

LA FEMME SILHOUETTE

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DEAR DIARY

Meagan shares her feelings on getting ready for and attending her first Alpha Omega meeting.

I WOKE up in bed Saturday morning, blurry eyed I saw the digital clock saying it was 5:55. My cold seems to have gone away but something else is weighing heavily on my mind. I am going to an Alpha Omega meeting tonight and fears of dread are already creeping into my mind. I quickly try to ease my fears and go to the bathroom to check my hair and freshen up a little.

I turn on the coffee hoping the whir of the grinder does not wake my wife and go sit down in front of the TV. Flipping through the channels I start thinking about the meeting again and what I should wear. I have already changed my mind twice and even laid out my outfit once the night before. I am trying to stay positive but I am really worried. All kinds of negative thoughts are running through me.

I have already decided to go dressed up as pretty and feminine as I can and will not change my mind on that but that brings all other kinds of worries into the equation. What if we are driving and see someone we know? What if we get pulled over for speeding? What if someone looks into the car and sees Meagan? What if... what if... what if... Oh the heck with it.

My wife wakes up and I run to her for a kiss and a hug, boy does she make me feel really good and for the moment I feel alive and all my fears are gone away. We plan to go shopping in the morning and I am really looking forward to that.

It does not last. My fears about tonight seem to be coming back and I am getting all kinds of thoughts again about what it will be like tonight. Will I be

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BE-ALL 2005

AO member, Abigail Grace, tells of her experience attending (with her S.O., Jean) and presenting at this years Be-All.

FROM June 8th to the 12th, Jean and I had the pleasure of attending the twenty-third annual “Be-All” in Chicago. In the past, the gathering used to move around to various cities, including Cleveland; however, the last four years it has been held in Chicago. The conference relocated this year to the Sheraton Chicago Northwest, a large hotel whose staff extended every courtesy to the 400 plus participants.

We drove over on Tuesday the 7th. We had a pleasant trip, except for getting through Chicago in the last part of the evening rush hour to reach the hotel above the northern tier of the city. Ugh! Misery! I’m glad I don’t have to drive THAT every workday.

We arrived about 8 pm Chicago time, and checked in. The room was spacious and comfortable. (The only problem that bothered a lot of people was that the air-conditioning system seemed not fully operational so that even when units were turned up to the maximum, the rooms did not become quite cool).

The Be-All program included a variety of seminars, meals, social events, exhibitors and vendors. I attended a presentation by Cole Thaler from Lambda Legal on legal issues affecting transgender persons. Attorney Thaler is a young and experienced litigator, originally from New England, now working out of Lambda Legal’s Atlanta office. His presentation stimulated and challenged the three dozen listeners.

At lunch on Friday, Mara Keisling, co-founder and executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, gave a brilliant keynote address, calling for alliance building among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in renewed efforts to accomplish justice for all. The Saturday luncheon speaker represented Chicago-land PFLAG chapters, nine active groups in the metropolitan area. He spoke enthusiastically about PFLAG’s work both locally and nationally. In some time slots on Thursday and Friday, I wandered around the vendors/exhibitors area and talked with a lot of people. Jean and I both had lovely visits with a jewelry maker from Kentucky. She sat in her booth making wonderful things and chatting delightedly with passers-by. Her sister, a transgender woman, worked quietly by her side. I bought

Continued – next page

six pairs of pretty earrings and three bracelets. Other vendors sold shoes, foundations, hosiery, cosmetics, wigs, transgender tours and anything else you could ask for or imagine. Exhibitors included PFLAG, the Illinois Gender Advocacy Coalition and an interesting sociologist doing research on the legal and social welfare needs for transgender people. I engaged her in a long and interesting conversation.

Vendors also included makeup artists performing miraculous changes. Saturday morning, before I did my first seminar presentation, I had my makeup applied by Rori of Transformations, one of Chicago's most famous boutiques/salons for TG as well as GG women. After Rori finished doing my face, Rachel from Rachel's Wigs, did my hair in an elaborate updo! Wow! That was my first ever updo. The teasing, combing and styling took forty-five minutes. This masterpiece coiffure was held in place with over three dozen pins that I discovered when I took my hair down on Sunday morning. Rachel asked if I would model for her next year – an incentive to return!

By the time these magicians had finished my face and hair, I needed to run, as quickly as I could in three-inch pumps, to the room where my friend Theresa O'Connor and I were presenting our first seminar. I looked so different that Theresa did not recognize me until I said "hello" as I came down the hall.

Grounded in many spiritual traditions, and skilled in the areas of transformational coaching, holistic psychotherapy, energy medicine, and the new field of positive psychology, Theresa is gifted and equipped to uplift body, mind and spirit. Within her practice, located in Philadelphia, Theresa works as a personal and corporate coach and consultant to guide and inform all her work with clients. I met her on retreat in northeastern Pennsylvania two years ago. (The same retreat where I first met Virginia Mollenkott.) Last fall, we began talking about doing presentations together.

Our morning seminar we entitled *The Blessings of Gender Splendor*. Our course description said:

Many times the journey to full gender consciousness and expression can be experienced as difficult and challenging. This experiential program will focus on surfacing, claiming, and proclaiming the unique blessings and profound gifts of this journey. Participants will create words for their experience and will use the format for affirmations to formulate and express their blessings.

Our afternoon seminar we called *The Path of Gratitude, Grace and Self-Embrace*. We described it as:

The field of positive psychology is only several years old, but the extensive research showing the benefits of the attitude of gratitude is remarkable. Our time together will be an interactive experience surfacing the sacredness of the gender journey, using evocative music, guided meditation, and sharing of stories and blessings. Participants

will leave with new eyes to witness the grace and beauty within themselves and their lives.

We designed the two seminars so that people could benefit from either one or both in tandem. About thirty persons participated in the morning one and about twenty in the afternoon. We received excellent feedback from participants.

Be-All participants included the full range of persons one could expect at such a gathering: heterosexual and gay crossdressers; pre-operative, post-operative and non-operative transsexuals, transmen as well as transwomen; bigendered persons; intersexed persons; drag kings and drag queens; androgynes.

For me, the people were the best part of the whole conference! I enjoyed the 88-year-old World War II Navy veteran (who has crossdressed since age 5) as much as the enchanting androgynous college student from the upper Midwest. I was deeply moved by the wheelchair-bound veteran beginning hormone therapy in preparation for sex reassignment surgery in a year or two. Participants reflected a variety of race, religion and age - probably the most diverse such gathering which I have ever seen.

Jean and I made some new friendships, which we both sense will extend over time and distance. The talents and accomplishments - personal and professional - of the persons we met repeatedly left us in awe.

Saturday, the last full day of the program, finished with a grand banquet, followed by music and dancing. Attendees came out in their formal fashions in every color, shape and size. I opted for a black, ankle-length evening gown. (A girl can never go wrong with basic black!) With my hair teased into my upswept do and dressy sandals with 4" heels on my feet, I found myself towering over my charming dinner companions, Jean and Theresa. Yet I certainly did not stand out. There were plenty of tall women, well over 6' without heels, dressed to the nines and having a great time.

Sunday morning was a bittersweet time. Lots of people, including me, came to breakfast dressed en femme. After three full days in womanly mode, I could not, would NOT miss one more opportunity for self-expression. Plenty of tears mixed with hugs and kisses as folks said "good-bye." Yet, as we headed east for home across Indiana and Ohio (taking a beltway to avoid the Chicago central city and its traffic snarls), we had much to share, much to be thankful for, much to cherish. While the early summer dusk settled around us on the Ohio turnpike nearing Cleveland, I felt blessed, enriched and extremely contented. I anticipate that we will go again next year. The investment of time and money yielded riches of the mind and heart, which I have not yet been able to total. ■

LIMINALITY

Betwixt and Between

By Elaine Suede

These observations regarding some aspects of crossdressing from an anthropological perspective are influenced by my recent immersion into anthropological study linking social behavior, creativity and transformation (see La Femme Silhouette - June 2005).

An oft-asked question is whether crossdressing is just one stop on a journey that ultimately ends in physical transformation. My personal conclusion is that for many, assuredly it is not. Our exploration of the liminal space can be the rewarding journey without end.

LIMINAL spaces are the transitional spaces in between one state and another. The word "liminal" comes from limen, the Latin word for threshold. A porch is a good example of what anthropologists call a liminal space - in this case, between the public space of the street and the private space of the home.

The concept of the liminal space, most notably linked to anthropologist Victor Turner, also suggests ambiguity - *"a no-man's-land betwixt-and-between... a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms."* Turner's concept of liminality is broad including not only physical space, but also community, culture, people, and personal identity. It's where boundaries dissolve and we move across the limits of what we are into what we are to be.

Turner also noted that in liminality, the transitional state between two

phases, one did not belong to the society that they previously were a part of and they were not yet reincorporated into another society.

This liminal, in-between status allows active exchanges of ideologies, concepts and methods of working. There is an indication of an on-going search for answers, yet the end point might not or need not be defined. Therefore, the 'liminal' might be read as a metaphorical realm where ideas and concepts - artistic, cultural, social, gender or otherwise - are in constant states of contestation and negotiation. Upsetting ordinary assumptions loosens the psyche and allows one to perceive in a new way.

For Homi Bhabha, Professor in the Humanities - University of Chicago, liminality is important as a passage between fixed identifications and represents a possibility for a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.

Since liminality is ambiguous, liminal people or threshold person elude the network of classifications - law, custom, convention, and ceremonial - that normally locate someone within a culture. As such, their indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions.

Prophets and artists tend to be liminal people, "edgemen", who strive with passionate sincerity to rid themselves

of the clichés associated with status and role and enter into vital relations with others in fact or imagination. In their work we catch glimpses of that range of potential which has yet to be accepted at large.

Finally, one of the most dynamic areas in anthropology is the field of sex and gender, with anthropological scholars redefining Western sex/gender norms through cross-cultural analysis. The possibility of having more than two genders was opened up by separating gender from sexuality, and instead associating gender primarily with social role and labor grids. For example, in many shamanic traditions, crossdressing allows the shaman to walk "between" genders, and to unite or balance within him or herself the abilities associated with each.

This admittedly incomplete, 'think piece' is a first attempt to gather a few thoughts in writing. If the reader finds the work of Turner and/or other liminal theorists interesting, I refer them back to their original works, which hold broader and better developed discussions. ■

**"all liminal works
confront,
⊙ offend
or unsettle"**

Susan Broadhurst

from: *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory, 1999*

Dear Diary – continued from page 1

accepted? Will they make me feel welcome? Will there be so many people there that I cannot find Abby? Will we get lost? I seem to start wishing we would not go and something would come up to prevent us from being there. However, my wife tells me that she will drag me to the car no matter what and we are going! I *know* we both need to go, Meagan needs it and B. needs it.

Shopping is great, even though I am acting very, very reserved and not saying much. We both get a chance to go our separate ways and I enjoy looking at all the Valentine jewelry. Hearts are becoming a favorite of mine lately; maybe it is just the season? I get home and my wife gives me an early Valentine's present - a beautiful pair of black slacks from the Tall Girl shop. I try them on and to my surprise they fit at the waist but are an inch too long. I decide to wear them with the pink blush sweater that we bought a few days before. I seem to feel a little better now.

It takes me 90 minutes to get ready and I'm still very nervous, but I am enjoying the process to change this not-so-attractive guy into a not-so-attractive woman. I hate my face but it looks a little better with foundation, and I am starting to see progress in my make-up. Practice, practice, practice. I am a little more relaxed now and start to think this may work out after all.

It takes a little over 30 minutes to get there plus a little while to find the meeting place. To my instant relief Abby meets us at the door and welcomes us. She is great by the way. My wife is disappointed that Abby's wife could not make it but we both go into the meeting room walking carefully due to the ice around the driveway.

My wife, being the open social person she is, immediately picks up the conversation with Diane and Abby, but alas the dessert we brought with us starts to leak all over her coat, pants and floor. We are a little embarrassed but we quickly clean up and my wife runs to the bathroom to clean up and I help clean up the floor.

More people start to arrive and we go to sit down. Talk is cordial and I am glad everyone seems to be so nice. Unfortunately, not all members can make it and about 10-15 people are in attendance. I sort of like it since that makes it easier to strike up a conversation. Diane Frank seems to want to make me feel relaxed and lets me know that we are here to enjoy and not to worry.

I am a little surprised at the choice of speakers, Christine - of the Cancer Outreach Organization, but it was an informative and enjoyable speech and I learned that there is great support in Cleveland for cancer which has

not only touched our lives but many others, as well.

We enjoyed a delightful meal of pork, cold cuts and salad and I snuck a piece of strawberry dessert afterwards. I cannot put into words how enjoyable and friendly everyone seems to be and that, more than anything, is what this is all about. Just people getting together and enjoying each other's company.

To end this entry Dear Diary I was really *STUPID* for my fears. I should learn to trust a little and just embrace and look forward to whatever comes my way. I learned a lot about being one with oneself, and I will be looking forward to the next meeting. ■

Supporting Meagan's comment above regarding our February speaker, Diane wrote these words for our April newsletter.

WE acknowledge our February meeting speaker. Her presentation struck a lot of notes with our members in part because of the series of unfortunate events in our lives. The approach "The Gathering Place" takes with cancer patients and the people in their lives - the people affected by cancer - is a model for support. They meet people where they are and walk with them where they need to go.



[Going Out]

COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

Diane S. Frank helps us think though our first times out of the house.

I'D LIKE to introduce a work in progress. It's about going out for the first time. This subject came to me when someone posted on a local bbs the notion that someone should come out to a bar, they'd never regret it. I thought and still think it was an outrageously stupid thing to say. This lead to my making comments elsewhere and in response to a few other things starting on a check-list of questions that people should ask before they decide to crossdress anywhere besides the privacy of their home. There are really two lists, one for crossdressers and one for their S.O.s. The questions encourage people to think beyond the mere fact of wearing a dress outside the house, and think of the longer-term issues. In my view, first time out experiences are fetishized (made more important than what they are) in both fact and fiction. What matters isn't so much getting out the first, if indeed that's something a person should do, but what does getting out the 100th time mean in a person's life? The first time out is only a step towards the 100th time out. For some people, some couples it's a good step to make, and for some it's a step to be avoided. Thinking through these questions will, I hope, help people sort things out for themselves.

FOR THE CROSSDRESSER

Where do you want to go?

- A walk around the block
- A walk around someone else's block
- A drive in a car
- A shopping trip
- A support group
- To your therapists
- A costume party
- A friendly bar
- A restaurant
- An accepting religious group

Do you have something appropriate to wear for your chosen activity?

If things went well, would you want to go back again?

- Never
- Of course
- Sure, I hope to make friends
- Where else would I go?

Do you want to go with your S.O.? Why?

- Never in a million years.
- If there was a suitable occasion
- Of course
- Maybe next time

Do you want to meet people?

- No one
- Other crossdressers but not spouses around
- Anyone in the GLBT community
- Crossdressers and spouses preferred
- Everyday people

FOR THE SIGNIFICANT OTHER

Do you want to reserve some activities out (like a favorite restaurant, a ski trail, whatever) for his boy side, never have his girl side there?

Do you want to tell him what to wear the first time out, or is it important that he choose himself?

Do you want to go together or let him go alone? Do you feel protective of him, or think he ought to be able to handle himself?

FOR BOTH

If you interact with others, what is your relationship to each other?

- just friends
- girl friends
- lesbian lovers
- "man in a dress" and wife
- other

If you talk about your relationship, how much are you willing to disclose to other people?

- nothing at all
- children
- pets
- hobbies
- Home address and phone number

Do you want to pass, simply be treated as two women or do you want to be recognized as the accepting spouse of a crossdresser?

If he needs to use a bathroom?

- do you guard the men's room
- do you accompany him to the ladies room
- tell him to hold it
- let him go alone
- look for a single occupancy/handicapped restroom

Will you address your husband using a woman's or a man's name, and what pronouns will you use?

What about alcohol? It can calm the nerves, but can also loosen inhibitions. Where's your balance?

Do you want to form relationships as a couple where he is crossdressed or just go out and have a good time?

Do you want to coordinate your outfits, like two girlfriends might before spending time together? ■

[From the Archive]

La Femme Silhouette - January 1998

These timeless thoughts from our current chairperson, Gloria Sue Fenton, were presented in our first on-line issue!

HELP

Kathy and I have a plaque that hangs on one of our dining room walls that reads as follows:

We chose this House where sunshine will flood it, where fine trees will shade it, birds build near it, flowers bloom around it, and where joyous children will find room for play.

We dedicate this House to simple, loyal family life. May all who dwell herein leave it with regret and return to it with joy. May it be to them a haven of Peace, of loving companionship, of earnest work, mutual service, wholesome play and laughter.

Here may kindred friends old and new and the stranger find an open door and a cordial welcome. May it be to them not merely a place of entertainment but of genuine hospitality.

Here may pure thoughts, love of good books, of music, flowers, and all beautiful things find expression. May friendships ripen and endure and no one go forth harmed by word or deed.

Here may children grow clean in body, mind and soul. May youth find inspiration, maturity find fruition and old age a place of rest and happy memories.

May God's blessing rest upon this House and on all who may dwell within it, and may it always deserve the sacred name of Home.

It doesn't say who wrote these words, but the words do express the way Kathy and I feel about our home, and those who share our home.

In a way this same philosophy can be true of Alpha Omega, from every new member to those of us who have known the haven of our group for some time now. Alpha Omega can be as a home for all of us to grow and learn. ■

[Last Laugh]
COGNITION



THE ALPHA OMEGA SOCIETY

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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