



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for the Transgendered
BM Sibyls, London WC1N 3XX

36 Salmons Lane
Whyteleafe
Surrey
CR3 0AN

NEWSLETTER 44

December 2007

020 8763 0146

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Regular Meetings

London usually the second Thursday of every second month at 5.30 - Service at St Anne's, Dean Street, Soho, followed by a meal in Chinatown, February 7, April 10 and June 12.

Manchester every fourth Saturday of the month at MCC. Contact Jenny-Anne 01606 783035, jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk or www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm

Rosie's Meeting in Dorset - every four months between 12 Noon and 4 o'clock at Rosie's house - ring Rosie 01258 830889. Next date Saturday February 16.

Weekends

2008

Friday 16 to Sunday 18 May - Windermere

Friday 13 to Sunday 15 September - St Columba's, Woking

2009

Friday 15 to Sunday 17 May - Whaley Hall, Derbyshire

Friday 11 to Sunday 13 September - Holland House, Worcestershire

Other Events

Saturday 5 January 2008 - Jay's New Year Party.

PLEASE HOLD IN YOUR PRAYERS

Please pray for the soul of Angela Hammerton who died in November, for David in ongoing illness, all those who cannot for whatever reason take the course of action their heart desires, for Susie after her unexpected visit to hospital, for Barbara after her operation to remove a tumour, Jayne in need of corrective surgery, and for all those known to us who are in need, and those with disabilities or who are in pain.

LISTENERS

People who are prepared to listen to others and are happy to be available are listed below. If you need someone to talk to, choose which one and give them a ring: -

Michelle Le Morvan 01743 341026

Jenny Bond 01623 836662
Jane Bowles 01492 660147
Jenny-Anne Bishop 01606 783035
Carol Moore 01625 858487

The listening system works. There are a number of Sibyls who use this service. If you want someone to talk it over with, why not give it a try?



THE BEGGING BOWL

Thank you to all those who responded. Please keep the donations coming. The newsletter has to be paid for and support given to those who would benefit from the weekends but can't afford the cost. All donations welcome, great or small. A big thank you to those who give.

NEW YEAR PARTY CHEZ JAY - SATURDAY 5 JANUARY 2008

There will be a Saturday gathering at Jay's house on 5 January. Like the garden party but indoors! Usual gathering about four o'clock for tea and buns, a thoughtful communion service taken by the Rev'd Martin Kelly (whom it will be a pleasure to welcome back) and then an evening of buffet, drinks and chat. For catering purposes, give me a call if you want to come. 020 8763 0146.

WEEKEND AT HOLLAND HOUSE - LAST SEPTEMBER

Reports on this weekend are included, Elen on the weekend as a whole and Tina on the theological aspects. There can be no doubt that it was a very successful weekend. In particular the splendid workshop run by Tina and Michelle aroused tremendous interest and still resonates. It will be resumed and built on at the St Columba's weekend on 13-15 September next year. This is not to be missed.

WEEKEND AT WINDERMERE - 16-18 MAY 2008

Bookings are now being taken for this weekend, our next. It is time to turn your thoughts in that direction. Windermere is always a popular venue and I'm sure that we will have no difficulty in taking all the rooms (the house has many beds but relatively few rooms). The special attraction this time is Gill Edwards (author of *Wild Love* and other books) who will be coming to talk to us on the Saturday morning, with the afternoon free for excursions, including the usual mini-bus mystery tour.

Elen will be organising the weekend and you will find the booking form at the end of the newsletter. Booking early for Windermere is always advisable.

ROSIE'S MEETING - NORTH DORSET - SATURDAY 16 FEBRUARY

The October meeting at Rosie's house was excellent and followed the Oasis formula. Marian took a thoughtful communion service after which those present thoroughly enjoyed Rosie's cooking and hospitality.

The next meeting will be held at Rosie's house at noon on Saturday 16 February. Please give her a ring to confirm attendance (necessary for catering) and to get directions. 01258 830889. Overnight stay possible. No charge, thanks Rosie, but donations to Sibyls if you want.

LONDON EVENING MEETINGS

These meetings are very good; gentle lovely evenings with a service which is always thoughtful, peaceful and healing, followed by a good meal in a peaceful restaurant with a nice atmosphere. Nourishment for mind, body and spirit. Few come but those that do find it worthwhile.

Details: 5.30 service at St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho W1D 6AF, 40 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it is), and from about 6.15 a gathering at the Imperial China Restaurant in Lisle Street, Chinatown. Next meeting - Thursday 7 February, then 10 April. Every two months, on the second Thursday - except when it isn't (as in February - how can we take St Valentine's Day from romantic Sibyls?). No need to book - just come.

MANCHESTER MEETINGS

Jenny-Anne and Elen organise events in the North-West. There is a regular monthly meeting, fourth Saturday, at the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Manchester. MCC is a friendly, welcoming, inclusive church. Jenny-Anne can be contacted on 01606-783035 or by e-mail jennyannebuk@yahoo.co.uk. The MCC has its own website www.mccmanchester.co.uk/trans.htm.

THE NEWSLETTER - ARTICLES

Please - write articles for the newsletter.

Items can be sent by e-mail to withers.susan@virgin.net (please note change of address) on CD or floppy 3½ inch disk to Jay (in Word, please) or print out in a clear typeface printed with black ink. Anything else defeats the scanner.

RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES



Tina has taken over responsibility for our relations with other churches. She has been very active in putting the transgender point of view in the Anglican church and in her quiet but determined way, I'm sure will do this very effectively. She has enrolled Sibyls as a partner in Inclusive Church which is trying to do exactly what its name suggests.

I have repeated elsewhere in this newsletter her appeal for people to get involved in the 2008 Lambeth Conference so that the bishops are well aware of us. So far only four people have offered to help and it would be good if there were more.

THE LEADERSHIP

Perhaps my standing down was rather a shock. Nothing much has happened - yet. One or two people have offered to take over a couple of the functions and, as stated above, Tina has taken over taking Sibyls to the churches. Early days, but it will soon be 2008. Any suggestions to me or to the committee.

RUGBY WORLD CUP JOKE

Police recovered a man's body from the harbour in Auckland, New Zealand. The body was wearing an All Black shirt, stockings, suspenders, lipstick and a blonde wig. The police removed the All Black shirt to avoid embarrassment to the family.

TALE PIECE

A group of Christians are raising money for charity by organising a pub crawl inspired by the Bishop of Southwark. The Right Reverend Tom Butler left a drinks party at the Irish Embassy last December and was later found in a Mercedes by the owner of the car, throwing children's toys into the street. Asked to explain, he said, "I'm the Bishop of Southwark. It's what I do." A team from the Ship of Fools website will retrace his steps on December 8.

We wish all Sibyls and those they love and those they find hard to love a Merry Christmas and a fulfilling New Year. With love and prayers.

Jay Walmsley (Miss)

Susie Withers (Mrs)

ANGELA HEATHER HAMMERTON 1945 - 2007

Sadly Angela died in November, having lived her life to the full until the cancer finally overcame her.

Tina writes:-

I was introduced to Angela by Sara, our electrolygist, who knew that we lived fairly close to one another. In fact, I work just a few minutes from Angela's flat. I'm so grateful for that introduction, as it was the start of what became a very intimate friendship. We supported one another through the rougher patches of transition: the perils of passing and maintaining one's thinning hair. She was charismatic, wise, discerning, and judicious, with great taste in clothes and oodles of style. A dedicated teacher and houseparent it was lovely that two of her former pupils, now artists of the Royal Ballet, attended her Requiem Mass, representing the many others who were in rehearsal that lunchtime. Her almost forensic analytical skills combined with deep intuition, made her powerful in conversation and in counselling her friends. These gifts were never fully utilised in her professional life, because she was rather a shy person prior to transition, but afterwards one realised that she could have run a large organisation; she had the ruthlessness as well! Angela loved her flowcharts, and had used them for years before they became fashionable, and it was wonderful to see her flourish and flowing until cancer cut her life cruelly short. Before she became ill we had began a writing project together and one day I will try to finish it in her memory, though it won't be quite the same without her 'voice'. In the meantime I mourn a dear friend and 'sister' who I miss so very much.

THE SIBYLS WEEKEND AT HOLLAND HOUSE

Elen

"The sun - it seems - is always shining when I arrive for a Sibyls weekend, and sure enough, the sun shone brightly once again as we turned into the car park of Holland House for the latest weekend."

That was how I started the last report that I wrote for a Sibyls weekend, two years ago. It will stand as a suitable start to this year's weekend at Holland House in Worcestershire, but a lot has changed since that previous visit. And not just the temperature! In 2005 it had been typically cold and misty November weather; this year we enjoyed balmy September sunshine.

Not that Sibyls itself had changed a great deal - it was still the same benevolent dictatorship run by Jay - though things were about to undergo quite a shake-up, as we shall see. No, the big change was in me. In 2005 I

had been still something of a novice with Sibyls, and had only been out in public as Elen for two years. Now I feel far more confident and comfortable, both as a trans-woman and as part of Sibyls. Perhaps having organised a couple of the weekends myself accounts in part for that!

Whatever the reason, I found that my perception of the weekend was subtly different, as if I were viewing proceedings through new glasses that seemed to reduce the significance of certain aspects, while accentuating details that I had previously missed. For a start, I knew so many more people there; of the 24 Sibyls who attended the weekend, there were only three that I had not previously met, and one of those - Elaine - was on her first visit. As were two couples from North Wales - Ellena and Doreen, and Trudie and Wendy - but these were no strangers to me as the two t-girls were part of the same support group that Jenny-Anne and I attend regularly.

One thing that I was pleased to find had not changed was the quality of the food served at Holland House. Friday night's supper was a delicious steak and kidney pie with an unusual filo pasty crust, and I managed to restrain myself from taking a second helping only to allow room for the strawberry meringue tart that followed. If I were not careful I would go home a good few pounds heavier!

After the meal Christina Beardsley gave us an introduction to a workshop that she and Michelle O'Brien were planning to run for us the following afternoon. This would be dealing in some depth with Gender, Sexuality and Spirituality, and Christina's 'taster' certainly made me keen to take part.

Susie's Night Office was based upon the passage in Luke where Jesus heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath. She read out to us a sermon penned by her local vicar about things being turned upside down (or is the way we normally see things upside down, and does Jesus turn our world the right way up?).

Saturday proved to be rather a filling day, both gastronomically and intellectually, though I did manage to escape from it all for a few minutes after breakfast. I took a very leisurely stroll in the attractive grounds of Holland House, something I had not felt inclined to do on my previous visit (at least, not without Arctic gear!). Summer, having eluded us all since early May, arrived just in time to make a graciously mellow exit.

Morning Office was taken by Michelle Le Morvan, who kick started our mental processes with a thought provoking consideration of awareness, based upon a passage in John, Chapter 9, and writings by Anthony de Mello.

We had no time to digest this, however, before the first of two workshops that Jay had lined up for us. This was organised by Daphne and John Cook, presented in two halves around a brief respite for tea and coffee. In the first half we were each labelled by Daphne - with little sticky labels on our backs -

as parts of a suit of armour as described in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Once suitably tagged, we had to find our matching partners; I quickly discovered that I was marked up as "Shoes". When we had gathered in our groups, we were asked to brainstorm as many words and concepts as we could for our label. Not a hard task for a group of t-girls when the subject was shoes!

In the second half Daphne led us in a meditation upon a collection of stones that we had gathered in the gardens during the mid-morning break in the sunshine. The meditation was followed by quite a lively debate on the appropriateness of using military symbols in Christianity.

After a tasty and filling lunch we plunged into the afternoon workshop, run by Christina and Michelle. This started with each of us giving a potted personal history, including where we saw ourselves in relation to gender, sexuality and spirituality. This proved to be a fascinatingly informative exercise, and demonstrated just how diverse a group of people Sibyls is, though I think it took longer than was anticipated. We had only time afterwards for a relatively short discussion on whether viewing gender as a spectrum was valid or not, and about society's 'boxes' versus nature. Because we ran out of time, Christina and Michelle offered to run a second workshop on this subject at St. Columba's next year. If it were possible to book for that now, I would!

After a quick cup of tea or coffee, we rushed off to the chapel to listen to Vespers to the Virgin Mary sung by Musica in Ecclesia (sorry, Jay, it was a rush for me to get into my glad rags for the evening and back down to the chapel for the singing!). I must say, though, that after a somewhat hectic day, sitting in the chapel with the evening sunlight slanting in through the glass walls and the space filled with beautiful evocative Gregorian plain-chant engendered in me (and others, I am sure) a welcome sense of tranquillity.

The Saturday evening entertainment is the highlight of any Sibyls weekend, and a number of the girls dress up for Saturday night dinner and the evening's 'performance'. Lesley was once again our MC.

Suzanne opened the proceedings with a funny story involving newly-weds and knickers, after which Elaine played her guitar and sang a couple of songs, one appropriately about the joys of being a woman. Daphne and John then regaled us with a PC version of "The Lost Chord" (PC as in computer; few of our offerings are Politically Correct!); entitled "The Lost Code", it was well received and drew forth two rounds of applause.

Our next three performers gave us poetry readings. Susan's was about the Belfast shipyards and some fictitious steam vents, Philippa gave us examples from the dark world of Roald Dahl, while Jasmine drew hers from "Praying Like A Woman" by Nicola Slee. Then Lesley serenaded us with some trad jazz songs, seemingly oblivious to a rather large spider that scuttled back and forth across the room during his performance (Wendy certainly wasn't!).

Another song, "Danny Boy", was brought to us by Michelle Le Morvan.

It was my turn next. I had prepared a light-hearted quiz constructed around old money, and was sure that some of my cryptic clues would completely fox everyone, eliciting appreciative groans when I announced the answers. I presented it to an audience divided into small teams, and quickly realised that I had met my match in Susie; fellow team member Rosie collapsed in paroxysms of laughter every time Susie whispered the correct answer to my clues (I suspect that Rosie's tearfully mirthful response to many of the humorous items contributed as much to the evening's entertainment as many of the 'official' performances!).

When I had finished, Jay took centre stage in a costume inspired by Ancient Egypt. As she danced around her scimitar on the floor, what I had at first taken to be a pleated gold cloak was revealed as a magnificent set of wings, modelled on those of the goddess Isis. When fully spread they filled the room with shimmering gold, a truly amazing sight.

Jay's was a hard act to follow, and it was Christina and Michelle who had to try! They sang a number from The Beggars Opera and got us all singing along. We sang it through twice, once singing the man's part and then the woman's (was this simply a sneaky way of extending their gender workshop?). They were followed by more poems from Christina Jenkins and Janet, and then a few jokes from Susie, who very nearly got left out! Lesley closed the entertainment with a quick burst on the spoons.

After the revelries, a peaceful coda; Rosie's Night Office was a restful mix of meditation, readings, Psalms and prayers to a background of wonderful music by Elgar and Vaughan Williams. Just the right Nunc Dimitus to send us quietly off to bed.

Sunday morning is always the emotional climax of a Sibyls weekend; I can never get through to lunch without shedding a good few tears, and I know I am not alone in that. This weekend was no exception!

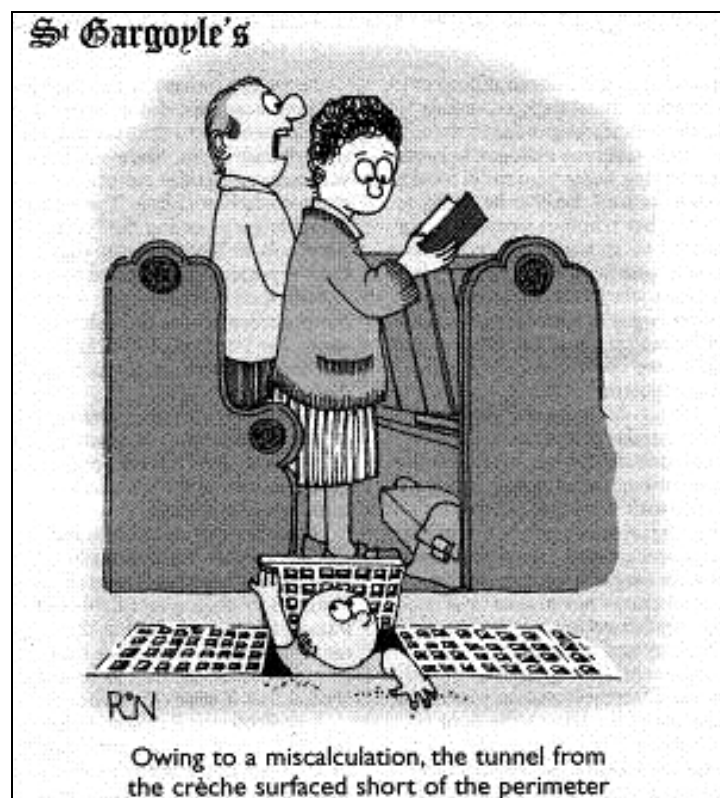
It began with an unusual Morning Office conducted by Christina and Michelle, drawing on themes from the previous afternoon's workshop. A number of individuals took part, giving us personally significant readings or offering prayers while standing beneath a red sari held aloft by two other Sibyls. Elaine played some suitable music on her guitar. For me, one of the most touching moments was when Doreen, partner of one of the new t-girls, spontaneously shared with us how much she had benefited from the weekend.

The communion service, led by the Reverend Georgina Everingham, provided further opportunities for lumps in throats, whether it was the heartfelt prayers offered by individuals while holding the Sibyls lantern, or the peace (a totally inclusive 'group hug' which I always find overwhelming). I also very

much enjoyed the way communion was shared, with each of us receiving the host and wine from the person on our right before giving them to the person on our left. Once again, it was wonderfully inclusive.

Between these two spiritual high points we came back down to earth with the secular Sibyls Together hour. It was here that Jay - following her customary thank you to those who had helped to make the weekend a success - dropped her bombshell. She announced her abdication as crown head of the organisation; not immediately but definitely within a year or so. After a stunned silence, we launched into a lengthy discussion upon who or what might replace her (as if that were possible!). No firm decisions were made but various options were aired, to be considered during the weeks ahead. I'm sure we will have much to discuss at Windermere next year!

And so, following another substantial meal - roast pork, this time, with apple sauce and vegetables - and the obligatory photographic session in the gardens, we concluded another marvellous Sibyls weekend and took our leave of Holland House. Will I be at the next weekend in Windermere in May? Try to stop me!



During the weekend at Holland House I tried to keep track of the themes as they emerged and gave a brief summary as an introduction to the Sunday Morning Prayer. Here is an expanded version; it's a personal view and I know people have other reflections which I look forward to reading.

The richness of tradition

A recurring theme was the idea that the Christian tradition contains strands that are friendlier towards us as Trans people than we often realise. Christina raised this in the first session with her recollection of one of the Articles of Religion (a foundation document of Anglicanism), while the monastic tradition, represented by the habited choir who sang Saturday Vespers, hinted at aspects of our humanity that transcend sexuality and, possibly, gender. One paper I read over the weekend was dismissive of the old practice of nuns adopting male names - e.g. Sister Mary Joseph - as misogynistic and gender-confused, whereas it could be interpreted as playful, or even liberating, from our point of view. I also liked the gender balance of the choir, as it represented a tradition far older than the music they sang: the dual monasteries of men and women, usually headed up by a woman (e.g. Hilda of Whitby).

At the end of Daphne's meditation on stones, Susan produced the stones that she had been given during two previous Sibyls weekends, a reminder that, as a group, we are accumulating wisdom: our own unique tradition of prayerful reflection and pastoral care.

Authority and the Spirit

Philippa's anecdote about a preacher who had claimed absolute authority to interpret Scripture on behalf of others led to a discussion about the role of conscience in matters of faith, and the dangers that lurk in all pretensions to infallibility, Protestant as well as Catholic. This theme continued at Saturday Morning Prayer, where Michelle Le M. described her disillusionment with hierarchy and magisterial teaching, and her preference for the mystical spiritual tradition which was content to confess its ignorance about the deepest aspects of reality. The issue resurfaced in Sibyls Together as we faced the prospect of transition from Jay's benign dictatorship to a committee model/shared leadership: would we need the structure of a constitution to protect both leaders and members, or should we continue in the Christ-like simplicity and openness that had marked Sibyls from its foundation? That we had just emerged from a red canopy, symbolic of the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit may, or may not, have a bearing on this.

Jesus Christ the radical

Jay's original vision for Sibyls had looked to the Jesus of the gospels, who needed only a minimum of human organisation to do his work. Susie's Friday Night Prayer had been an encounter with this compassionate Christ who broke with tradition by healing on the Sabbath day; a counter-cultural figure who included women fully in the community of faith. Michelle Le M's Morning Prayer continued this theme with a reflection on Jesus healing of the man born blind, also on the Sabbath day. Both episodes show Jesus in conflict

with the religious authorities, an experience we have sometimes shared because we are transgender, or because we have been true to Christ? Perhaps the two are closer than we think, and throughout the weekend people spoke of transgender as gift.

Care of the soul

We discussed the accusation, often thrown at us by conservative Christians, of having succumbed to the modern pursuit of self-fulfilment when we ought to be engaged in the Christian discipline of self-denial. Jay's observation that Jesus taught us to love God and our neighbour as ourselves reminded us that care of the self is integral to the Christian tradition. Michelle Le M. spelt this out on Saturday morning in the words of Anthony de Mello, 'spirituality is awareness, awareness, awareness' and the afternoon workshop was an opportunity to practice this by actively listening as people described their sexuality, gender and spirituality; in many cases by telling their story in some detail. In the safe, prayerful setting of the weekend we were able to appreciate the rich variety of people who belong to Sibyls and the range of transgendered experience. Here it could be celebrated and offered to God at a Eucharist presided over by a transgendered woman priest, as well as being acknowledged (in Pippa's reflection) as a source of pain that enabled us to empathise with others.

Spiritual warfare

Daphne's workshop on the armour of God took me by surprise as armour is such a masculine image and this was a predominantly feminine group (no FTMs being present) though it was balanced by her meditation on the stones and the vulnerability of our journeys. (Or was this just stereotyping on my part?) Perhaps it was because of our vulnerability as transgendered people that we were being encouraged to examine the armour; to recognise that we are engaged in a spiritual battle because of who we are, and our need of divine protection: St Patrick's 'breastplate' which we sang is, after all, 'the strong name of the Trinity'. The whole idea of clothing (also a monastic concept) seemed an exciting one for Sibyls, most of us being very conscious of the significance of clothes. Not surprisingly, 'stilettos' topped the list for those discussing shoes, but the original stiletto was a knife (the heel resembles it), so that the idea of 'cutting through' whatever stands in our way - verbiage, prejudice, phobia - surfaced there as well as in the group looking at the sword, which, like our transgendered nature, is often double-edged, piercing our own souls as well as setting us, and others, free.

Paradox and prayer

Given our 'queer' theoretical framework Michelle O. and I had both thought independently (Michelle was travelling during Daphne's workshop) of Joan of Arc when the armour of God was mentioned. Joan is a wonderfully queer figure - defying the stereotypes - and a delightfully androgynous one too - fusing masculine and feminine qualities that are often set against one another, just as Christian spirituality unites apparent irreconcilables like flesh and spirit, nature and grace, humanity and divinity.

As I mentioned in the workshop, I find androgyny a fascinating and useful concept, but the illustrations I brought were mainly of young women adopting

masculine poses and clothes; we said nothing about the androgyny of old age, and barely touched on the androgyny of transition or what it means to be an androgynous male: the wonderfully creative androgyny that was staring us in the face. Perhaps this was too close to home, or too intimate to share in a big group. Maybe we'll return to it next year when we break into smaller groups to develop the workshop further. Like Susan gathering stones from successive weekends I have an impression of the workshop picking up experience and insights each time it is offered. With thanks to everyone for their contributions at Holland House 2007.

Tina

TRUTH TO TELL

Deirdre

In the September edition of "The Sibyls" Jay raises the vital question of transgendered people having to lie about some of their activities. It's a very real question that some of us have had to learn to live with. It's not easy to reconcile, especially when one is in a position of trust; one is always aware of the double standards which often define the only way to cope.

I can remember two particular moments in my life at which crucial decisions had to be taken suddenly. One was to give up smoking. I'd smoked my way through university, despite being engaged in sport at a high level. I knew all the arguments against doing so: after all, the other members of my crew repeated them often enough! One day my baby daughter was sick; nothing unusual about that, until I realised that in what she had disgorged was one of my fag-ends. I've never smoked again from that moment on.

The second was a confrontation with my wife when she began to realise the extent of my transvestism. I'd received a letter from a TV friend which I left in a jacket pocket. Another letter had been received to which she quite properly needed to refer, and not being able to find it immediately she went to my jacket to see if it was there. The ensuing confrontation was, shall I say, unforgettable. It included the indisputable fact that "you're not only my husband, you're my Minister!"

The very fact of being TV presents a dilemma. It's not generally accepted in society, and can be devastating in relationships unless handled with extreme care and discretion. Yet having constantly to suppress so vital a part of one's nature is in itself a source of danger, for eventually it will demand expression, perhaps in circumstances that override the necessary caution. However careful one tries to be there is always the possibility of leaving traces which can point to what is going on. In her article Jay rightly refers to possible consequences as being "too terrible to contemplate". Perhaps the only way to deal with such a situation is to resort to subterfuge. It is never easy to deal with.

There will always be situations in which one has to decide how much to reveal in particular circumstances; social and personal relationships depend on this to a very considerable extent. The saving grace comes as so often from the Bible. In Ephesians 4:15 Paul writes about “maintaining the truth in a spirit of love” (REB). This is something we each have to decide for ourselves. It needs time; it needs thought; it needs prayer. One line I’ve often used in pastoral advice is: if you can live with your decision, it’s likely to have been the right one.

I can live with that.

MEETING THE SIBYLS FAMILY

Elaine Sommers' personal reflection on attending the Holland House Weekend September 2007.

As a new member of Sibyls, and with much encouragement from my friend Rosie, I booked in for the Holland House Weekend, albeit with some apprehension. My impression was that Sibyls exists for full-time transgender people, many of them post-op. I wondered how a cross-dresser, who spends 90% of the time in male role, would get on in such an environment. Would I really fit in? Would I even be welcome?

I also wondered if my fairly traditional Evangelical background might be seen as too narrow for the group.

Well, all my fears were unfounded. As I walked up to the front door I received the warmest of welcomes from Jay, Rosie, and many others who were at pains to put me at ease. The ice melted. I was at home.

I can't speak too highly of the weekend. It was lovely to meet so many dear people, all with their own gender and faith stories. The Saturday workshop session was a real eye-opener as we heard the stories of each person in turn. What struck me was the wide diversity of those stories, which covered gender, sexuality and spirituality. People were amazingly frank and honest (although it was made clear that no one *had* to say anything). By the time we had gone round the group, I realised that there was no question of whether I was going to fit in - anyone and everyone was represented here.

The weekend was a wonderful mix of fun, laughter, deep spiritual insights and special moments. Not to mention the food!

I think for me the highlight was the Sunday Communion, which showed the Sibyls Family in action - a living, loving community of very special people. During the prayer time, one of the partners (female) stood up and gave thanks for the fellowship and love she had experienced, having been very unsure whether to attend the weekend or not. Many of those listening were moved to tears by the heartfelt words they heard, but for me it served to break a dam in

my heart that had built up over years, concerning my dear wife. Over 36 years of marriage we have stuck together and loved each other, even though my wife has never been comfortable with my Elaine side. When I go on TG weekends, I am always conscious and sad that she is unable to share those special times with me. But in that moment at Sibyls another thought came to me: My dear wife *should* have been there beside me. It didn't seem right that she wasn't. I just broke down in a flood of tears and emotions. And I hadn't even taken a tissue with me! Thank you Rosie for bailing me out with a hanky. And for all those present who were about to call the Water Board to report a leak, you now know what was going on.

The lovely thing about it all was that I felt it was quite OK to let it all out in the open; there was absolutely no feeling of embarrassment, or a need to apologise. We went round sharing The Peace, and all I could do was hug people. I was too choked up to speak a word of greeting. It didn't seem to matter.

So, all in all, I was so glad I took the plunge and went for the Weekend. I will never forget everyone's kindness and caring love. I do hope I will be able to go to more events if I possibly can. And I pray with all my heart that one day, in God's good timing, my dear Soul mate will be able to be there at my side.

All my love,

Elaine

I am repeating here Tina's appeal to get involved in the Lambeth Conference 2008 and lobby for more acceptance of transgendered people in the Anglican Church. We have four volunteers so far but more would be welcome. Literally the more the merrier.

Jay

LAMBETH CONFERENCE 2008; How to get involved

Tina

Every ten years the bishops of the Anglican Communion gather, mainly at Canterbury. As we know, at their previous Conference in 1998, they agreed a resolution on sexuality — the notorious Lambeth 1.10 — which is often misused to condemn LGBT people, but which also initiated a 'Listening Process' by which our voices and stories could be heard.

Since then, the consecration of Gene Robinson, a partnered gay man, as a bishop in the Episcopal Church, USA, has caused shock waves and talk of schism throughout the Anglican Communion, yet somehow it looks as though most of the bishops will participate in Lambeth 2008, despite threats to boycott it.

The media simplifies all this as an issue of sexuality, focusing mainly on the exclusion or inclusion of gay people, but we know that transgendered people

like ourselves are often excluded from church life, and ministry so it is vitally important that we are represented in the Lambeth Conference exhibition space where Changing Attitude, Affirming Catholicism, Inclusive Church and Integrity will be sharing a large stand and creating opportunities for dialogue with individual bishops when they meet at the University of Kent at Canterbury from July 20th to 3rd August 2008.

I have volunteered to co-ordinate the trans presence in my role as Changing Attitude Trustee for trans issues. What I envisage is a rota or relay of people spending a day or two at a time doing this essential PR work, which will be quite exhausting, but very exciting: take a look at the Listening Process material being assembled for the bishops by Canon Phil Groves at www.anglicancommunion.org/listening/index.cfm (By the way, there may still be time to contribute to this if you feel so moved).

Changing Attitude has booked accommodation so I can request that one room (more if necessary) be set aside for the trans representatives, with each participant paying for their stay according to the number of nights that they are there (the cost per night sounds quite reasonable).

At this stage I would simply like to hear from those who are interested in sharing in this task which, as Jay has reminded us, is an important aspect of the Sibyls: 'to engage with churches on behalf of Christian transgendered people.'

You can email me at tina@belgravia7.fsnet.co.uk or contact me on my mobile 07904 162 312 I look forward to hearing from you,



THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group
For the Transgendered

12 Ffordd Las
Rhyl, Denbighshire
LL18 2DY
☎ 01745 337144

WEEKEND AT THE WINDERMERE CENTRE 16 - 18 MAY 2008

Name.....

Required - Single/twin room/triple (delete as appropriate)

Name of other occupant(s) in room

Prepared to share with

Address

.....

.....

Phone No.

Please reserve for me the following number of places:-

Mini-bus outing	£12.00
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(please book and pay for this in advance)

Full weekend Friday night to Sunday lunch	£125.00
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24 hour overnight full board	£62.50
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Day visitor – Saturday lunch and tea/coffee	£26.50
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(add £2 if you want breakfast)

Day visitor – evening meal/Sunday lunch	£15.00
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If you are not coming for the full weekend please specify the days/times for which you are booking

.....

Cheque, payable to “Miss J Walmsley – The Sibyls”, enclosed £.....

Any special dietary requirements

Any other special needs

Do you need help with transport to Windermere

Please send this form with your cheque to Ms Elen Heart (address above) asap