

# TRANS SPIRITUALITY

## A TRANS-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Issue 08

Autumn 2007

Better late  
than never?



Steph with Vanessa at Detroit Pridefest 2007 (see p. 37)

**“Ideologies separate us. Dreams and anguish bring us together.”**

~ Eugene Ionesco (1912-1994)

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**A TRANS-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

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## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Recently, my spirituality has been sincerely tested due to setbacks, let downs and circumstances beyond my ability to cope, without finding myself striking out at phantoms. After I received and read my latest issue of *Trans Spirituality* (07), a light reappeared and I was once again able to see further and beyond my own circumstances.

Thanks to all of our *Trans Spirituality* family that dared to share their feelings and opinions.

Steph, I truly apologize for being such a "B" in my last letter to you. I understand your position more clearly after this issue. I am able and willing to wait as long as I must for you to review and respond to my requests. And I will keep them coming. I love you very much, my sistah girl. You are more than my editor. You have been my friend and hope, and you remain so until that lid is closed in my face and body buried in dirt as my spirits travel on to a much better place.

And Watson, you have been a Godsend. My heart is not like stone because of the faith I have in the lives that have touched mine and given of themselves towards

my fight for justice. Simply because they are truly angels and I am truly worthy. I love you guys endlessly, so please bear with me.

When my mom wrote, stating her doctor predicted she has six months to live, I felt I didn't have much time and I had to get moving! I wanted the "Under Construction" sign to come down like 'yesterday' and our introductory presentation to major media networks to begin today.

I believed in my heart that justice would prevail if a true injustice has been righteously exposed. I have the truth of a true injustice on my side, so I placed all my faith in God and that truth. I always will.

I still believe in the goodness that lives in most people and that is something restored in me by all of my *Trans Spirituality* family, ever so gently. Thanks again for the labor of love put into this 07 issue. It is a blessing to many of us in captivity in more ways than one.

Please forgive this pussycat if she sometimes becomes a tigress. It's because my cage sometimes seems to be closing in on me when I do strike out at its very existence.

May we all find our way guided

by the light our spirituality creates for the purpose of our transformation and movement to live true.

Sincerely Yours,  
Valjean

Dear Editor,

Let's talk about increased workload, increased mistakes, etc.

Sometimes in life, we bite off more than we can chew, much less swallow. In those cases, it's often better to spit something out, so you can chew the remainder of your food better.

The amount of "errors" in issue 07 was astronomical. I was surprised as much as Steph loves to "edit," that so much did not get "edited," despite the number of "editor's notes" throughout the text.

The zine is our foundation, and all other programs, ventures, and 'dreams' of would be, could be, or might be, should come *after*. I strongly feel that some of these other projects need to be spun off to others immediately. Otherwise, in the event that no one is able to take them on at this time, we should suspend them until such time as Steph is able to deal with them *without* them affecting the quality of the zine.

I just did a comparison with *all* of our issues and hands down, issue 07 was the poorest quality zine put out to date.

I also propose that we put it out once every three months to give ample time for assembly in the *highest* quality. I don't ever want to see pages stapled incorrectly (with only one staple too), photos and articles 'sun-glared' to the point of being wholly illegible, etc. We can do better. Why? Because we *have* done better, consistently. Compare the old issues.

It's like we're starting not to care about our zine anymore, which translates into putting less care into it.

Do you know what the equivalent of rationalizing a bad decision in life is? When we start to make *excuses* for doing something wrong that we can get right. This breeds acceptance of error, which breeds repetitiveness.

I'm sure I am not alone when I say I'd rather get the zine late, as long as we get it right. So Steph, spit something out so that you can get back to the grade A editorial work you addicted us to. Live true.

Tsunami Caryl-Averlyn

Dear Editor

Hello. I'm Naomi Sue White Eagle, a pre-op sister here at Walla Walla State Penitentiary. I'm with Ms. Sarah J. Babcock in here. Sarah got me reading your magazine, and now I look forward to each issue. You had some great ideas in this last issue.

I like the idea of a house where transsexuals could go to after release from prison. That would be a great help. Maybe we could put back into the program once we are on our feet again out there.

Well, I just wanted to thank you for sending me these magazines. Keep up the good work, sisters. Oh, I wrote this poem for Ms. Sarah (p16). I was thinking maybe you could print it in your next issue, if not, that's cool too.

Your magazine is great, keep it going!

Naomi Sue White Eagle

Hey Girlz –

OMG, this is so cool that we as transgender women (MTF) have this forum to sound off & share our spiritual beliefs.

Just to introduce myself, I'm a 29 y/o T\* woman named Carmen. I am currently serving a 4-year term

at California Medical Facility in California. I then will be transferred to a Federal prison to serve the rest of my life in an institutional setting. Does that stink or what?

I was given the *Trans Spirituality* mag by a straight inmate who is trans-friendly. He seems to understand the struggles of T\* inmates and our fight for equality; and he's a great friend. So as you can see, there are a few good men left in the world who care about the transgender struggle behind these walls.

Thank you so much, sisters, for taking the initiative to put together a publication for all of us to share with each other, for our beliefs in a totally cool environment.

Peace and love to you all, girl-friendz.

Tranz-Genderly,  
Carmen (Vacaville CA)

Dearest Steph,

I wish to thank you for printing my letter to you in your "Letters to the Editor" section. I hope I receive responses from all the sisters out there. It's for a good cause and will benefit all of us. I have an excerpt from my book that I would love to share with my transgender sisters.

It is from the dedication part of my book *The Crime of Prison*. It goes like this:

### In Dedication

To those of you out there that have experienced your own horrors and nightmares in jails and prisons, who have suffered from hate, violence and rage at the hands of physical and mental tormentors, you are not alone. Perhaps by sharing my prison experience with you we can touch, and in this touching, we can heal, and through this healing, we will find love. By sharing this love, we can stop the hate, and in the act of stopping the hate, love shall be forever preserved. I believe the greatest gift we humans can give to one another is love, the precious flame that is the light of our souls and the source of our immortality. Let this be my gift to each and everyone of you, such that it is.....

Peace,  
J. "Cat" Erickson

Dear Steph,

Hey grrrr! Thanks so much for your letter. I'm glad to finally hear from you! Please let Amanda know I tried to write to her, but the letter came back return-to-sender. Is her

address no longer valid?? Maybe you could let her know I wrote to her???

Yeah, I was *really* hoping to contact Natasha in response to her request for pen-pals. ☺ Particularly since you indicated you would facilitate her request. Also, she specifically was interested in hearing from a pre-op MTF transgender girl. I am also bi and/or lesbian and have a preference for other girls. I am just so intrigued & fascinated by Natasha, based on her articles and pics in TS-TRD. I can wait until she is able to correspond directly.

To update you on my situation I recently transitioned and am openly identifying myself as a girl now, of the female gender. My nickname is "Baby" and my formal name is Jennifer or Jenni. I've been taking hormones but without a prescription.

The medical doctor referred me to the "Transgender Clinic" (we inmates weren't even aware this existed!) So, I will be evaluated for hormone replacement therapy. If treatment is denied I will have to pursue legal action.

I'm *out* of Ad-seg now, and doing good.

Sincerely yours,  
"Baby" J. Gann

Dear Steph,

How are you doing? I know you're very busy and I love all you're doing to help us. Your ideas are great. I love the idea of clothing. Making clothes are great too. I am a crossdresser, so a red short skirt & heels, wig, makeup are great for me.

I am incarcerated in a Massachusetts state prison. The girls or sisters up here are not treated too badly. But I do know in other states they are treated terribly. I really hate to see that and I speak up for them. I myself love transgender women.

Is there any way I can write to any sisters at all? I go by Paulette and I would love to write to some sisters. Do you have any info on halfway houses for us sisters, especially in Massachusetts?

I would love to communicate to sisters more often if possible. If I can help you in any way then let me know. Steph, I will do what I can for you. I hope you write me back. I would love to keep in contact with you. Well, have a great day & be good.

Love ya,  
Paulette



## Corrections

### New feature introduced by Tsunami Caryl-Averlyn

In issue 07, on page 36- "SO WHAT DO YOU LOVE?"- by Tsunami Caryl-Averlyn, the 'T' in the third paragraph should be 'in,' so that it reads: "In some ways."

'Signing' in the first paragraph should be 'singing,' and on paragraph #9 which is actually on page 37, 'of' should be 'or' so that the sentence reads- "Sincere heart *or* not."

These errors are apparently a result of a miscommunication between Tsunami and Steph in regards to proof reading the rough draft.

The 'fuzzy' unclear pictures, however, fall squarely on the shoulders of the editor (or whatever 'editor's note' she's going to find time to insert).

And the philosophy on page 38 just needs to be completely re-printed. Can *anybody* read that? How did it get past *quality* control?

**TRANS SPIRITUALITY** is a quarterly zine for demonstrating how the transgender experience includes a rich spiritual dimension. Our initial focus is how T\* inmates are finding incredible ways to apply their spirituality to the challenges of living in a gender-oppressed environment. If their spirituality proves effective for dealing with the challenges they face each day, what does that say about how *we* are integrating our spirituality into *our* daily transgender experience?

**TRANS SPIRITUALITY** is a public forum for expressing diverse views. Such views are the responsibility of those who express them. These published views are not necessarily those of Jen Durr Press, its staff, or the Founding Corps of the TRD. *Or represent the current views of those who wrote them, since every woman is free to change her mind!*

**TRANS SPIRITUALITY** is open to submissions. Material can be submitted to: Steph Turner, **TRANS SPIRITUALITY** Editor, 3204A University Student Apartments, Rochester MI 48309.

We prefer to receive submissions online, at [jendurrpress@gmail.com](mailto:jendurrpress@gmail.com). Material may be edited for space and continuity. Unsolicited material by snail mail cannot be returned without a SASE. Please request our *writer's guidelines*. Payment to writers is a copy of the issue in which the material appears. All rights reserved.

**TRANS SPIRITUALITY** is currently available for free to anyone who asks and if we have enough funds and copies to distribute. Donations always welcomed.

## **TRANS SPIRITUALITY** A TRANS-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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## Feature message from our sister Natasha T'Chort

# Hail & Greetings

*As most of you know, my eventual release is close at hand. So this will be my last submission for some time. It may be about a year until I actually start to resubmit any real print. So before I go, I have a few things I wish to say.*

*First of all, thank you all so much for all your support and wonderful words in this 'zine. You all have given us more than words can say. Whether knowing or not. I've gained so much from all of you. Your experiences, your insights, your ideas and so much more have induced great experiences and journeys to remember.*

*Some of us who have been here from the beginning (about mid to late 2003) are only now just getting personal contacts with each other. All I can say to all of you who have been around and just coming to surface – stick around and connect! You can't imagine*

*what wonders will come. As of a year ago my future was blackened with fear and uncertainty. Granted, my fears are different and my uncertainty is altered. My future has flourished into promising excitement and expectations, all because of this 'zine and those involved. Reach out and you will be touched by things you never thought true. This is because those here at Trans Religious Dialogue, past, present, and yet to come are all true to what we are, who we are, no matter what. So don't hesitate, you're not alone if you choose not to be. Believe me, I know this as I found out.*

*Delirious---Girl, glad to know you're still doing well. Although you see me as a 'queen,' I never really identified with that title. Your words were meant as encouragement as I know you, but try to take another look, honey. And don't take this negatively, because I enjoyed you and missed*

*you since you've been gone a lot! But try to remember that not all of us are as fortunate as you have been. You've been out a couple years now and lucky. You missed the worst of NDOC. It's changed a great deal since 2000. If you had been to other 'yards' besides intake (NNCC) and here (E.S.P.), you'll still see remnants of what it once was like. Yes. It can be worse, but it once was. Girls, homosexuals, queens, etc once were faced with daily rapes, beatings, forced sex to pay drug debts and if not, forced to 'lock-up.' We're nothing more than sex toy property. And as far as NDOC is compared to most other states, we're soft now compared to what girls, etc. still face in other states.*

*You are a smart 'queen', so get me on this. Get me when I say 'imagine it being you,' who still has such environmental 'pains' – ok, love? You've got great insights too, but try to focus on a wider view in TRD. Personal views are welcomed, but remember we're not the only ones.*

*I also understand your concern on the Trans-Action point. But, I'd never sign a contract that*

*restricted my freedom to express myself. So long as the ones who 'chit-chat' as they please don't slam one another's religious/spiritual natures. Who are we (any of us) to say, "Hey! Can you do that elsewhere?" If a Christian, Jew, Satanist, Wiccan or other wishes to hold discussions of their beliefs, Gods/Goddesses, etc...so be it, no matter where they stand. But if they are slandering someone or someone's God/Goddesses, religion/spirituality, no contract can change their being. You can't force values by contract agreement. These are life's lessons that must be learned. Some just don't ever learn. How do you contract that? We are supposed to unite. Contracts divide, I think. Don't be mad, ok, bitch? You know how I feel about you, ok? Stay in touch too.*

*Valjean and Tsunami...come on, girls...you two are long time running friends...right? It seems like discussing pinpoint topics are great expressions of self, but taking them as a need to defend one's self and points made, can only lead to further points of defending. You both are right and pushing too hard at each other*

*can't be healthy. Can it? I knew what you were saying, Valjean, but also I felt invigorated to read what Tsunami wrote with what she pulled aside of it. I felt like a total freak for my sexual preferences as a T-girl. And I have my issues to battle daily, but I felt comforted by her words that expressed how she too is attracted towards T-girls.*

*Your words "I would rather 'die' before having to endure or indulge in such a role" are understood for you personally. But the way you said it felt like an attack on those like us who desire such a 'role.' As if you detest us for it. No, I'm not accusing you as much as asking. But if this is so, it would seem to me a mentality we all fight in our different ways against established norms.*

*I'm a girl through and through, but physical attachments (as well as emotional, spiritual, mental, etc.) have my interest with like 'attachments' included. Does this make me less of a girl? So then do we dictate one's nature by their body parts and how they use or not*

*use them? It's like one war of homosexuals vs. transsexuals – only now its transsexuals vs. transgender vs. trans-whatever. Why is it so hard for all to see it for what it is? And to see it like it is and not feel division?*



*This being said, I wish to expose a project I'll be focusing on as soon as I can. I wish to hear from any and all who may wish to express interest in this project.*

*As you know, I am a Satanist. My original TRD submission in 2004 was about 'Baphomet,' the icon image of my Satanic path. In*

*short, this image is of a goat-headed, goat-footed figure with the breasts of a woman and a phallus (penis for you who ask) of a man. An image of Satan I could identify with more. Mistakenly called a 'hermaphroditic synthesis,' but yet, me, nonetheless!*

*The point? I am planning to create a Satanic coven, of those who identify with Baphomet. A coven of T-girls who wish to remain non-operative, fully functional, breasted and phallused and create a coven of only such T-girls who wish to revel in this image of Baphomet as Satan's glory. As our glory in its reflection. This is not to be a sex club or party/fan club, but a true coven to practice, congregate and revel in our spiritual path. But any Satanist knows what such a unity can create in its festivities!*

*Likewise, as Baphomet shows magic ceremonies with masculine/feminine (or male and female counterparts), polarities are essential factors. We, as both (granted feminine oneness), who then should be the most powerful of sorcerers/ess? So I guess this is a brief 'call to arms' or 'declaration'*

*to all Satanic/Baphometric T-girls who wish to remain as such to gather your Satanic 'synthesis' and give heed to this call. If you are one and reading this....can you feel the vibe? Do you have access to your religious practice where you're at? In prison? If you fit this bill, if you have access to religious material, and if you wish to help establish and be a covenant member – write in to Natasha T Chort, 3575 Grove Lane, Auburn Hills MI 48326.*

*Also, if you look into an Azure Green catalog (let me know if you need an address to get one), you'll find a Baphomet pendant you can order for \$7.00 (\$12.00 with S&H). Let us rize up and let us be recognized!*

*Hail to you...Hail Satan!*

*Well, I'll bring this to a close as I close another chapter in my life – to start yet another. Try not to miss me – ha! All of you, be well and be true...until 'necks' time.....Natasha*



# Letter to TS-TRD

By Bella Donna Night Raven

Dear Sisters, Brothers, and everyone in between,

Hi. I hope that this letter finds you all well. It has been awhile since I have heard from anyone so I figured that I had better get busy and do some stuff and get it sent off.

I have several things that I want to share with you all. I received a long awaited visit from my significant other, Mishka, who is also TG (FTM). We had three wonderful days to get to know each other again and just be in each other's presence. You know, things most people would take for granted, like holding hands, a hug, a kiss, and gazing into each other's eyes! :) ;) Mishka also will be making a future submission to TS-TRD and will help with some of the transcription of other submissions to TS-TRD.

I sent a change of address to Amanda's Chicago address, but I used the address on the label (which was wrong-*transposed*) :) instead of the address I had in my address book. Being as school is out, I figured that I would have Mishka send an email. Instead of me trying to send another letter that may not be seen till fall.

Anyhow I do not know what the

next submission deadline is, but I hope to have some cutting edge and thought provoking material to share with you.

I also recently found some addresses in the Prisoner resource list put out by the Prison Book Program of the Lucy Parsons Center & Books store, 1306 Hancock St., Ste. 100, Quincy MA 02169. They are:

- **Tranzmission**, PO Box 1874, Asheville NC 28802.
- **TIG – Prisoner Penpal Project**, PO Box 11222, Portland OR 97211 (they request a brief paragraph about yourself).
- **The Gender Mutiny Collective**, PO Box 0494, Chapel Hill NC 27514.

Of the three I mentioned I have only heard from Tranzmission and that was in 2004, so I can't confirm that it is current. I'll let you know if I hear back from any of the above.

I would also like to know if anyone has heard from GIC-TIP lately. I have written them several times and even included a self-addressed stamped envelope for a reply, but none has been forthcoming. The last I heard from them was winter 2004/2005. I have so many problems with my mail I just don't know what the problem is at times when I don't hear back from

someone or some group that I have dealings with.

I have noticed that this week (late June 2007) CNN has been running a lot of stories about transgender issues. I have also noticed the negative reactions of a lot of my fellow prisoners to those stories. It kind of hit home because in the July/August issue of a fairly widely circulated magazine there were references to myself in my real name regarding "cross dressing" and "sex change." Not the kind of thing one wants splashed across the prison grapevine. But as I have done over the years, I will hope and pray I don't have any problems. But if I do, then I will handle them!

We have a long way to go and as long as our state of being, that is the fact that we exist provokes such strong and negative reactions from people. We must have a strong spiritual protection and grounding. We must have faith in our own goodness, and be on good terms with our divine higher power.

Yikes! August deadline! It's July 24 now, better wrap this up. I do sometimes get distracted, and I only received the summer issue of TS-TRD yesterday, 7/23/07. My transfer this spring has caused me to get way behind in just about everything I do or need to do.

I have included a couple humble submissions for the next or other

issue of TS-TRD. See Karmic Debt, and The Bravest Thing. Due to limited time, space, and typewriter ribbon, I can't really comment on some of the fine submissions or new names that I saw in the summer issue. Plus I missed the spring 2007 issue (hint, hint).

The Supreme Court denied my certiorari petition on my habeas corpus, so I have to start all over in the lower courts ☹, but I look forward to bringing some new issues before the Courts, that should include the lack of treatment for transgender issues. I am now in the process of getting the resources (\$\$\$) and research together to make a good start on that. And once again to try and keep this on the spiritual tip, I am trying to get into the frame of mind and spiritual awareness to do battle with the legal Dragon that I am facing.

I am calling upon the Spirit of Joan of Arc who was a transgender warrior, and who was burned alive after torture as a witch. For some spiritual guidance and support in my upcoming legal efforts.

To Steph and Amanda, keep up the good work. Thanks and as usual you have my permission to print all of the information and letters I have sent in this mailing.

Yours in Sisterhood,

Donna

P.S. – Congrats to Amanda too!

## The Bravest Thing I Ever Did Was to Wear a Dress

**Bella Donna Night Raven — © 2007**

I have a tale that I must confess.  
 It is strange but true, no more no less.  
 I tell it freely and under no duress.  
 If you thought you knew me, well you'd never even guess.  
 The bravest thing I ever did, was to wear a dress.  
 I had always wanted to do it, but it seemed like such wickedness.  
 I fought the urge, till it I could no longer repress.  
 It make me so crazy, I had to say yes.  
 It felt so good, I felt sexy like a temptress.  
 I do not want to argue or be querulous.  
 But if I am wrong, then call me a villainess.  
 I feel so pretty and witty, just like an heiress.  
 It makes me confident and gives me finesse.  
 I'll nevermore settle for any thing less.  
 So don't be scared, and get over the stress.  
 Make a move, like the Queen in chess.  
 Be brave and wear that dress.  
 Listen to your inner Goddess.  
 And You She shall bless.



## Self-esteem

Tsunami Caryl-Averlyn



I believe in myself.

I have self-esteem.

Self-esteem means that I have:

- 1) self-awareness – I perceive myself on both the rational and emotional levels.
- 2) self-acceptance – I accept all of me, my weaknesses and my strengths.
- 3) self-responsibility – I consciously endeavor to do at all times that which is good for me and others.
- 4) self-assertiveness – I express myself in the knowledge that I have a right to be me.

# Stumbling

Naomi Sue White Eagle — © May 26, 2006

for Ms. Sarah

I stumbled into you,  
As I bounced off the walls.  
There you were to pick me up,  
From my terrible falls.

You knew of my pain,  
From your past.  
You assured me if I'd listen,  
The pain would not last.

You said, "Girl, face the mirror,  
And be true."  
But dig deep,  
And let yourself shine through!

I'm getting past my fears,  
And found my courage inside deep.  
I love this transsexual woman,  
Climbing life's mountains steep!

Thank-you, sister Sarah, for showing me,  
That transsexual women do have a place.  
Now I too can help those lost,  
Transsexuals with pain on their face!

Sarah helped me find my strength,  
So strong I'll be.  
But best of all,  
My heart is free!



# **Karmic Debt, Paying Dues, Getting By**

**By Bella Donna Night Raven**

Just when I thought that my life could not get any more complex or complicated, it did. Being Transgender in prison is and has never been an easy thing. I have managed over the years to adapt to my surroundings and develop habits and practices that seem to work for me. As far as spiritual growth, and physical safety go at least.

I have recently encountered a new situation that at the risk of offending anyone I will share with you. The Federal Bureau of Prisons has started a new program where they are concentrating the placement of sex offenders (SO's) into five prisons in their system. The prison I am now at is one of them, and let me tell you it is not a pretty sight. Nor is it, in my humble opinion, going to work.

SO's cover a wide range of prisoners from rapists, to child molesters, to creeps who download kiddy porn off the Internet. I am not here to judge anyone's actions.

But the problem for me is one of perception. In prison, everyone must find their place to fit in, and not to do so can cause big problems. Most of the get-in-where-you-fit-in is along racial, ethnic, or gang lines.

Into this complex situation is how each group deals with it's SO's. In my group, white SO's are at the bottom of the pecking order. And to associate with a SO brings condemnation and unwanted attention. My problem is that I have noticed a significant number of persons who may or not be Transgender in with the SO's! Are they SO's too? The answer to that question in some cases is yes.

Do I withhold my fellowship/Sisterhood from them? Yes, I do. That may seem to be mean or hypocritical. If it is, so be it. I can not cross that line, or cosign for your status as a SO. Nor has anyone come to me and claimed innocence, though I know some may be.

We all have a Karmic debt to pay or work out. I will not go out of my way to be rude, or seek to cause harm to any SO, but to be rather blunt about it, as a former victim of SO's and a potential future victim, it ain't worth the risk. We do have an obligation to our fellow Transgender Sisters and

Brothers, but it is not unlimited nor are we obligated to put our selves at risk to do so.

If you are a SO and Trans-gender, well, you have a tough row to hoe. If you are not a SO, be very careful of who and what you associate yourself with.

Just because you are in a class of people who are in many cases reviled and rejected. Not every other outcast is your ally or friend. In fact, to be a good role model to others of our kind and to represent ourselves to the public, we should strive to be separate and distinct in our situation.

At one time, being Transgender was against the law in many ways. At least expressing yourself as such. For the most part it has been decriminalized, though a lot remains to be done as far as the civil rights and anti-discrimination goes. But keeping this thought in the spiritual realm, we must take and maintain the moral high ground in our quest for wholeness in ourselves and respect from others.



We cannot allow ourselves to be used or abused by others who prey upon the weak. They are psychic vampires (*no offense to Natasha – maybe predators is a better word*) and will drag you/us down. I don't want to get into a detailed argument of what the limits of sexuality are. I think everyone knows what is right or wrong, what is rape or child molestation, or other forms of the exploitation of others. I will

not judge others, but to be true to myself and who I am, I must use good judgment.

Lastly, I would say that sometimes to restore the karmic balance or the scales of true justice, you have to break the cycle or circle of abuse. This calls for direct action even if you are the victim (in other words don't just lay there and take the abuse). If you are the guilty party, stop. Refrain from further abuse and do make amends for your past actions. Even if it means you must suffer for awhile. Everything we do has consequences, for good or ill. If you want justice, practice it.

## American Pluralism: a book review

By Tsunami Caryl-Averlyn



*Faith and Pluralism, An American Muslim's Perspective*  
by G. Mahmoud Eboo

G. Mahmoud Eboo, who has lived in the USA for twenty-five years, addresses the topic of 'American Pluralism'.

Eboo first worked in the New York City area where he repaired jet engines using laser technology. Later he started his own repair company in Atlanta, which he sold to Honeywell (pretty impressive).

Eboo, who still lives in Atlanta, now serves as president of his Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Imani Ismaili – council for the United States, Australia and New Zealand. He explained that Shia Ismaili Muslims all share spiritual allegiance to his Highness Prince Aga Khan, who is supposedly the forty-second hereditary descendant of the prophet Muhammad. He alleges to write not as a theologian or a leader, but as an 'American Muslim'.

Eboo said he learned about religious pluralism at an early age. He was six years old when his parents set him to boarding school in England from his home in Kenya.

When he was thirteen, he attended Harrow School in London where his roommates were a Jew, a Christian and a Hindu. They had few prejudices and were curious about each other's faiths. They learned to understand and respect each other and continue to be friends.

When Eboo came to America, he didn't find the Jeffersonian vision of religious pluralism that he had studied. Jefferson's vision of America was a land of promise and parity where religion could be practiced freely and the law protected all.

While Eboo said he felt the country was tolerant and accepting, there was little understanding of Islam and no notion of the Abrahamic relationship. People were not ready to acknowledge a Judeo-Christian-Muslim society.

After '9/11,' Ebo said, the tolerance and acceptance shifted to animosity and suspicion. A deeply wounded America could not differentiate the '9/11 violence' from

'Islam'. Indeed, to many this was Islam – its philosophy, theology and ethics.

He said he had first experienced violence from a 'Christian' source. While he was in London, an IRA bomb exploded near him. Though Protestants are fighting Catholics in Northern Ireland, the war was never viewed as a religious war but rather as a dispute over territory – and the violence not looked at as related to philosophy, theology, or ethics.

To most Americans, all Muslims are Arabs and live in the Middle East, whereas only fifteen percent of Muslims are Arabs. There are one hundred million Muslims who call Europe and America home. Eboo said he feels there is little knowledge of the contributions Muslims have made to mathematics, art, medicine, literature, etc. Eboo was concerned that coming generations will not be able to practice their religions freely. Eboo said he believes that future generations will discover there can be a pluralism of interpretations grounded by a universal set of ethics that the founding fathers believed in two hundred years ago, but we need to have the courage to educate ourselves.

## **“Tales of the Crypt” “Has Anybody Seen the Lost Tomb of Jesus?”**

**By Tsunami Caryl-Averlyn**

'My faith,' as well as the Christian religion itself, would be destroyed if any tomb were to be found that could be proven to contain the remains of Jesus, claims Robert Gingrich, of Overland Park, Kansas. He was reacting to questions raised in the recent television documentary "The Lost Tomb of Jesus," produced by James Cameron and directed by Simcha Jacobovici.

The main question was whether a tomb containing ossuaries (bone boxes), once held the remains of Jesus and his family.

In 1980, construction workers unearthed the tomb in the tallit section of Jerusalem. Ten ossuaries were found. Six with inscriptions bearing the following names: Jesus, son of Joseph, Mariamne Mara, Matia, Joseph, and Judah, son of Jesus!

Viewing the boxes twenty-five years later the filmmakers made a case that the names refer to Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary Mother of Jesus, Matthew, Jesus' brother Joseph, and Judah, the son of Jesus

and Mary Magdalene whom Jesus supposedly married (Yeah, here we go with that again).

Now, for most 'Christians,' finding bones, ashes, the 'Holy Grail', dust or anything else belonging to Jesus is impossible. While scholars find stories of dying and resurrected gods in other religions, Christianity in most of its expressions is unique among the world's major religions in being based on the belief that its founder was resurrected from the dead.

Even the Apostle Paul said without the resurrection, the whole Christian thing is in vain. (I Corinthians 15:14)

Although all religions have ways of pointing to an ultimate truth, no other major living religion makes such a claim about its founder.

See, if Jesus was not bodily raised, there is no evidence that he can overcome death and bring back believers from the dead. Also, one has to understand the views on resurrection of early Jews and early



Christians. The word *resurrection* in early Judaism always referred to a particular miracle. It meant a miracle that happened to somebody's body that brought them back from the dead.

That's the main reason that early Jews would keep bones in ossuary boxes in hopes of the resurrection. So

when you hear about the resurrection of the dead in Christian or Jewish documents, it refers to the raising of the body and in this case Jesus.

The claim of Christianity is that there is a spiritual element and a physical element to resurrection. This is what the empty tomb communicates, and what Jesus' appearance in physical form communicates.

According to Darrell Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary, a research professor of New Testament Studies, "If remains were to be found, Christianity might morph into an ethic, but that would be the end of Christianity as we've known it."

# The Naked Truth

By Delicious

I made my presence felt in the spring of '07 issue. Without a doubt, some of you girls were like, "Who the hell does this bitch think she is?!" Well, let me properly introduce myself. I'm Delicious (in more ways than you can imagine) and I'm a 26-year-old Native American *transvestite* from Minnesota. I am currently incarcerated in Nevada.

I moved to Reno in 2004 with my friend/employer, 'Mama'. She came out here with the goal of opening a nightclub bigger and better than the one she owned and operated back in Minnesota. As her popular, talented DJ ☺, I was invited to come along and keep her new dance-floor packed, like I did back home. To make a long story short, Mama decided to relocate (again) to California in hopes of opening up a gay club in San Francisco. I respected that, due to the fact that she's a transsexual. However, I didn't pack up and move west with her again. At the time, I'd just returned from a trip to Minnesota (visiting family) and I was settling into my new plush



apartment. On top of all that I found the love of my life, so there was no way that I was going to leave Reno. Unfortunately, Mama and I had a falling out before she embarked on her journey to the land of beer and boys on stripper poles.

Guess what happened next? Delicious got introduced to 'crystal meth.' Soon after that, I lost my apartment, my soul mate and my self-respect. I ended up in and out of jail for various petty crimes. Worse, I found myself prostituting like there was no tomorrow. At that point, I honestly didn't care if I lived to see the next day. My only concerns were getting high, gambling, and selling sex,

so I could continue to gamble and get high.

Somewhere between all of my sugar daddies, tricks, and boy toys, I found a man who took me in, made me eat, sleep and promise to change my ways. I promised, but of course you know I had my fingers crossed. I used him for a place to rest, change and get ready to go back out and party. What's even sadder is that I was so messed up mentally, that I ripped him off over and over, even though he gave me money plus bought me whatever I wanted and/or needed.

You know what? He always let me back in no matter what time of the night or day it was, and no matter who I had with me. He truly loved me, but I was still hurt and bitter about how my life had suddenly become. That the only people I showed any kind of love and respect to were the girls in the street.

Okay. Now let me tell you about a totally different situation. Don't trip. It all ties together in the end. One hot August night I was out hooking with another Indian girl, Kim. We eventually got into a fistfight with each other in the heart of downtown Reno and ended up in jail. Here's the kicker. We took off our earrings and

kicked off our stilettos over an argument about who was smarter! Go figure. While in jail I cried every night. Not because I was feeling sorry for myself. I cried because I felt so ashamed for all of my actions. The sex, the drugs, the fights...I knew Delicious used to be a caring, loving, understanding individual. What happened? When did I change? The only answer I came up with was 'crystal meth.' I used to criticize people who claimed that drugs or alcohol influenced their behavior (for whatever reason) and thought it was a sad excuse.

Now I know from personal experience how powerful drugs and alcohol really are. When I got released from jail I was determined to be stronger than drugs, so I began to break habits. I didn't run to any of my girlfriends' apartments where I had kept extra clothes and make-up. Nor did I call my dealer to ask if I could boost her some high-end digital cameras or designer perfume for a large quantity of dope. Instead, I marched my faggot ass right down to the drop-in center/homeless shelter and checked myself in. I let my eyebrows grow out, clipped my fingernails and shaved my head Britney Spears style.

With a clothing voucher in hand I went into a thrift store and emerged with two shopping bags full of all male clothes and a pair of pink platforms that I couldn't resist. In the days that followed I got involved with a couple of agencies that specialized in assisting people with housing and temporary employment.

Remember the guy I told you about who kept on helping me out when I didn't fully appreciate it? Well, since I was clean and sober with a positive state of mind, I decided to pay him a visit. He was so proud of me, yet appalled to hear that I was staying in a homeless shelter. He insisted that I move back in with him. Now you know that I jumped on that offer quick as hell. I couldn't stand that damn shelter anymore, anyway. Okay...so it was all going good for Delicious again. I turned that guy's house into a home with my added feminine touch and nightly meals I prepared from scratch. A couple of months later we were taking a stroll through downtown stopping to eat and gamble a little here and there.

Who should we bump into? Kim! She and I hugged, apologized and contemplated whether or not to celebrate and put the past

behind us over cocktails. My guy was like an angel on my shoulder, reminding me of how far I came and how much I'd accomplished. Kim was like a devil on the other side in my ear, "Like, girl, it's only a couple drinks." I said, "Okay, bitch. Just two more." Now, sisters, know that two turned into two more. The next thing I know, I'm trashed, talking slick to my guy in front of all my 'friends'.

The last thing I remember is him telling me not to come home until I'm sober, and then Kim screaming at him, "She is home." Boom! I woke up in a jail cell. I had absolutely no clue whatsoever what I did to get there. Actually, I racked my brain for over an hour trying to recall any little detail from the night before. Finally, I worked up the courage to press the intercom button and find out my charges. Bzzzzzz. The lady who answered my call sounded nice and friendly when she asked how she could be of my assistance. When I explained that I wanted to know why I was in jail, because I was too intoxicated to remember, she responded with a pleasant "Just a moment, please." After what seemed like an eternity, the familiar voice came back over the speaker, only this time she sounded hesitant.



“You really don't remember, do you, Mr. Jackson?” Then she sounded sympathetic as she informed me, “Honey, you're booked on two counts of murder.” Just kidding! ;)

I guess I walked into a liquor store and took four canned Piña Coladas out of a freezer, slipping two of them in my pocket as I approached the counter to pay for



the other two. As soon as I exited the business, an employee seized me. Fighting to get away got me a charge of robbery. Resisting arrest got me charged with assault on a police officer. Putting on a phony performance to please fake friends got me two to five years in prison.

Do you think any of them girls wrote or visited? Please. The only one who sent a letter was...yeah, you guessed it. When I wrote back I told him the naked truth.

Basically I let him know that I never felt the same way for him as he felt for me. No, I didn't want to remain friends, and I asked him to donate all of my belongings. Sounds sort of rough, but if I did

continue a friendship with him, he would've kept all my clothes and other property in place, thinking there might be a chance for reconciliation in the future. I've held him back too long from meeting who he's destined to be with. I had to let go in order for him to go out and find someone who could love him in ways that I couldn't.

Had I still possessed my old scandalous street mentality, I would have used him for all I could and forget about him until I needed him again. But since I came to an understanding with myself about change, I did the right thing. Now I sit in an empty cell without a dime on my books, but I feel good. I know I'm far from perfect, but I recognize my mistakes. I realize what steps I have to take in order to get where I want to be.

It won't be easy, but deep within me is a fighter and I will not give in to temptation like I did in the past. I believe everything happens for a reason, although we may never know or fully under-

stand why. We've all been united in trans spirituality and there's no denying it. So let's help each other grow, be strong and get through the bad times. That, my sisters, is what Delicious is about.

### The Last Word

I decided to share this story with the whole *Trans Spirituality* family so you can understand what type of state of mind I'm currently working with. Before I met Mama, I was on and off the streets. Even while I was 'off' the streets, I've always been 'in' the streets. I learned how to survive (physically and mentally) in the most stressful situations. Situations where some would rather face suicide than endure the pain and struggle I've dealt with.



Don't get me wrong, my life hasn't been all bad. Truth is, I've sipped champagne with the best of 'em and have had my fair share of diamonds and high fashion clothes given to me as gifts. But that's not a lifestyle I wish to glorify. I've risked

my life too many times to be that 'bitch'.

It's a blessing to have this opportunity to talk about it. I've had priceless, personal possessions stolen from me by 'friends'. I got left to fend for myself when the heat got too hot for the girls in my corner. I've been raped more times than I care to admit. Besides that, I've been stabbed, shot at, pistol whipped and beat unconscious. Delicious is a survivor.

I know a lot of you girls are too. I look forward to reading some 'sister' stories from all of you in the future. It feels good to get certain stuff off of your chest and it's a plus, because when you talk about your painful experiences and positive accomplishments, others can learn more about you as well as themselves. So it's really therapeutic.

Words will never express how much I am grateful for *Trans Spirituality* and those involved in making it what it is. Thank you for taking the time to read my feature, and if you have any questions or comments, please feel free to write your piece to the 'Feedback' column. My love and respect....hugs and kisses.

Delicious

Body Language

insightful humor by Zoe Kala



If you're no longer Marty then what or who are you?

From now on, please call me **Melissa**.

Oh, so you're one of those transsexuals, right?

Well...

Oh, I'm sorry. *Transgender*?

Actually...

Or do you prefer new woman?

I'd prefer-

Gender variant?

Uh-

Genderqueer?

What do you want us to call you?

*Melissa*.

# What a Long, Strange Spiritual and Gender Trip It's Been

By Vanessa Lynne



The title of this article is based on a lyric from the Grateful Dead. And, indeed, the music of the Dead, and others like the Indigo Girls and Bob Dylan, have formed a part of my spirituality. Likewise, they have also help to set my mind free from the constraints upon my gender identity and expression. But that is getting a bit ahead of the story. Let's go back to where my life's journey began, in 1964, in a suburb south of Detroit, Michigan.

The place where I grew up was (and in some ways still is) very "old school" Roman Catholic, with lots of churches and other related social institutions. Several different European ethnic groups were (and still are) common, such as Polish,

Italian, and German. My dad's parents came over from Poland early last century (1900s) and were part of a mostly blue collar, Catholic, socially conservative milieu. Think of the TV character Archie Bunker and you have a pretty close approximation of what many of my grandparents' generation were like.

My mom's family was Protestant Christian, but for whatever reason my parents decided to raise my siblings and me in the Catholic Church. We attended regularly for a while, then less frequently, then more regularly again. We also attended Catholic schools for a while. I got the feeling that my parents were a lot less devout than my dad's parents, yet we still attended church enough that I more or less thought of myself as Catholic.

In this sort of social environment, even conceiving of alternatives to the predominant religion/spirituality was extremely difficult. So, too, was imagining anything outside of "normal" sexual orientation or gender identity. "Gay" and "lesbian" were names that young people called each other, not unlike "nerd" or "dork." Any actual gays and lesbians were securely hidden away in the closet.

As for transgender/transsexuality, all I can recall being aware of was the handful of “celebrity” transpersons like Renee Richards and the occasional sensationalistic article in the *National Enquirer* or *Weekly World News*.

I was always a rather sensitive young child, and although I was interested in sports I was not really that inclined to be rough-and-tumble like “boys” were/are supposed to be. I recall certain adult friends of my parents remarking that I reminded them of some female in their lives...a girlfriend, sister, daughter, or whatever. However, it was not until middle school that I really thought much about my gender identity.

It was then that I can first recall being drawn to women’s and girls’ clothes and to certain stereotypically female practices—such as leg shaving. But, this being the 1970s/1980s and being that I was in a relatively conservative locale, I just did not feel like I could actually act on these feelings. At least not in any significant way. So I mostly just fantasized, hoped it

would go away, and tried my best to be the *young man* that I was told I was supposed to be. Played football, listened to heavy metal music, and so on. But, as many other transfolk will attest to, the feelings did not go away no matter how much I tried to wish them away.

Graduated high school in 1983 and headed off to college. There, I found that there were organizations for gay men and lesbians. But not anything for transgendered

people. Well, none that I was aware of. I knew I did not really belong with the gay men because I am not attracted to men in a sexual or romantic way, and feared that the lesbians would

reject me for having a male body. So, I continued to basically stay in the closet and this would continue for nearly two decades.

Meanwhile, I searched for a spiritual path that was right for me. Catholicism was not really doing it for me, and Christianity in general did not seem like my cup of tea, or glass of beer, or whatever. In college, I dabbled in the “Eastern religions” (particularly Buddhism),



Renee Richards

which is not an uncommon thing for countercultural types in Western countries such as the United States. I never was really too serious about it, though, and mostly was kind of an agnostic or atheist by default.



Mikhail Bakunin

I became very involved in left of center politics and in some ways I suppose this became an equivalent of religion or spirituality for me at that time. In particular, the Anarchist tradition of people like Emma Goldman and Mikhail Bakunin encouraged in me a tendency to be skeptical of all religion. Yet, still, the need for some sort of spirituality remained.

It was not until I entered graduate school in 1989 that I began to learn of Paganism and Wicca/Witchcraft in particular. I found it very interesting and compelling, particularly the emphasis on Goddess worship and the Sacred

Feminine. Finally I had found a spiritual path that really seemed right for me. And so I have been a Wiccan Goddess worshipper ever since.

And what of my gender identity and expression? Well, it was not until about 2003 that I was able to even begin facing that part of me that needed to be more feminine. It was about that time that a friend and political comrade came out of the closet as a male-to-



Emma Goldman

female transgendered person. Or, more simply, as a woman who had been born with a male body and was therefore sorted into the box marked “boys” at birth and expected to grow up to be a man. Well, however you wish to express it, he was now presenting as she. And at last I began to feel like maybe I could more openly face my own gender issues.

SACRED FEMININE	
grace	radiance
inspiration	intuition
harmony	sensuality
compassion	empowerment
partnership	wisdom
celebration	balance
passion	freedom
beauty	fertility

Sacred Feminine

In early 2005, this friend and her spouse had a party at their house. It was the first time I had seen my friend in her newly liberated female persona. I lingered at their house after all the other party guests had left. It was partly because I had not seen them in a long time, and in a certain sense I had never seen my friend in her true persona ever before that night.

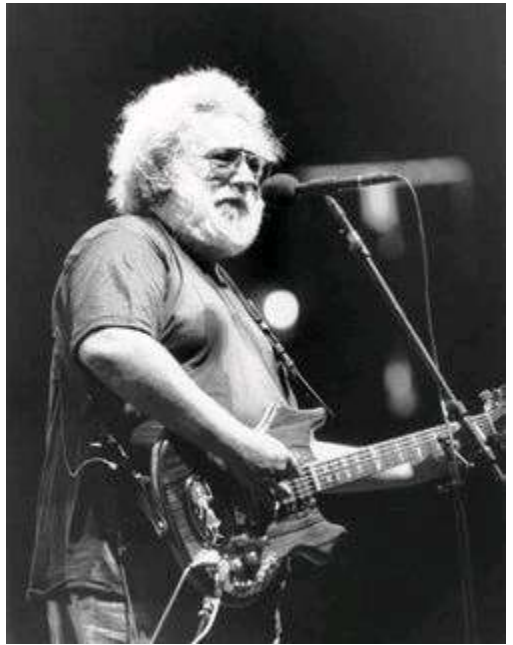
I was not necessarily consciously planning to come out to them, but that is exactly what I did. And so, now two other people in the world knew me as a transgender.

Through this friend, I soon began to meet others in the transgender community as well as in the broader LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community. I began attending events, going shopping for women's clothes, and wearing such clothes in public or at least semi-public places.

I find myself learning new and interesting things every day, and am not always quite sure how to exactly define myself or if I even care for definitions anyway. I may be a crossdresser, I may be a woman in a man's body who will eventually need to transition to full

time as a woman, I may be gender-queer or androgynous or otherwise outside the female/male gender binary, or I maybe...something I have not learned it is possible yet to be!

I do know that I have a very strong feminine side and that the more I can express it, the more at peace I feel. My spirituality (Wiccan/Pagan, also Hippie/



Grateful Deadhead) is closely entwined with my transgendered nature. It is indeed an exciting and profound trip that I am on and I feel blessed to be experiencing it.

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# New Bodies, New Worlds

*By Amanda Armstrong*

Over the past few months, a number of my friends and I have been playing an old Surrealist game known as the “Exquisite Corpse.” Three or more of us gather in Alana and my apartment, usually in the evenings. We sit around a table on which colored pencils, pens, erasers and pencil sharpeners are spread. Each of us takes a 5x7 sheet of paper, folds it in thirds, and then sets to work drawing the ‘head’ of a creature on the top third of the paper.



Each of us first draws an image in pencil, then retraces the lines in pen, and ultimately colors the figure in using our collection of colored pencils. When we have each finished with our heads (and have extended the bottom of our drawing a little bit below the first fold), each of us folds the paper over so that our head is hidden, then passes the paper to another participant. We each then draw middle sections, following the



same method. Finally, after having passed the paper one last time, we each draw the feet. When we are finished, we unfold the various sheets of paper,

revealing our bizarre collaborative creations.

While there is a lot to say about the Surrealist method of the “Exquisite Corpse” in general, and about my friends’ drawings in particular, I want to focus here on two aspects of this art form that speak particularly to issues of gender variance



and social injustice.

The first concerns the (blindly) collaborative aspect of ‘exquisite corpses’—that is to say, the way that each artist plays an equal role in



determining the contents of any given creature’s body, even as we each have no idea how the creature as a whole will turn out. One of my friends and collaborators, Mark Robinson, once remarked that this aspect of the technique reminds him of childrearing, in that each adult who plays a role in a child’s development has a profound affect (for better or worse) on the person this child will become, even as each individual person who affects a

child has no idea of how their particular contribution will fit into that child’s complex psychological mosaic (made up of various tendencies, desires, fears, etc.). I think that this aspect of ‘exquisite corpses’ also resonates with certain dimensions of trans and

genderqueer peoples' experiences, insofar as we so often develop a feeling for our authentic body-selves through our intimate relationships with friends, partners, and even—if we are lucky—family members. In a sense, like the creatures drawn by my friends, each of us bears in our bodies and our psyches imprints placed there by our various companions.

The second aspect of these 'exquisite corpses' that particularly



interests me is the way that so many of them speak to issues of oppression and liberation. Often, one can detect a tension

between signs of oppression and signs of liberation within a single creature. And sometimes, such as in the picture of the bird that is rooted to the ground, the juxtaposition of signs of liberation (the wings) and oppression (the roots) generates an

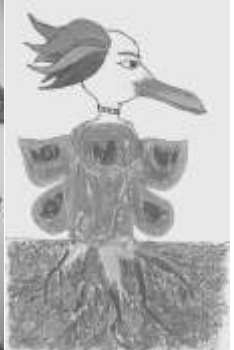


image that is contradictory, even downright absurd. The bizarre juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous elements is something that Surrealist art is known for. And while sometimes Surrealist images are simply playful or silly, not infrequently they present us with a figure that speaks profoundly to the contradictory nature of our lives—to our simultaneous freedom and constraint, pleasure and misery, control and disempowerment. In this way, 'exquisite corpses' can help us make some sense of our nonsensical world.

# Fresh Ideas

## "Submission Guidelines" Proposal

**By Valjean Royal**

We are always looking for stories, poems, artwork and feedback from our readers and subscribers. All submissions become the property of Jen Durr Press. If you submit artwork or photos, and would like them returned, you must also enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope. Or items may not be returned to you.

Artwork, poems and stories must be free of any foul, obscene or inappropriate language or images. Submissions of such material may result in rejection. Due to the amount of material received, not all submissions may be published in the current issue. We reserve the right to edit for content. The editor of this publication is no longer able to correspond with any of the inmates other than reading the letters, transposing submissions for entries. Please understand that this is due to the large number of letters and requests

that the editor receives and can not respond to individuality and maintain any form of excellence in the quality of duties performed as your editor as well. We will answer any questions asked related to any Jen Durr Services in each new issue of our publication. Remember! *Trans Spirituality* will be published four (4) times a year. Deadlines for admissions are usually on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, May, August, and November. "As we do – you too, can Live True!"

*(Editor: Val suggested this Writers Guidelines after I shared with her some of the trouble I've been having keeping up with all of my commitments. They're not exactly the way I would have things done, but perhaps her wisdom in it is something I need to heed. Now that the editorial staff is expanding, it's no longer up to me alone. Your feedback to Val's Writers Guidelines is welcome, as we welcome new staff members to share the work, and share in your concerns.)*

## Building a Community on Fumes



By Steph

It is now two years that I have been out and getting on with my life. And two years of working on this zine, and seeing it grow. In the beginning, I was able to give it much more of my focus since I was just getting into my academic routine. As my academic opportunities unfold, it coincides with my efforts to build a community of free-world supporters for the TS-TRD.

How I was going to raise support out here remained an enigma to me. I didn't have any way to get around, and even if I did I feared there would be little to no interest in supporting an exfelon trans like me. If only I had some platform to share my story of being wrongfully convicted and incarcerated because of my transgender status. Val had a similar need to publicize her story of suffered injustice, and we mutually launched the TransInjustice website to serve this need.

Fortunately, I lived with someone who knew much more about web design than me. However, her support was pretty much limited to setting up the

TransInjustice website, and the growth needs of the zine were taxing my limited resources. To continue this growth I needed more help. I could not do it alone anymore. When Natasha petitioned for some information on where she could go upon release, I seized the moment to suggest we could help one another. In that seminal moment of community building, the TransAction vision was born.

### Getting out

Meanwhile, I struggled to balance this effort with my goal to complete my education. It is through the opportunities this campus experience provides, I believe, that I will be able to do much more for the TS-TRD community. And my efforts are beginning to pay off. Because I was able to transfer 46 credits from my two previous attempts at college, and because I've been attending classes fulltime year round, I have finally earned enough credits to graduate.

Without prospects of a job, and to increase my chances for accep-

tance into a prestigious graduate school, I am continuing for another year. The financial aid is available, and this aid has been my only means for staying in Michigan. As long as I stay in Michigan, because I am a tribally enrolled Native American, I tuition is covered by the state because of a treaty obligation 170 years ago.

Until late June, I was living on campus with Kim (aka Watson). She has been a great ally, even presenting a masculine persona to relate to our transgender experience. She doesn't identify as trans, but is an out bi who wants to be sure everyone is adequately supported in their marginalized identities. We met through the Gay-Straight Alliance, worked on the annual drag show together, and now we both serve on the GSA

board. Serving on the GSA board allows me to build up my credentials and attract interest in my primary concern: the TS-TRD.

A series of circumstances led Kim to move out of the apartment we shared, and I didn't want to stay there not knowing who I would get as a replacement roommate. So we searched for a place off campus, and found this spacious condo just north of the campus. We had previously discussed this possibility for the fall, when I would need more space for Natasha. Events pushed up that option to late June.

Just before we moved, we each purchased a car. Kim landed a new job to help pay for the car and other expenses, and that has kept her busy and less available for supporting the TransInjustice

website or other ways she supported our efforts. For me, having my own car was essential to reaching out to the local GLBTQA community to build support for the Trans-Action program.

Right before I bought my Toyota, I started getting rides Sunday mornings to the Metropolitan



**Steph & Vanessa at Detroit Pride Fest**

Community Church of Detroit (MCCD). It's about 12 miles south of here in Ferndale, which is the GLBTQA junction in the Detroit area. My local support base started there. In Ferndale, there is a GLBTQA center called Affirmations. Each Tuesday night they have a Transgender Rap Session, and once I purchased my car (and took out a small loan to buy some gas ☺) I started attending it.

The group meets from 7pm to 9pm, each getting a turn to discuss how their gender experience and transitioning needs are being experienced since the last time they shared. I thought a talking circle like this would be an integral part of the TransAction program, so it was refreshing to see it in action. It was encouraging to share freely this vision for the TransAction program and the needs of transgender inmates, and receive some modest support from those who (apparently) have never been inside.

After the meeting, when Affirmations closes at 9pm, many gather at a local dive for some karaoke, food and spirits. At my first time there I met Jennifer, one of the few transwomen I've met who actively supports the social



needs of other trans persons. Jennifer introduced me to Vanessa, and to Rachel, and to CJ (among others).

Rachel is even more of a dynamic transwomen who is something like the glue that holds this local trans community together. Along with her partner, she started Transgender Michigan a decade ago. Rachel serves as its



Rachel Crandell, CJ Tune, Sue Crocker

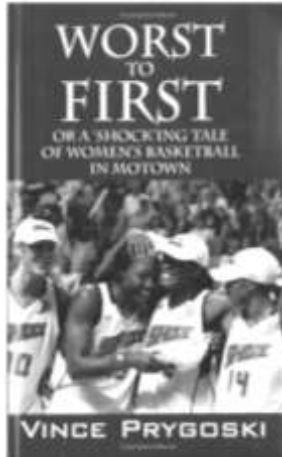
executive director, and CJ serves as the chairperson of the board. Both of them expressed support for the TransAction vision, but dished me a dose of reality by indicating how limited resources are for the local community. Between donor fatigue and few who are willing to be out enough to volunteer, I was told

transgender orgs often appear big on the outside while remaining quite small on the inside. Undaunted, I pressed on. My resources are limited too, and I aim to make the most of them. And trust help will arrive as needed.

### Getting help

Thankfully, Vanessa needed a place to stop and change on her way down to Affirmations. I needed a ride (since I don't have income for gas money), so again a situation opened up where we could meet one another's needs. Vanessa recently began her transition, and we found in one another an enduring friendship.

Besides a weekly ride to Affirmations, we also lived it up at the June Pride Fest in Ferndale. More networking, more opportunities to publicize our cause. Taking a break from my usual black, I donned my lamé with red PVC and silver boots. Okay, more evidence of overextending my

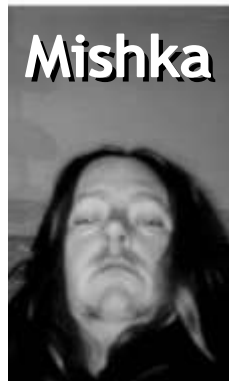


time and money.

As an avid fan of women athletes, Vanessa self-published a book about the Detroit Shock. *Worst to First, or a 'Shock'ing tale of women's basketball in Motown* recounts the miraculous comeback of this WNBA team

from last to first place in the 2003 season (available from Amazon.com, under her legal name of Vince Prygoski). That's why she appears on the cover wearing the WNBA shirt, with Deanna Nolan's number. With her writing talents, Vanessa was a natural to ask to help with the zine.

A while ago I received an offer from assistance from Mishka, Bella Donna's friend. At the time I hadn't yet thought through how to reorganize the zine to take advantage of assistance coming several states away. He followed up that offer just as I wondered how I was going to find time to transcribe the submissions for this issue. After sending him the photocopies I made of the submissions I had thus far, he transcribed them and emailed them back to me. Thanks, Mishka!



I then forwarded these items to Vanessa for proofreading. And after reviewing them one more time, I'll be sending the finished copies to another trans volunteer who will do the layout. I met Jaelyn through an ally on campus, and Jaelyn is no stranger to the experience of being an incarcerated trans-woman. She spent almost 90 days in the county jail when she couldn't pay back child support, since steady employment is a rare commodity for anyone in the Detroit area.

### And now moving on

It was never my aim to carry the load alone in the long run, so it is refreshing to start receiving help. Perhaps the next editor to *Trans Spirituality* will emerge as I move on to a more challenging schedule my final year at Oakland University. The demands of graduate school next year will likely prevent me from being able to continue as I have been. And I'm looking forward to passing on the reins.

As Amanda has done during her graduate schoolwork, I will strive to maintain a presence in the zine. My role in TransAction and Trans-

Injustice is yet to be determined, but I hope to remain involved. I do have a knack for starting up projects and moving on, letting others shape them into a broader vision.

Natasha soon will be here, and how this arrangement unfolds will inevitably influence my future plans. Her outdate keeps getting bumped up, and she may already be out by the time you read this. Among the first tasks she will be given is to help me go through the list of names who have not been able to receive their copy of the zine.



I'm looking forward to seeing where this teamwork will take us. Each of us can complement the strengths and weaknesses of the other. I need someone to counter my weakness to get in over my head. Too often, I underestimate how much time and money a task will take. And when something breaks down, I get even further behind. Then when a project comes due, I'm not able to give it proper focus and mistakes get by me. My full potential becomes compromised, and I can lapse into depression.



Instead of always trying to play catch up, I need someone to help me balance the load. Or just get back to basics and stop taking on more than I can obviously chew. I think Tsunami has been trying to warn me of this, but apparently I've been too dense to get it. Someone up close and personal may get that message through at the moment it's needed, and maybe Natasha will help me to better negotiate my commitments. Or I just need to take Val's advice and take a long needed rest. With Natasha here, I think I will...if I can just schedule it in somewhere. ☺

Meanwhile, I have mounting health issues to attend. Are they related to putting myself into stressful situations? I don't know. What I do know is that I don't have health insurance, and need to travel to the rez outside Green Bay for my medical needs. I will be visiting Green Bay several times over the next several months to address a mouthful of decaying teeth. Then there's that colonoscopy that I cannot yet afford. Wish I could do something about my receding hairline, but that too will have to wait.

I may run myself dry, but I am

encouraged that it is for a good cause. There may be only a few of us out here building up this community, but even if all we have to run on is fumes then I am content that the effort is being pursued. I don't know the full story on what happened to the TIP Journal, and perhaps they too ran dry. But I'm not giving up what I started 14 years ago, and that is working to improve the lives of transgender inmates from a spiritual dimension.

I thank you for your support and understanding, even as I fail to reply to your letters. I hope to soon delegate that function to Natasha, as I continue my focus on the larger matters that can have the most impact for the broadest number of people. And hope I can accomplish much before transitioning into graduate school and having to completely reorganize my routine. No matter how consuming my schedule can become, there will always be room for my thoughts of you, and what I went through with you just a few short years ago. That indelible experience drives me to succeed out here, so I can make a lasting change for us all. So we can all enjoy more freedom to live true.

(So, Val, how's this for reflecting on the history of the TS-TRD?)

## **Tsunami's Life Philosophy**

*Tsunami Caryl-Averlyn (reprinted from Issue 07)*

1. There are at least 2 people in this world that you would die for.
2. At least 15 people in this world love you in some way.
3. The only reason anyone would ever hate you is because they want to be just like you.
4. A smile from you can bring happiness to anyone, even to those who don't like you, if there are any.
5. Ever night, SOMEONE thinks about you before they go to sleep.
6. You mean the world to someone.
7. You are special and unique.
8. When you make the biggest mistake ever, something good comes from it.
9. When you think the world has turned its back on you, take another look.
10. Always remember the compliments you receive. Forget about any rude remarks.

AND-----

when life hands you lemons, ask for tequila and salt,  
and call me over!

## **Sounding Off** →

My Dearest Val,

I felt that your last issue and all that “Transwoman vs. Transgender vs. Transsexual,” and on and on, was interesting. But of course it had nothing to do with my “sounding off” on your “matters of the heart”. And although you put a “twist” on where we started, the bulk and gist of what was stated remains infallible.

Here is the biggest difference. When you spoke in “Matters of the Heart,” you were speaking ‘in general’ and opening up your umbrella to try and cover *everyone*. That is, everyone who identifies as a “trans-woman”. So I let you *know* that not all who identify as a trans-woman (including yours truly) would agree that it’s only ‘natural’ to be attracted to a man. That’s absurd and I offered a broad spectrum of T\*s that would also disagree with your umbrella. Most blatantly, gender identity has *absolutely nothing* to do with sexual preference. And I will argue this until I die because it’s obvious, and it’s all around us.

Now, you’re telling *your* story. As in what *you* as a trans-woman prefer and what *you* consider ‘natural.’ I don’t have a problem with that. In fact, if you had made it ‘herstory’ to begin with, you never would have heard me ‘sound off’.

;) But you didn’t, and here is where we are now.

I *never* identified our publisher and editor (Amanda and Steph respectively) as ‘trans-women.’ Go back and *read* issue 07. I used the TS/TG short ‘T\*’. If you go further back to our Trans-Religious Dialogue (TRD) days, both Amanda and Steph self defined themselves in that literature. Amanda even took hormones at one point, yet always preferred women sexually.

And now we cut to the chase. I ask you Val, “What has gender identity got to do with sexual preference?” Well?

A person could be born a biological woman, have SRS/GRS, and still be sexually attracted to women. So what’s ‘*unnatural*’ about that? You stated what you said should be ‘natural’. Again, that’s absurd. *None* of this is ‘natural,’ although it ‘*might*’ be natural to *you*. Keep your paintbrush off the rest of us. I want to *stay focused* on the issue. What has gender identity got to do with sexual preference, and who says what’s ‘natural’ in all of this?

Tsunami Caryl-Averlyn

*Note from proofreader Vanessa Lynne: I agree with Tsunami! I am a trans-woman who is only attracted to other women, that is, I am a trans-lesbian. Or at least, that is how I choose to define myself at the moment.*




## Colonization of Gender

By Steph



In Issue 04, page 26, Valjean offered up some of her battle-scarred wisdom for incoming T\* inmates. In her encouragement to newbies to avoid the pitfalls of prison romance, she commented: “As a Trans-woman (if you are) it is only natural to be attracted to a man.”

Whoa! Some of us asked ourselves, “Did she just say what I think she said?” On the surface, it seemed she was arguing that being a trans-woman predisposed one to being attracted exclusively to males. But her argument was about steering clear from the desperate men who presented their lust as love. Val’s argument was aimed at those newbies who would naturally feel attracted to these men’s enticing gifts of goods and affection.

In Issue 06, page 31, Tsunami challenged Val’s wording. Tsunami’s own shared experience defies such a limiting categorization of gender and sexuality. Of course,



she’s not alone. For many, being transgender means transgressing those simple categories of gender and sexuality provided by the heterocentric model. There is a powerful spirit within us struggling to break free like the genie from Aladdin’s lamp, and this spirit cringes at any hint of being forced back into that stifling bottle.

In the prison environment and beyond, it is difficult enough to demand legitimacy for being something other than the social categories provided by those who would not understand us. It can hurt to the core when one of our own appears to pull us back into those restrictive categories. Even if that wasn’t the intent, the pain can be the same.

Indeed, as Tsunami stated in Issue 06, “There was a time when all bi’s, queers and T\* were clumped together into gay or lesbian categories.” Now that we as

transgender persons have emerged socially into something distinct from those sexual identity categories, we continue to evolve into newly discovered identities. Each new discovery seeks social resources, such as full acceptance and protection from harm. As long as social resources are limited, and full inclusion into the public arena seems off limits for the near future, there is likely to be some infighting to stake our claim to those precious resources. There will likely be attempts to *erase* the experience of those who break a mold that another has spent much energy to build.

With the marginalized fighting one another, those in the majority continue to enjoy their established privileges. Access to good jobs and equal protection under the law, for example, remains more plentiful for those who do not have to fight to legitimize an evolving identity. When we add another letter to GLBTIQQA<sup>1</sup>, suggesting our collective identity is still in flux, potential allies are less sure where to provide support. Because we don't want to air our disputes in public, we tend to remain less socially visible. And this invisibility suits the majoritarian sense of comfortable familiarity at the

expense of our minority populations.

To appeal to majoritarian inclusion, we have learned to characterize our experiences along the essentialist-constructionist spectrum. For the transsexual, there is something *essential* in the experience of gender. Almost every piece of personal experience points to being born with the need to identify with the gender opposite of what had been ascribed at birth, even down to the defining genitalia. For them, gender is something quite real and important in shaping their sexual identity. For the gender-queer, there is something *socially constructed* about the experience of gender. Almost every piece of personal experience points to the unnecessary garment of distinctive gender norms, with a yearning to traverse the whole gender spectrum into a newfound depth of being fully human. For them, gender is largely a cultural illusion that can easily get in the way of a legitimate diversity of sexual expressions. The intense disputes between these potentially polarizing factions can leave those somewhere in between less socially visible.

Can all these experiences be legitimately true? Do we co-exist because we share a common

political foe? If we no longer felt threatened by our common foe, would our differences along the *essentialist-constructionist* binary erupt into painful conflicts? Haven't they already in some quarters? What of a *transconventional* person like me who intuitively transcends that nature-nurture binary? Could I ever be respected because of my inherent recognition that reality doesn't submit neatly into either divisive modality, but involves a complex of essential elements expressed in socially constructed ways? I experience the tension created by valuing one explanatory modality over another as naturally resisted in the interest of maintaining integral peace that acknowledges all aspects of life. Why isn't this an admirable quality?

If the term "transgender" becomes socially ascribed with the honor it is due, so that being one who innately transcends gender norms acquires high status and awe, would there be more of us embracing that term? What if it suddenly became "cool" to naturally transcend any binary that hindered our full development? Promptly, we wouldn't have to compete over limited social resources, like protection against hate. Internal contentions would dissipate, and

we would likely celebrate our next distinctly emerging identities.

When you think about it, a similar pattern has occurred to ethnic identities. Until the civil rights movement emerged a half century ago, there was little if any social consciousness in America about the legitimacy of an ethnic identity other than from Western European stock. As cultural norms oppressed ethnic minorities, it served the ethnic majority's interests to keep these minorities fighting one another—lest they turn their collective energies against the social privileges of the majority. In this *colonization* of social values, the majority compelled minorities to adapt to their way of thinking by shaming them for their "backward" ethnic values. To enjoy the few social resources available to them, minorities had to act more *white*. And many us did!

While growing up in the 60s and 70s, I remember struggling to fit into white society by hiding the fact that I am "part" Indian. I wasn't the only Native conditioned to think this way. By the early 90s it suddenly became "cool" for us to be openly Native American. For a while I was expected to prove my Indianness by rattling off my blood

quantum, but even this measure soon faded. Then it became okay to find where I was situated along the traditional-progressive spectrum. And now it's becoming acceptable to not be tied anywhere along this spectrum, and allow my Native roots to grow at Nature's own pace.

How we Native Americans (and other ethnicities) suffered colonization serves as a model to help me understand how gender has been colonized by mainstream Western society. By colonization I mean: *The process of one entity moving to a new region and establishing domination over another entity already established in that region.* For us Native Americans, our ideas of gender and sexuality were eventually supplanted by ideas shaped in experiences a world away. Along with imports of gunpowder, alcohol and the horse, we also found homophobia where none existed before.

A little over a decade ago, as I was emerging into my Native identity while struggling to preserve my own integrity amidst a hostile environment, I observed how some African Americans' attitudes toward homosexuality differed in some respects to mainstream attitudes toward homosexuality. Compared to many of the Caucasians, they presented

less aversion toward anal sex (and the homophobia I encountered seemed more directed at men not living up to their full potential of masculinity). Many of them actively resisted further colonization to Western constructs of gender and sex, especially the black Muslims. And as I was allowing my own Native identity to emerge, I took encouragement from their example.

Ironically, it was about this time that gay and trans Indians were rejecting "berdache" and taking on "two-spirit" as the preferred general label. "Berdache" came from the French, who took it from an Arabic word to describe a male-bodied prostitute. The label betrays the European concept of a catamite relationship, where an older man has sexual relations with a younger male-bodied person.

The concept of "prostitute" doesn't fit well with traditional Native culture since these tribal cultures had little to no currency structure. The traditional two-spirit wasn't engaging in sexual relationships for economic benefits, but for cultural reasons the earlier European observers couldn't see or comprehend. They saw "catamite" or "pederasty" and imposed their own moral issues upon a well-

established cultural institution, colonizing it with their cultural constructs of sex and gender.

Contemporary two-spirits are reclaiming their traditional understandings of sex and gender, with its positive regard for what is natural and free from external impositions upon the harmonizing course of Nature. We look back and see even the idea of homosexuality was an immigrant import. In some tribal cultures, the relation the MTF two-spirit had with a man was considered equivalent to a heterosexual relationship. Gender identity presentation defined the relationship, not the physical reproductive parts. Traditional Native American thinking was not that materialistic, oriented toward a more fluid spiritual encounter with ways of relating. Becoming reacquainted with these traditional values is helping us to decolonize from those gender constructs that have limited us for far too long.

Perhaps the broader transgender movement is in a process of decolonizing from the gender and sexual constructs of Western norms. In the process, we join our gay and lesbian cousins for our collective goals of social inclusion, but remain distinct and sometimes

overlapping in our unfolding identities. We resist being pulled into the category that works wonderfully for them, while trusting them to support our claims to use our own labels. Along the way, we invent new labels to help us uncover aspects of humanity hidden by those old Western culture norms.

A few years ago I coined a term to describe a pre-op transsexual who is attracted to one of the opposite gender but temporarily the same anatomical sex: *ontological heterosexual*. She prefers the insertion of the man's penis into her vagina, if only she had one. If it's okay for her to allow him to penetrate into her anus, as he would other women, then this was tenable. But not the preferred method. She would be much more stimulated if he pressed upon her clitoris, if only she had one. But in our Western culture, it isn't easy to get this detailed about our complex sexual and gender identities. Especially when Western ideas about the physical aspects can be so touchy! So there are some pre-op MTF attracted to men as a straight woman (and some post-op MTF who now self-identify as a straight woman), but forced to contend with the label of homosexuality because that is how it



appears to those colonized into Western norms.

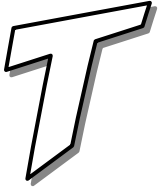
For a pre-op or non-op MTF attracted to females, she can pass as heterosexual. Since Western norms defines gender by the physical reproductive parts, such a couple could present themselves within that expected norm and continue to enjoy such social benefits as a state recognized marriage. For the post-op MTF attracted to females, she passes into the Western norm for homosexuality. The threat of losing social benefits, like a stable source of income, can impact her transition. She can go stealth, but this equates to another form of social invisibility – where the security of one takes precedence over the social legitimacy of the many. Beyond her is *ze* or *e* or *NOTA* (i.e., “none-of-the-above”) or *YTBD* (i.e., “yet to be discovered, or disclosed”). Much of identity terminology appeals to Western norms, and this can limit those identities far removed from the Western colonization of gender and sexuality.

In Issue 07, pages 29-30, Valjean affirmed our shared diversity. “Despite this variation in terminology, most trans people will agree that their self-identification is an

important right.” As Val asserts, I too “would never place any of us in a box.” Why bother? We’d only break the box, right? Yes, Val, “trans people come in all forms, shapes, and sizes.” I am asexual, but I would never expect others to be asexual simply because it works for me. So I trust you aren’t saying other trans-women should be attracted to men simply because this has been the natural experience for you. “Who is to say whom you will love?”

Until we are allowed to fully love ourselves, in the body of our gender identity, our full potential will likely remain clouded by a colonization of gender terms and ideas. As a trans-woman (if you are), isn’t it only natural to yearn for liberation? Freedom not to escape some debt to society, nor to exploit some selfish sexual desires or whatever the minders fear who police our gender borders. No, but freedom to identify ourselves apart from this limiting colonization of gender. We yearn for the liberty to move beyond cultural restraints upon our innate existence and fully Live True!

<sup>1</sup>GLBTIQQA = gay, lesbian, bisexual or bi-affectional, transgender, intersexual, queer, questioning, allies.



# Transcending Tolerance: Embracing One Another's Spiritual Heritage in all its Diversities



By Steph

Delicious's recommendation that in the TransAction program (a proposed reentry program for trans exfelons introduced in prior issues), religious belief and practices should be kept a private matter is understandable (Issue 07, page 25). I concur with her, that we do not want to spoil this needed transitional environment with unnecessary tension about religious differences.

One of the reasons religious differences can become so divisive stems from how attached we become to our religious beliefs (or to any belief). They can define our core values, even our purpose for existing. No wonder they are stubbornly defended. Where possible, our Western values tell us it's best to keep them a private matter.

Gender norms are often vehemently defended for much the same reasons. For the gender normative, core values and one's social existence is defined by how well each conforms to conventions of masculinity or femininity. Of

course, as T\* it's less practical to keep our unconventional gender expressions a private matter.

How a genderqueer experiences gender can be remarkably distinct from how a transsexual experiences gender. Can such a distinction create a source of contention in the program? As Cellá noted in Issue 07, page 32, these distinctions can create enough social cleavage to threaten our fledgling sense of community. We can learn to *tolerate* our differences, but I am excited about embracing our diversity and learning from the synergy of one another. It is when I am the most free to be my true self that I am most free to encourage others to reach the full potential of their true selves. It is when I am free to live out my spiritual ideals that I feel most connected to others.

What if the motivation to transgress and transcend gender barriers is similar to the motivation to transgress and transcend religious barriers? Something within me compels me to challenge any

socially constructed norm that hinders nature's pull toward the realization of my full human potential. My full human potential includes being connected with the *true self* of others, and intuitively resists any convention that would hinder that connection. This compulsion draws me into the transgender experience, where I experience an intuitive yearning to be *fully human* across the feminine-masculine divide.

Likewise, this compulsion draws me to transgress and transcend religious barriers that would keep me from experiencing a fuller dimension of my full human potential. I experience an intuitive yearning to live beyond socio-religiously defined boundaries, and learn from a variety of religious expressions, allowing each to deepen my own spiritual heritage. I am not rigidly affiliated with any one religious tradition, and part of me is fluidly affiliated with them all.

But I don't assume others should experience such religious fluidity. Such religious fluidity contributes to my capacity to empathize with others. Such fluidity helps me maintain what is known in some faith traditions as *right relationship*. For others, to be in *right relationship* relies more heavily on rigid

references to categorical religious identities.

While I don't expect others to benefit as I do from such religious fluidity, I do expect everyone's religious expression (whatever it may be, even agnostic) will draw out the best of them, and contribute to their resources for living in a communal environment. Trans-Action, as it is currently envisioned, is to be a communal environment that is supportive of everyone's sacred resources for a better life. As it is currently imagined, we want to strike up a proper balance by avoiding any excessively rigid rules. Haven't you had enough of someone else's rules?

We want to provide a transition from the oppressive prison environment, where your personal power and identity is virtually stripped away, to a nurturing environment that empowers you with a liberating responsibility towards gender liberation and self-actualization. From this perspective of self-responsibility, you would negotiate what you expect from one another through a process of respectfully expressing your needs.

As needs change, so shall the negotiation of how to respect one another's needs. This may include

writing down some of your needs, so we will all know, for example, when you need some quiet time to read or some alone time to freely cry. Some may need these written reminders, to avoid misunderstandings. Some may need to keep their expressed needs flexible, and will not rely on having them written down, to also avoid misunderstanding. Can we not negotiate a compromise, and mete out an agreement that faithfully respects each one's needs?

From our diversity of spiritual expressions, I trust we can benefit from one another's perspective on how to best address these shared needs. Obviously, there will be aspects of our spirituality that will remain private, and other aspects that may be visible while not meant for anyone but oneself. I suspect these will be conventional religious beliefs and practices that have come to hold special meaning to each practitioner. I suspect there will be aspects of one another's spirituality that will be more universal, such as how to encourage one another to love and be loved. And how to inspire one another to live up to our full T\* potential, optimizing every-one's opportunities toward self- and communal development.

These are lofty ideals indeed. What should happen if two get into a tiff over how something should be handled, and both sides refer to religious values? Find a secular solution? Better yet, why not embrace the opportunity to learn from one another's religious backgrounds and find a solution that is greater than the limited scope of any one particular religious view? Too ideal an approach in the midst of conflict? For me, this is actually a way of life. To not pursue this "trans-religious" approach, and seek the best in us all, is to lessen my own spiritual integrity. I yearn to embrace one another's spiritual heritage in all its diversities. I yearn to become a fuller person from being confronted with ideas challenging my own.

In the beginning, there will likely be few enough participants that such religious issues will be worked out informally. As the numbers grow, perhaps something more formal will be needed. Not necessarily a "contract" that limits each party to a set or rigid terms. Will we need to sign any agreement not to bring up certain religious matters in the presence of others? Right now, I wouldn't discount it. But I am skeptical of rushing too fast into a "conventional" solution.

I wouldn't want to rigidly agree to not having any written agreements. I want to be sure we are nurturing an environment that adequately allows for a diversity of religious expressions.

There may come a time when someone just needs to "Sound Off" their reaction to another's religious expression. What if a seemingly nonreligious reason for doing something erupts into a conflict over the religious values behind the action? For example, what if A, who has been cut off from her monies, expects B with her good fortunes to share more of her monies? If A's expectation for fairness points to her religious values, which she subconsciously presumes others share, why not bring them to the surface for awareness and negotiation? Couldn't we find a forum for *sounding off* our myriad of differences, without it devolving into a mutually defensive conflict?

Of course, one of our differences will be how prepared we are to encounter the strident views of others. Perhaps each program participant can state at the start what level *she* is open to other's religious beliefs and practices. This would be understood as a stated need each of us would be pledged to respect. We respect one another's

needs in the understanding that is how we best receive respect for our own stated needs.

As Cellá put it so eloquently in Issue 07, page 32, "I feel we owe it to ourselves and to our transgendered sisters and brothers to form an inclusive, embracing, and justice-loving community...a community that educates, supports, and acts in cooperation with others as we struggle towards the goal of achieving religious, political, legal, human, and civil rights for transgendered everywhere." The TransAction program can be where such a community can be nurtured among exfelon trans. Especially for "those transgendered whom are just beginning to blossom into the beautiful individuals that they are."

Delicious shared with us her positive experiences with Jasmine and Natasha. And she shared the insight from Jasmine that "a lot of girls in the system are two-faced and greedy" (Issue 07, page 34). From her shared experiences, I can see Delicious's desire for the TransAction program to succeed by avoiding the pitfalls that may come from those less mature than Jasmine and Natasha. This appears to be the intent of Delicious's comments and I respect that.

I respect Delicious's beliefs, and welcome their clarification if needed. I fully appreciate how she has dropped her guard and allowed us to see where she is coming from, in her "Naked Truth" piece in this issue. It is one thing to respect one's belief, but for me a much more beautiful experience to become intimately aware of how such beliefs were shaped. When it comes to being vulnerable and sharing tender emotions, we transcend notions of disagreement (how can you disagree with someone's feelings?) and invite others into that room in our hearts where our beliefs are shaped. By

cultivating that deep honesty we may find a common cord of spirituality.

Perhaps these are merely lofty beliefs, yet to be tested in the daily grind. Will we need to agree to disagree, just to get along? Or can we agree to transcend "mere tolerance" and truly enjoy our differences? Perhaps there will remain a role for some kind of agreement after all. I respect a contrary view that respects Delicious's beliefs, and mine, and others. I respect any view, except those being crammed down my throat! ☺

## Jewish Guide Has Transgender Blessing

By ERIC GORSKI, AP Religion Writer

*Thursday, August 9, 2007*

(08-09) 14:41 PDT (AP)

Halfway through a newly revised manual promoting inclusion for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people in Judaism's Reform movement are two short blessings written by a rabbi who was raised Eliza and now goes by Elliot.

The prayers for Jews undergoing sex changes are included in the 500-page second edition of a guide called *Kulanu* — Hebrew for "all of

us" — published this week by the New York-based Union for Reform Judaism.

"Here you have a Jewish person who is undergoing a very momentous aspect of their personal journey, and they will reach into their tradition to have this affirmed in the way we do it, through a blessing," said Rabbi Richard Address, an editor of the volume and director of the union's

Department of Jewish Family Concerns. The union represents 900 Reform synagogues in North America.

The inclusion of the transgendered blessings alongside a liturgy for same-sex union ceremonies and a divorce document for same-sex couples is in keeping with the Reform movement's tradition of liberal positions on human sexuality.

The largest branch of Judaism in North America, Reform Judaism allows gay and lesbian rabbis and cantors.

But Address said the blessings also illustrate a broader trend: an explosion in self-styled rituals and ceremonies written by people hungry to bring spiritual import to life's major events.

"They're saying, 'If the prayer book doesn't have one, I'm comfortable writing my own,'" he said.

That describes some of the transgender blessings in "Kulanu." Two were written by Rabbi Elliot Kukla, who said he came out as a transgender male around the same time he was ordained last year at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish

Institute of Religion. Kukla wrote the blessings for a friend about to start testosterone hormone therapy.

"It was a way of sanctifying the moment for him, and also signaling there is a place in Jewish tradition for all the different parts of our lives, including moments that are profound and maybe surrounded by stigma," he said.

Kukla's contributions are simple and short. "Blessed are You, Eternal One, our God, Ruler of time and space, the Transforming One to those who transform/transition/cross over," one blessing says. Another reads, "Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Ruler of time and space, who has made me in God's image."

The manual also suggests using a Jewish prayer traditionally recited to mark special events or notable firsts, according to the Jewish news agency JTA, which reported on the revision Wednesday. Address acknowledged conversations about whether the sex-change blessings would be viewed as offensive, but the decision was "to err on the side of inclusivity."



# My Back Page

**All apologies for the tardiness of this issue. Issue 09 should come out shortly to help catch us up and perchance explain a little what's been going on at this end. So please think about submitting material for issue 10, deadline 2-1-08.**

