

TRANS SPIRITUALITY

A TRANS-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Issue 10

Spring 2008



TAP at Creating Change

TransGender Michigan drag show

And some other stuff...

**TRANS SPIRITUALITY
A TRANS-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

In this issue...

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

~ Eugene Ionesco (1912-1994)
Romanian-French dramatist

Letters to the Editor 3

FEATURES

TAP at Creating Change Conference 5

From benefit drag show to our own national conference caucus and beyond

Photo collage of TransGender Michigan benefit drag show at Backstreet, back page

Between the Day of Remembrance & Creating Change..... 17

Another T murdered, in the shadow of talking about change*

FRESH IDEAS

Jasmine, a caged flower struggling to unfold 19

Another introduction from someone in dire need

Acceptance 22

Bella Donna returns with a theme close to our hearts

FEEDBACK

“Family Affair” 24

Delicious responds to issue 08 contributors, as a sister would

You Do What You Do To Survive..... 25

Steph takes a spin on issue about T and SO's*

SOUNDING OFF

Woman to Woman 28

Delicious reacts to Natasha's last Hail & Greetings from inside

FUN & INFORMATION

And the Survey Says... 29

Current results of TS-TRD Subscriber Form survey sent out

Mormons Move Towards the 21st Century (slowly) 31

Tsunami takes us inside the dilemma of being Mormon and GLBT

Transsexual inmate loses SRS suit 33

One of our own receives a bad court decision

Body Language 34

Zoe gives us a friendly poke at the Vatican's position on homosexuality

Runaway Survey *insert*

Mishka has a questionnaire for you to fill out and return to him, please

Letters to the Editor

Dear Steph,

Today (01/23/08) I received my 08 issue of *Trans Spirituality*. It was a long time coming, but to me it was always worth the wait. I appreciate the time, efforts and hearts placed in every page of every issue.

It is ours, the good and the bad of it, the bitter and the sweet. I love it!

And again, a very true and sincere thank you goes to all the way over gun towers, cements walls, and barbed-wired fences to my TS family that makes this delivery possible.

In gender loving amazement,
Valjean Royal

Dear Ms. Turner,

I thank you for your time in writing me the letter that you sent. I look forward to receiving the *Trans Spirituality* zine. I got to read the latest issue through Ms. Naomi Sue White Eagle. I am also here with Ms. Sarah j. Babcock. They are both good people to be around, they try their best with me. I hope to continue on with trying to reach the main goal, in becoming a New Woman.

Ms. Turner, I plan to be out this year and I will try my best once I am out in trying to get a pen-pal system going. Once I get everything ironed out, I plan to get back with you on it.

Anyway, things are alright here. Well, I better let this go for now.

Sincerely,

Yours in sisterhood,
Jammie C. Jackson

Dearly Beloved Sisters,

Hi there again! I consider myself fortunate to have wonderful sisters such as you all at Jen Durr Press who sincerely care, and who it in such an ardently loving way through your, Trans Actions. ☺

I see the parole board in 2009 again and should be getting out this time for sure. I too will be able to share gender loving care with girls in prison. I've already got a few good ideas. I've been imprisoned over 24 years now and thank goodness it is almost "over". ☺

Oh yeah, congrats and good luck to Natasha in her new role as Trans Spirituality Circulation Coordinator. Can't wait to hear more about the "Creating Change Conference". Ha, wish I could be a part of the fundraiser drag show for TransGender Michigan. Or at least receive a few cute photos. ☺

It's wonderful to hear about you gals (Steph & Mandy) doing so well at continuing your education with grad school and all. You go, girls! ☺

I am looking forward to receiving my first issue of *Trans Spirituality*, whenever you can send a copy to me. Until then, please take care, Goddess Bless, and know that your kind efforts are truly appreciated by us gals in "here". By for now!

In gender loving care,
Joni

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, 3575 Grove Lane, Auburn Hills MI 48326. (This address will change again this year.)

We prefer to receive submissions online, at 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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FEATURES

TransAction Program at the Creating Change Conference

By Steph

TransGender Michigan

A year ago I splashed into the local GLBTQA scene as a trans activist with a heart for trans prisoners, and explored the level of compassion there was for us. Out of expressing this energy last spring I was invited to join the TransGender Michigan board of directors, and jumped at the opportunity to be a part of an organization that could help nurture TAP.

TGMI is the key trans organization in Michigan. They just celebrated their tenth year of existence. The organization is enduring a downturn in board membership and community involvement, so I arrived at a time of great need. Considering the plight of transgender prisoners, their need is in good company.

As a board member of TransGender Michigan, I am required to put on a fundraiser each year. Since I already have experience organizing a drag show

and know some of the local talent, I thought putting on a benefit drag show would be ideal. And putting it on during the week when Detroit would host the Creating Change Conference

could help raise the number of attendees. This national conference draws over 2000 GLBTQA activists around the country, and we thought we could provide some of their evening entertainment.

Backstreet

One of the top drag performers in the Detroit area (if not *the* top draw) is DeAngela “Show” Shannon. She has been performing in drag



shows for about twenty years, and is now the Entertainment Manager at one of the local clubs, called Backstreet. She also serves as a Mistress of Ceremonies, as she has been at our campus drag shows. It was at that campus drag show two years ago where I first met her, and worked with her in the next show as I became more involved in organizing last year's campus drag show.

Late last year I called her about this idea of putting on a benefit drag show for TGMI during the Creating Change Conference, and she gave the idea the enthusiasm and dedicated energy it needed. If you ever get a chance to see her perform on stage, you will see she is a powerful woman of boundless energy. And she has a great zeal



for the less fortunate transfolk in our community.

DeAngela hooked me up with the manager of Backstreet, John, and we started ironing out the logistics. In late January, Natasha and I drove down to Detroit to see

the venue and wrap up the details.

DeAngela introduced us to her co-MC, Tori Lynn. Tori shared DeAngela's concern for the less fortunate

transfolk among us.

Tori told us of a plastic surgeon who may be willing to perform a set amount of surgeries for free, once we get our nonprofit status through the IRS.

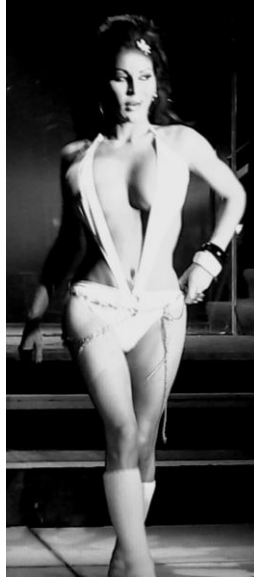
He would be able to perform a set amount, she explained, as a tax write off.

Wow! If only we could find an endocrinologist who would offer as sweet of a deal!

Eventually, I would be in contact of the owner of Backstreet to work out more details. And to backpeddle from some miscommunication. He commissioned a bus to ferry conference goers to and from the club that Thursday night. The show was originally set for Friday night, but it was agreed not to compete with an evening mini-ball going on that night at the conference hotel. The owner also paid for professional fliers to be made and printed, and I picked some up to distribute around Ferndale and Royal Oak (two communities with a large GLBT population). At the last minute, everything seemed to be falling into place.

TGMI benefit drag show at Backstreet Thu 2-7-08

As the show opened up that Thursday night, everything was *not* falling into place. Few conference goers seemed interested in our drag show, which only costed \$7 at the door. \$4 of each \$7 was to go to TGMI, with the first three going to cover the costs. Without a large



turnout, that wouldn't be enough to cover the cost and TGMI would be benefiting at their expense. That's not what we had in mind.

Besides conference goers, we hoped many from the local trans community would be there and show their support for this organization that supports them in their hour of need. But the turnout of local trans-folk was dismal. It seemed

the largest turnout was from the usual club goers, but many club goers would typically be going to another club that has a regular Thursday night drag show. Backstreet was not usually open on a Thursday night and so does not compete with that other club. The late change to a Thursday night show helps to account for some of the low turnout.



As the evening wore on the numbers gradually increased. The show was to start at 10 pm, but was delayed to allow more time for others to arrive. DeAngela opened the show and announced its purpose, to benefit TransGender Michigan. She then did one of her numbers for the night, lip-synching to a dance hit. Then I came on, in my new red PVC skirt and eight-inch heels, lip-synching to a dance mix of "Stand Back", the Stevie Nicks hit.

"No one looked as I walked by. Just an invitation would have been just fine." We sent out invitations, but where is everyone? Just walking by? The mediocre turnout felt something like a metaphor for the movement: the persistent social invisibility of transpersons. By the second set of the show the club was finally coming to life, if only by life supports.

TransGender Michigan gathered in a couple hundred that night, just enough to pay a couple months of the telephone hotline that is administered out of Affirmations. It was last June that Cj, chairman to the TGMI board, warned me that there is often a low turnout of local transfolk when asking them to show up to volunteer at an event. Apparently that

includes events for their entertainment and social benefit. But we endure.



Creating Change Fri 2-8-08

After three hours of sleep that night, I returned to Detroit the next morning, to spend the day at the Renaissance hotel for The Gay and Lesbian National Task Force conference. To pay my way for attending this conference, I had committed myself to volunteer work in the morning. (Natasha

Creating Change Conference 2008 ***February 6-10, 2008***

Schedule at a Glance

Wednesday, February 6

9:00am - 6:30pm Day Long Institutes

Thursday, February 7

9:00am - 6:30pm Day Long Institutes

8:00pm Welcome to Detroit/Opening Plenary with Julian Bond

10:00pm *TransGender Michigan benefit drag show @ Backstreet*

Friday, February 8

9:00am-12:15pm Academy for Leadership and Action Trainings

9:00am -10:30 am Workshop Session I

10:45 am -12:15pm Workshop Session II

12:15pm - 1:30pm *Lunch on your own*

1:30pm - 2:45pm Plenary Session w/ Matt Foreman: State of the Movement

3:00pm - 6:15pm Academy for Leadership and Action Trainings

3:00pm - 4:30pm Workshop Session III

4:45pm - 6:15pm Workshop Session IV

6:30pm - 7:30pm Caucuses

8:30pm Evening Events

10:00pm Mini-House Ball

Saturday, February 9

9:00am - 12:15pm Academy for Leadership and Action Trainings

9:00am - 10:30am Workshop Session V

10:45am - 12:15pm Workshop Session VI

12:15pm - 1:30pm *Lunch on your own*

1:30pm - 2:45pm Plenary Session with Bishop V. Eugene Robinson

3:00pm - 6:15pm Academy for Leadership and Action Trainings

3:00pm - 4:30pm Workshop Session VII

4:45pm - 6:15pm Workshop Session VIII

6:30pm - 7:30pm Caucuses

Who Cares About Transgender Inmates?

8:30pm Interfaith Service

Sunday, February 10

9:30am-11:30am Workshop Session IX

11:30am-1:00pm Brunch and Closing Plenary

stayed home to be fully rested for when I needed her on Saturday. She's nocturnal, you know!) I spent the whole morning as a "room monitor" at an academy session about building leadership skills. If I wasn't so dog tired from being up all night before, I may have gotten a lot more out of it myself.

For a GLBT event, I was encouraged by the representation of trans issues. There seemed to be concerted effort by the NGLTF to counter the Human Rights



Campaign's lackluster record on trans issues. Barney Frank, take notice!

There was a workshop session that reported on transgender discrimination, a session on trans inclusiveness in other GLB orgs, a session on two-spirit people in the movement, a

session on how to (jump) start your local transgender political/activist organization, and interfaith

coalition caucus and a generic transgender caucus. And this was just for Friday, with many more options for Saturday!

Of course, I couldn't attend them at all. And some I had to miss because of my

volunteer commitments. I did attend the Interfaith Caucus, and then switched over to the generic Transgender caucus put on by Rachel, TGMI exec dir. As TGMI's volunteer coordinator, I attended the afternoon session called "Many hands make light work: Building a large and sustainable volunteer team".

Creating Change Sat 2-9-08: *It's War In Here*

The next day Natasha joined me. She forced herself to get up early that Saturday morning, February 9th. Despite wiping out on the icy highway and almost getting hit by a few cars as we spun out of control, the trip to the conference that morning was

uneventful. However, our narrow escape to safety did have a way of waking us up fully!

We reported first thing to the volunteer desk and received our volunteer assignments for the morning. Again, I served as a “room monitor” at a session called “The Trojan Horse Approach: Creating Change from Inside Mainstream Institutions”. Natasha served as a “runner” (doing odd errands if called upon, but she wasn’t).

For the next session, starting around 10:30 am, we sat in a session for which I looked forward to attending ever since I read it in the program online. Put on by the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, “It’s War In Here: Transgender Women in Men’s Prisons” featured the SLRP report of transgender and intersex prisoners in New York men’s prisons. They were anticipating about 15 attendees to show up and share their concern for the plight of transgender prisoners. To their

surprise the room quickly swelled to around a hundred!

After going over the highlights of *It’s War In Here*, they invited volunteers to come up and read a personalized segment of the report. I read a segment with these volunteers, giving voice to the kind of experiences for which many of you are all too familiar. The deliberate indifference to medical needs, the sexual assaults from other prisoners and from prison staff, the blatant transphobia in prison policies, the trauma from being accosted for being gender variant,

“I have faced violence where I have been beaten and raped because of my being a transgender with female breasts and feminine. I have been burned out of a cell block & dorm because I wouldn’t give an inmate sex. I have been slapped, punched, and even threatened because of my being a trans- gender that told another inmate ‘No’ when they told me they wanted sex from me or my commissary buy. I have been harassed verbally and have had others grab my female breasts and ass because they knew I was trans- gender and figured they can get away with such actions—which they do most of the time due to the fact no one cares what happens to us transgenders inside. I’ve been subjected to all kinds of verbal harassment from ‘look at that inmate scumbag transgender’ all the way to threats and sexual harassment physically as well as verbally.”

– “It’s War In Here”: A Report on the Treatment of Transgender and Intersex People in New York State Men’s Prisons, p. 25.

a litany of inhumanity committed upon us.

They were planning to show a segment of the “Cruel and Unusual” documentary, but there were simply too many of us and still fit in everything. They had the attendees

break into groups and gave each group a scenario to read. Our group read about a transgender exfelon who was allowed to stay with a friend upon release, but only for a brief while. She had diabetes and needed to stay on insulin, but wasn’t assured she would have uninterrupted access to it or medical attention. A job was lined up for her, but never actually materialized. We were to brainstorm what could be done for her.

This became an ideal

Who cares about transgender inmates?

Welcome to an open discussion on what can and is being done for the plight of transgender inmates. And what can or is being done for their eventual release.

Various individuals and groups around the country are attempting to address various needs of gender variant inmates, with limited resources. What can we do as a community to become better aware of these needs and discover what can and is being done about them?

Brule B at 6:30 pm on Saturday.
Creating Change Conference in Detroit 2-9-08

opportunity to share what TAP is all about. Natasha and I handed out our business cards to anyone who showed an interest. And we had fliers (*at left*) for our caucus later that day, ready to give to all. Meanwhile, Natasha put it all into perspective by sharing with the group how close to

home this scenario is for her. It’s not a mere piece of fiction, it is her life right now. And without TAP there was little hope to rise above these challenges.

We came together as one and each of the groups shared their scenarios and response. When it was our group’s turn to speak, I then had another opportunity to

share with more concerned listeners this vision for TAP and this zine community. The session facilitators let us pass out those fliers to everyone as



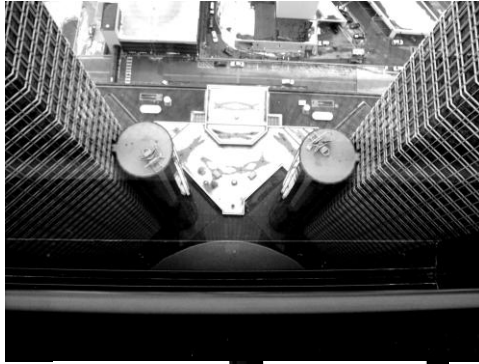
the session broke up in time for lunch. Before I left, though, I got some pix of the facilitators: Franklin Romeo and his assistant (whose name I cannot recall now).

Right after lunch we joined the plenary session, where over 2,000 other activists gathered in a large room to hear Bishop Gene Robinson speak. "So ultimately, to look at the big picture, I think what we are about, in all of the change that you've been talking about in all of your workshops and so on, we are about the end of patriarchy." I concur, but I suspect that the prison culture may be the last to hear the news.

Creating Change Sat 2-9-08: our caucus

Before getting started on our caucus, we take a break with Cj, on the 66th floor of the Renaissance

Center. The conference is being held at the third through fourth levels of what is the tallest building in Detroit. We gaze out the window and take in the view. As high as we are off the ground can seem as high as the climb to reach these changes we're proposing. But create change we must, even if only one caring soul at a time. I



catch my breath and then take the elevator down to prepare a discussion that will answer the question: "Who Cares About Transgender Inmates?"

The plan was to toss out some discussion starters

after briefly overviewing issues facing transgender inmates, but our session grew legs of its own. Despite several other attractive caucuses to attend (and some I would have attended if I wasn't conducting this one), there were

around 18 conference goers attending. This included many who sat in on the “It’s War In Here” session earlier, including Franklin himself. That earlier session warmed us up for our discussion, “Who cares about transgender inmates?” Apparently many more than we had previously thought.

We spread out copies of GIC TIP Journal and TRANS

SPIRITUALITY so they can see the efforts being done by some of us. We also had the TI t-shirt on display, and had the TI book-markers ready to distribute along with the business cards for TAP.

After briefly introducing myself and Natasha introducing herself, we invited each attendee to introduce themselves. And to share what interest they have with transgender prisoners. The aim was to discover how our individual pursuits could be pooled together,

and a synergy developed from our common concerns for this oppressed population. Well, that’s not exactly how the caucus unfolded.



With each discussion starter, Natasha served as a rich source of real information of how it truly is. Some caucus attendees started asking her pointed questions about what it was like for her in the joint, and how her struggles have spilled out after prison. For example, her frustrations with

trying to get identity papers. It reminded me of the interviews in the “Cruel and Unusual” documentary. Instead of viewing the DVD, as Franklin had planned, the attendees got to see “Cruel and Unusual” in the flesh!

As the session wrapped up we exchanged business cards with one another. One of them was a lawyer in California who told me about a transgender prisoner conference held last year in San Francisco. I missed that one. Another lawyer

gave me his card and expressed his support. Other activists traded their contact info and the room cleared out. But Natasha continued sharing her story with a transgirl named Vanessa (not our friend from Flint), while I continued conversing with an activist named Kim Duursma. Ironically, she is from Grand Rapids, where I first tasted the injustice of transphobic authorities. How sweet to find a caring soul from that conservative locale rise up to the challenges we face. It was a wonderful cap to a great weekend. Now to follow up on all these contacts!

Help wanted

At our last TGMI board meeting, after wrapping plans for the benefit drag show and conference activities, Rachel tossed out a long-term vision. Since Transgender Detroit is having a transgender empowerment day in April, perhaps we could join forces with them by having a transgender job fair.

On one level there are trans workers who are concerned about their careers, of the prospects of

ever being able to be promoted after transitioning. Of course, there are a large number of transfolk who are either underemployed or unemployed. My emphasis is upon the so-called underclass who are barred from the means of reasonable employment. Not only is it legal to discriminate against transpersons but also against exfelons. How does someone with both identities ever find work, especially in this strained economy? And without reasonable means for self-assistance, what are the prospects of staying out of trouble?

The plan is to take a list of GLBTQA owned businesses and inquire which among them would be willing to hire an out transgender. To that questionnaire I want to ask how open they are to hiring an exfelon transgender person. Perhaps they can freely voice their concerns, and we can do whatever is

possible to address such concerns. In the very least we can have sufficient research to bring to the attention of politicians, who speak so eloquently of lowering the crime rate why failing to address the structural causes behind it. In this election year, yeah, it's time to do more than talk about creating



change. We're here living the change that is desperately needed, and this need keeps growing.

Postscript

Before this goes to press there will be another Founding Corp member of the Trans-Religious Dialogue getting released. Barring any unforeseen impediments, Karen Krebs gets out Tuesday, March 11th. She'll be moving to Kenosha, which is somewhere between where Amanda lives and where my mother lives. We're looking forward to meeting one another at last. She will be on parole in Wisconsin, so she will not be eligible to join us here in Michigan. But we hope she can still play a role where she will be at.

During the SRLP session, as we discussed what is currently being done for transgender exfelons, an idea came to me. Why not get a list of all faith-based post-release programs and see how many are supported by denominations that now bill themselves as "welcoming churches"? From that we can write to each one and see how willing they will be to accept a transgender exfelon upon release from prison. Valjean found one in Indianapolis, the Jesus House, and perhaps we can through diligence find many

more. Then TAP could serve as a network to connect these programs and serve as a guide toward addressing transgender specific needs. At least until a TAP residential facility can open up in each state, if that proves necessary.

In the shadow of this conference I find the visions large and the means to carry them out quite lean. But we know we have to start somewhere. Some days prove exceptionally challenging, but nothing has robbed us yet of our enduring hope. Finding others at the conference who support our goals inspires us to look past our meager beginnings.

Natasha and I will continue to nurture this vision, and trust the resources will fall into place. Some of it is finally trickling in. Natasha has been quite successful selling my old coin collection on eBay, along with some other excess items. We invested this money toward a professional tattoo kit so she can get back to what she does best. And she at last is getting an adequate supply of 'mones, seeing her breasts developing quite naturally. Yeah, we're taking this one day at a time, and embracing each moment we get to freely live true.

Yeah, and live true indeed!

Between the DOR and Creating Change

By Steph

This article was written on Friday, Feb. 15, 2008 and circulated over the Internet. For the trans community here in Detroit, this struck with profound resonance while hosting the Creating Change Conference. The Monday before the conference began, a trans-gender sex worker was found shot in the head, her body dumped on Detroit's east side. Matt Foreman, the executive director of The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, even referred to this tragedy in his *state of the movement* address.

Between the insensitivities of some local press accounts ("he was a cross-dressing prostitute") and the poor handling of the matter by the Detroit Police Department (referring to the victim as a "man in women's clothing" and refusing to release her name to a nervous community), we were boldly reminded how much *change* is still needed to address our basic needs. Ceridwen Troy's timely social commentary illuminates the uphill challenges that we continue to face, and reminds us that the next Transgender Day of Remembrance will not be short of names!

How to kill a transperson

By Ceridwen Troy

On Saturday, Sanesha Stewart, a transwoman of color living in the Bronx, was murdered in her own apartment. She was 25 years old. Her accused killer, Steve McMillan, had known her for months, yet when he was arrested, he claimed to have been enraged to find out that she was what the media coverage called not really a woman. He stabbed her over and over again in the chest and throat. She tried to fight him off; there were defensive wounds found on her hands.

On Tuesday, eighth-grader Lawrence King was in a classroom in Oxnard, Calif. He was openly gay, and often came to school in gender-bending clothing, makeup, jewelry and shoes. According to another student, it was freaking the guys out. One of them shot Lawrence in the head. He was declared brain-dead on Wednesday.

It is easy to look at cases like this and think, how tragic. How random. How senseless.

But then, you forget how easy it is to kill a transgender person.

You forget that all across this nation, faith leaders of all stripes, men and women who claim to speak for God Himself, call us sinners, call us abominations, call us evil.

You forget that at best the media depicts us as something to be pitied, something that our families must be strong and overcome. At worst, they depict us as abnormal, exploiting our bodies for ratings, exploiting the public's fear of us for shock value.

You forget that on a good day, law enforcement agents are neglectful of us, and that far more frequently they join in our harassment. You forget the trans-women of color who are rounded up on suspicions of prostitution. You forget the beatings that go uninvestigated. You forget the molestation and rape we face when we are arrested. You forget the medical establishment that drains our wallets for the therapy and hormones and surgeries they tell us we need. You forget the way we are then refused treatment when we are dying, dying of treatable diseases, dying of easily patched wounds.

You forget that, by the law of the land, it is legal in the majority of states to deny us employment, to deny us service, to deny us housing.

You forget the shelters and the rape crisis centers that will not allow us through their doors.

You forget that many of us do not even have family to turn to when we are at our most desperate.

You forget that the leaders of our own community have told us that it is not time for us to have rights, that it is not pragmatic for us to be considered worthy of the same respect as other human beings.

You forget that in our own circles, it is considered a negative thing to be too flamboyant. You forget the way our pride parades have been derided by our own community. You forget the scorn heaped upon drag queens by other gay men. You forget the fear to be seen in public with a friend who is considered too open, too queer.

You forget the way it seeps into the minds of transgender people, too. You forget the way a transsexual will shout that she is not a cross dresser, as if there were something wrong with that. You forget the catty names we call each other if we don't pass.

You forget how many of us take our own lives every year.

You forget because the noise is always there, a constant drone in the background. Every newspaper piece that calls a trans woman *he* instead of *she*. Every talk show host who spends an hour talking about our genitals. Every childish taunt about looking like a tranny. Every trans person who talks about themselves as true transsexuals. Every activist and politician who tells us now is not the time.

You forget too, how easy it is to kill a person of color, with myths about gangstas and lies about immigrants. You forget how easy it is to kill a person living in poverty, cutting off her welfare because she is supposedly being paid to breed. You forget how easy it is to kill a sex worker, with sex-shaming language, slinging about slurs like hooker and whore.

You forget the message hidden inside every single one of those statements.

You are less than I am. You are not worthy of the rights and respect that I am worthy of.

You are not human.

It is very easy to kill something that you do not see as human.

It is very easy to kill a trans person.

Addenda by Steph: It's also quite easy to incarcerate a transperson, and increase our public invisibility. At least until we get out, to then seek some way to put us back in. We are like some social problem that just will not go away. Oh, but there is a way to make the problem go away. See us as *human* and give us our *rights!*

FRESH IDEAS

Jasmine, a caged flower struggling to unfold

By Jasmine

Allow me to formally introduce myself. My name is Jasmine. True to both forms of jasmine, I am in spirit and essence a beautiful person, wild and unable to be kept down by the many obstacles life throws our way. If given a moment for understandability by any person then it is learned that I have a sweet enjoyable personality and good looks.

I am in all things a beautiful sweet smelling flower given a human form. However, it's been a long and hard way for the blooming of this sweet smelling flower. For many years from the time I could clearly think on up till this present day I knew I should've been born a female. I can recount the younger years when I would be outside playing the games like double

Dutch, hopscotch, and house. These were some of the childhood activities I liked being a part of (even if I was called every fagot in the world). I felt comfortable. I knew how to twirl a hoop and drill step better than most of the girls.

But when it came to activities like basketball, baseball and football, I was never much interested in them. Even now I don't like them. When trying to play such sports with the neighborhood boys it would turn out terrible. I wasn't comfortable playing along with them and would become offended if I felt I was being handled too roughly.

After awhile I became something of loner. I was raised by my grandmother Mary, who is a strong black



God-fearing church-going woman. There was no room for support and understanding of being openly gay, let alone transgender. I was the only male in the house, so it was expected of me to hold my place in the household.

I was raised to believe that gays and transvestites were the work of Satan. Yet in my heart I simply could not believe this to be the truth. "How could I be an abomination when I came into the world this way?" That question hurt me, confused me, and made me feel rejected by my family and peers.

I knew I would be accepted by my peers and family if I lived the supposed "correct" way of life. Inside I was not happy and slowly self-destructing.

At the age of 13 years old I began living what I thought was the "correct life and ended up being kicked out of the house by my

grandmother. This event made life hard for me both mentally and physically. Not yet able to take care of myself legally and feeling rejected by family I was so confused. I turned to my girlfriend for support, whom I had chosen at the time to prove I was not gay or transgendered.

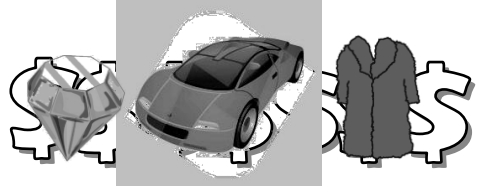
The girl and her family accepted me the way I was and loved me for me. She and her family were under the impression I was simply highly feminine and plenty of men were like myself. I impersonate a life that was not genuinely me for three years with massive suppression. At the age of sixteen I began slipping out of the straight life and into the gay life. Some of my affairs became too hot and lots of ridicule began. But I still hadn't confessed my true form at this time and slipped into a form of depression that made me not want to have dealings with anyone on a relationship level, so I stayed to myself until I was 18 years old. Working hard everyday with a fixed mind is how I made it through the dark years. At 18 I moved to Philadelphia and became openly gay and life seemed so much better. I felt at the time that I had made the best choice of my life, yet I would see the T-girl and my heart yearned to be like that.

The flower was ready to bloom then, but I would not give water or light to my inner flower and I ended up breaking down. I began using

drugs heavily and prostituting. I didn't care about myself anymore and I wished I would die. I ended up meeting a guy who picked my ass up and out of the streets, but I didn't desire him physically. He told me lots of things about my femininity that made the woman in me rise up stronger, but when I finally worked up the courage to ask him how he felt about being with a T-girl or what he thought of us I quickly lost the will to confess my heart to him. He was my stability and means of support at the time. I didn't want my ass bounded back on the streets again, so my better sense told me not to do anything irrational. He bought cars, diamonds and furs for me. He paid the bills and supplied the food and shelter.

I'm sure most of you girls can feel where my mind was at in that time. He ended up going to prison again and my ass was thrown out in the cold. I mean this literally too. I went back home where my mom was and began working again to support myself, trying to get a grip on my quickly rolling out of control life.

I was 19 years old at the time and was less than two months to my 20th birthday when I meet two drag girls. Better yet, two transvestites named "Tori and Michelle, with whom I instantly became good friends. On my birthday drag it up with realness, not the sequence and



high flamboyant ensembles I had seen in Philadelphia. It was on that hot evening of July 27th that my flower fully began to bloom. I loved the way I looked and felt. I knew at last I would never again return back to the life of a man.

Out of fear of being rejected again by family I packed up the belongings I owned and moved west with Tori to Nevada, where I became a working girl. My mother probably lost her mind because when I became an openly gay male she accepted me but asked me to take care of my health and to not dress up like a female. On that promise I gave to my mother I took off to Nevada.

My mother has not seen my face since the year 2002. I'm in prison right now, but quickly approaching release. I love my life as a female so how do I approach my family with my true form? Once I am out of N.D.O.C. I will begin my physical transformation, but in reluctance because my family's love and support still matters a great deal to me. What do I do about this? I have so many fears and concerns. Please help.

Jasmine

Acceptance

By Bella Donna Night Raven

Acceptance means a lot to most of us. The pain of rejection, the hatred from others, and being cut off from society. These all lead us to seek *acceptance*. We must also learn to *accept* ourselves for who we are. *Acceptance* is also something we must be willing to give to others who may not be quite like us but worthy of it.

I think that every transgender person had a struggle going on within them for their identity. Even those who expressed themselves in their chosen gender from day one. There was pressure put on us all to conform to the biogender norm. We were told that to be *accepted* we had to act a certain way. Not for any real or just reason, just because.

For myself the struggle for *acceptance* had to begin with *accepting* myself as being transgender or not fitting my biogender. That struggle took me over thirty years, and I still have problems in that area due to the trauma inflicted upon me as a transperson.

I became aware of my cross gender feelings early on in my life. Other factors helped to strengthen this cross gender identification within me. But there was a countercurrent of influence that coerced me into acting within my biogender role to gain the *acceptance* we all crave as human beings. At an early age I did crossdress with and without the help of my sisters. It became *unacceptable* behavior at some point and then I did it in secret, but had a lot of guilt about this secret and *unacceptable* activity. Yet I was unable to suppress my feelings even through I tried to.

Like many others in our/my situation, I also acted out in a negative fashion. That is I sought *acceptance* by being the class clown, or the smart alec, or the bad boy. In an ironic way people who don't fit the norm can be *accepted* or at least respected as the anti-hero or outlaw. Which is what I later became.

One of the ways I came to *accept* myself was to meet others like me and get to know them on a personal level. If they-are-okay then I-must-be-okay too kind of thing. (Though I did this way too late.)

The trouble with the outlaw way is that we burn too many of our bridges, and it destroys our lives in the process. It causes a lot of pain and suffering that is really needless. There is also a tendency to create or perpetuate negative stereotypes about us.

If we can first *accept* ourselves on our own terms and define who we are, then we can present ourselves to society without all of the excess baggage that gets hung on us by the *unaccepting*. No, this is not a word game. What I mean here is this: if we present our talents, our ethics, our beauty, the essence of who we are in our own way. And not in some negative response to our oppression. We can demand *acceptance* as a right, instead of some concession or grudging and reluctant reward. Because we are entitled to *acceptance* and they can only really take it away from us if we let them or by our behavior give them a reason to do so.

What I am trying to say here is being transgender is within the norm of human behavior, it is not pathological or deviant behavior. But in and of itself there should be nothing wrong with being transgender.

In order for the status of a person being transgender to be *accepted* as an *acceptable* or rather non-objectionable way to be. We must as a people examine our behavior, or actions, and what does motivates us to be who we are.

Our spiritual beliefs do play a key role in this. We are entitled by law with the right to have any religious belief, and the free exercise thereof. As long as our actions are otherwise not in violation of someone else's right, we cannot be barred from the exercise of our beliefs. Which makes us legally *acceptable*. Yet it is still legal to discriminate against us.

Socially we are still *unacceptable* in a lot of ways, things, and places. We can change that, but we have to in many cases earn that *acceptance* from others. Like a lost of others who came before us, we may have to try harder, work harder, be smarter, stronger, stay longer, do what ever needs to be done. Just to get what should be ours by right. I can and must *accept* that truth. It's not fair but neither is life.

Respectfully submitted
for your *acceptance*,

By Bella Donna Night Raven (2007)

FEEDBACK

“Family Affair”

By Delicious

Issue 08 was definitely better late than never! I squealed with delight when it finally arrived in the mail. Once again, I was filled with an overwhelming sense of pride. It's quite apparent that the Trans Spirituality family is growing with each issue that is published, so I'll keep this short and sweet in order to give other girls a chance to shine.

Steph, you're like a bottle of wine. You just get better with time. As always, your contributions were radiant with intelligence. I had to put on my shades and grab my dictionary! Trans Spirituality will never be the same without you, don't forget that. Nevertheless, it's encouraging to see another Native trans-woman using her talent and power to lead others toward success. You're truly an inspiration. Stay strong.

Vanessa...you rock! I loved your feature. Some girls take titles and definitions way too seriously. It's so refreshing to see a chick tell it the way it is. I can't wait to read more of your submissions.

Tsunami, you feisty thing! The letter you sent to the editor had me LMAO! I'm really enjoying your debate with Valjean. The topic is good. I'm curious to see how each of you sisters respond to one another. The both of you are obviously streetwise and book

smart, but I suggest that you girls take a page from Steph's book and “agree to transcend mere tolerance and truly enjoy each other's differences.” Personally, I'd like to see you both channel that energy into producing more of those positive, thought provoking pieces that helped *Trans Spirituality* become what is it today.

So there really is a real life Amanda Armstrong! I was beginning to wonder if she was just an urban legend. It's about time, honey! I'm looking forward to reading more of your interesting pieces, also.

Last, but not least...Bella Donna. I am, like you, a convict. I don't socialize with sex offenders, snitches or people who are in protective custody. Sisterhood, to me, does not apply to them girls who indulge in or condone rape, child molesting, tattling, etc. Girl, just remain focused on your legal work, never mind the drama and keep them contributions coming!

P.S. - Shout out to all the new sisters who wrote in and sent their love. Welcome to the family! Let's remember to help Steph with any kind of donation, whether it be a couple stamps, an extra twenty bucks you can spare or artwork that she can attempt to sell on eBay. Every little bit helps.

“We are family / I got all my sisters with me.”

Hugs & kisses,
Delicious

You Do What You Do To Survive

By Steph Turner

“That bitch is a baby raper fag!”

“Yeah, a straight up tree jumper!”

“Probably a mothafuckin’ snitch, too!”

In this world are many caring people who give careful thought to their perceptions before giving voice to their prejudices. This verbal exchange occurred between those who are evidently not among them.

As if to avoid drawing attention to their own lack of social status, these voices cater to others of like-minded desperation. As explained to me about a decade ago, “For not having enough business of their own, they have to get into the business of others.”

He’s often the very one who’ll later brag about coming into his girlfriend’s mouth after she asked him not to. Or points to a young woman and treating her as a mere sex object by declaring, “Yeah, I gotta have dat!” Is he seeking others whom he perceives with worse sexual crimes to relieve him from the shame of his own? As if he

is saying by his actions, “See, I’m not as bad as that!” Somewhere in that insistence is the presumption we t-girls are all about sex, and this makes us somehow responsible for his own insecurities.

When he’s unsure about his own masculinity he is likely to be insecure in his sexuality. And this insecurity leaks out in the way he relates to the gender variant, as if they represent the very fear he has: that he can lose his masculinity in an instant. Could it be from these insecurities that he confuses gender identity with sexual orientation?

They are especially drawn to objectify, to depersonalize, the “business of others” who are sharply different from themselves. This includes anyone who doesn’t share their prejudices, or their bitterness, or their shallow regard for others not in their clique. And this includes depersonalizing the gender nonconforming. At least while among one another.

While one-on-one, he doesn’t bring up my gender nonconformity, and then I see it’s not his personal conviction to put me down for being overtly feminine. It is only when he is with other like-minded males, who share his sense of tenuous masculinity (that can

somehow be lost by not doing the “right” things), that he feels this need to distance himself from me. He is willing to make up the most outrageous lies and cast the most ridiculous accusations to somehow “prove” he is not as *unmasculine* as me.

For someone who cannot accept his own gender identity, why should I expect him to have any appreciation for the beautiful complexity of mine? I don’t have anything to prove to them. I am not the one seeking affirmation for my personhood by resorting to desperate acts. To quote The Who: “I don’t need to fight to prove I’m right; I don’t need to be forgiven” for being a trans person.

Granted, there are gender variant troublemakers among us. Some of them have been convicted of egregious sex crimes, and it makes one wonder if they deserve some of the added harsh treatment in the joint. Well, who am I to take the side of the state and point angry fingers at them? Any trouble I had with a sister was a personal matter, and not based on what some impersonal court declared in their imperfect pronouncements upon her.

The state failed miserably in my case, basing a conviction solely on a transphobic lie. In a state where “no corroborating evidence is necessary for a conviction of criminal sexual conduct”, an ultraconservative community abused this law to put a sister down. Adding insult to injury, I was then thrust into a prison culture where many were doing the same damn thing! For them, the truth was cheap and it mattered more to spread any gossip or fabricate any vicious lie to emphasize how they are different from my feminine self.

For them, there must be a rigid divide between all things masculine and all things feminine, bridged only in sex. This fits into their myth of pseudomascularity, dividing up humanity into opposing parts. It’s as if they must create opportunities to compete, to demonstrate bravado, to push others down to pull themselves up. To me, this is not a sign of strength but of inner weakness. My inner strength allows me to transcend the cultural barriers between guilt and innocence—just as I naturally transcend the gender binary. I experience myself as profoundly connected to all aspects of

humanity and honor that dimension in my trans spirituality.

Hence, I resist any social pressure to pull us sisters apart. Where I exist, in a profound spiritual realm, there are no disposable souls. If a sister has been convicted of child molestation, she is still my sister. She may have issues, but so does the convicted drunk driver, so does the convicted burglar, so does the convicted assault and batterer. And these issues are compounded by the way the state (mis)handles them. I refuse to be complicit to such an impersonal system that washes its hands of its own collective responsibility and assumes all problems are located solely in a maladjusted individual. As long as the state does not protect us from institutional and personal discrimination, it is the state that is maladjusted. It is the state that is *fucked up!*

Because of these institutional realities, feeling a bond with a t-girl in the same yard and actually being able to communicate with her may be two entirely separate things. What I would not be able to do in person (e.g., walk over and greet a sister who is in a different group on the yard) I

can do through *Trans Spirituality*. We are a growing family that transcends prison politics and an emerging community that transcends institutional barriers.

But on the yard and in the units, I know you must do what you must to survive. Sometime that may involve distancing yourself from a t-girl who is frowned upon by others. Especially by those whose opinions matter greatly to you, and can affect your ability to get through this in one piece.

Whether this is a sad commentary on the social environment of prisons or there is enduring reasons to self-segregate from such sisters, the purpose of Jen Durr Services (and by extension this zine) is to bridge all such distances. "Ideologies [may] separate us, but dreams and anguish bring us together." The ideologies we find in the prison environment can certainly divide us in person. But the dream of living true to who we truly are

shall continue to draw us together. And nothing can keep this shared love I've known from spreading to every corner of our little community. Yeah, and that includes you, you "tree jumper"! ☺



SOUNDING OFF

Woman to Woman

By Delicious

Okay, Natasha, let's talk about the content of your Hail & Greetings feature (issue 08). You make it seem as though I've never been through similar (or the same) experiences as you or other rape victims. Not a day goes by that I don't remember some of the unspeakable things that were done to me. I still feel dirty and ashamed. Who's to say that I haven't been as fortunate as you? The point I was hoping to get across was this: We survived and are continuing to survive. Let's be strong and focus on the positive. Dwelling on the past doesn't allow us to move forward.

My personal views are expressed with the intent to reach every reader. My personal views are expressed with the intent to reach every reader, regardless of sexual preferences, religion, etc. You're the one who refuses to transcend your beliefs and unite in trans spirituality. How many Christians, Wiccans, people who are agnostic, etc. do you think are scrambling to attend your Satanic coven? (*But my dear Delicious, your point is moot since only serious Satanists need apply.*) I'm not trying to be a bitch and I apologize if it seems like I'm

criticizing you. Although your belief system is different from mine, I still respect and support you.



"It's like one war of homosexuals vs. transsexuals – only now it's transsexuals vs. transgender vs. whatever."

That's very true, and you're not making matters any better by segregating

certain sisters in the Trans Spirituality family. We transcend our personal beliefs to unite in sisterhood. Please don't pull any of us down to form cliques or factions. How about proposing a project that all the sisters can participate in, despite religion?

Speaking of religion, I have to thank you for proving my point for me. Your response to Valjean and Tsumami enduring issue validates my stand on the TransAction matter (issue 07, page 25). Imagine how heated the discussion would be if the topic were religion! Contracts can divide, sure. It depends on how you look at it. I encourage you to think positive and view it as a "peace treaty".

Hugs & kisses,
Delicious

FUN & INFORMATION

And the Survey Says...

By Steph

Now that we have a Circulation Coordinator, it was time to update our distribution list and ensure all the addresses were current. While we were at it, it was also a good time to find out why many of us aren't getting our copy even with the correct address.

We only know about the ones that were returned to us. We suspect (and confirmed by what some of you have said by letter) that you never received some issues sent to you. Well, this is not acceptable.

So we sent out a TRANS SPIRITUALITY Subscription Form to everyone on our distribution list who is doing time somewhere. We thank you for all of those who have responded, and encourage the others to find a stamp, fill it out and send it in. We

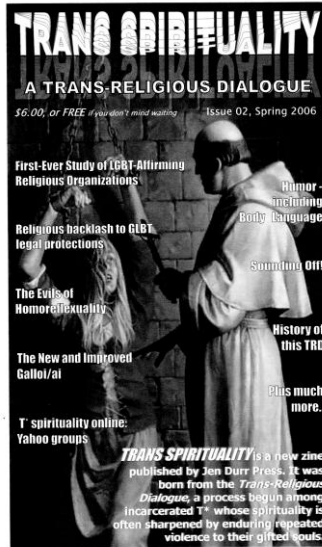
shall find the time to process all the info and put into a form that will help us improve the zine's delivery.

We wonder if some of you never received this form either. In many cases, it means this copy of the zine will not arrive either, and these are the ones of special concern. We know of one

Founding Corps member who is refused everything we send to her on the grounds the facility doesn't fully recognize her legally changed name.

These are just some of the challenges facing distributing this zine across the nation and to facilities of varying levels of security. And varying degrees of politics. The assorted restrictions imposed by a plethora of

mailing rooms does affect our decision of what to include in the zine. But it doesn't determine our choices, for we will continue to press toward the rights of transgender inmates at whatever the consequence to us.



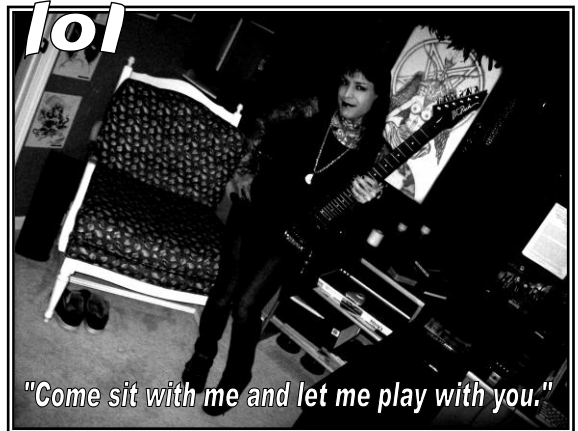
For example, one facility refused entry of issue 02 on the grounds that the cover depicted, in their estimation, sexual bondage. The cover was actually a frank depiction of the Spanish Inquisition, where unscrupulous priests targeted vulnerable women. It served as an ideal metaphor for what we as transgender inmates endure in the name of dogmatic policies. It was, in my estimation, a clear indictment of the prison culture status quo. Could that be the real reason it was refused?

Within our limited budget, and tight constraints of time and resources, we can scarcely afford to send a replacement copy each time one fails to arrive. Especially if that copy is never returned. Just so you know, Mandy is able to cover the cost of limited number of zines, so we don't have sufficient back copies to send to all those who request them. Priority will go to those who failed to receive the ones we had already sent, once we can adequately determine if the replacement copy will indeed be received.

With postage going up again in May, at least only one cent this time, we are mindful of the rising cost to

send out the zine. The greatest rise comes with a greater number of subscribers. At least I have received a couple offers from allies out here willing to pay for a subscription, and that will help us handle the costs. Selling ads is still somewhere out on the horizon. We definitely could use someone with some salesmanship skills, and wonder if anyone of you leaving soon could be that person.

Among the latest refused copies of issue 08, there was at least a silver lining. One was rejected because the recipient was paroled and the other from a recipient who was discharged. It would have been nice to get a contact address for wherever they landed, but it is still quite refreshing that they are now back on course with the liberty to live true.



“Mormons Move Towards the 21st Century... (slowly)”

By Tsunami Caryl-Averlyn

When he was a teenager, Connell O'Donovan opened up to this Mormon seminary teacher that he was gay...and all hell broke out! O'Donovan was greeted with rebellion – and a prescription to chart the frequency of his sexual thoughts, fasting and praying when the urges to have a nice thick juicy cock down his throat came, or even better, a squash sized black one up the shit chute, the way things are “suspose” to be, as a suggested means of “willing” those urges away. Huh, imagine that. Not even Pee-Wee Herman could imagine that.

“He didn't know what to do,” O'Donovan said of his teacher, who is now a church elder. “He was a super nice guy, just misinformed.”

Raised a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), O'Donovan, a writer and historian, served a church mission and married in the church's Salt Lake City Temple, fortunately to a woman who secretly had a fetish for wanting to wear and use strap-on dildos.



However, he came out in 1985 and eventually left the faith, unable to reconcile his intrinsic gay identity with the teachings of the church.

“I had to throw the baby out with the bath water. I started from scratch and rebuilt myself,” he said in a recent interview with The Associated Press. “I decided that I can use the word grace, but in a different way.”

Recently, O'Donovan, 43, gave the keynote address at the 30th anniversary of “Affirmation”, a support group for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Mormons in Salt Lake City.

Affirmation grew out of concern over increasing suicides among GLBTQ Mormons in the 70s, and from the frustrations of living a closeted life. Today, the group, which is not recognized by nor connected to the Church, has chapters across the United States, Australia, Canada, England, Italy & South Korea. (Yeah, even South Korea.)

For many, Affirmation is the first place they connect with other GLBTQ Mormons.

Buckley Jeppson, 48, a former “client” of Tsunami’s “special services”, and a gay Mormon who lives in Washington, DC, states: “Affirmation helped me through in the beginning. That was useful. It was the first time I actually knew I wasn’t the only person out there. It’s comforting.”

Officially the Mormon Church has taught that homosexuality is a sin and that traditional marriage is an institution “ordained by God.” In the 1990s, following an exodus of their members, low enrollment at Brigham Young University, and “hundreds” of Mormons coming “out”, the elders modified their position to differentiate between homosexual orientation – same gender attraction, as they call it – and having an “active” gay sex life.

Church president Gordon B. Hinkley (*who passed away since this article was originally drafted*) has said gays who remain celibate can continue to enjoy full membership in the Church, a standard seen lately in other faiths.

Affirmation’s Salt Lake City Chapter president, Duane Jennings, sees both positions as baby steps of progress. “They use to teach that the thoughts were evil,” and encourage suicide, he said.

And there is other progress, Jennings said, beginning with acknowledgment by leadership that they don’t fully understand “these problems.” (How many times, ladies, have we had someone outside the loop pretending they ‘understand’ how good we feel to tucked with a thong pulled up between our asscheeks, but we should control these urges? Ha!)

Mormons once prescribed marriage as a cure for homosexuality, but leaders now discourage that so women (and in some cases men) won’t be married under false pretenses, or expectations, Jennings said.

It’s almost impossible to imagine the church recognizing gay marriage. Civil unions with legal protections equal to those in marriage also seem unlikely to win

support. Church leaders have no position on legislation that might offer some lesser, limited rights.

O'Donovan, who years ago was a self-described "angry radical gay activist," founded Queer Nation Utah and staged protests during the faith's twice-yearly general conference, agrees progress has been made but remains frustrated that the church continues to believe homosexuality is a temporary condition. What he

wants from church leaders is repentance and an acknowledgment that while gay Mormons may not "fit" in with the church, they could find what he did in Affirmation - a place where he was welcomed, valued and respected. Now here's a thought for all my sistas. Examine your faith/religion, and ask yourself, whichever one you profess to be a part of, are you "welcomed, valued and respected" in that faith.

Transsexual inmate loses SR5 lawsuit

Wednesday, February 20, 2008

The Oregonian

ASHBEL S. GREEN

The Oregonian

A federal judge dismissed an inmate lawsuit seeking to force Oregon prison officials to pay for a sex-change operation and a transfer to a women's prison.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Janice Stewart ruled that Anny May Stevens could not pursue a federal lawsuit for a sex-change operation because a state judge already threw out the same claim.

Stewart also ruled that it was reasonable for the Department of Corrections to separate male and female inmates based on anatomy.

"Requiring that segregation be made upon a person's self-professed gender identity, rather than their anatomical gender, would impose the onerous burden on prison officials of sorting out those with genuine gender identity issues from those who would feign such a condition in order to be placed into an opposite sex facility for more nefarious reasons," Stewart wrote in a ruling dated Feb. 15.

Stevens, who stabbed a man to death in downtown Portland in 1997, is serving an 18-year sentence

for manslaughter.

Transsexual inmate lawsuits are rare. Stevens is one of more than a dozen transsexual prisoners across the country who have sued over medical treatment in recent years. A federal judge last summer ordered Idaho prison officials to provide hormones to a transsexual

inmate while a lawsuit was under way.

Oregon prison officials don't dispute Stevens' diagnosis but argued in court papers that neither hormone treatment nor surgery is medically necessary.

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Body Language

insightful humor by Zoe Kala



What If

What if, people spent more time thinking about how many people are worse off than they are, instead of thinking about who they believe are better off than they are?

What if, people paid more attention to all the similarities they share with everyone they meet?

What if, people spent more time fulfilling real obligations than being chained to imagined ones?

What if, people spent more time concerned with what's happening at this moment, than with what happened in the past, or with what may or many not happen in the future?

What if people spent more time dealing with facts than leaping to conclusions and acting upon assumptions?

What if people spent more time trying to understand themselves, than judging the lives of others?

What if no one ever did any of the above?

carl d. gordon

