

Stands by her man

Wife supports his crossdressing

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By Bonnie Barber

Although transvestites are abundant in Provincetown this week—roughly 100 are here to participate in the tenth annual Fantasia Fair—one thing in short supply at this week's festivities are the wives of many of these married men.

But this is not the case for one Chicago-area couple. Marie, who has been married 10 years, is in Provincetown with her husband, who this week is known as Rhonda.

Unlike many of the "women" here for the fair whose wives think they are away on business trips, Rhonda asked his wife to come along. "And Marie said—Sure, it would be fine," he said.

Rhonda and Marie have a relationship that is unusual throughout much of the transvestite community. Although Rhonda points out that many transvestites feel compelled to tell lovers and relatives about their crossdressing, the reception is not always as overwhelmingly receptive as they may have hoped.

While Rhonda said he saw no need to tell his close relatives about his crossdressing, he has always been blunt with his girlfriends and Marie.

Yet the revelation about his "fetishes" was usually not made until their relation became sexual, Rhonda said. "It's a strictly sexual fetish," he said. "I'm a straight male, yet I dress in women's clothes."

What may have begun as a sexual fetish has now blossomed in the past five months, beginning when Rhonda bought his first dress in June and started attending a transvestite group. Although Marie maintains that she was supportive of her husband from the beginning, she was reluctant at first to attend any of the group's functions for fear of feeling out of place.



Marie(l.) and Rhonda

Advocate photo by Bonnie Barber

One thing Marie had no problems handling were shopping expeditions with her husband for his female wardrobe. "It was like she had a new girlfriend," Rhonda said. "We were like two teenage kids giggling and shopping."

Rhonda added that other women in the store thought it was great to see a husband who was so involved in shopping with his wife, while not realizing that many of the earrings and jewelry they were sizing up were actually for him.

Marie is straightforward about her ability to accept her husband's crossdressing habits. "I loved my hus-

band from the beginning," she said. "It's a type of love where I'll do anything to make him happy."

"By being married to a transvestite, I have a lover, husband and girlfriend. It's the best of both worlds."

Judging from comments heard from other transvestites, and Rhonda and Marie's own observations, Marie is somewhat of an anomaly in the world of transvestite's wives. Rhonda realizes he is fortunate to have a wife who supports and accepts his crossdressing practices.

"My wife is one in a million," he said, "and I treat her like gold."

As a result of Marie's acceptance and willingness to accompany her husband to transvestite affairs, she has been used as a sounding board and advisor for their troubled wives. Marie said that while on a trip to the Poconos last month, she and another woman were the only wives to accompany their husbands.

During the course of their stay, Marie said, "I helped her deal with her thoughts on her husband being a transvestite."

Rhonda added that Marie has also been the envy of many transvestites whose wives are not as accepting as his. "Other transvestites are fascinated and disbelieving that a woman like Marie exists and is having a great time with me as a woman," he said.

"A lot of them want to know if there are any more at home like her."

Both Marie and Rhonda feel they have benefited from their participation in Fantasia Fair. Marie said she has watched Rhonda grow more confident every day. She described how he now walks down the street dressed up, holding his head up and making eye contact, rather than gluing his eyes to the sidewalk as he did on Friday.

Rhonda said the highlight of his week so far was the service they attended with the other Fantasia Fair participants at the Universalist Church. "The sensation is difficult to comprehend," he said of sitting in church with his wife while wearing a dress and surrounded by transvestites, gays and lesbians.

"There was a genuine, sincere feeling of love which brought tears to my eyes. Our biggest fears as transvestites is acceptance. And being accepted by so many people at once was amazing."

Although he had known about the Fantasia Fair since its inception and had always wanted to come, Rhonda said it

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was only during ruminations on his life while cutting the grass that finally made him come to Provincetown.

"I asked myself what I would regret the most if I died and hadn't done something," he said. "And I realized that I would regret not coming here for the fair."

It was also while cutting the grass that Rhonda realized that in order to be completely fulfilled, he had to act out his yearnings to imitate being a female.

"I realized I was 45 years old and wasn't going to live forever," he said.

"When I realized that the happiest moment in my life had been dressing up as a woman for Halloween 20-some years ago, I thought why not be happy now too?"

As a self-described light crossdresser, who dresses up about once a month, Rhonda said he can "completely fill up his happiness quota."

When he returns to Chicago with Marie at the end of the Fantasia Fair week, Rhonda said one can be assured that he will be smiling when he cuts the grass now and reflects on his trip to Provincetown.

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