

F. O. R. G. E.

For Ourselves: Reworking Gender Expression

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Coming Out Issue!

This issue focuses on coming out, since October is national coming out month! It's not just for gay men and lesbians, you know!?

Included in this issue are many interesting articles, from a variety of perspectives. E. Huntington Behr relates a humorous story of his coming out, while living between two worlds. Dion Manley put into writing an experience he shared with members of the final workshop at last year's True Spirit Conference – a very touching and emotional remembrance/awakening. Tamlin discusses the process of coming out as a femme, exploring a gender/gender expression that often isn't recognized or acknowledged.

Please join us on October 16, 1999 at Transformations by Rori for further discussion on coming out.

This newsletter and all future newsletters, will be published on the web. Major renovations will be occurring at the FORGE website. Please continue to watch the additions and improvement of the page! www.execpc.com/~dmmunson/forge.htm

October 1999 Meeting

When: Saturday, October 16, 1999

Time: 1:30 – 4:00 pm

Where: Transformations by Rori

146 N. Oak Park Avenue

Oak Park, IL 60301-1321

(See page 2 for directions)

Topic: Coming Out:

A Transformational Process

Fee: \$5.00

Just a note of warning: Transformations by Rori is a business that caters to transwomen clients. The owner has warned that some of the ladies might be trying on clothing and using the dressing room during our meeting time.

FORGE Calendar

(All schedules are tentative and subject to change.)

October 16, 1999

Topic: Coming Out:
A Transformational Process
Transformations by Rori
Chicago, IL

November 6, 1999

Topic Domestic Violence
Guest Facilitators:
Rich Jentzen (Howard Brown)
and Lindsay McBride (YWCA)
Location: Howard Brown
Chicago, IL

December 1999

Topic: Coping with the Holidays
Exact location TBA
Chicago, IL

January 8, 1999

Topic: Bridging the Gap:
MTF/FTM Dialogue
(with Gemini Gender Group)
Location: Milwaukee, WI

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October 16, 1999 Meeting Coming Out: A Transformational Process

Coming out can be a joyous or challenging (or both) process! Many of us choose to voluntarily come out to our friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances; while others of us remain silent. For some of us, we can keep our trans-ness to ourselves, especially if we don't alter our bodies or desire others to call us by a new name. For others of us, we need to inform people that our voices will be deepening, that we'd like to be called by another name, that we might start to look differently, that we need to start using the men's bathroom.

Coming out can be as "simple" as correcting a sales clerk's pronoun reference, to as challenging as telling our partners or parents.

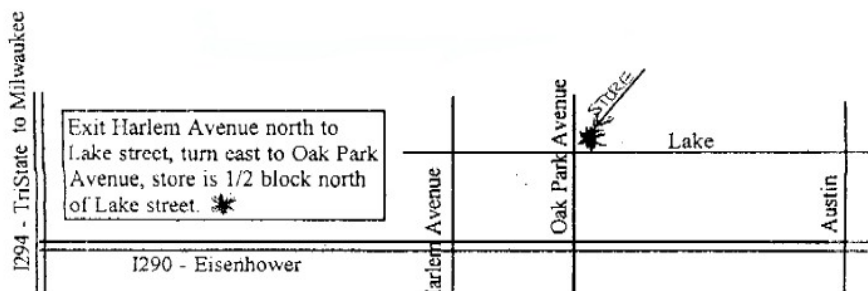
Coming out is a process of self-discovery (often self-actualization), that frequently leads to sharing our discovery and journey with those we care about, and those who need to know so that we can continue on our journey. Sometimes, though, "coming out" isn't by choice - we are read as trans, humiliated or mocked for who we are. Regardless of how we come out (voluntarily or not), there can be much stress, anxiety, fear, relief, joy, satisfaction - all powerful emotions.

October's meeting will offer a venue for people to recount their coming out stories, to discuss their trepidation about coming out, talk about feelings and experiences. As with every meeting, all are welcome.

Directions to October's Meeting Location

[Directions from Wisconsin]

Merge onto I-94 E.	39.3
I-94 E becomes TRI STATE TOLL S.	24.3
Take the I-294 SOUTH/TRI-STATE TOLLWAY exit towards INDIANA/O'HARE.	20.9
Take the I-290 EAST/EISENHOWER EXPY exit towards CHICAGO	0.3
Merge onto EISENHOWER EXWY E.	5.9
Take the IL-43/HARLEM AVE exit	0.2
Turn LEFT onto HARLEM AVE.	0.5
Turn RIGHT onto WASHINGTON BLVD.	0.5
Turn LEFT onto S OAK PARK AVE.	0.6



Freedom from Within

By c. Michael Munson (tgwarrior@execpc.com)

"... and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." -John 8:31-32

How could anything contained in the Bible relate to coming out as Trans? While I certainly don't ascribe to much of the rhetoric in the Bible, there is much wisdom in the words, read as the words that they are, without extrapolating other meaning to them.

As I found myself wandering into the Trans community many years ago, I noticed that some people had, indeed, found their truth, found comfort in their identity and in sharing their true selves with others. Some Trans people, though, seemed desperately unhappy, unfulfilled, lonely and isolated.

I pondered on what made some trannies happy and well-adjusted, while others seemed so despairing, so desolate. One of the things I noticed about the people who seemed happy, was that they were out. They didn't dwell on what people would think of them, or fret over if they passed well enough or not, or even, in many cases, whether they would lose their jobs or their friends. They were confident people. They were sure of themselves, even though they weren't sure of what their future would be. They knew their identity and held it up to the light illuminating their path, and one step at a time moved on their journey. They knew the freedom that would come in speaking their truth, in acting on the truth they saw within.

While I noticed these traits in trannies long before I even considered transitioning, it made me realize something very important. I was concerned for a brief time about being perceived as a freak, a misfit, a pervert. I was afraid to take action about feeling male and appearing female. Then I realized: I already am a freak, a misfit, a pervert! Could it really be worse than how I was already living? Maybe. Maybe not.

At the time I was trying to figure out how to put words to what I had felt for so many years, I was a psychology major in college. The work of Humanist psychologist Abraham Maslow became a cornerstone in framing my thoughts.

The focus of the humanistic perspective is on people's conscious experiences and perceptions, and on freeing them from disabling assumptions and attitudes, so that they can develop their potentialities and live fuller lives. Its emphasis is thus on growth and self-actualization rather than on the cure of disease or alleviation of disorder.

As I recently reread the basic tenets of humanism, I realized just how much of it relates to my transgendered experience, and how I've chosen to live my life.

Some people view being transgendered as a hindrance, something they wish weren't there, something they are ashamed of, that only poses challenges and reaps no benefits. While I used to consider myself a pessimist, as I started coming out as a dyke, then as queer, then as trans, then as an even bigger queer, I realized that I must be an optimist. **I love being trans.** Being trans opened up a world I didn't realize existed. It's a world of freedom, a world in which I have choices, and I have a say in my own destiny. I had come to terms with my conscious experiences and perceptions and had freed myself from disabling assumptions and attitudes. And I wanted to start living a fuller life. Each day, I realize the potential that exists - just in the fact that it is a new day, a day in which I can be live fully and without fear.

Many trans people do "stealth" transitions - move to a new city, change jobs, do everything they can so that no one has to know that they are trans. I have taken a totally opposite approach. I have stayed in the same city, in my same apartment building, continued to eat at the same restaurants, have the same job, same partner, same just about everything. I AM NOT A DIFFERENT PERSON!! Why should I have to change my life in order to accommodate other people's possible discomfort?

While, of course, it is wise to be sensitive to the people around us, it is also important to be

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F.O.R.G.E.

Mission

We're a social support group for female-to-male transsexuals and transgenderists; butches; drag kings; gender queers and radicals; gender outlaws; people assigned female at birth, raised girl -> woman, with fairly unambiguous female bodies at some point in their lives with masculine self-identification (at least some of the time); and our significant others. We meet monthly in order to form friendships, share information, compare experiences and strengthen ourselves and each other.

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I Am A Transsexual...No, Really.

By E. Huntington Behr

See the Amazing S/He Behr...

When I was 14 or 15, I announced my lesbianism to the world, proudly, defiantly, joyfully. A bold move under the best of circumstances, but considering I was, at the time, in, shall we say, the cracker factory, it was downright insane, so to speak. That experience taught me that coming out required many qualities: courage, conviction, an underdeveloped sense of action and consequence, determination and patience. Coming out meant overcoming denial. Although the denial one had to overcome was supposed to be his or her own—not everyone else's. Once the *outee* flung open the doors of his closet, he wasn't supposed to be slammed back inside.

...A Man by Day...

I don't think it's accurate to call how I came to transition a decision. More, it was one of the several times in my life when taking a particular course of action resulted from something like giving in to an urge. It happened as I was walking across my college campus one day. Literally, with no more emotional anguish than I would have felt had I decided to blow my diet on a Snickers, I accepted that I had to do this. Truth be told, it wasn't as rash as it sounds. I first knew at the age of 15, just a year after that other coming out (if at first you don't succeed 'n all). So the impulse I felt was really just a push to overcome the denial I'd been living with for 19 years. I still can't explain why it felt so easy.

At the time I was coming to grips with this my circumstances were these: I had just broken up with my girlfriend (lesbianspeak translation: lover) and was attempting to live with her platonically. I was cleaning houses to put myself through school and working as a bartender at a popular dyke bar on weekends. I had only my brother left in terms of family. All in all, my urge or whatever it was was pretty well timed.

Shortly after starting to transition, I left school over a dispute involving the Italian language and got another part-time

job as a package handler for UPS. It was my first job as a man; I had been on testosterone all of six weeks. For reasons beyond my understanding, our shift leader, or team captain or whatever he was called, picked me, a five foot, three inch, smooth skinned, Billy Ray Cyrus wanna be to handle oversize, overweight packages. It must have been my massive upper torso. Halfway through my first shift I was pretty sure I would become their first work-related fatality. By three-quarters of the way, I was kind of hoping so. I didn't, of course. Instead, I learned something very important. Never underestimate the power of sheer panic when it comes to supplying hitherto non-existent upper body strength. By day three I was tossing 120 lb. weird shaped bundles all over the place. By night I experimented with ever-more constricting ways of preventing my binder from slipping down far enough to become a bustier while I worked. Did I mention the part about sheer panic?

...A Woman by Night

In the days following the commandment given to me by the transsexual god (I still refuse to call it a decision) as a deeper understanding of the enormity of it all began to settle upon me, I knew I had to do the honorable thing at the lesbian bar where I worked. I did—outed myself—confessed the sordid truth. I had no idea it would be so hard. I remember thinking how ironic it was. I had done it all before, coming out, that is. I should have been an old hand at it this second time. Maybe I knew even as I told almost complete strangers that I was a lesbian I wasn't really telling the truth. Maybe that's why that was easy and why this was so hard, so real. The thought of keeping it a secret for as long as I could never crossed my mind. These were my sisters after all, this was the community that had raised me. They deserved nothing less than complete honesty. Besides, my budding male identity needed all the validation it could get and passing as a woman was just not going to work in my favor. I knew all of that. I knew also that lesbians bear an almost primal animosity toward FTMs (of which I had just found out I was one). I knew I was risking everything where they were concerned: prejudice, hatred even ostracism. Still, no matter the consequence, I was determined to do the right and noble thing and to keep on doing it until every last patron knew who, and more importantly, what I was. Or until I got fired, whichever came first.

"Well, actually, I don't go by that name anymore," I said to Who-ever-she-was when she came into my café. "Now, it's Behr"

"Oh. Bear. That's cool. Why are you changing it?"

"Because I'm (gulp) transitioning. I'm becoming a man." In my head I could hear the cold clang of an iron gate swinging shut.

"Oh, Hey!" Who-ever-she-was would call out to the next woman who knew us both. "Don't call her that anymore. Her new name's Bear"

"Cool name. Okay, Bear, I'll have an espresso."

"Ask her why she's changing it. Because she's getting a sex change; she's going to be a man," Who-ever-she-was would explain as if divulging classified information.

"Actually," I corrected politely (customer service being my middle name) I prefer to be referred to as 'he'. I already think of myself as a man.

(Continued on page 6)

Submit!

Contribute an article, short story, personal experience, poem, news brief, anecdote, cartoon, anything! Let others hear your voice – your story.

Each issue of the FORGE newsletter has a topic, accompanying the upcoming month's meeting topic. Submit articles on the following topics by the press deadline noted!

- ⇒ Domestic Violence within the Trans Community (Press deadline: October 15)
- ⇒ Coping with Families at the Holidays (Press deadline: November 15)
- ⇒ Bridging the Gap: MTF/FTM Dialogue (Press deadline: December 15)

Let the FORGE newsletter be an extension of your voice, an expression of yourself.

on femmes and mirrors

coming out as a femme?

how can I write about that? perhaps I consider "femme" to be an alternative gender, but it's not like I've "come out" as a femme in the true sense of the word...

then again, who's to say that I haven't?

coming out, I reflected, is not just the process of announcing yourself to the world. the most important aspect of coming out always dwells within.

within is where my process of coming out as a femme currently resides...trying to figure out "where am I, and how did I get here?"

more and more, I'm realizing I didn't start to come out to myself until those closest to me reflected back to me what I already knew.

I'm certainly not a femme in the traditional sense.

I look at queer history. femme. skirts, makeup, high heels. okay. skirts, I like those. makeup, maybe three or four times a year, on holidays. or going to a show. or my birthday.

heels. I fall off heels and break bones. not my style.

even as a child, in some ways, I was a tomboy. I liked to collect crickets and grasshoppers. then, after I was done caring for my small charges, I would go play on my swing set.

in a velour skirt and patent leather mary-janes.

I've been odd like that as long as I can remember. whenever I was with girls or women, when walking into bathrooms, into parties, through conversations, I always ended up feeling like a misfit. I not only didn't care what most women or girls my age were talking about...I didn't even comprehend what they were talking about. fashion? makeup tips? suntans? boyfriends? I never understood it, and I still don't.

in my skirt and hose and dress shoes, I could certainly pass as a traditional female. I never wanted to be anything else but a woman...yet...among most traditional females, I've always felt like I don't belong. like there was some knowledge, aspect, something, that I'm missing.

I never "got it." I don't think or feel the way most women do. yet I've always identified as a woman.

what am I, anyway?

only recently have I found a label that seems to fit. in many ways, the label found me.

femme. femmes are powerful creatures, I've concluded. different from "female," which can be a powerful identification as well. femme, however, is a redefining of a gender, in many ways another gender entirely.

my progression from denying I was a femme ("how can I be a femme? I'm not very feminine") to calling myself a femme, has evolved from a few directions. what has helped more than anything, though, are the mirrors a few close friends have held up for me

the mirrors led me towards a new way of perceiving myself. a way to define what was already within, to define this uneasy feeling of not being solely "female." to a path towards finding my

truth. to discovering that I don't have to be traditionally feminine to be femme.

I had the feelings. I had the identification. what I was lacking was a name.

it was the people I love, the people who know me best, who created the space for the label to fall into place.

it was my partner who lovingly named me the "pit bull femme," the protector of those she loves, the defender of what she believes in. the person who can think for herself and express her own opinions. the person, the proud femme, who isn't afraid to create a new mold.

it was my friend, my fuckbuddy, my mentor, a Toplike person in my s/m life, who decided that I was his "pet femme," the loyal, intense, searching, sometimes awkward, enthusiastic, relentlessly sexual, sensual femme who has claimed her body, sexuality, and spirituality as her own to enjoy and explore.

femme was always within me, even in my most tomboy of moments. femme is the person who refuses to be traditional, who refuses to believe that gender is simply a bipolar system. the person who believes that there are many varieties of "woman" which fall outside the mold of what most people would consider "female."

in a way I was out to those I love before I was out to myself. the identification was always mine. the names, the doorways to coming out to myself, just fell into place, through the perceptions of those close enough to hold up mirrors.

of course I've come out as a femme. I now know how to answer "what am I, anyway?" I've looked in the mirrors and I've liked what I've seen.

I'm a femme. and I already know what that means to me.

Genderspeak! - Speak out!

Speak your gender! Express yourself!

Contribute an article, short story, personal experience, poem, news brief, anecdote, cartoon, anything! Let others hear your voice – your story.

Let the FORGE newsletter be an extension of your voice, an expression of yourself.

*I Am A Transsexual...No, Really. Cont.**(Continued from page 4)*

"Oh," they would reply in unison. Their expressions were unmistakable. They didn't comprehend what I was saying in the slightest.

"Well, the word will surely spread like wildfire and slowly they'll get it." I had expected to do a lot of self-consoling, only not for this particular reason. In the meantime, I made my self as psychologically ready as possible for the onslaught of questions, accusations and reproaches that I knew were soon to come.

It never did.

I practiced my arguments, what I would say in defense of my transbrothers and sisters. How they were doing to us exactly what had been done to them and where did oppression end; when would it stop?

Nothing.

Word did eventually spread, but not like wildfire, more like molasses and no thanks to anyone but myself. Where was the rumor mill when I needed it?

"Hey, you know that girl who runs the café? She's gonna get a sex change."

By then my voice had dropped to such a deep register that I had to yell to be heard over the music. They got the name right almost one hundred percent of the time. Then again, renaming oneself is not altogether foreign to Lesbiana. The pronoun? Forget it.

"This is Bear. She's going to be a man."

At first, I would interrupt with my Trans 101 speech. "No, see, I already feel like a man. That's why I have to do this."

"Did you always feel like a man?"

"Yes." A glimmer of hope.

"This is Bear. She's always felt like a man."

"AAAARRRRGGGGHHHH!"

The only battle I hadn't thought to prepare myself for was no battle at all. No comprehension. For them, I guess it must have been simple: Anyone working in a lesbian bar must be a lesbian, regardless of what else she might be. In truth, it was really no different at UPS where only hours earlier my co-workers bragged about the length, girth and superhuman abilities of their organs. It was just conversation. I guess for them it must have been simple also: Only guys handle oversized packages, so anyone handling oversized packages must be a guy no matter what he looks like.

It seems to me there's a lesson in here somewhere and if so, maybe it's this: Possibly, gender is nothing more than a set of circumstances; some public, some private; some we choose,

*Freedom from Within, cont.**(Continued from page 3)*

sensitive to ourselves, to allow for the freedom of expression and the speaking of our own truths.

Sometimes the truth isn't what we want it to be. Sometimes it's painful. Sometimes it's just unexpected.

One of the most difficult aspects of coming out for me has been the multitudes of ways I've needed to come out.

Like many of us, I have come out several times to the same people. First as gay, then as lesbian, then as a radical lesbian feminist, then as a dyke, then as a leatherdyke, then as a genderbender, then as transgendered, then as transsexual, then as queer, then as a trannyfag, then as a queer who doesn't have a primary partner that looks queer in the same way, then... what will be next?

I have only recently begun to feel the freedom of coming out as a queer who has a primary partner that others don't see as the same type of queer as I am. So much emphasis is always on queer = gay, and gay = looks the same, acts the same, is the same. I'm very queer. So is my partner. But we are queer in radically different ways (to the outside world) and are queer in dramatically similar ways (to each other, internally, in the privacy of our own homes).

A few years ago, people started seeing me as a gay man. I thought this was an amazing "accomplishment". I was being seen for how I felt! But then it started to feel trapping. I was gay to them/queer to me. But I certainly wasn't gay in the way they assumed I was. I needed to live in their reality of my gayness, my queerness. It strengthened me as a person for a while because it was how I wanted them to see me, how I feel I am, matching my internal identity; and then it started eating away at me, at my personhood. I knew it was time to come out about how I am queer, in my own unique way. By far, of all the types of coming out to people I've done, this is the most difficult, but I also believe it is the most freeing.

It takes courage to see who we are. And even greater courage to share who we are with others. Sometimes the steps are small. Sometimes they are larger than we could ever have imagined.

The freedom obtained through self-actualization and

Coming Out Letters Resource Web Page

For samples of coming out letters by trans people, please check out Lisa Lee's web page, where you'll find 3 FORGE members' coming out letters: Devon McDaniel, Jacob Hale, and Michael Munson's. Lisa's web site can be found at

<http://www.msu.edu/~lees/gender.html>

Can I just Piss in Peace Here?!

By *Díon Manley* (*DionHM@aol.com*)

Here we are, driving on the road and I gotta go bad. I'm debating...which to use, which to use ... same old anxiety heightened with the physical need to relieve myself. We pull up, to a café and gas station alone among the Plains. That familiar sinking feeling, while I sit there. My partner leaves the car to get the gas. I get my guts up once again and go into the men's room. Ahhh, quiet! I pull my pants down, and prepare to do the deed. Bam!! Into the bathroom walk three very loud, very rowdy men! A moments panic but I calm myself down thinking that there's 2 other stalls and they'll be out in a few seconds. Real wrong. Eternity passes and I begin to wonder if they had viewed me as female and want to kick my ass. They were shouting, laughing and banging each other into things while nobody took a leak! I feared they'd slam the door to my stall any second yelling for me to come on out of there. I finally managed to take care of biz then just sat there afraid to move... They were still in there! I pulled my pants up fast now failing to remain calm. "What are they talking about?! Why don't they just leave!! Is it too much to ask just to take a piss?! What are they gonna do? What's taking so damn long here?!" I gave in and just curled up in my seated position inside the stall. My having a tendency toward personalizing things and being sensitive was not helping here. I began sizing these men up and what they could do to me. Then suddenly a wave rushed through my body with a realization that I'd rather get beat up than put myself through entering another women's bathroom. I also contemplated other obvious possible realities with this situation, but it was not going to stop me from entering or exiting anymore.

This being a few years ago, the sound of the door slamming open as they entered and their loud echoing voices still ring in my memory. As does my cold sweaty panic, while breathing hard trying to be absolutely quiet. I realize that when I opened the door to walk out of that men's room, I was ready to face whatever truly being myself had to bring.

the end

Gender Quotes

"Well' said one reporter, 'if you don't like the publicity, why don't you go away and change your name?' I replied, 'I've just been away, and I have just changed my name. What more do you want me to do?'"

- Christine Jorgensen

"The goal is not to tell for the sake of telling, but not to hide. The more people you can find and be honest with, the better you'll feel."

- Barney Frank, U.S. congressman

"...to me, it was like being in a black-and-white movie that suddenly converted to color."

- Andrew Sullivan, writer

"It is better to be hated for what one is than to be loved for what one is not."

- Andre Gide, writer

I Am What I Am

*From the musical: **La Cage Aux Folles***

Lyrics and score by Jerry Herman

I Am What I Am

I am my own special creation

So, come take a look

give me the hook or the ovation.

It's my world that I want to have a little pride in

My world and it's not a place I have to hide in

Life's not worth a damn until you can say "Hey world, I Am

What I Am"

I am what I am

I don't want praise

I don't want pity

I bang my own drum

Some think it's noise, I think it's pretty

And so what if I love each feather and each spangle?

Why not

Try and see things from a different angle

Your life is a sham till you can shout out "I Am What I Am"

I am what I am

And what I am need's no excuses

I deal my own deck, sometimes the Ace, sometimes the Deuces

There's one life

And there's no return and no deposit

One life, so it's time to open up your closet

Life's not worth a damn till you can say "Hey world! I Am

What I Am"

FORGE
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Milwaukee, WI 53201

Next Event
October 16, 1999
Chicago, IL

