few times was met with enthusiasm, but no one knew where to look.

Following the Tri-Ess awards

presentations, Mel and Peggy Rudd, our "Dignity Cruise" leaders, invited us all to the Viking Lounge (up there on deck 14!) as their guests for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. Dinner was "International Night" and a spectacular success. [Your Editor had pouted about thrice being denied genuine Key Lime Pie...and wound up with a WHOLE pie, courtesy of the head waiter! I also educated the Assistant Waiter about how high-test coffee was really known as Norwegian Protein in Nordern Minnesoda. It confused his Puerto Rican mind, but not his humorous soul.]

A quick trip through the casino to a quarter slot...and it PAID! \$7.00 to the \$1.00 dropped. The gaming here included craps, roulette and black jack in addition to all kinds of "one armed bandits". Each night the cruise director mounted a Las Vegas style show for after dinner entertainment.

It was a budgetary pause for us last summer to commit that kind of money to such a venture but it WAS the Tri-Ess annual convention/board meeting: the Holiday en Femme. We would NEVER get another chance to take a Caribbean Cruise at these prices. YET -- thought IS being given to doing it all over again NEXT year. Start saving for it NOW!



S.P.I.C.E. VI Registration Form please PRINT

Mail to L. Hester, [redacted], Atlanta GA 30344

Name: _____ Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: (____) _____ -- _____

E-mail: _____ Male Partner's name _____ Attending? Yes ___ No ___

Support group affiliation? _____ **CHECK THE PACKAGE YOU WANT:**

- | | |
|---|--|
| _____ Thursday - Saturday (July 16-18) \$139.00/person
(6 meals) | _____ Thursday -Friday (July 16-17) \$105.00/person
(4 meals) |
| _____ Friday - Saturday (July 17-18) \$105.00/person
(4 meals) | _____ One day (Specify day) _____ \$80.00/person
(2 meals) |
| _____ Individual Lunch (Specify _____) \$20/person | _____ Individual Dinner (Specify _____) \$40/person |
- _____ ADD \$12 for *The Sweetheart Connection* - a quarterly written and published by partners of crossdressers.

TOTAL REGISTRATION = \$ _____

Check # _____

Make check payable to: S.P.I.C.E.