

OUR HISTORY

IN the beginning, CDI was founded by Kristine James and her good friend Karen C. This was 16 years or so ago. Their inspiration came from attending an event sponsored by Tiffany Club of New England (founded in 1978) which took place in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

In those days the internet was still in its infancy. Our information came largely from publications which only select establishments carried. One of these was the legendary Lee Brewster's Mardi Gras. Our community relied on parties and clubs geared towards T-girls and the men who admired them. These were the days when we were on our own completely. Social and support groups were but a handful nationwide. The term "transgender" was still largely unknown and there was no "T" in the acronym "GLBT". We were at the bottom of the social totem pole and we knew it.

Against this backdrop, Kristine and Karen reasoned that if a self supporting Trans group, with its own facility could be successful in Massachusetts, then why not New York? They knew that for each 'girl' who would venture out that there were many more who remained closeted and terrified. Our only protection was the one that Lee Brewster fought for and won, which protected us from arrest. This sole protection was won in 1973 and sadly few of us were even aware of that.

Under Kristine's leadership a hardy band of girls gathered and met initially at the old Iroquois Hotel. This was the birth of CDI. Once a month a room would be rented and the girls would come and get dressed. Often there was an outside speaker who would come in. When the meeting was concluded they would take the elevator downstairs to a piano bar named Julies. In time the tourist boom forced the early CDI meetings elsewhere. Some of the other venues that the early CDI met includes Muriel Olive's Fem Fashions on 31st St., Karolyn's Oasis at the 29 Palms Bar at 29th and Lexington Ave., Lee Brewster's Mardi Gras, and the trans club Sally's.

Through the years girls have come and gone but some of early pioneers are still with us (Kristine, Lucille, Cheryl, and Nancy). Our current success is due to their determination and perseverance.

*"Those early years before the internet bore an eerie resemblance to the early human societies of hunters and gatherers. Peril and risk was everywhere. Many of us were loners both in and out of the closet. What a difference a mere generation has made."
..... Kelly McDaniels*

Part 2

Throughout the early years Kristine and Karen never forgot the original dream of a place of our own. Finally, after much moving around Kristine initiated a search for a rental space that would fit the needs of "CDI" as they envisioned it. Soon she found it. One day she was looking at a "Voice" classified and noticed an ad for a garden apartment. She

immediately called and made an appointment to see it. While the apartment itself was in need of repair (it had been unoccupied for some time), it boasted a more than 450 square foot garden out back that provided enough seclusion for out door meetings during the warm weather. The inside was likewise more than sufficient for larger gatherings. Equally important was the location. In the shadow of Port Authority in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood, there was easy access to all major transit hubs, and the neighborhood itself sported enough diversity to allow for the inclusion of a group like ours. After the lease was signed the initial furnishings were obtained from various thrift shops. More importantly CDI meetings could now be conducted on a weekly basis. It was decided that Wednesday evenings would be open house or hot line nights. This would be the time when girls could come and get dressed and enjoy the freedom of their feminine selves. Equally important was that with a contact phone number CDI could declare through various publications and classifieds that we were here and in extant. As the line from an old movie said, "if you build it, they will come"; and so in time that's exactly what happened. Girls came via word of mouth. Closeted cross dressers phoned in, sometimes locally, and sometimes from far flung reaches all across America. For those who lived in isolation with the secret of their feminine self, it was heaven sent just to know that there were others just like them. The basic mission of CDI to reach out to the closeted cross dresser and transgendered became firmly rooted. During the first 2 years of being headquartered in the apartment, our infrastructure was very basic. Kristine being the lessee and responsible party exercised final decision making and the newly created office of president took many of the responsibilities regarding the open house and club. Nancy Lamar was our first president as we exist today in our own facility. While many girls would come and then go, this early period saw the arrival of members and key holders who would make significant contributions as time went by. They included Sandy Hilton, Carrie Lee, Rochelle Nicole, Caprice Bellefleur, Joann Princivalli, and Elizabeth later known as Vicki Lynne (Cyber Vicki).

The foundation had been firmly laid for what was yet to come.

CDI History: Part 3, The Great Leap Forward

Almost immediately, the acquisition of the apartment provided the fertile ground necessary for the growth of CDI. From 1997 to 1999, this was seen dramatically in the areas of communications. The significance of the simultaneous "internet explosion" was lost on no one, particularly Vicki Lynn Cross. She had taken an almost immediate interest in the new technology and volunteered to put up a website for the group. Soon we were out there in cyberspace and available to all who were interested. The amazing fact is that the importance of the emerging internet was seized on by many in the trans community, probably more so than much of the rest of society. Information, rapid communication, and anonymity were all provided for, and for many CD's (and other transgendered), this was a gift from heaven.

The inner informational network of CDI was no slouch either. Upon her arrival (circa 1998), Joann Princivalli (formerly "Percy") put together a newsletter for the group. For

girls who had no internet access, her “Gender Crossings” (the final name) newsletter provided the latest on areas of importance in the trans community along with the social happenings within CDI itself. Joann published the newsletter until the spring of 2002. By that time the vast majority of girls had achieved internet access. Gender Crossings was gracefully retired and Joann herself moved into the arena of being a “transgender” activist, where she remains today. Vicki has worked for the betterment of others as well as on societal end of the TG spectrum. Both of these girls provided invaluable services to CDI for which we are grateful.

*Up to now I have written this history from the perspective of one who was not present, but who rather, has collected and assembled the facts as best as possible; and then putting them out to you the reader. However, we now enter the times of my personal recollection. It is my intent to retell the story as accurately as possible. So when you come upon portions of this narrative that are written in the first person, know that it is from the recollections of I, Kelly McDaniels. I also ask pardon in advance, from you the reader, for any omissions, as that it is my intent to neither sleight nor offend anyone. It is rather my hope that the memory of these years be preserved for the generation(s) that is to come and that they be added to and abridged for historical accuracy.

I purchased my first computer in the spring of 1999. I immediately went to the World Wide Web and “Googled” the phrases crossdresser, transsexual, transvestite, or crossdresser groups. Lo and behold, my very first hit displayed the website of “Crossdressers International”. I immediately contacted the web mistress (Vicki Lynn). As I recall, I asked many questions which she answered kindly and patiently. I was still closeted and very cautious. Finally, she convinced me to attend my first open house (hotline night). I remember. The date was Wednesday, June 1st, 1999. Until this moment, I have never revealed to anyone that my first open house was also my 43rd birthday. Upon my arrival, I was warmly welcomed by the girls who were there. The BBQ was blazing and Sandy Hilton was the evenings cook and hostess. I was told that the evening was free of charge, as that I was attending for the very first time. I was impressed by the camaraderie that I saw. After an interview with Nancy Lamar I was accepted as the newest key

holder. In the weeks and months that followed cabinets were purchased. San Diego Tina and Rochelle trucked them in and Rolanda Rose and I built them. Each time Nancy promptly rented them, and we all thought about that famous movie line “if you build it, they will come.” They most certainly did!

June to November saw a number of achievements. Nancy Lamar had achieved her goal (and Kristine’s vision) of the CDI apartment being a self supporting entity. Prior to this the apartment had been subsidized by our founders.

In October, we repainted the apartment. After receiving both Kristine and Nancy’s blessing, a team was assembled, that included Rochelle, Tomi Sawyer, Rolanda Rose, and me. It had been years since painting had been done and everything required 3 coats of paint. In November of 1999, I was named apartment manager. Numerous projects followed that included retiling the patio, beautification of the yard, repainting projects inside and out, and the inevitable building of more cabinets. During that time period a

former key holder by the name of Jasmine rewired the yard and provided additional lighting as well. It had become apparent that we were rich in talent.

It was during this period that Karen C. again became active in CDI. A number of years previous she had undergone SRS and had made a good life for her, but had always kept in touch with us. Well Karen and Nancy decided to redecorate the apartment. All of our curtains and drapes were made by Karen. In addition, she with Nancy commissioned the purchase of the custom sofa in the rear of the apartment. And then with the arrival of the carpets, our apartment was transformed!

The times were changing. Many girls who were to become the matrix of CDI (2000-2008) had arrived and found their niche in this period. Through the years Kristine had been active in producing the IFGE Conferences with her good friend Allison Laing. While she still participated in CDI, the day to day affairs were being increasingly assumed by her “children”. In February, 2001 Nancy Lamar took over the lease for the CDI apartment. She was no longer president. Frederique (who had joined months before) became president. Her administration was short. She decided to fully transition and in fairness to the group, asked for someone to step up and replace her. Her short time in office was marked by the continuity of established policies, and the contribution of living room furniture which we still have to this day.

Wendi D. assumed the presidency of CDI. Rochelle Nicole served as her vice president. The year was 2001. Nancy had focused her presidency on the financial solvency of the CDI apartment. She had been successful beyond all hopes (both club and apartment have been solvent and models of success since). The freedom from financial fear that being solvent gave us, freed Wendi and Ro to concentrate on “CDI outreach” wherever they went. It must be said that both of these girls gave the group close to 6 years of service, both serving as president and vice president of CDI.

Some of the programs and services that happened under their “watch” include the holiday toy drives; financial charity to other groups such as IFGE’s Winslow Street Fund, TG Legal & Educational Defense Fund, and Support to the GLBT Center etc.

Also, during the years 2001-2006, CDI became a fairly regular participant in the PRIDE Parade. Rochelle also organized (separate from our treasury) fund raising activities for the AIDS March.

Our paid membership increased significantly during their tenure. Our outings became increasingly adventurous and very well attended. Our open house became known for both the hospitality and the excellent meals that were provided. The 6 years of their era in the CDI presidency saw the primary mission of outreach to others brought to a new level. Our abilities in intergroup communications were further enhanced by formation of the CDI Exchange Yahoo Group. This group was set up and moderated by Sharon Paige at Wendi’s request. A similar group for the key holders co-operative was also formed. This became known as the CDI Forum.

It was also during this time period that a committee spearheaded by Caprice Bellefleur and Joanne Noble presented CDI with its first ever By-Laws. Prior to that, CDI had lacked a written code. Today, thanks to the officers and volunteers of that time, we have one. Wendi remains active in CDI (current president) and serves on the board of IFGE.

Rochelle remains active in CDI and is ever on the lookout for new activities.

I would be remiss not speak of one who has served as the caretaker and numbers cruncher of our finances. Caprice Bellefleur served as CDI treasurer until January, 2007. In 2001 her able sharpness in matters of finance were expanded those to include the finances of the apartment as well. For six years she went about the business of keeping the books balanced for the club and apartment. Unlike other groups, CDI has never experienced less than total accountability in finances. In 2002, Vicki was no longer able to do the website. Caprice took over and built a new website from scratch. The amazing thing is that she had never done website construction before. Caprice also is credited along with Joanne Noble with producing the By-laws of CDI. While Caprice remains treasurer for the apartment, she is also active as an attorney for the name change project. She along with Joanne Noble, and Joann Princivalli are actively involved in the struggle for transgender rights at the state level.

Towards the latter part of 2006, Joanne Noble became a caretaker president of CDI. She served until the annual meeting in January, 2007. Her presidency stuck to established policies that were tried and true.

The annual meeting of 2007, brought a new generation of girls to the helm. Rita Petite was elected president, Madelyn (now Cleopatra de Nile) became vice-president, Amy Miller was elected treasurer, and Phyllis Ann became secretary. The membership voted to separate the finances of the club from the apartment. A new Yahoo group was also established

In May of 2006, the new team fulfilled their promise to incorporate as a “not for profit” corporation and established a checking account for club purposes. The apartment had previously incorporated as Proteia Inc. with a board consisting of Nancy Lamar, Caprice Bellefleur, and Kelly McDaniels.

The administration of Rita Petite saw an increased emphasis on the social aspects of the club. During this period Clover Honey had become increasingly active in the area of promoting outside social events, while not CDI sponsored, provided additional venues for outside activities. One of the later benefits of this approach was heavy exposure for CDI in “Transgender Tapestry”, a national magazine published through the auspices of IFGE. Another of the successes of 2007 was the identification by Nancy Lamar and Rita Petite, of Carmen’s Place. This was a shelter assisting TG street girls in Queens. Along with Madelyn, they organized a clothing drive for the shelters benefit. In January 2008, a caretaker administration with Wendi as president, Kelly as vice president, and Clover Honey as treasurer assumed office. Hannah Forlorn later became secretary. The task of recording the events of our administration are left to another.

Postscript

Through the years CDI has had many successes, yet like most families there have been times of disagreement and great sadness. We have seen Kristine joyously leading the girls on the old August cruises around Manhattan. We cannot forget Alta and her give all attitudes for the old CDI proms in years past either. And what of the CDI co-sponsored

Halloween Party at the old Androgyny Club back in '98? We turned out over 60 girls for that one! Our history is rich in memory

Yet on September, 11th, 2001, we cried with the rest of America and the world for the thousands of dead, only a few short miles downtown from our apartment. Wednesday, September 12th, 2001, was one of the few times our open house was ever closed. In the months that followed many girls from CDI served their country and city at Ground Zero. In looking at our history, it is important to recognize that we come from many walks of life and that each of us bring different skills, opinions on how things should be done, and outlooks on what it means to be transgendered.

One of the problems that groups such as ours can repeatedly experience is officer burn out. We have been gifted with some of the best and talented of girls anywhere, yet too many of us, too often, take on work loads that should be more equitably divided.

It is my hope that each of you will come to understand that your predecessors worked hard for what we have today. We did not always agree with each other and at times had less than favorable opinions of each other. Yet, together we share a belief that as long as there is a closet, that groups such as CDI are necessary in our society. We continue to exist for the newcomer.

Finally, you are invited to become a part of this history. Learn from our successes, but learn from our mistakes as well! And now I must go.

It is your turn to live the life and to pick up where we leave off.

Kelly McDaniels

July 25th, 2008