

## A Significant Other View by Julie Freeman

### What Wives Fear

I am sure all of you have read about Peter Oiler, the truck driver who was fired because his company learned about his crossdressing. Now mind you Mr. Oiler did not come to work crossdressed nor was he parading around his neighborhood. He was simply crossdressing in the privacy of his own home. But when rumors of his being gay circulated around the company and Mr. Oiler asked management to stop the rumors, management asked why that bothered him. He replied, "Because I'm not gay. I'm transgendered."

The company, believing that its image would be compromised by having an employee who crossdressed, asked him to resign and eventually fired him. This is the kind of situation that wives live in dread of happening to them. This fear of a husband losing a job is behind much of the hostility, anger, resentment, and bitterness that is expressed by so many wives. The well-being of their families, particularly those with young children, is uppermost in their minds and they will do whatever they believe necessary to protect their families. It is unfortunate that we live in a society where the crossdresser does not know whether or not his company or his community at large will accept his crossdressing.

There are those within the community who feel that keeping crossdressing a secret is wrong and only perpetuates discrimination and intolerance within society. Some of these individuals thus have "come out" to their employers and have been accepted with no repercussions.

Others have, unfortunately, lost their jobs. Some who lost their jobs knew the possibility existed, but made a conscious choice to do so, believing that life would go on for them just in a different direction. Then there were those who lost their jobs because they were "outed." They had had no choice in whether to reveal that side of themselves.

So wives are not only fearful because of what their husbands may consciously choose to do. They are also fearful of their husbands losing jobs through no choice of their own. It is no wonder then that relationships between husbands and wives are strained, particularly when issues of family well-being are at stake.

Is there any solution to this problem? How can the crossdressing community reassure the wives and partners of crossdressers that what happened to Mr. Oiler will not happen to them? There is no absolute positive in this. None of us know at any time what trick of fate will befall us to change our lives drastically. That is just a condition of living.

But the crossdressers in our lives can certainly make an attempt to see that what came about with Mr. Oiler and his family will not happen to them. Before making any statements to management, crossdressers should be aware of their companies' policies and attitudes regarding alternate lifestyles. Even the most outspoken in our community do not believe, I hope, in being foolhardy. Crossdressers need to remember that their wives and children must come before their efforts to education society. It may be necessary for them to remain silent and even closeted for a period of time (while their children are growing up) if they live in a particularly violent and discriminatory community. This is not a message I am sure which the crossdresser wishes to hear. It is, unfortunately, a message that wives and mothers must deliver.

## Significant Fears

When crossdressers join support groups, it is not unusual for them to inquire about support groups for their wives or partners. Usually their wives have just recently found out about the crossdressing and are under great stress as their once peaceful lives have been severely jolted.

Their fears are quite significant. Does my husband want to become a woman? Is my husband gay? What about our children? Am I going to become a lesbian? Will my husband leave me for a man? How will his job be affected? Will he lose his job? What about our neighbors? What about our relatives? What about our friends? How will they react? Who can I tell? What about our finances? The list goes on and on.

They fear his taking hormones not sure of what medical outcomes may result. They fear his going OUT in the general community, not sure of how society will react. Will he be the victim of insults at the least, violence at the most! They fear his telling others, not sure of how others will react. They fear embarrassment; they fear coming to resent their partner; they fear the end of their marriage or relationship. Significant others begin to doubt their own femininity as they view their husband's developing feminine side especially if he appears "prettier" than they. Their self-esteem plummets and they wonder

if there is something “wrong” with them because the man they chose to love and perhaps marry is not the man they thought they loved and married. They doubt their own sexuality, blaming themselves for the CHANGE in their partner. Sometimes they even fear they are the cause of the crossdressing.

So it is no wonder their crossdressing spouses or partners are looking for support. They probably had no idea the extent to which revealing this side of their personality could affect their wives. Of course, not all wives react the same. Some take the news in stride and never need support; but there are too many others who seem to fall apart at the news and it is this group of wives who need help the most.

They must and foremost be told that the crossdressing is in no way THEIR FAULT and is in no way a reflection of their femininity. They certainly must be told that they are not suddenly going to become lesbian if they decide to accept their husband’s crossdressing or for that matter decide to accept their partner if he decides to go through sexual reassignment surgery.

They need to be told there are helping professionals who can help them come to a better understanding of just what crossdressing is and how it can become incorporated into their relationship in a matter acceptable to both. They need to know that it is okay for them to set boundaries; it is certainly not expected that they become supportive of every facet of their husband’s crossdressing. They need to know they can progress at their own rate. They need to know there are many others in the gender community with the same concerns and fears. They need to know they are not alone. They need to be directed to the appropriate support groups whether it be helping professionals, other significant others, or couples’ groups. And it is up to the crossdresser in the relationship to find this help

## Message from an SO

I am a member of an on-line support group mainly for wives and partners of crossdressers. I thought you might be interested in what one of the other wives had to say to the other wives on the list about crossdressing. SO refers to “significant other.” CD refers to “crossdresser.” DH refers to “dear husband” or “darned husband” depending on how the wife feels when she is writing.

“In just a few short days, this board has shown me that there are so many more ways to feel as the SO of CD than I ever thought possible. I’ve read books, blogs, and discussed this subject with my DH, and, of course, I knew that reactions ran the gambit from extreme anger to full-on

acceptance. I think that perhaps seeing, first hand, all of your reactions has just made it so much more „real“ to me.

In reaction to your emails, your heartfelt stories of love and woe, I have myself run that gambit of emotions. I am broken-hearted at the number of you who hurt on a day to day basis. Many of you have stated that your hurt comes, in large part, because of this being hidden from you for so long. I am thankful that I can't relate to this, but I ache when I think about how hard this must be for you. Some of you have expressed that your primary issue is that you think it's wrong as you were raised in a strict, religious home.

Those of you who feel this way, it upsets me that society (and society's idea of what is right and wrong) has closed your mind, and is now negatively affecting your marriage/relationship with the person you love enough to choose for yourself, and who chose you for him.

I've read apologies from some of you for being happy and content in your relationship. I've seen pleas for help. I've seen lighthearted joking. I've seen a sisterhood of support. All of this in only 3-4 days. The truth is none of us is exactly alike. None of our situations are exactly alike. None of our spouses/boyfriends/DH are exactly alike. I'm learning this the more I read. There is one thing that we all share in common: The men we love dress in women's clothing. None of their reasons for doing so are the same. None of them do so in the same way. None of them are exactly alike, either. I'd also venture to say that we all love these men very much; otherwise we wouldn't be here trying to grow and learn from each other so that we can make our relationships work better.

I would like to offer a challenge to you all (the accepting ones, the forbidding ones, and all of those in the middle). When you're at a place mentally and emotionally that you can do so, try and reflect on the emotions your DH must feel, and must have felt his entire life. Try and imagine him as a little boy dealing with these thoughts. He was probably so confused and alone, and terrified that he was bad and that the people he loved might stop loving him. Imagine how horrible that must have been for him as a little boy, an adolescent, a teenager, a young man. Imagine that at some point in his life, he met you, fell in love with you, and asked that you to be his partner in life.

Think about the comfort you feel knowing he's there for you. Think about the rock he has been for you. Think about the feeling of „home“ you have in his arms. Now, remember, he feels those same things about you. Also, think about how emotionally crippling it must have been for him to live in fear that he could lose that with you if you ever found out about his secret. He's hurting, too. He's probably been hurting for longer than you know. This is the man you love, the man who loves you, and the man you've chosen to live your life with. You know this man inside and out, and now finally you know his secret. The weight of the world is probably off his shoulders now, and he's probably holding his breath, waiting to see how much he will lose.

I guess what I'm trying to say is. I feel for each and every one of us (myself, included). What I see here is love. True love. Strange love? Perhaps. But we're all here. Trying, working, sharing, and growing. You've all touched me. Thank you so much for sharing your stories, and for listening to mine.”

Perhaps more wives and partners will become accepting when they read her wonderful post

