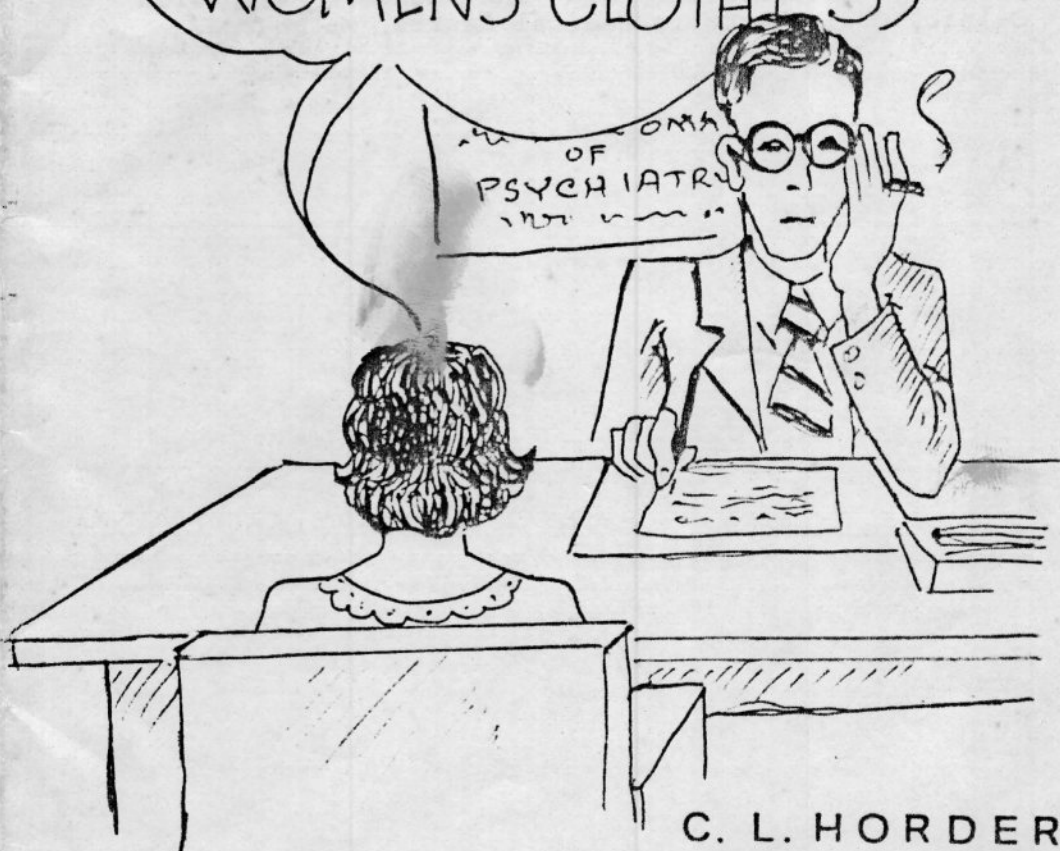


A RESPONSE TO

"MY HUSBAND LIKES
DRESSING IN
WOMEN'S CLOTHES"



C. L. HORDERN

FOREWORD

This booklet deals with the subject of transvestism not only for men who behave in this way but for their families and friends.

It has been written with skill and sensitivity. Due emphasis is given to facts without the emotional and judgemental overtones that so often detract from publications of this kind. I recommend it as a reliable source of information about transvestism.

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"MY HUSBAND LIKES DRESSING IN WOMEN'S CLOTHES"

Well, in most such cases, the appropriate response is "Congratulations, Lucky You." Does this startle you? It is certainly not what you expected. Or wanted?

Hopefully, this comment has brought you out of any mental numbness, self-pity, shock, or horror you may have felt about your husband's transvestism, as it was intended to do. You should now be able to start looking intelligently at the situation, and so see the good as well as the bad aspects.

Why congratulations?

We shall discuss this towards the end of this section, when we better understand what we are talking about.

The Nature of Transvestism.

There is a very substantial degree of misconception about transvestism, the term for cross-dressing. Many people equate the whole field with the small section occupied by the so-called "drag queens". These are mostly homosexuals and they like to caricature or burlesque women. They usually seek the public arena for this denigration of womanhood, and thus become the most visible manifestation of transvestism. They give the general public a very wrong idea of what transvestism is about.

They differ greatly from the great majority of transvestites, who mostly do their cross-dressing in secret, often unknown to their wives and families. These have a great respect for womanhood, and wish to enjoy some of its advantages, including the lovely feel and variety of women's clothing.

Unfortunately there is a great pressure on men, particularly Australian men, to show only so-called "masculine" characteristics, so much so that a "guilt" complex is usually engendered in any male who allows his innate femininity to come to the surface, and this applies particularly when this femininity seeks expression in clothing. This is the reason that most transvestites cross-dress in secret.

PART I - WHAT MAKES A TRANSVESTITE

It is generally accepted now that we all have some masculinity and some femininity in our make-up. None of us are completely masculine or completely feminine in all our characteristics. We are expected to have a substantial preponderance of masculine characteristics if we are male, or a substantial preponderance of feminine characteristics if we are female. This is not necessarily the case.

The terms "sex" and "gender" are not synonymous. They refer to two different things. Sex is physical, gender is psychological. Sex - male or female - refers to the biological equipment the person has. Gender - masculine or feminine - refers to the attitudes or mental characteristics that person has. There are many "shades of grey" in gender. Surprisingly there are also "shades of grey" in sex as well.

There are five indicators of sex:

1. Appearance of genitalia - the presence of a recognisable penis, etc.
2. Presence of internal reproductive structures - in particular the existence of the uterus.
3. Hormones and secondary sexual characteristics - in particular features like breasts and hair distribution.
4. Gonads - the presence of ovaries, testes.
5. Chromosomes - types of chromosome structure can be identified typical of male, female or inter-sex states.

Any of these may indicate a different sex to that indicated by the others. Sex classification is given at birth and is normally based on genitalia only. This then usually sets the pattern for the baby's upbringing (gender training).

Gender is very much less clearly defined. At birth, there is little or no readable indication of gender. Some authorities consider that a new born baby has potentially all characteristics of both genders, and that the eventual gender of the person is wholly the result of conditioning and training after birth. Others state that gender identity is controlled by hormone strength.

However, there does seem to be strong grounds to believe that a predisposition to one gender or the other may exist in the new born infant (in the same way as artistic-ability, for example, seems to be inborn). This innate gender predisposition may or may not "match" the sex.

If it does not match, childhood training tries to suppress any "wrong" gender characteristics, but with varying success. Also whether a particular characteristic is masculine or feminine is, in most cases, arbitrary according to the ideas of the parents who train that child, and of the society into which the child is born.

A suppressed characteristic may rise to the surface at any time, even after many years. This is particularly so if there be some "trigger" incident. This is all perfectly normal.

From the above, it will be seen that for a male to show some femininity is by no means abnormal, nor does it indicate that there is anything "wrong" with him. This femininity, if enough to be obvious, is there because of its inadequate suppression to conform with society's arbitrary "norm", eg. "Little men don't cry." Note: "Suppression", not "Elimination". The effectiveness of such suppression depends on the strength of the desire for expression, on the strength of the innate predisposition, and on the strength of the suppressing actions. As with anything suppressed, particularly if the suppressive force needs to be substantial, a "break-out" may occur at any time. Subsequent resuppression then becomes even more difficult.

One characteristic supposedly confined to females is the pleasure given by the feel of silken garments and other sensations induced by the nature of feminine clothes and adornment. For a male to desire this pleasure cannot be either wrong or unusual.

Thus we find that this is an area in which the femininity of MANY men seeks expression, even if this is frowned upon by society. Note: we said "MANY men!" In Tahiti, where society does not bring great pressure to bear on its suppression,

cross-dressing is done by about one in four of the men at least some of the time. In Australia, where "being a 'man'" is so important, this figure is considerably lower. We find, therefore, that much of Australian cross-dressing is done in secret. Reliable figures are therefore impossible to obtain, but it is believed that at least 3% of Australian males cross-dress, although the percentage is probably somewhat higher.

Your Husband.

Hopefully you have now realised from the above, that your husband is not abnormal, is not a pervert, is not a freak, nor is he any other terrible type. Is he any the less a man? Has he changed in any way now that you know that he likes to cross-dress? The answer to both these questions is "NO".

In nearly every case this desire appeared before marriage, but was not understood. It was expected to go away once that person was married. For this reason, no mention of it was thought necessary to the prospective wife. It was not realised that transvestism is too firmly entrenched in a person's nature for it to ever go away. Therefore there is no cure. It can be suppressed to a certain extent, but any suppression generates pressures which may seek relief in bad moods, quarrels, and unreasonableness in other things, even alcoholism. Instead of going away, it reappears stronger than ever after the newness of the marriage has passed, and this is due to the presence of the wife's feminine clothes bringing the thought of wearing them to his attention.

Your husband IS still a man! He is still the same man he always was. You have merely found out another facet of his nature - that he includes a liking for feminine clothes and adornment amongst his less masculine characteristics. This does not lessen in any way his other characteristics which attracted you to him.

He doesn't love you any the less because he cross-dresses. He needs this outlet, otherwise he would not do it. If he has kept it secret till now, it is because he loves you and fears

that you will reject him. The guilt-complex that has been engendered in him by society about his cross-dressing leads him to consciously expect rejection by you. However the stress build-up from its suppression requires relief. Due to this internal conflict, he needs your HELP, not antagonism. He really needs your love.

We will look into living with transvestism in Part II of this booklet.

Why Congratulations.

With our primitive ancestors, the act of mating amounted to a bestial urge, virtual rape, and little pleasure - indeed none at all for the female. Due to his size, the male's domination was irresistible.

Over the ages, men and women have undergone a radical transformation. Not just in their physical appearance, but in their psychology - the way they think and behave. No longer is the dominance of the male and the subservience of the female valid, men and women are closer together. They now share characteristics of both sexes - they are now more or less androgynous. (ref: Article by Robert Wilson (in London) in the Melbourne "Sun" supplement "Sun Living" 30.12.86).

(From the same Article) Masters and Johnson, the internationally acknowledged authorities on sex and human loving, reported on a test of students, that a third were found to be androgynous, and that such people "display more self-esteem, achievement orientation, and social competence than people with more traditional masculine or feminine patterns".

(Also) A senior lecturer in human sexuality, Dr. Elizabeth Stanley, says about non-androgynous people: "There are ghastly little plastic moulds called masculinity and femininity which we are pushed into regardless of the true shape of our natures. A great many of the problems I have to deal with are created by people, particularly men, denying the feminine bits of themselves. Especially their emotions. This

can cause a great deal of misery and broken marriage. People who are more in touch with their emotions are better adjusted people, better able to form close relationships."

Your husband's desire to cross-dress demonstrates his androgyniety - that he wants to accept, whether consciously or sub-consciously is unimportant, his femininity, his emotions. This indicates that he has a loving and considerate nature and good social competence. He is the best "husband material". Surely this merits congratulations!

Transsexualism.

Before closing off this section, there is one area of transvestism to which the above situation does not apply. This is where the femininity in the male is so great that that person has considerable dysphoria (mental discomfort) on having male sex organs, and wishes for an operation to remove these signs of maleness. These are the transsexuals. While possible, the likelihood of your husband being a transsexual is not great.

Not understanding their condition, some of these transsexuals do in fact marry, and sometimes produce children. Unlike the majority of transvestites, they are unable to form satisfactory heterosexual relationships, nor can counselling give much help in that way. There is no heterosexual basis on which a strong marriage can be built.

In some cases, however mutual (non-sexual) love and affection may be sufficient to hold the partnership together. There has been a number of cases where this love and affection has held together in a lesbian relationship formerly married couples after the male has had a sex-change operation.

PART II - LIVING WITH TRANSVESTISM

We have now seen that transvestism has no "cure". It will not go away. On the other hand, it is not evil. It is nothing new. It has been practised all down the ages, even by Roman Emperors, and French and English Kings. We now hear that Leonardo da Vinci painted a portrait of himself dressed as a woman - the Mona Lisa of the mystic smile.

Transvestism is regularly practised by women. The vogue includes the wearing of many masculine garments - slacks, jeans, shirts, etc. - often bought in men's wear only shops. Why then, is transvestism by men not fully accepted? This is probably because it is considered by other men to be an attack from within on "male supremacy". Can you suggest any other reason why "men in dresses" have not been accepted.

What is your real objection to your husband cross-dressing? Apart from "what others think" have you any real objection other than the equivalent of your husband objecting to you wearing slacks as they make you look less feminine.

Isn't the whole crux of your problem "What others think"?

Is it going to be so terrible an ordeal to you to let your husband relieve those stresses which his abstention from cross-dressing will generate?

Do you really need to be absent when he is dressed as a woman?

Think about it!

Do you only love his masculine image? Or do you love him personally? With all his faults?

How would you feel if your husband refused to have anything to do with you whenever you wore slacks?

THINK ABOUT IT!

I hope that all the self-pity, shock and horror you initially felt has now evaporated, and that you are now prepared to sit down with your husband and work out practical details. In all differences in ideas, compromise is the only answer that works.

Compromise means that both of you try to see the other's needs and points of view, and by discussion arrive at a procedure that meets the main requirements of both parties. It is vital that neither party does all the giving nor all the taking.

Compromise = Give + Take.

Details of any compromise must not be rigid, as it is impossible to foresee all situations - Guidelines only are needed.

You, no doubt, would prefer to see him only dressed male, whereas he wants to spend some of his spare time dressed female, as he gets enough of male dress when he is at work. Compare this with the business wife liking to relax in slacks as a contrast to her formal skirt or costume which she needs to wear at work.

How often will he want to Cross-dress.

How often varies from person to person and from time to time. Probably more frequently than you would like, but a lot less than you fear. Initially, when first given freedom to do so, he will want to cross-dress quite a bit, but this will settle down after the initial self-indulgence. This is quite natural. There will be much repression to be got out of his system.

Frequency is usually the main subject for compromise and here it is essential that the compromise should not be rigid. So many things can affect his desires to cross-dress from time to time that a rigid timetable would be unworkable.

If you are generous in giving him freedom to cross-dress, he will almost certainly be generous in helping you with your chores. Do NOT demand this, but tactfully encourage this activity. Demands that, if he wants to be a woman, then he must do the woman's work will not help relations, but a pleasant request for assistance will almost certainly get results. Even if you prefer to do a certain job yourself, don't refuse his help if he offers it. You will reap the benefit of this in a stronger marriage by accepting happily.

If you are satisfied with your gender, it will be hard for you to understand why he is not. Remember that the restrictions on a woman's gender-role have been relaxed greatly in recent years. You are completely free to wear anything your like. There are no clothing restrictions to irk you. Your activities are also far less restricted now than of yore. On the other hand the male, who in nature is usually the fine feathered one, e.g. the peacock, has been expected to dress to a sober and limited style. Ponder on this aspect.

You get plenty of opportunities to really "titivate" yourself up. Realise that he likes to do the same with his femmeself. He will get much more pleasure out of it than you because it is much more of an occasion for him.

Try to share activities. If he wants to go out "en femme", he will probably be glad to have you go with him. But do NOT go in a spirit of "keeping check on him". Go to enjoy a pleasant time together, just enjoying yourselves. Go to a show. Go shopping, or just window-shopping. Go to a restaurant. Go to a transvestite meeting (see notes at the end of this section).

What about being seen?

Do not go worrying about meeting someone you know. If this does happen, just carry it off as naturally as you both can. If you have helped your husband to make the best presentation of "herself" with choice of clothes, make-up etc. "she" should not look ridiculous. If neither of you panic, but show

complete acceptance of the situation (even if you dont feel it) you will at most get only curiosity, not ridicule. For anyone, dressed normally or otherwise, it is important, when in public, to show obvious complete acceptance by yourself of both yourself and anyone you are obviously out with. Others are led to judge you by the way you obviously judge yourself. This self-acceptance is at all times of the utmost importance to the transvestite out in public. It makes all the difference on how others react, and more importantly on whether they "read" him. So, if comment on his actions or appearance is necessary at any time, do it in such a way as to help his self-confidence.

If the two of you can achieve a "bosom-buddy" girl friends attitude without strain you have it "made". You will almost certainly find real enjoyment for yourself as well as for your "girl friend" husband, particularly if you have a good sense of humour. Try it, allowing time for the both of you to get over your initial nervousness. When all is said and done, marriage is for sharing life's experiences together, and not just from the opposite poles of masculine and feminine. Above all do not take your husband's cross-dressing as a serious problem - ENJOY it as much as you can. This applies to both of you. Have FUN!!

Entering and leaving the Home.

How serious is it really if your neighbours know of your husband's cross-dressing? I am sure it is not as serious as you think. Put your self in their place. If you saw your next-door neighbour going out with his wife, both nicely dressed as women, what would be your reaction. You would probably do little more than raise an eyebrow, and possibly smile. But would you think any the worse of them? You would wonder why, naturally, but you would put it down to the odd things other people do. And that would be that.

The same as with meeting someone you know when out, if you act as if what you are doing is perfectly natural, little if any, comment will be raised. However if you act guiltily, or

look as if you are being secretive or ashamed about your actions, you draw attention to yourselves and invite adverse criticism. I dont mean that you should "advertise" your actions or your husband's cross-dressing, but go about what you want to do discretely but not secretly. Do not worry too much about being seen and recognised.

Shopping.

Encourage your husband to shop "en femme". But not in the shops nearest your home. This last would be advertising his cross-dressing, and neither of you want that. Shopping "en femme" is the best way for your husband to obtain clothing that looks and feels right on him, as there will be no problems in trying the clothes on. Nearly all shops will be very helpful. If he would like you to go with him, dont hesitate. Your advice on choice of clothes and accessories will probably be appreciated. If you are near the same size, you can probably get clothes that you can share. This will save money. This side can be a problem, as the two of you now need a third wardrobe - "hers". When your husband's other self first "comes out", expenses will be high until a reasonable variety of clothing has been got together for "her". You should make allowances for this. Afterwards wear and tear on his male clothes will be less as he will not be wearing them as often. "Sweet reasonableness" on both sides should keep clothing bills within the budget.

Shopping expeditions as two girls together can be a lot of fun, not just for clothing, but for other things as well.

Most people do not take enough notice of others to "read" your husband. But what matter if they do? What would your reaction be if you saw someone you were certain was a man dressed presentably as a woman? If "she" was behaving himself and apparently going happily about "her" legitimate business, you, having satisfied yourself that "she" was doing just this would take little further notice, if any. Even if "she" was a man you knew, you would be unlikely to seriously concern yourself about his actions. After all, it is his life he is living.

Acceptance.

It has been the experience of all transvestites who do go out in public, that nowadays there is a tremendous acceptance of their cross-dressing. Of course, there will always be a few people, particularly those who have no knowledge of the subject, who like to see evil in anything different, just because it is different. If you worried about such people, you would lead a very uninteresting existence.

Many people show a very real interest in meeting a self-accepting transvestite - not to ridicule him/her but to seriously learn about transvestism and why transvestites want to cross-dress. They want to extend their knowledge of human nature. They also ask about transsexualism, and seek to know the difference between it and transvestism. Films like "Tootsie" and "Victor/Victoria" have made the public aware of the phenomenon of transvestism and have whetted their curiosity to learn more.

Children.

Whether the children should be told is a very contentious point. This is something about which the parents will have to make up their own minds, because they know their children better than anyone else. They would therefore have some idea on how their children are likely to take it. Before telling them, both the transvestite father and the mother must be in agreement that they should be told.

There is exactly the same argument for telling the children as there was for telling you. That is "It is better to be told the proper way than to find out the wrong way". Being told the right way allows for explanations to diminish any shock. It allows opportunity to assimilate ideas which are probably rather radical. There can never be any certainty of the children not finding out other than complete suppression of your husband's transvestism, and look what damage the resultant stress may do (see discussion in Part I). This could be far worse for the children. It could even result in complete marriage breakdown and divorce - absolutely the

worst thing that could occur, as the children usually are the ones who are the worst affected by divorce.

Very careful consideration should be given on whether and how to tell, or to take a chance in the hope that they will not find out. Perhaps telling them gradually by making game of it could be the answer. "What sort of a Mummy do you think Dad would make?" "Do you think it might be fun to find out some night?" "Would you like Mummy to dress Dad up as Mummy one night so that we can see?" Children would possibly get fun from such "dress-ups", and this could be gradually led into acceptance of Dad cross-dressed for longer periods - doing the cooking as Mum, etc.

Once the children know, both your life and your husband's will be so much easier, as neither of you need to be so careful what you say in front of them. Remember, it must be a joint decision. Think about it. Discuss it together.

Don't put it into the "too-hard" basket.

Try to reach a mutual decision.

Other Family Members

If you see other family members with any frequency, they should also be told of your husband's cross-dressing. Again the same argument applies that it is better to be told than finding out the wrong way. Quite often it is found that the one who is expected to be the most horrified is the one that is the most accepting and vice versa. If you as the transvestite's wife can accept his cross-dressing, it does not leave other family members much option but to try to understand and accept. At first most of them may be in much the same state of shock as you were when you first found out, so be understanding with them. Perhaps this pamphlet may help them too.

Try to encourage them to learn something about transvestism instead of condemning it by some preconceived idea. However, do not carry on an argument on the subject. If they will not

try to learn and understand, tell them you will not discuss it with anyone who has a closed mind, and change the subject. This should apply both to you and to your husband. Such discussion is useless and only creates ill-feeling.

Transvestite Groups.

There are two groups operating in Melbourne to provide a social atmosphere for transvestites to meet. They each meet regularly once a month, and the two monthly meetings are a fortnight apart. This enables transvestites to enjoy membership of both groups, as many do. There are also occasional additional meetings and outings.

At many of the meetings, as well as the social get-togethers, talks on subjects of interest to transvestites (and transsexuals) are given. Often demonstrations on make-up, wigs or other matters of interest may be presented. Each group publishes a monthly newsletter.

Both groups will particularly welcome wives who come along to the meetings, and will also welcome other relatives and close friends of members. Cross-dressing is not compulsory, but is encouraged for members, not that much encouragement is needed.

The Melbourne Groups are:

The Seahorse Club of Victoria - Initial contact through
Box 2337 V, GPO Melbourne, 3001

The Elaine Barrie Project - Initial contact through
Box 405, P.O. Altona, 3018

Further Assistance

If, after reading and absorbing the above, you still require further help to come to a mutually satisfactory agreement with your husband re his transvestism, we can only suggest that you, with your husband, obtain counselling from the Marriage Counsellor from whom you received this booklet, or if it was otherwise obtained, from a Marriage Counsellor who has some knowledge of transvestism.

PART III - A WIFE WRITES

(The final part of the pamphlet is an adaptation of an article which appeared in The Seahorse Club of Victoria Newsletter and was written by a member's wife. The original article is available, on request, from Seahorse.)

Slowly I took the photos from the packet with my name on it, saw the face of an attractive woman looking out of them, saw the lovely figure, shapely legs, and thought, "Oh no! My husband has another woman!"

I had heard of this happening in other marriages and now it was happening in mine.

He came home from work and we both acted normally but the atmosphere was strained. Later, lying in bed together, I wondered if he was thinking of the other woman, not knowing whether to approach the subject myself or just wait.

"Did you find some photos in the shed love?"

"Yes. Who is she? Why didn't you tell me? I'll try harder. Please don't leave us for another woman."

"Don't you recognise her? --- It's me! Dressed up in women's clothing. I'm a transvestite. I like to dress in women's clothing."

"Thank goodness."

"Pardon?"

"Thank goodness. I thought you were sick of me and had another woman. What's a transvestite?"

Explanation given. Oh boy, how do I cope with that? Is he different, has he really changed since I found out? NO, not at all so I decided to stay, to read up on the subject, learn all I can about transvestism and try to accept this other new found part of my husband's character.

However, (at that time) reading up on the subject proved more difficult than I had thought and after a desperate search for written material on the subject produced only a couple of sketchy, vague accounts by psychiatric experts, the nagging doubts soon come back.

Strangely enough I felt that I could quite easily accept the new situation but with so little apparently known about transvestism, my husband treated it with wariness and guilt. This was perhaps the major obstacle in our search for peace. I wanted, needed to talk about it. My husband didn't! He kept it bottled up within himself, hedged and tacked and avoided any discussion that could develop. It was as if he had built a castle within his mind: a place where he could run and hide should any situation disliked by him evolve.

Naturally, such behaviour strained our relationship.

How I longed for the circumstances we knew in our early marriage. When we were living in an old farmhouse, away from the urban rush and the possibility of visitors without notice. There with nature we shared a beautiful privacy: a privacy that would have been ideal for learning about such a phenomenon as this. But those times were long past.

Of course, my greatest fears were, "What would the neighbours say? What would our friends say?"

But circumstances change, and especially as my husband was involved with construction work. Within the next few weeks the current job contract was to draw to a close and my doubts and fears were shelved as we packed up and prepared to move to a new project.

For the first time we moved into our very own home and I guess that the excitement of this, and our feverish attempts to organise the same to our liking overshadowed everything else. And as the months passed with no further mention of transvestism I guess I slipped into a kind of self satisfied complacency.

Some twelve months passed and due to sickness in the family I had reason to stay with my mother for a couple of weeks. Returning from that trip I found my husband to be quite a changed person. For the first time in years he was completely relaxed and obviously very happy. It was obvious too that he was becoming impatient for some privacy in which to talk about something.

Late that night when we were finally alone, it all come out.

"Got a bit bored with my own company while you were away Love. I went to town one day and bought some new clothes. Do you want to see them?"

It was quite a sensible selection for the beginning of a wardrobe. The underwear was all fairly cheap as were the mid heeled sandals. The frock he had chosen was a neat little orange coat dress, quite fashionable at the time. He had even bought a basic collection of make-up and a wig. I smiled to myself as I thought of the amateur job he would have done with the cosmetics.

"That looks quite comfortable for sitting around at home and relaxing," I commented.

"Oh I didn't always stay at home. On Saturday night I went to Melbourne," he replied, and I can still remember the room temperature dropping by several degrees.

"You parked in some darkened side street I suppose."

"Oh no. I went into the city, parked the car in Elizabeth Street and spent nearly three hours mingling with the crowd, window shopping. It was really marvellous. I feel totally liberated."

I wrapped my coat more tightly around myself and moved a little closer to the heater as the temperature plunged to fifteen degrees below.

During what must have been a few seconds a thousand thoughts raced through my mind. What if the neighbours had seen him? What if our friends had noticed? The police!! It would have been great if he'd been picked up. How could I ever face my family? What would people think of us?? Funny, I had always wanted him to talk about his desires and feelings concerning transvestism, but now that he was, he was saying things that I didn't want to hear! And I didn't want to hear any more so I went to the kitchen to fix a cup of coffee.

It is truly amazing how rapidly the human mind can turn over thoughts and considerations. During the coffee preparations our whole married life together appeared in my "mind's eye" like some miraculous video disc replay. I remembered the happiness, the sadness, the sweet and the bitter. I remembered our hopes and our home, our family. My husband had worked and created. He was a good provider, a respected father.

I remember too my aching desire for my husband to unlock his heart and share his transvestic problems with me. And finally I could see my rejection of him. Oh God, where lies justice?

Armed with our coffee and a tear in my eye, I returned to the lounge room. Some new motivation seemed to take hold of me and I said, "Would you like to change now, darling?"

That was the beginning of many, sometimes weekly, sometimes monthly, femme nights in our house. It was like the dawning of a new day. It was as if our courtship had began again. I think we actually found each other in the months that followed. We found our peace and shared a beautiful togetherness that grew stronger, bonded with love and respect. New qualities that I never knew existed in a man became apparent in my husband. And strangely enough on reflection, I began to wonder how we could ever have felt that we were threatened by a problem called transvestism.

Some twelve months later a very sad and troubled letter appeared in Father Glover's column in the Melbourne Truth. It was written by a transvestite who was going through the same torment and unhappiness that we had known for so many years. A long letter was written by us in reply, explaining our life together and offering any assistance we could give. This was duly published and about thirty people replied, seeking friendship, advice or just someone with whom to share transvestic desires. So much correspondence became rather tedious though and eventually the Victorian people were met and formed together in a small, exclusive club. Correspondence continued with interstate people. We felt a real sense of achievement, we were able to offer understanding to people less fortunate than ourselves. However, we realized that much more was needed.

At home though, I could only relate our peace and happiness to the fact that we had finally learned to share all aspects of our lives together. That was the message that we tried so hard to write into the correspondence that we had undertaken.

Some time later my husband noticed an advertisement in one of the "underground" magazines of that time. It was an advertisement pertaining to the Seahorse Club, a national transvestite organization. It seemed like a prayer answered so he immediately applied for membership.

Several months later my husband had to go to Sydney to attend his brother's wedding. Fortunately, a meeting had been arranged with Jill, the President of Seahorse in Sydney. The weekend before his departure had been enjoyed as a quiet "femme" time at home as we packed Robyn's clothes in preparation for this major event.

All was not to be plain sailing though. Breakfast the next morning was interrupted with the entrance of our eight year old daughter as she dropped a loaded bombshell...

"Mummy, who was the lady with you last night?"

The question did not come as a real surprise as this was one of the aspects that we had occasionally discussed. At that moment though we were temporarily lost for words and told her that it was someone whom she would probably meet in the near future.

My husband had often voiced the opinion that, although we had accepted his transvestism, he felt that it was coming between him and the children. At the time our daughter was about eight years old and one of our fears was that a full revelation of the situation may cause her to lose her respect for her father. Our son was almost six and our greatest concern with him was that such knowledge might influence him to develop similarly.

As we had formed many new friendships in this new-found TV world, many changes were made to our life-style. My husband wasn't terribly keen to go visiting other TVs socially on his own so we were burdened with the added expense of baby sitters. And when we wanted to invite others into our home, "straight" days were stipulated and we dreaded the possibility that some indiscreet remark about cross-dressing may slip out.

Lady Fate plays an unpredictable hand though. We were all sitting around the television set one night watching some Current Affairs programme. An interview with some "pop group" was being screened and one of the gimmicks used by that group was that they performed in "drag".

It was quite a family discussion that followed, during which a basic but fairly comprehensive explanation of the motives behind transvestism were given. We were most elated as both of the children indicated that they accepted the explanation and appeared quite willing to accept transvestism as a very real part of the life of some people.

Our son did not pursue the matter further. However our daughter did. After asking many questions she was given, to the best of our ability, an understanding of transvestism and finally taken completely into our confidence. Her interest

was almost indescribable and every request was met. Wardrobes and clothing, shoes and photo albums were produced, studied and discussed. Then finally, the inevitable. Our daughter asked to see "Robyn" in person.

A date was set, and on its arrival, "Robyn" made the most shaky entrance he had ever experienced! So nervous! Dear daughter however, was soon to put him at ease. She was most impressed and considered the occasion called for her to "dress up" as well. And so she spend a most enjoyable evening with her mother and new-found "friend". And when her bed time arrived her total acceptance was declared by a good night kiss and the words, "I wish we could do this every Saturday night Daddy."

During the ensuing months our son became much more familiar with talk of "men who dress as women" and eventually he also shared our secret. His attitude was, "So what, but I would prefer to play footy or cricket."

Over the years since, he has readily accepted the situation where daddy wears a dress and on one occasion his sister even conned him into putting on make-up and a skirt. This venture was short lived, about ten minutes. He is however a regular user of make-up! Even if just to paint on weird moustaches, beards and sideburns. And above all, a fairly close father-son mateship exists during leisure time. His father's transvestism does not interfere with family life.

With the family situation apparently satisfactory we had no hesitation in inviting other TVs to our home. On each occasion that this did occur, the visitors were treated with interest and respect by our children.

When our third child, a daughter, was born we decided that "Robyn" would be treated as just another occasional member of the family. The baby has grown up with an awareness and acceptance of transvestism from the very beginning and at three years old, to her, nothing could be more natural.

We did, when first telling the children, impress upon them that daddy's transvestism was to remain a family secret, and we feel that this wish was respected. Over the years though, we have become more involved with Seahorse and its members and, I suppose, more liberal minded. Now it is quite a regular occurrence that TVs arrive at our home. We are quite aware that our children have since discussed these things and neighbours have observed, but with little consequence.

Our children regularly attend the Victorian Seahorse meetings now and are quite familiar with most aspects of transvestism. Though we failed in the beginning to give them credit for having the ability to assimilate knowledge that society generally sees fit to reject, only time will prove the full effect of such knowledge. It is our belief that our honesty with them will be the major controlling factor.

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