

■ **Christine-Jane Wilson**, a transvestite whose heart-warming story is featured on page nine, believes there must be others like herself in Mensa. "A high IQ is no exclusion clause to being a TV!" she says.

As a member of the Transvestite/Transsexual Social Group and editor of the Group's regular journal, *The Glad Rag*, Christine-Jane says: "The membership of the TV/TS Group ranges from high IQ to thick as planks—dukes to dustmen. Just as the only thing Mensans can be sure of having in common is a high IQ (whatever that proves), so the only thing members of TV/TS are sure of is the desire to cross dress! The name of the game is *not* self-aggrandisement but hoping to help others who might be going through the same sort of hell that I did before getting my mind unscrambled. Transvestism can be sheer bloody hell, as any 'closet' TV can testify. TV/TS has helped turn that hell into an enjoyable and joyful hobby. The manic compulsive element is destroyed and becomes fun—and funny. Perhaps a little of this comes through in the article."

Christine-Jane Wilson: no need for pretence



THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY

After forty years of torment, Christine-Jane Wilson reveals how she came to terms with transvestism.

About sixteen years ago Geoff McKenzie went to photograph some bookshelves designed and made by a journalist for an article for a D-I-Y magazine; largely because he'd heard that the magazine would pay for the materials if it were an original design.

Geoff rushed in with a "must-be-quick-I've-got-another-assignment-in-an-hour" and the photography proceeded apace. They fell into conversation, and about six hours later Geoff left, having persuaded the journalist to 'have a go' at the Mensa test. (The "other assignment" was just a ploy in case the photographee proved to be a monumental bore!)

The journalist duly received a test paper and put it away somewhere safe, eventually turning it up about four months later. He had no particular desire to find that he had a mental age of four, but as he'd promised Geoff, he rang Mensa to ask if it was too late to 'have a go'. He was told 'OK'; duly completed the test, and proceeded to the next stage—the invigilated examination.

Unfortunately, the day he was to sit the test, he was entertained at a lunchtime press conference and drank not wisely, but too well. Result: he arrived for the test that evening with a colossal hangover. He failed—scrabbling only to the 95th percentile.

However, in the middle of last year she saw a test in a paper, found it relatively easy, and decided to have another bash. Test paper at home again, then a trip to Birkbeck College, and Christine-Jane found herself (to her everlasting surprise!) a member of Mensa.

He? . . . She? ? ? ! ! !

So what happened during the sixteen years; a sex-change? Nothing as drastic or dramatic as that, I'm afraid; it's just that after forty-odd years of torment, I've come to terms with myself and accepted the fact that I'm a transvestite. After years of feelings of guilt and the constant fear that someone might discover my "dreadful secret" I've finally accepted that I enjoy being a woman, dress accordingly when I feel so inclined, and go out and have fun.

Transvestism, I know from personal experience, is *not* funny; not, that is, for the 'closet queen', in constant terror of dis-

covery, exposure, ridicule, rejection. What causes transvestism? Nobody knows; background, breeding, intelligence have no bearing; transvestites range from dukes to dustmen, from idiots to Mensans. (By statistics, I am not the only transvestite Mensan—there are others out there somewhere! Hello, there!)

I was cross-dressing by the age of twelve. I'm the type who lives on her nerves, and went through all the normal work trauma of examinations, engineering apprenticeship, two years in the army, design and planning offices, good and lousy jobs—and also the ordinary life trauma of family, friends, unrequited love, etc. But in my case, underlying all these, was the

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constant thread of tension caused by transvestism. Living like that, you do one of two things; got to pieces completely, or learn to control it. I learned to control it—self-enforced relaxation. I wondered if I was gay. (I'm not). I wondered if I should have been born a girl. (No). I wondered if I was mad. (I stand on the fifth amendment!)

I did make contact with the National Association for Mental Health while I was in the army, and through them, after I was demobbed, had a few abortive consultations with a psychiatrist. They did no good; partially because he seemed to regard my feelings as a rather distasteful perversion, and partially because I found that I was analyzing *his* questions to analyse *me!* (e.g. "He's asking that question to see if I had a dominant mother")

Ten years ago I got married. I threw out all the female attire (for about the fifth time!), swearing that I'd never cross-dress again. So we married, and I was happy. Eight years later the desire to 'dress' was stronger than ever, but I'd built such a defensive wall around myself over the years that even my wife couldn't get through it. I knew when I proposed that

marriage wouldn't "cure" me, and knew that it was unfair to her not to tell her about it before we married, but after that many years it becomes virtually impossible to talk to anyone about it. I knew that I had to tell her, but I couldn't! After eight years of marriage we had virtually ceased to communicate. Discussing it later, we found that we were both going round our home making mental inventories of our individual and joint possessions; for the split to come.

At that time, in a state of absolute desperation, I rang Gay Switchboard—not because I was gay, but who the hell *else* do you ring if you're male, with an overwhelming compulsion to dress as a woman? Gay Switchboard, bless 'em, gave me the answer, the last thing I would ever have thought of, a number from the London telephone directory—"The Transvestite/Transsexual Helpline".

So I found myself talking to the inimitable Yvonne Sinclair, and was astonished to find someone who accepted the desire to wear a skirt as the most natural thing in the world! Twenty-five minutes of conversation with Yvonne did more to sort out the knots in my mind than all the previous years of worrying, agonizing, and trying to rationalise the irrational.

I joined the Transvestite/Transsexual Social Group, attended meetings as often as I could find an excuse, and later became editor of their journal, *The Glad Rag*. It was a release which brought in its wake an even greater tension. I had accepted my transvestism, but was sure that divorce would be the inevitable result of disclosing it to my wife. I was torn in two directions; I wanted the freedom to express part of my personality which I'd forcibly repressed for years, but also wanted so very much to keep my wife—and it seemed that the two were incompatible.

It had to happen. One day we had a colossal row over something unforgivable which I'd done (not directly connected with my transvestism, although probably induced by its underlying tension) and it came out at last. Thinking that we'd reached the end of the line, I thought I'd finish the whole thing, and I told her at last.

Helen has written about this, and her words on the end of the row were; *Then, at the beginning of December 1983, there was an explosion and at that moment I knew we couldn't go on, there was nothing more because Chris said very quietly, "There's something I've got to tell you", and I was sure then that he had met*

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someone else and all the silence had been his quiet fight to get over it, and I had lost. Then it came—"I'm a transvestite". Total blank. Tears still dripping down my face. And I thought, "That's it, that's what it was all about, that's the wall! Thank Heavens!"

It was a miracle! She accepted it, and now comes with me to the Group, and to costume balls, and enjoys it with me; and to me this is the greatest part of my enjoyment of my transvestism. From being sheer hell (admittedly self-inflicted) it has become a hobby which gives me immense pleasure and satisfaction.

The other major change wrought by my contact with the TV/TS Group has been humour. Throughout my life, my sanity has been preserved by the fact that I have an overdeveloped sense of the ridiculous. No matter what depth of crisis or depression I was passing through, a time came when I would suddenly see the funny side of it. Once I could laugh at it I was on the way up again. The sole exception in life was my transvestism—this was one thing which I could *never*, *EVER* laugh at. Now, thank heavens, I can. When I'm 'dressed', my aim is to present a feminine image (as opposed to *effeminate*), but I have no illusions that I'm a lovely female. While enjoying being a woman, I am always aware of what I really am; a feller in a frock. I can laugh even at this aspect of myself now!

Apart from going to Group meetings and costume balls, we also go out 'in public'; and in case you are wondering, yes, it was Christine-Jane who sat the Mensa test on a beautiful sunny 28th July. It was only my second outing 'in public'. Helene drove me up to town, we had to walk about three blocks from where we'd parked the car to Birkbeck College, and I sat the 2.30 test with some forty or so others. It was bright and hot in the classroom, and a pleasure to be in a light summer dress! On the way home we ate at a local Greek restaurant, where they can never be sure whether Helene is going to come in with me—or her husband! They welcome either!

Two things have had a tremendous influence on me in the past two years, and my only regret is that I didn't come to terms with them years ago.

The first is, of course, my transvestism. Now that I've accepted myself for what I am, and not only that but have the loving support of my wife, I thoroughly enjoy it. I have, if you like, the best of both worlds. I can be the man about the house and

The Transvestite/Transsexual Social Group is at 274 Upper Street, Islington, London N1 2UA. The invaluable Helpline Number is 01-359 4868. The line is "manned" on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings from 8 pm to 10 pm, but there is a 24-hour answering machine on which messages may be left, and this is monitored daily. Any callers get a very fast response—by the time they reach the stage of desperation when they call the line—they need it!

The Group is unique, in that it meets socially every Saturday and Sunday night from 7.30 until late. An 'open door' policy is maintained; *Everyone* is welcomed; hetero-or homosexual transvestites or transsexuals; wives and girlfriends; or even those who are just genuinely interested or enjoy their company. (Most of them are good fun to be with—like Mensans, they're something different to your actual, average 'Joe Public'!)

The Group also publishes a magazine, *The Glad Rag*, which appears ten times a year and is issued free to members. It is also on sale at various outlets throughout the country or direct from the Group at £1.00 per copy. The object of the journal is to present useful information and guidance, together with amusement and interest.

Christine-Jane featured in an article in

Woman magazine on December 1st 1984, and the Co-ordinator of the Group. Yvonne has counselled, helped and comforted hundreds of troubled or desperate people and saved not a few marriages. She has also written an excellent book, *Transvestism Within a Partnership of Marriage and Families*, which is an invaluable help to any woman who finds that one of the men (or boys) in her life likes to wear a frock. She is probably the greatest expert on the subject in the country, and her compassion and advice is backed by her knowledge, sound common sense and an earthy sense of humour.

As a result of her tireless work, the Group now has a high reputation and is a referral point from Samaritans, other helplines, Marriage Guidance Clinics and many of the major 'Agony Aunties' of the various media.

Further information may be obtained direct from the Group, which works completely in the open, or, should there be other Mensans who are suffering anxiety because of transvestism or transsexuality, either themselves or because of relatives or friends, Christine-Jane and Helene would be pleased to offer what little help they can give. Naturally, whichever approach is made the information would be treated with the strictest confidentiality.

business, and shelve all the responsibilities that this entails by relaxing as 'myself'. No need to be macho male, no need for pretence, no point in being pretentious when you're wearing a frock! It is not only a joy to me, but wonderful relaxation.

The other influence is passing the Mensa test and becoming a member. So far I haven't taken much active part, but hope to in the future. It has affected my thinking in many ways, mainly, I hope, for the better. Quite apart from the compulsion to cross-dress, I've always thought that there was *something* different about my mind, and it worried me. Now I find that I'm part of a select 2% I can accept that the way I think is bound to be different from most (I wonder what per cent of the population I represent as a transvestite Mensan!).

I'm not normal. But neither are you, if you are reading this as a Mensa member. What is 'normal' anyway? It's only average—and who the hell wants to be average?

I'll finish with one instance of how my mind has changed since joining Mensa: I

used to think that I'd got a 'grasshopper mind', that I couldn't concentrate. If I had a problem, I'd find that my mind kept sidetracking on to other topics, and would force myself to concentrate on the one particular problem of the moment. I have now accepted that I can concentrate on one problem, meanwhile allowing other thoughts to happily chunter away in the background (rather like listening to a symphony, where you're hearing the whole and are maybe 'concentrating' on one particular section of the orchestra, but are conscious of, and listening to, the other sections working individually, in parallel). I get the immediate problem solved and often find that a couple of others are part-way to solution.

I *still* don't consider myself to be super-intelligent (Helene says I'm now a certified genius!) but am prepared to accept (for whatever it's worth) that in joining Mensa I've proved that my mind is at least 'different'.

I must confess that I'm quite proud of myself at passing the tests, as *ME*, whereas *HE* failed them!