



SIBYLS NEWS

Issue No. 69 December 2014



Welcome to the Advent and Christmas issue!

To be a light to lighten the darkness



In this issue:

'The Narrow Way' by Anne Brontë
(1820 – 1849) – Sent in by Raymus

Believe not those who say
The upward path is smooth,
Lest thou should stumble on
the way,
And faint before the truth

2. Sibyls Committee meeting report. Soho Sibyls.
 3. Advent-time Sibyls philosophy. Advent Calendar (2).
 4. Inclusive churches. Review of terminal illness care
 5. More reports, esp. 'Theology of Marriage'.
 6. Becoming a Woman—a part-time view.
 7. History of Christmas.
 8. The Commercialisation of Christmas (continued)
 - 9 & 10. The lighter side
 11. Gender stereotyping
 12. Newsletter issue dates and topics for 2015.
- Do we want a weekend in 2015?

THE SIBYLS

Christian Spirituality Group for Gender Variant People

BM Sibyls, London WC1N 3XX

www.sibyls.co.uk E-mail: info@sibyls.co.uk

The Sibyls is a UK-based confidential Christian spirituality group for transgender people, and their supporters, offering companionship along the journey, and information/advocacy to churches. Sibyls pray, eat, and talk together, and seek to fulfil Christ's command to love one another. Members must respect the security of each and every other member, and must never jeopardise that security.

Sibyls Committee meeting - 18th November 2014, Birmingham

Summary (*Full minutes of the meeting - 17 pages - are available on request from the editor*)

6 members present, 3 apologies. Some of the main topics of discussion are below, (re-ordered from the minutes to flow better in this abbreviated form):

Membership: names of those who did not reply to a request for confirmation earlier in the year were removed from the membership and circulation lists. The membership list has now started to rise again, with 7 new members since the last committee meeting. **It now stands at 63.**

Meetings: there will be no weekend in 2015. **(Please see editorial)** We have mooted holding a day conference in Birmingham during September/October

A Couples Weekend continues to be worked on, but there is no immediate prospect of a firm date. There are so many very delicate considerations to be worked through. It is hoped an article on this proposal will appear in a future Newsletter.

A website is being developed, with the help of IT students in Manchester. Meanwhile a temporary one is already up, but not yet running.

Social Media presence is still under consideration, with security a top priority,

A Constitution is being developed, so that ultimately, Sibyls can apply for registration as a charity.

Relations with other groups and campaigns: Sibyls is taking an active role in the LGBTI Coalition, (next Coalition meeting is Saturday 13th December at St Andrew's, Short Street, Waterloo) and is hoping to join the European LGBT Forum. We need to develop relations with other denominations besides C of E, (the focus of LGBTIAC). We should have more input into events such as 'Sparkle'. **N.B. There was some disagreement over the extent to which Sibyls should move from a support function to a pressure-group function. (Editor's Note – please comment to me on this matter if you have any feelings about it.)**

Sibyls Book. This has been under preparation for many years, and has been rejected by two publishers, with a third now considering it. It may eventually be published as 'print on demand'.

SIBYLS LONDON EVENING MEETING

11 DECEMBER 2014 5:30 p.m. at St Anne's Church, Dean Street, Soho.

THESE SERVICES ARE OPEN TO ALL TRANS PEOPLE, TO THEIR FRIENDS, SPOUSES AND SUPPORTERS

Details: 5.30 service at St Anne's, 55 Dean Street, Soho W1D 6AF, 50 yards up on the left from Shaftesbury Avenue (it doesn't look like a church but it is), and from about 6.30 a gathering at a Soho restaurant.

You can just turn up on the evening, however it would also be helpful to get some idea of numbers in advance. If you do know you are coming, please email Susan at sgen4144@gmail.com. We normally decide on the restaurant to go to at the end of the service. If you are late please ring 07546 213 971.

The planned dates for 2015 are February 12; April 9; June 11; August 13; October 8; December 10.

Inclusive Advent? Inclusive churches? The Sibyls reason for being.

The Sibyls were asked if anyone could provide a piece for the online 'Inclusive Advent Calendar' at <http://inclusiveadvent.co.uk/>. (Set up from Dec 1st by the Inclusive Church movement to raise awareness within the Durham Diocese.) The notice was extremely short, so a member quickly responded with the following, which she has extended for this newsletter. **It is the essence of the Sibyls' philosophy.**

¹³ *For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.*

¹⁴ *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret,*

¹⁶ *.....in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

Psalm 139: 13-16

People on the gender variance spectrum can find it difficult to feel that God loves them. But He does! Gender characteristics are determined during early gestation by the action of hormones governing development of the part of the brain that holds the core perception of self-identity. Due to hormone imbalances or insensitivity in later gestation transsexuals develop physical sexual characteristics at variance with their brain sex. In contrast, intersex people have atypical X and Y chromosomes in their genes that can lead to ambiguity in sexual characteristics.

Both trans and intersex people have a difficult time in life – struggles to try to conform to binary sex roles can bring anguish, self-recrimination and self-loathing. Owning one's true self rather than a construct to please others is difficult, and involves painful adaptation of relationships for gender variant people and their nearest and dearest and sadly often ends in rejection. Yet trying to be someone other than oneself as made by God is a life wasted and frequently a life terminated too early by suicide. Sadly, all too often churches reinforce the prejudice of wider society against trans and intersex people. Latter-day scribes and Pharisees in the Church persecute trans and intersex people to maintain a literalist sexual binary interpretation of Genesis 1:27 in the face of biological fact that up to 1 in 100 humans are gender variant to some degree. Far from welcoming and nurturing these hurting people, often they are condemned as a sinful threat and cast out - or are grudgingly allowed entry only with stringent conditions, and their gifts are rejected. I am barred from the church in which I was baptised. We are as we are because that is how God, the God of diversity, made us. It is not a lifestyle choice or a perversion. Transsexuality isn't catching! Let all churches welcome gender variant people and celebrate their special insights and talents which enrich the whole Body of Christ. Isaiah 56 v3-5 assures those outside the binary sexual stereotype that they ARE part of God's people after all. Thanks be to God that His Saving Grace is for all of us....let not the Church reject those whom Christ lovingly created.

Prayer

Like the Magi we celebrate the coming of our Emmanuel. Jesus confounded the expectations and prejudices of the religious establishment of His time by his actions, His teaching and His sacrifice. Inspire Christians to reach out in love in the power of the Holy Spirit to the outcasts just as Jesus did, bringing hope, healing and inspiring changed lives. May Your Church be enriched by gender variant people and their gifts.

The contributor is a member of The Sibyls (and a regular worshipper and PCC member of a church in the diocese of Manchester) who is writing in a personal capacity as a transsexual person and wishes to remain anonymous.

Have a look at the calendar if you can: <http://inclusiveadvent.co.uk/>

Advent Calendar (2)

Every year the people of Saltaire. Just North of Bradford, make a community Advent calendar by putting pictures in the windows of the cottages, through which the house lights shine, daily adding to the delight of walking about the village. Here is an example from last year:



INCLUSIVE CHURCHES

Metropolitan Community Churches throughout the world embrace diversity. In the UK there are churches in North London, South London, Manchester, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Dorchester, Torbay, Bath and Newcastle. See ufmcc.com/ for details.

CARDIFF City United Reformed Church (www.cityurc.org.uk),
Windsor Place, Cardiff, CF10 2BZ, 029 2022 5190,
Sunday service at 10.30am.

BRIGHTON Dorset Gardens Methodist Church (www.dgmc.org.uk),
Dorset Gardens, Brighton, BN2 1RL, 01273 605 502.

OXFORD St Columba's United Reformed Church (www.saintcolumbas.org/),
Alfred Street, Oxford, OX1 4EH, *Sunday service at 10.45.*

EXETER Southernhay United Reformed Church (www.southernhaychurch.org/),
Dix's Field, Exeter, EX1 1QA, *Sunday service at 10.30am.*

LONDON St Luke's Parish Church (www.chelseaparish.org/),
Sydney Street, London, SW3 6NH, 020 7351 7365.

St James, Piccadilly (www.st-james-piccadilly.org/),

St James's Church 197 Piccadilly London W1J 9LL / 020 7734 4511

Soho Masses (www.sohomasses.com/), It is possible to contact lgbtcatholicswestminster@gmail.com

Church of the Assumption & St Gregory, Warwick Street, London, W1B 5NB

Many other inclusive churches may be found by going to the Inclusive Church website (www.inclusivechurch2.net/) and clicking on Churches. Please do let the editor know of any other inclusive or welcoming Churches for inclusion in future Newsletters.

STOP PRESS - care for terminally ill LGBT patients

A research team at King's College London is seeking people who identify as LGB and/or T and are approaching the later stages of a life-limiting illness (such as cancer, neurological conditions, heart, lung or liver disease). The research team would like to find out more about their experiences, to identify how care could be improved.

Some details of the research are on view at:

<http://www.gmfa.org.uk/Blog/lgbt-volunteers-needed-for-new-end-of-life-study>

More News and Reports

Sept 24th— Elaine gave a fine interview on bcfm radio in London, talking about the decision to come out.

Sept 27th— Susan and Tina led a workshop on 'Transgendered perspectives on marriage' at the conference **'To Have and To Hold – the theology of marriage'**, at St John's Church, Waterloo, London. (Report below)

Oct 18th— *Accepting Evangelicals* 10th Anniversary Celebration In London, addressed by Steve Chalke and Vicky Beeching

'To Have and To Hold – the theology of marriage', held on Saturday 27th September 2014 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. at St John's Church, Waterloo, London.

A Report on The Workshop: Love's constancy & legal niceties: transgendered perspectives on marriage
Led by Tina Beardsley & Susan Gilchrist

This workshop considered the experiences that are encountered in marriages when a transgendered individual is involved.

Extensive background material was presented before the workshop proceeded, beginning with the article in the Church Times of 19th September, in which Dr Chris Cook, Professor of Spirituality, Theology and Health at Durham University, wrote about the Pilling report commissioned by the Anglican Church, and how scientific evidence is used in the report. He is critical of the report for not evaluating the scientific evidence with sufficient rigour and he asks that more critical attention be given to this evidence when the church engages in the Shared Conversations.

Susan's research on the history of the theology of marriage and gender difference was offered.

Some dozen scenarios were presented for discussion (e.g. A couple married for 37 years where one partner is a trans woman and lives in dual roles with her family's support. She does not have gender recognition.)

After a description and discussion of the various scenarios the following questions were addressed: What are the legal issues in a marriage where the trans spouse is not the biological parent but wishes to be registered as such? What are the impacts of transition on the marriage of those people whose children, or some of them, are unsupportive to the trans parent? What is your view on the statistics of couples who stay together or separate? What are the reasons why couples separate at this point? How essential is gender to marriage? How should we define heterosexuality and homosexuality – in absolute terms, seeking the complement, seeking the similar or what?

The Church of England's official teaching is 'between a man and a woman for life.' Transgender and intersex people pose a significant challenge to that assertion. Is marriage limited to a man and a woman? Dare we ask what is a man and a woman? Are we agreed that Christian marriage, or the ideal, is life-long fidelity? What is the role of procreation in marriage? What do we understand by gender complementarity and is this essential to a marriage? Is marriage a sacrament? Can trans people's marriages reflect the union of Christ and the Church?

GROUP DISCUSSIONS

An extremely interesting and full discussion ensued, for which there is sadly insufficient space in this issue. A full report on the conference, including the workshops, is available at

<http://www.lgbtac.org.uk/events/HaveAndHoldConf27sep14/index.htm>

‘Becoming a Woman’ – a Part-time View by Amy

Editor’s note: This follows the thread begun by Jay in issue 66 ‘Becoming a Woman’, and followed by the editor in issue 67, under the title ‘Life after Transition’. Those two articles were both written by transwomen. Amy, on the other hand, only comes into sight on one day a month. She writes:

I’m living two lives. One where we’ve been married for 25 years. Another is entirely a different story. Less conventional. A twilight life, struggling to enter the light of day.

In 2000, prior to a house move, I brought everything back into the light, and reminded (Redacted) of what we discussed before we married. 14 years later, we are still together. I manage both lives under licence. Amy emerges once a month. It is an Amy day. Over the years I’ve moved from scaredy-cat hand-held attendances at a T-support group to my own mini RLE (real life experience). Only this is RLE is just once a month. I try and find ordinary as mince ways to spend my Amy days. As our cars age, I do seem to spend much time taking them to the garage for repairs and renewals. For a number of years now I’ve done this “as Amy”. I am known at both the garages, and wonder what will happen if I need a tow there in Andrew mode! This “once a month” is why I have so little time to get to meets like Sibyls weekends. I’m too busy just living the ordinary life.

We live in a village in the sticks, and out of respect for (Redacted) I do try and be as discreet as possible when “launching” and “landing”. Living in a village, if you cough it is known which hand you raised to your mouth. I have been observed by our neighbour opposite, and next door, but never any comment. I suspect the whole village knows, but just on the off chance they don’t, I maintain this pretence, but love (Redacted) to bits and don’t want her at the soggy end of gossip. I think those around me know I am different, but accept that I don’t eat babies, and that I try and present in a discreet manner. But likely it’s simply that “frankly my dear I don’t care”.

I must admit now that people are much less unaccepting than they were in my teens and twenties. I can go to church and present in whichever gender I feel appropriate - and generally am not shunned. Maybe I am exceptional, lucky even.

I suspect the girls where I work know that I am different, because of the way I get on with them so well. Smiles (warm smiles) are the order of the day; many even use my name, even though I don’t know them all. There are about 300 peeps where I work. So something has occurred! Maybe it is like in my previous job where one of the girls whispered in my ear one morning that I’d left my mascara on. Known, but not significant.

‘Stealth living’ is something that will attract strong feelings either way.

I am fairly open, but recently when I caught the eye of a traveller at BR Oakham who is in senior management where I work, I did smile fleetingly (as you do), and passed on to the far end of the platform, and joined at a different carriage, and was careful when changing platforms in Leicester not to have a repeat “eye” iteration. I don’t advertise the relation between my two “dual roles” unless it is unavoidable.

If I ever do become open in my dual roles, or even “transition”, then I will not want to rewrite or erase my history. I am who I am. My life is enhanced by being gender gifted. I went to a boys school, (the one where the Richard III exhibition in Leicester now lives), and that can’t be changed. In conversation (there were separate schools for boys and girls), I went to the generic name school, not the generic name boys school. If I was pushed I would say. But I rarely am so pushed.

So why am I still associated with Sibyls? In the light of the greater acceptance these days, I did wonder whether the Sibyls would just ‘fade to grey’, but here I am writing for the periodical! I love the Sibyls Weekends. A chance to spend quality time with loving sisters and brothers, networking (nattering), accepted as me by Sibyls, staff and many locals alike. I could manage without, but am encouraged, strengthened and built up by so associating. How do others Sibyls feel about Sibyls? I can’t say, I’m not others, I’m me. I’m very happy to be associated with Sibyls. I am unable to give much back, though. Here is a little something.

Of the first 390 Google Christmas images there are only two which refer in any way to the story of Jesus, at nos. 46 and 66 .

Is Christmas too commercialised? Is it defined by shallow materialism?



In one of his Christmas Eve homilies, Pope Benedict famously urged worshippers to "see through the superficial glitter of this season and to discover behind it the child in the stable in Bethlehem". At the time of writing (late November), I find it hard to begin talking about Christmas. But when shops are putting up displays and setting out cards in September, it feels that something's gone completely wrong. So what is going on?

History

The Victorians are responsible for our current conception of Christmas. Ultimately, the practice stems from the Pagan celebrations of the sun-god Mithras and the festival of Saturnalia, but these were later encompassed by the Christian version of the holiday.

Gifts were a part of the original ceremonies, but Saturnalia, for example, typically consisted of candles, pretend fruit and dolls. These all have symbolic meaning, yet somehow this practice has transformed into iPad frenzies, sold-out games consoles and superfluous gadgets.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Christmas wasn't widely celebrated, but society soon revived the practice. Although our modern Christmas celebrations in Britain have been linked to Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's German husband, the commercial aspects can be thought to sprout from 1843, when Henry Cole commissioned the first ever Christmas card. At first, their price tag was too much for ordinary Victorians, but as times progressed they became increasingly popular, and in 1880 11.5 million Christmas cards were made.

Presents used to be given to mark the new year, but the increasing popularity of Christmas meant that they were brought forwards to match up to the holiday. The first gifts were small enough to hang from the tree, but they were soon scaled-up.

Many of our familiar Christmas traditions were laid down by the Victorians, but pushed further and further throughout the 20th century. For example, decorations became less haphazard and more stylized and important. The gifts became more extravagant as manufacturing continued to advance, and they started to take centre stage in the celebrations. St. Nicholas characters became prominent figures, and soon developed into one of the core images of Christmas commercialisation: Santa Claus.

Although the British Father Christmas stemmed from medieval times, the idea was popularised again in the 1860s thanks to an engraving of a poem written by Clement C. Moore about St. Nicholas. Eventually, the traditionally jolly Father Christmas was merged with the European "Sinterklaas" style gift-giver. His focus on rewarding good behaviour and punishing bad behaviour seems positive, but York University Marketing Professor Russell Belk sees it in bleaker terms. To him, the St. Nicholas figure represents the idea that "if one simply deserves it, material wishes will come true."



This focus on gifts and consumerism started to attract criticism pretty early on. In 1890, the Ladies' Home Journal denounced it as a "festival for shopkeepers," and in the 1950s a group of French priests treated hundreds of children to a burning effigy of Santa Claus. He was being burned as a "heretic," though obviously this was the punishment for his position as the commercial, secular figurehead of the celebration. By that point, the capitalist nature of Christmas was firmly established. In the US in 1939, President Roosevelt had moved the date of Thanksgiving forwards to allow for a longer Christmas shopping season.

Christmas – for Belk and fellow researcher Wendy Brice – has become "the distilled essence of contemporary consumption." **"Four of the deadly sins, against which Christianity once railed, are now seen by some to be venerated in Christmas celebrations: avarice, gluttony, lust and envy."** The Christian underpinnings have become fused with the marketing message that plays out of every television. The family values, the generous spirit of giving and the overall positivity of the holiday are repackaged and presented as a subconscious reason to buy a particular product. According to Belk, this actually serves to protect the Christian core of the ceremony, although many religious leaders disagree. As Tom Lehrer quips in his 1959 song "A Christmas Carol":

"Angels we have heard on high tell us to go out and buy."

Continued on next page

Not all religious commentators feel hostile to commercialisation

“Earlier price competition, means earlier savings,” writes **Oliver Bruce Taylor**. ‘No doubt Christmas advertising does start early, but the consumer can only benefit from this and as a result, have a far merrier Christmas. Early advertising promotes consumer awareness of different products, services and crucially their prices, giving families more time to plan and prepare financially for the extra spending during the holiday season. This could prevent some vulnerable families, especially during the present job uncertainty, from going into debt or taking out expensive pay day loans’

“What exactly is wrong with the commercialisation of Christmas?” says **William Oddie**. “The more presents people buy, the faster the economy will recover: so let it rip”

But this doesn't seem far from the atheist position

‘I love the commercialisation of Christmas’, says **Johann Hari**. ‘Far better to worship Mammon than to waste our time worshipping a supernatural being’

Some different responses from Christians:

‘**Christians Are to Blame for the Commercialisation of Christmas**’ claims Janet Morana “How did we go from that warm feeling about Christmas and knowing that we were celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, to the secular frenzy we have today? Don’t blame the non-believers. Instead I think those of us who believe in the divinity of Jesus need to examine our own consciences.

If you are a Christian who celebrates Christmas, ask yourself these questions.

- 1) In decorating your home for Christmas, are there as many decorations depicting the Holy Family, Angels and the Wise men as there are snowmen, Santas and reindeer?
- 2) When selecting Christmas cards, do you pick only cards with Mary and the Christ Child or do snowmen, Santa and skating penguins top your list?
- 3) Wrapping paper for gifts: Here, too, no Season’s Greetings or Happy Holidays on my wrapping paper. Yours?

The commercialization of Christmas is the fault of us Christians. If we only purchased the items that are Christ-centred, then that would be what the companies would produce. For them it is about profit”

‘Countering the Commercialisation of Christmas’ (Howard Dayton)

“The **first step** is to pray for God’s guidance in determining a reasonable amount that should be spent for Christmas. The **second step** is to develop a budget that categorizes the amount of money that will be set aside for Christmas The **third step** is not to use credit cards unless the entire balance can be paid off when the bill comes in. The **fourth step** is to involve your family in some kind of **service**, such as:

- providing a special meal for that family and gifts for the children to open on Christmas morning.
- helping a poor family afford presents
- helping the homeless
- visiting the lonely and imprisoned
- sharing Christmas Day with a lonely person. Loneliness is devastating enough to deal with on a daily basis. During the Christmas season it can become the catalyst that drives those who are alone into deep depression. What better way for Christian families to show the love of Christ on the celebration of His birth than to provide comfort and fellowship to those who will be alone this Christmas?”

As **David Blunkett**, for Christmas 2013, wrote in the Daily Mail,

“It saddens me that Christmas has become so commercialised and over-hyped that its true meaning has become lost beneath the welter of fairy lights, tinsel and extravagant presents. It’s an occasion when most of us look forward to spending time with family and those we love. Nevertheless, for some, Christmas will bring only heartache and loneliness, and the thought of families getting together to celebrate serves only to make the loneliness worse.”



*One bitterly cold winter's day
A Police patrolman came across a
motorcyclist, who was swathed in
protective clothing and helmet, stalled
by the roadside. "What's the matter?"
asked the policeman.*



*"Carburetor's frozen." was the terse reply.
"Pee on it. That'll thaw it out."
"I can't"*

"Ok, Watch and I'll show you.

*The constable lubricated the carburetor,
as promised. The bike started and the
rider drove off waving. A few days later,
the chief constable received a note of thanks
from the father of the motorbike rider.*

*It began: "On behalf of my daughter,
who recently was stranded....."*



A little Logic



Barbara Walters, of the 20/20 agency, did a story on gender roles in Kabul, Afghanistan, several years before the Afghan conflict. She noted that women customarily walked five paces behind their husbands. She recently returned to Kabul and observed that women still walk behind their husbands. Despite the overthrow of the oppressive Taliban regime, the women now seem happy to maintain the old custom. Mrs Walters approached one of the Afghan women and asked, "Why do you now seem happy with an old custom that you once tried so desperately to change?"

Without hesitation the woman said, "Land Mines"



GONNA BE A BEAR

In this life I'm a woman. In my next life, I'd like to come back as a bear. When you're a bear, you get to hibernate. You do nothing but sleep for six months. I could deal with that.

Before you hibernate, you're supposed to eat yourself stupid. I could deal with that too.

When you're a girl bear, you birth your children (who are the size of walnuts) while you're sleeping and wake to partially grown, cute, cuddly cubs. I could definitely deal with that.

If you're mama bear, everyone knows you mean business. You swat anyone who bothers your cubs. If your cubs get out of line, you swat them too. I could deal with that.

If you're a bear, your mate **EXPECTS** you to wake up growling. He **EXPECTS** that you will have hairy legs and excess body fat.

Yup, gonna be a bear!

Monastic Life

A young monk arrives at the monastery. He is assigned to helping the other monks in copying the old canons and laws of the church by hand. He notices, however, that all of the monks are copying from copies, not from the original manuscript.



So, the new monk goes to the Old Abbot to question this, even a small error in the first copy, it would never be continued in all of the subsequent copies. The head monk, copies for centuries, but you make a good point, my son."



pointing out that if someone made picked up! In fact, that error would be says, "We have been copying from the

He goes down into the dark caves underneath the monastery, where the original manuscripts are held as archives in a locked vault that hasn't been opened for hundreds of years. Hours go by and nobody sees the Old Abbot.



So, the young monk gets worried and goes down to look for him. He sees him banging his head against the wall and wailing.



"We missed the **R**!" "We missed the **R**!" "We missed the **R**!"

His forehead is all bloody and bruised and he is crying uncontrollably. The young monk asks the old abbot, "What's wrong, father?" With a choking voice, the old Abbot replies,

"The word was **CELEBRATE!**"



I thought it was time to release this outrageous slur (Ed.) (Thank you Penny!)

GENDER STEREOTYPES — DRIVE THROUGH ATM

An international bank, planning to introduce drive-through ATMs into the UK, carried out a series of trials in order to see how British people would cope. The results from two typical tests were:

Male subject

Drives up to ATM, opens the car window, inserts card into machine and enters PIN, enters amount of cash required and presses "enter", retrieves card, cash and receipt, closes window, drives off

Female subject

Drives up to ATM, reverses back to align car with ATM, re-starts stalled engine, opens the car window, finds handbag, empties contents onto passenger seat and locates card, turns radio down and ends call on mobile phone, attempts to insert card into ATM, opens car door to allow access to ATM due to excessive gap between car and ATM, inserts card, re-inserts card the right way up, ignores sound of car horn from vehicle, searches contents of handbag (on passenger seat) to locate diary with PIN written on front page under d.o.b., enters PIN, presses "cancel" and re-enters PIN, enters amount of cash required and checks make-up in rear view mirror, drums fingertips on steering wheel, looks at ATM for one minute and then presses "enter", retrieves cash and receipt, searches contents of handbag (on passenger seat) to locate purse and places cash inside, places receipt in back of cheque book, re-checks make-up, drives forward two yards, reverses back to ATM ignoring sound of car horn from vehicle behind, retrieves card, searches contents of handbag (on passenger seat) to locate card holder and places card in empty slot, drives two miles. Releases hand brake

A SPANISH TEACHER was explaining to her class that in Spanish, unlike English, nouns are designated as either masculine or feminine. 'House' for instance, is feminine: 'la casa.' 'Pencil,' however, is masculine: 'el lapiz.'

A student asked, **'What gender is 'computer'?'** Instead of giving the answer, the teacher split the class into two groups, male and female, and asked them to decide for themselves whether computer' should be a masculine or a feminine noun. Each group was asked to give four reasons for its recommendation.

The men's group decided that 'computer' should definitely be of the feminine gender ('la computadora'), because:

- 1. No one but their creator understands their internal logic;**
- 2 The native language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else;**
- 3. Even the smallest mistakes are stored in long term memory for possible later retrieval;**
- 4. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheck on accessories for it.**

The women's group, however, concluded that computers should be masculine ('el computador'), because:

- 1. In order to do anything with them, you have to turn them on;**
- 2. They have a lot of data but still can't think for themselves;**
- 3. They are supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time they ARE the problem;**
- 4. As soon as you commit to one, you realize that if you had waited a little longer, you could have got a better model.**

EDITORIAL

Please keep the comments and articles coming! Please feel free to use a nom de plume if it helps with security. Very short contributions (e.g. 100 words) are welcomed and will be published. Controversy and argument are welcome too.

Planned 2015 issue dates and a few possible topics are below. No need to stick to these ideas only.

- 10th March - Deadline 5th March - *possible* topics: The European LGBT Forum. When to transition?
- 12th June 5th June Chris Dowd's detailed results. (see Issue 67)
- 10th Sept 5th Sept What is the nature of forgiveness? Grace versus rules.
- 10th December 5th Dec Are psychiatrists any help? Legal matters.

Do we want a weekend gathering in 2015???

Your editor sits in a mid-position between committee and non-committee. I don't attend committee, but do get committee papers. This is a privilege, but a slightly disturbing experience, as I see such *change* whilst carrying within me memories of almost the entire existence of the Sibyls. I've just looked it up – the first newsletter in my files is No. 2, dated November 1996. Jay Walmsley had founded the Sibyls that year, and discovered she had tapped into a great need. Attendances were high, enthusiasm was intense, and the energy was crackling. Strange to recall it now, but *all* the administration was done by Jay. In her memorable phrase, it was a benevolent dictatorship. Attendances at weekends soared, till there was talk of holding four main weekend gatherings a year, with other more local ones as well. Jay did almost all the administration, and kept that to a minimum.

This is not the Sibyls we have now. I don't mean that in any way as a lament. Times have changed, needs have changed, the development of the internet has reduced the excruciating loneliness of trans people with problems in their place of worship – and in their own souls. Society has become more tolerant, more understanding (in patches), and more supportive of those who do not fit into the traditional, conventional patterns. That is to be celebrated. Meanwhile accommodation costs have rocketed. In consequence, in recent years it has become almost impossible to attract sufficient numbers at the weekends, and people, including Jay, have seriously questioned whether Sibyls' time was over.

It took a group of energetic and creative people to re-imagine the organisation. I admire the committee for their tenacity and the work they have put in. They travel to Birmingham from all over the country to meet on a regular basis, as Skype meetings seem not to have been satisfactory. I have summarised the minutes of their latest meeting on 18th November on page 2. One matter stands out for me like a black sheep in a white flock (I live in Wales) – **there are no weekend meetings planned for 2015.**

I regret this as a matter of principle, since I am a conservative and reactionary old bag, and like good things to continue indefinitely. I have always enjoyed the weekends, especially when there was a focus for discussions. **So I have to put my money where my mouth is, so to speak, and offer myself to organise a weekend next year.**

If you have any similar feelings, and would like to meet with other Sibyls in a beautiful place for a weekend in May 2015, then please get in touch with me as soon as possible. I need to know if it's worth doing the necessary research. **If it attracts, please email me or phone me (details below) before the end of January.**

If I hear nothing I shall do nothing, but there will be no minimum size of group, since there is no need to book a whole building.

carol.nixon2012@btinternet.com 01974-821295

