

Cross-Dressers Find Acceptance During Annual Provincetown Fest

By K.C. Myers

PROVINCETOWN — "Ever since I can remember, I have always wanted to be a woman," said Abey, an insurance adjustor from Hoboken, N.J., who must be 6'6" in heels.

"Not sexually though," amends Abey's fiancée, Sharon, also an insurance adjustor.

They were at a cocktail party at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum Wednesday evening "to meet the locals" as part of a week-long cross-dresser's convention that ends Sunday.

For the past 20 years, the cross-dressers have found Provincetown to be a safe haven to step out of closets and secret clubs, to walk the streets in broad daylight.

For many, it is first time they will ever be seen in public, explained Ariadne Kane, the executive director of Fantasia Fair.

There are 125 of them this year, all well-to-do, predominantly heterosexual males from all over the country. Many are accompanied by their spouses.

"I fell in love with a person, not an outfit," explained Sharon. She met her future husband at a week-long New Age seminar, when he was in his male persona.

"We fell in love on the first date and I knew I had to tell her about my cross-dressing before it went any further," said Abey.

"He didn't want to get hurt later," Sharon added. "He told me, 'I believe in free gender expression.' And I said, 'That's my kind of guy.'"

Sharon is an attractive divorcee who has three grown children. She said Abey is best person she has ever met.

"He is sensitive, gentle, caring, he writes poetry," she said.

Abey said she always wanted to act more like a woman than a man. She wanted to be nurturing to



Ariadne Kane, executive director of Fantasia Fair: "It's not my job to judge people."

Staff Photo by K.C. Myers

children. Socially, but not sexually, she just preferred the female persona.

"Many of these men who want to act like women think they are gay," said Sharon. "It's very confusing for them. They could go through life as gay men and be very unhappy."

If it were a perfect world, said Abey, she would be androgynous. That is, she would wear make-up when she felt like it, and earrings if she had time to put them on in the morning.

But it is not a perfect world. Ariadne, who in the male persona is a therapist in Augusta, Maine, counsels cross-dressers, transsexuals and others with issues about gender. Ariadne said if there is one answer to the eternal question of why some men cannot resist wearing wigs and heels, it is the Judeo-Christian culture. "When a culture tells you what is good and what is bad, it invites a whole series of dysfunctions to follow."

"Why is it that women can dress like men and it looks cute?" asked Roger N. Millen, who is teaching the cross-dressers T'ai Chi this week.

Sharon said it is because women dressing like men are seen as aspiring to the more powerful gender, but for a man to dress like a woman is for him to adopt the weaker persona. The culture finds it unacceptable that a man would want to stoop to the level of identifying with the weaker sex, she said.

While this all sounds politically correct in theory, there is little acceptance for cross-dressers in practice. Ariadne said people invariably perceive them as "Halloween freaks."

Yet Ariadne, a former private high school math and physics teacher, said those prone to behavior unaccepted by society have two choices. "Either you desist and feel shortchanged by life or you persist and face the culture head-on."

After thinking deeply about the choice, Ariadne came to a conclusion at age 25. "If I get pleasure from dressing as a woman, why shouldn't I? The question then became when, where and what is the outcome I'm looking for."

With an agreement with his wife that dictates when and where he can cross-dress, Ariadne said she has managed a successful professional life and good marriage for 25 years.

The week-long Fair includes seminars and healing workshops during the days. The main event is the FanFair Follies, held last night. Tonight is Fantasy Ball, where participants dress up as their favorite famous females.