

# LA FEMME SILHOUETTE

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## DEAR SLEEPLESS

*Diane Frank: We've had a flurry of requests for support coming in from women all over the country. I have no idea why now or why us, but it's happening. Primarily Sherry handles these, but every so often I get involved too. Sherry liked this particular response, and so I thought I'd modify it a little for general consumption and share it. The spouse we're writing to, like many, is having a hard time. We don't try to tell people what to think, but we do try to offer ideas for them to consider.*

Dear Sleepless,

For a while, I've considered CDing generally to be a sexual thing, or at least to start there. But I think, when we're talking about middle-aged men, we may need to factor in something else - midlife crisis. Given your husband's patterns, as I understand your description, his persona as a woman is a reconstruction of his life. You say he's had problems recently. In the past, people in such circumstances might just head out west and start a new life. That theme of starting a new life, new opportunities and leaving the past behind is a theme in American Literature and I think it's pervaded our culture. But there is no "west" anymore. It's a lot harder to pick up your feet and get a fresh start any place.

We both know that simply buckling down to business, dealing with the problems is what an adult needs to do and does when he/she is in your husband's situation. But that's not all we're made of. Even though he knows what he has to do, the feeling of being trapped by it can be pretty awful. For whatever reason, he

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## GOIN' UPTOWN

*Elaine Suede: I recently received this nice note from Sheila telling of her experience at a new transformation salon - GORGEOUS - located right here in North East Ohio.*

LAST FRIDAY, my make-up work was completed by Denise Russell (a professional female impersonator) at a new transformation salon located at 25 S. Main Street in Monroe Falls, OH - adjacent to Stow and Cuyahoga Falls. This is an "uptown" boutique complete with a lovely, albeit, small selection of clothing, shoes, jewelry, cosmetics, wigs, lashes... and a few other things I'm sure I missed. It's the kind of place you would expect to find in downtown New York City or Chicago.

It's owned by David (Farah) who get a big assist from Dennis (Denise Russell). Both are professional female illusionists, very thoughtful and kind and in business to serve people like us. I'm good at reading people and this pair is genuine. Their price to do my make-up work was \$30. It was the most stunning transformation I've had to date. I also bought a new wig (dark with some red) for \$21.99. They gave me a bottle of nail polish and a two rings. Read: No charge. So for \$51.00 Sheila left their shop as a brunette (for the first time) in a new Liz Claiborne summer suit feeling like a million bucks.

The business is called "Gorgeous," it is in a lovely neighborhood. Absolutely secure, safe and friendly. "Gorgeous" shares its quarters in a building owned by Kremer Realty (whose owner shops there regularly for her agents) and a beauty salon. Enter the main door and you are confronted with three more in the foyer. Choose the door on the far right with the Gorgeous sign and you're in business. You will be treated with the utmost attention to detail and like the human being you are. No giggles here. Business at Gorgeous is all about helping us become the best looking females we can possibly be.

Elaine, you might be interested in knowing that Denise Russell is tall (like you) and lives life dressed as a man. But in a matter of less than 30-minutes she becomes an extremely attractive and talented performer who sings

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*Dear Sleepless – continued from page 1*

discovers life as a crossdresser and he no longer feels trapped. That's why the quote from "My Husband Betty" is so important:

*"When my spouse and I were having problems I coined a new "mantra" for myself and for conversations with my spouse: The crossdressing is functional, the manner in which it is handled can be dysfunctional!"*

There is I think a difference between an outlet and avoidance. If your husband's time in skirts gives him a vacation from his frustration with his life, as you describe it, and he returns to with renewed energy and calm, then his crossdressing may be very functional for him. While it clearly isn't the mode you'd like, it serves a purpose you would endorse, yes? If, on the other hand, it is merely avoidance and he neglects his obligations to work and family, then he's not handling things in a functional manner. I think I'd be careful to distinguish the two situations: recreation - that is healthful recreation of himself versus avoidance - disappearing from reality. Play time, recreation, vacations seem to be a requirement of modern life.

So I ask you to consider this, and I know it's a stretch - think about how his crossdressing helps him cope with the frustrations of his life - and then ask how you can help make it work even better for him. After all, which is more important, that he solve his problems or exactly how he does it? And if on the other hand, it's avoidance then how can you get him to make it constructive? Here are some things that might be useful to consider - I don't know what he calls himself but let's say it's "Mary". If you see him getting frustrated and trapped and avoiding issues by crossdressing, you might ask him how "Mary" would approach things differently. "What would Mary do?" "How would Mary feel about this?". This turns avoidance into engagement.

I don't know if you ever saw Tootsie or remember it if you did. It's the Dustin Hoffman movie about an actor who fails as a guy, but succeeds wildly impersonating a woman actress (Dorothy). Leaving aside the sexist notion that a man can so easily put on a dress and compete with women, there's a line there, where Hoffman is reflecting on his experience to his roommate, played by Bill Murray. He says, "I think Dorothy's smarter than me", and goes on to say why.

Mary may be "smarter" than Maury. Not because Mary really is smarter than Maury, but because Mary is a condition of being that permits Maury to try things, approaches that are off-limits to Maury. You know the popular "motivation" question that's been in vogue

lately? "What would you try if you knew you couldn't fail?" Mary is a place where Maury can try things without fear of some kinds of failure.

So in summary, my message is if you can't make it go away, how can you make sure it's constructive and useful (at least to him). How can you make lemonade out of a lemon? And while you may dislike and disapprove of the activity, while it may never be acceptable or commendable to you, you can at least take some pride in your work in making sure it's a constructive force in his life and thus in your marriage. It's not a responsibility you have to accept, but it's there if you want it.

Diane

*Goin' Uptown – continued from page 1*

in her own voice. No lip-synching here. She also knows how to remove the male aspects of our faces in favor of the softer female side. Years of performing as a "drag queen" have yielded more than a few make-up tricks.

To me this is exciting. There is no other business like this in the state of Ohio. To find a salon like this you would have to travel to East or West coast, Chicago or South Beach. That makes Gorgeous newsworthy in my opinion. Others will share a different view, but I am thrilled to have such a wonderful new resource available to us at fair prices.

Both Dennis and David told me they have grown weary of watching our group being "gouged" at every turn. The purveyors of wigs in our area are marking up their prices in the 300 to 500% range, according to them. "We don't and won't do that," they said.

If you get a chance you should take a couple of hours and drive up to Monroe Falls. My strongest feeling is that you will find the owners to be a delightful pair, and their services to be above the standards we had previously set for ourselves.

Your friend,

Sheila

# Stuck in the Middle With... Me

By Michelle York

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“Being a man one day and a woman the next isn't an easy thing.”  
—Priscilla, *Queen of the Desert*

“You're not missing anything.”

That was my wife's reaction to my longing for the “intimate-yet-casual” friendship that I felt only women could share at the end of my previous article.

She told me about how guarded her own relationships are with other women, how she competes with them in terms of looks and clothes, how she feels that any confidence she makes in her female family members will immediately be shared all around.

She's right, of course. I'm completely guilty of romanticizing female relationships. And a lot of other aspects of being “feminine.”

And, of course, doing the reverse and demonizing all things masculine.

But if I want to accept myself as a person who is not going to transition, as someone who will always be standing on the border of two worlds, then I owe it to myself to try and explore and understand all aspects of my personality. Since I wrote my original article in May, I have been through an eye-opening summer of exploration.

In all my previous attempts at understanding my transness I only tried to explore my feminine feelings. This time, however, I've actively tried to see what I like about being a man. I went out and bought some summer men's clothes that were

fashionable—in a decidedly “metrosexual” way—but undeniably masculine. I've begun taking the martial art aikido again, which has done wonders for confronting both my aggression and learning how to control and channel it.

At the same time, I've tried to do some very deep thinking about gender.

My wife once asked me a very good question. She wanted to know what it is I wanted to get out of crossdressing. What I wanted people to do when I was out crossdressed.

Knowing it to be not quite the right answer, I said that I wanted to be treated like a woman when I was out crossdressed.

That made her upset, and deservedly so. Did I want to be treated like an object? To have my thoughts and opinions discounted automatically? To have to suspect everyone's motives? (Is that guy being nice to me because he's nice, or because he's creepy?)

The truth is, I'm not sure what it is that I want when I say I want to feel like a woman. There is the possibility—the very distinct and overwhelmingly likely possibility—that all this is coming out of some warped sexual desire, that I create Michelle as a substitute woman that I'm attracted to, that all this is some huge vanity and bent self-love.

And yet. And yet, when I grew up I hated being around the boys. I hated playing rough. I cried a lot. And I desperately, desperately wanted to feel pretty.

So? Isn't that still just a superficial understanding of women's lives?

Yes. Of course it is. But I can't help it that as long as I've been conscious, some part of me has always felt “girl” even when all the evidence—biological and social—said “boy.”

I like who I am. I want to explore my masculinity and integrate it into my life. I've spent a lot of time in the last ten years learning about my femininity. It's time to stop running from my biology and embrace it.

But I still need to understand why I need to feel feminine—to think of myself as feminine, rather, since I'll never really know what it feels like to be feminine.

Is it wrong to just want to feel pretty? Am I betraying women by wanting that? Am I still just a joke? Is it wrong to embrace parts of the beauty myth that oppresses the wonderful women in my life?

## The Middle Way

As I've written before, one thing that has bothered me about the way I choose to express my transness—essentially, by dressing in a very stereotypically “feminine” manner: makeup, skirts, high heels—is “cherry-picking,” taking things I like about women while turning my back on the problems of actually *being* a woman.

The other thing that bothers me about my flavor of transness is that I'm forever going to be in between masculine and feminine. I'm not going to transition, but I can't live as a “man” as our society normally allows that.

The two issues are related, of course. I know I'll never be a *real* woman in the sense that somebody who is born female can be. But worse, I suspect that my own way

*Continued – next page*

*Stuck* – continued from page 3

of expressing what, for lack of a better term, I call my “femininity,” is somehow *fake*, a construct, and an insulting one at that. And even if I were to transition I would still feel that way.

Of course, I’m speaking only for myself. I certainly don’t think that somebody who has the driving *need* to transition won’t ever feel “real” or—much more important—not *fake*. Some transsexuals say that their male personality was a construct designed to hide and protect their true identity, which only emerges during the transition process.

But I don’t think that’s true of me. While I certainly have a mask that I can use to hide my trans nature, at the same time I’m quite comfortable as a man and slowly trying to find a way to be a man who is transgendered. It is very easy for trans people to get lost in the *symbolology* of feminine expression, reducing women and women’s lives to simple placeholders for Feminine.

So that leaves me having to seek a Middle Way, to try and navigate somehow between genders, taking the behaviors I like from each while trying to respect both of them. I won’t pretend that this is easy. In fact, it’s one of the hardest things I’ve ever tried to do—the only thing that keeps me at it is that I really don’t have a choice.

Still, I am beginning to realize that there *is* a Middle Way, and I may finally be on it. That a false dichotomy of gender roles can be used to oppress me as surely as it does women. (And men, but not as seriously.) Lately I am feeling good about myself, and even happy that I am neither fish nor fowl. I’m still not sure exactly how I’m going to find a way to express myself as a real human being. But I know it isn’t impossible.

## Vanity, Self-Delusion, and Public Spectacle

“If you don’t transition or crosslive, what is left of crossdressing *except* vanity, self-delusion, and public spectacle?”

I still don’t know. Yet I’m far more positive about my transgenderedness today than I was when I wrote those words back in May.

Why?

I could give you the usual spiel about how I’m accepting myself and who I am and trying to find my joy and all that rot. But I won’t.

In Hesse’s *Siddhartha* the hero only becomes ready to reach true self-knowledge when he literally vomits up his old life at the bank of a river. At some level I had to do something similar, I had to finally give in to the vast potential for my crossdressing to be a shallow, empty experience to start finding a way out of it.

I’m trying to start to explore *all* sides of the trans experience. And since I’m not going to transition, that means my masculine side.

I really like the summer clothes I bought. I like them because they’re masculine, not androgynous. And that’s affirming to me, because I can feel good about feeling like a man while still signalling that I am not bound to ordinary conventions of masculine dress—and at the same time indulging in the “freedom of expression” that I idealize in the way women can dress.

I say *idealize* because my women’s outfits are usually as straitjacketed and stereotypically feminine as my masculine clothes are usually stereotypically masculine. What’s the point of that? Aren’t I challenging gender assumptions here?

Another thing that is happening to me is that my feminist convictions

are being hardened. I read *The Beauty Myth* over the winter and that was an eye-opener; reading *Backlash* this summer has been a white-hot blast of revelation. This *has* to be part of learning about who I am. How can I talk with a straight face about “feeling like a woman” when I know *nothing* about how women really feel?

But it also means coming to terms about what I wear when I do crossdress. When I go out, on some level I’m celebrating, so I’m not going to feel guilty about dressing up a little, about trying to look pretty. In fact, there’s not one damn thing wrong with liking to feel pretty.

It’s only wrong when you think that’s *all* there is in being a woman, or being feminine.

So is there anything more?

Maybe. What if I said there was glamour, self-expression, and, well, public spectacle. There’s no getting around that. But so what? *Every* woman has been a public spectacle in her life. Just for being a woman.

There’s nothing wrong about being a public spectacle, either. It’s all in the spectacle you create.

I don’t pretend to understand why I’m trans, why I feel the need to do the things I do. And just because I don’t want to feel guilt about doing them doesn’t mean I have a blanket license to do anything I want. I guess what this really boils down to is that you have to be aware. Of yourself and others.

I like to think I’ve taken the first steps towards that goal. ■

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*Michelle is a married  
thirty-something  
crossdresser living in  
New York City*



[Desert Camp]

## LEGIO PATRIA NOSTRA

*David Henry, writer for the Manchester Evening News (UK), fills us in on reality TV - "european style".*

15 July 2005 - The Foreign Legion is the fiercest fighting force in the world. When new recruits sign up, they are put through a gruelling training programme designed to turn them into military machines.

Under the scorching sun, in the burning heart of the African desert, they are pushed to breaking point, both physically and mentally, by brutal officers determined to ready them for life in one of the world's toughest regiments.

Surely this is no place for a gay wedding-dress designer with a sideline as a female impersonator? Well, Dean Gardner, 27, from Failsworth, is just that, and he willingly signed up for the toughest challenge known to man.

The Legion has often been romanticised as a refuge for lost souls seeking a second shot at life. But 11 young men signed up for the Legion's punishing training programme last year for very different reasons. They were taking part in a new Channel 4 reality show. And Dean, just about the last man you'd expect to join this arduous and unremitting test, was among them.

The only gay in the fort, Dean is a wedding dress designer, fashion lecturer, and part-time drag act. As he admits himself, he is not exactly Legion material. "I wanted to get in touch with my masculine side," laughs the outrageously camp Dean. "No one could believe it when I told them I was going to do this. Everyone said I wouldn't last five minutes and, to be honest, I thought that too.

"I'm not Legion material, but that's exactly why I wanted to do it. And everyone doubting my ability to stick it out actually made me more determined.

### Doubts

"I always like to go against the grain and do things completely off the wall and that's how I saw this. It was a self-experiment.

"I wanted to pit myself against society's alpha-males and

show that people like me are tough and strong even if we don't show it in the traditional way."

Dean worked for fashion designers Vivienne Westwood and Alexander McQueen before setting up his own wedding dress company, designing frocks for society brides and celebrities, including soul singer Beverley Knight. He also performs in clubs as a modern drag act, wowing crowds with his repertoire of risqué songs.

A smoker and a drinker, he hadn't exercised since his school days, and even then he used to skive off PE lessons. But somehow Dean, surrounded by ex-soldiers and former professional boxers, proved to be one of the most able recruits and survived longer than many of the other, more likely contestants.

"Here was me, who likes flower arranging doing all this mad, military stuff," he says, cackling loudly. "I honestly found the whole situation very funny. A lot of the other men were very macho. Some of them had this attitude to me like, 'how dare you come on this show?' Most of the ones who had a problem with me were the first to go. They were the ones who couldn't take it - not me."



The 11 raw recruits flew out to Morocco's Fort Tafnildilt last summer to spend five weeks training in the desert. Meeting the challenge required blood, sweat, tears and guts, as the recruits suffered mental breakdown, physical exhaustion, and severe sleep deprivation. Only half made it to the end and after only 24 hours in the camp one recruit quit and another ended up in hospital.

"When we first got to the fort I was absolutely terrified. It was in the middle of the desert and I thought I'd made a terrible mistake.

"When the first person left it really spurred me on. I thought, 'great, now I won't be the first person to leave'. Then someone else dropped out. And I realised I was doing OK."

Among the tasks they endured were five-hour jogs in the desert sand dunes, eight-hour fort patrol shifts in the blazing sun, and expeditions across the Sahara with 25kg rucksacks on their backs. And discipline had to be maintained throughout. Uniforms had to be kept in pristine condition and 13 specific creases had to be ironed into their clothes. If they were dressed incorrectly or there was a speck of dust on their clothes, they were given the

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*Desert Camp – continued from page 5*

harshest of punishments. The worst was being thrown into the outside tank containing all the fort's waste.

"The officers really picked on me and another lad. They could see I was totally unused to that lifestyle and tried to grind me down. The officers would stand an inch in front of your face and scream at you.

"It's all a mind game. You have to be psychologically strong. If you're not, you can forget it.

"I got strength from the other recruits. I became a mother figure, really, and they would come to me with their problems. It made me much stronger. Strangely, my feminine qualities helped me in such a masculine environment.

"I was open about my sexuality from the very beginning. There were a few eyebrows raised but those who had a problem didn't last long, anyway."

Coping with such an extreme and intense challenge was tough for Dean. During the course of the training, he was placed on a drip for two days after he became seriously dehydrated. "You just had to face it. The worst was the sleep deprivation. I only got about two hours' sleep at night. Sometimes we didn't get any.

"But I had these hidden reserves of energy. I was so determined to last the course. I knew I couldn't give in.

"They really tried to break you, to strip you of your personality so that you become a killing machine."

At the end of the five weeks, Dean was regarded as one of the best recruits. And he says he enjoyed the experience. "I was a lot fitter afterwards. And I felt much more confident in myself.

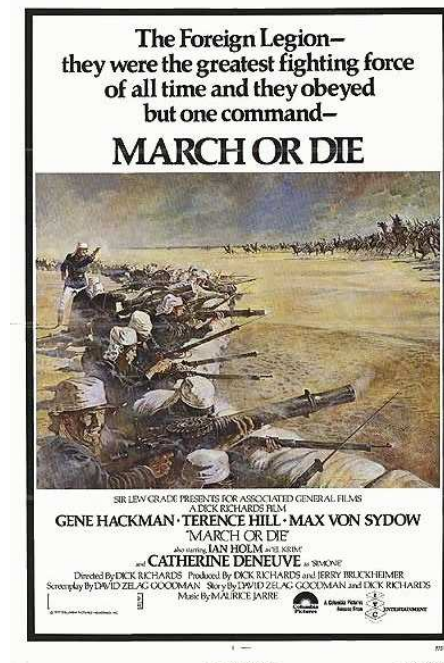
"I really enjoyed the camaraderie between the recruits. I got on really well with some of them and we are still friends now."

Back on home soil, Dean is focusing on establishing his cabaret act. Despite enjoying his time in the desert, he says he's glad he won't have to go through anything like that again.

He giggles: "I can put the Legion in the can with all my other great stories to recount in years to come."

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**Legio Patria Nostra:** Legionnaires translate their Latin mantra two ways, "the Legion is our country" and "the Legion is our family."



Associated General Films

1977

[From the Archive]

### La Femme Silhouette - August 1999

*Our current chairperson, Gloria Sue Fenton, wrote this six years ago this month!*

### THE CLOTHES

The clothes I wear do not make me "Gloria" any more than the clothes I wear make me "Martin". It is the words and actions that come from my heart, mind, and soul, that define the person I am. My heart, mind, and soul are guided by the emotions, knowledge, and beliefs that have become engrained in me through my own existence and co-existence with anyone and anything that has touched my entity.

The physical, mental, and spiritual presence that total to be the entity I am, or will be, is my legacy as to how others have been, are, or will be touched by my life. My life has always been, and will continue to be an evolution of myself as a human being. As a human being I try to live my life so that it has meaning and worth to me, and hopefully, then to those who are touched by my life.

It is very important to me that people know the person I am and use that as the basis of how they are going to judge me as a human being, rather than judge me by the clothes and things that are not important at all.

"Gloria is "Gloria."

"Martin" is "Martin".

*Continued – next page*

I do not try to "pass" because, to me anyway, it indicates I am trying to fool someone, or to hide something. It took me a lot of years to be able to find a spark of pride in being who I am as a human being, and I don't want to hide that from those I care about. Everyone in the world may not know all about Gloria, but they don't need to, any more than everybody in the world needs to know all about Martin.

I will probably never know why Gloria exists, or why there is the intense need to express who I am, and be at peace with that, while needing those same things as Martin. I would never wish this duality on anyone because I know the dark side of fear and guilt that can be a part of it, and how it can tear your life and the life of those around you apart.

When we are very young, there is this intense compulsion to wear the clothes. As we reach puberty, a sexual aspect becomes part of the process. Generally, all along there are the questions, and insecurities as to why we have this need, and this leads to fear, guilt, anger, frustration, and pain. Somehow we grapple to keep our lives and our sanity; and, hopefully, in time allow ourselves to accept what is, even if we don't know why.

Some of us find individuals or groups that help us to explore this buried identity. As we explore and discover, we find a part of our being that we give the freedom to express. And the more we express this being, the less important that the clothes, make up, and other things are to being a crucial part of our identity; and the human being we are finds its own reality.

I realize that not everyone who meets or sees Gloria will or will ever be able to see beyond the clothes, or what they perceive. I try to give them understanding for that, because I was there myself for a long time. As we ask society for understanding and acceptance, we in turn have to give society the same.

We also need to give that same understanding and acceptance to those who we claim to be a part of our community. We have to see beyond the labels we toss around at each other, and put aside the egos, the temperaments, and all those things that are not really important to the cause we claim to be striving for. If we can't see beyond our own differences and work as human beings towards a worthy goal, then how can we ever expect society to see beyond our differences, and treat us as humans?

We also have to accept and realize that not every one of us is ready and/or willing to rush to the front lines to wage the battle for understanding and acceptance. We

need to respect each other's rights before we make demands.

As a community, we can unite. As a community, we can fight the good fight. But first we need to stop fighting each other, and as they say, "make a plan and work the plan".

The clothes we wear do not make us the human beings we are. We need to look within our own hearts, minds, and souls as human beings to find ways to unite and then ask for understanding and acceptance from within our own community and then from society. If we can't work together and give ourselves our own "human" rights, then how can we ever expect "Society" to see beyond the clothes and makeup?

I get awful tired of hearing or reading how an individual puts down another individual or a group, or how a group puts down an individual or another group. It's plain, pure nonsense. We are different individuals and different groups; and we can have different needs as individuals, or we can have different areas we focus support in as groups. Why not?

Isn't that an inherent right we claim as human beings? A while back I heard of an individual who was kicked out of a group because they supposedly were not progressing fast enough to suit some others in the group. This goes beyond nonsense, this is arrogant stupidity. And this is a sample of the ignorance that keeps "this community" from realizing that the diversity of ourselves as individuals and as groups, should be the core of the strength that unites us all.

Like I said in the beginning of this article, wearing women's clothing doesn't make me Gloria, or the human being I am. And, likewise, just because another individual wears women's clothing, that doesn't make them think just like me or need the same support that I do. Maybe before society will listen to us, we need to remove our own blinders, and see beyond "the clothes" to the person inside and practice the understanding, acceptance, nurturing, and caring, that we preach. That philosophy has to apply to different groups, wives, partners, family members, friends, and every one of us whose lives are affected by crossdressing and gender expression.

If we can't do that for all of us affected by crossdressing and gender expression, then we don't have any right to demand it from society, because we don't deserve it.

I have a right to not be judged by "society", by the "community", or by you; and so does my group. And you have the right to not be judged as a human being by "society", the "community" or by me as well. Clothes do not and never will unite us, but giving each other and each group respect and dignity can, if we let it. ■

[Last Laugh]  
**WALK OR DIE**

Madcap *Eddie IZZARD* on how to walk like a woman:

*"Think ocean liner - like you're cutting through the sea. The more you weigh, the less you rock."*

See an Eddie fan site deliciously titled: [CAKE or DEATH](#)



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The Alpha Omega Society is a non-profit social support group for heterosexual crossdressers and their wives or partners. Our membership is open to all who share this focus. Also, members from related organizations, helping professionals, and approved guests are welcome when cleared through Alpha Omega's officers may attend meetings.

Meetings are the second Saturday evening of each month unless a special event is scheduled that takes the place of the regularly scheduled meeting. The location of the meeting or event is only released to members or others with the approval of an officer. Members and visitors must be 18 years of age or older. We will exchange newsletters with any other similar group. Send all correspondence to The Alpha Omega Society, P.O. Box 2053, Sheffield Lake, OH 44054, or email us at [officers@aosoc.org](mailto:officers@aosoc.org)