

Like many men who cross dress, I'm not gay nor do I have any intention of going down the transgender route. I'm happily married to my wife of 14 years, have no kids and I'm fortunate enough that I get to live a simple but fulfilling life with the two people I love most - my wife and my mum. (My dad passed away some years ago.) Still, I had always been baffled by my occasional desire to cross dress when I was alone at home. I never knew what to make of it other than to keep it strictly to myself. Lately though, I have started to view it in a more positive light, which eventually led me to open up my inner feminine side named Alanna to Ophelia.

Before I get to the fun part about my first meeting with Ophelia, I should talk briefly about my cross dressing journey to provide some context. It began when I was at the age of seven. I was drawn to wearing women's stockings after seeing my mum do it. But all that soon came to an abrupt end when my dad left my mum and I for someone else. Seeing him hit my mum repeatedly before he left us made a lasting impact on me. I realised I was the only "man" in the house and swore to protect my mum from getting hurt again. My inner feminine side disappeared, and for the next 30 years, the desire to cross dress didn't cross my mind. I was preoccupied with the demands of growing up and providing a financial safety net for my family.

It wasn't until a few years ago when I was in my late-30s that my inner feminine side began to resurface again. Initially I was just being playful and having fun. But the more I thought about it, the more I realised that my desire to cross dress was partly driven by my wanting to be a more complete person. I wanted to truly understand what it feels like to be a woman and to see things from a woman's perspective. There are many good qualities in women from which men can learn. Among the positive traits I noticed observing my wife and my mum, and other educated women whom I have met, are their greater sensitivity to people around them, their patience and more balanced and measured approach to dealing with many things in life. To be sure, there are other traits in women, my wife and mum included, that drive me crazy. But in my lifelong quest in wanting to be a better person (not just "man"), I focus on learning the good qualities in both men and women. So my cross dressing in recent years was not just about me being playful, presumably driven by my genetic makeup. It was also about self-discovery and self-learning. Now I don't pretend to know all the reasons for this "behaviour" of mine, which unfortunately is still not widely understood by our society at large. But I was starting to see this "behaviour" not so much as a curse, but as a gift. It was with this thought that I finally had enough courage to let Alanna reach out to another person. Of all the people I could have chosen for Alanna's "baby step out" moment, I chose Ophelia. She was the only person I felt I could trust. She certainly lived up to my expectations, and more.

I first learned of Ophelia while watching an online SBS documentary on cross dressers in Australia. Even though Ophelia had no more than three or four minutes of airtime in what was a short documentary, she came across as someone who was not just very good at cross dressing, but also highly intellectual in a broader sense. I then went through her CDWC website in detail, read every single word and all her client testimonials, twice. Then came my introductory email to her. I could tell from her style of emailing that she doesn't waste time writing unnecessary words. By the time we had our third email exchange, she had already sized me up and was spot on, including some of my other features which I didn't explicitly describe to her.

Like some of her new clients who were on their way to meeting her for the first time, I was nervous. On the night before the meeting, I was feeling so anxious in anticipation of how the whole experience would turn out that I had less than four hours of sleep. Oh yes, I am hopeless. Still, I managed to show up at a café on a cool afternoon the next day in the lovely seaside suburb of Coogee in Sydney. When I finally met Ophelia there, she greeted me with a wink. After a short walk, we were in her cosy apartment. Having been deprived of sleep the night before and being shy, I wasn't quite being myself. But Ophelia had a natural way of conversing with me that made me feel comfortable in what I was about to do, which is to cross dress in the presence of another person for the first time in my life! She immediately put me at ease while talking about her partner Cathy and showing photos of them and a few of their friends having a great night out in Sydney recently during the Chinese New Year festival. Her level of compassion and empathy towards cross dressers was so amazing that she made me feel like I was just like another ordinary person. Even before she told me she has over 3,000 books in her possession, I could already tell that she reads widely. The positive paradigm in which she talked about cross dressing, among a broader range of subjects, seemed so effortless. Very few people can do that unless they have a wealth of knowledge and experience on the subject matters. She also had great respect for my privacy. Throughout the five hours I was in her apartment, she never asked me where I

live or work, or what I do for a living. She only asked whether I had kids (they are good at snooping around their parents' stuff especially those meant to be hidden) and whether my male name was Alan (which would have been an easy giveaway to revealing my male identity, a common mistake made by many cross dressers).

Now here comes the fun part. With most of Ophelia's stock now in her Melbourne home, she had brought along many items that would suit my relatively slim body. (Those items took up a considerable chunk of her precious luggage allowance on her flight from Melbourne.) I can easily fit into most normal size clothes for women, and has a women's shoe size of 8 or even 7 depending on the shoes. As she started going through the items in her usual order, it soon became obvious to her that I'm a newbie. Until that day, I had never touched breast forms before and never had nail polish. I didn't quite know what she meant when she said "tuck"; I was too embarrassed to ask. Pantyhose was about the only area I had some experience, given that this is where I started my cross dressing journey. Levante pantyhose is my favourite, especially sheer ones. I had brought along a pair with less than 10 denier. I wore it, got myself in a black skirt and blue top, and put on one of a number of pairs of killer heels she had brought over from Melbourne. I looked at myself in the mirror. The bottom half of my body looked like it would blend quite easily with other genetic women, never mind that I almost tripped on my first step in those heels! Next came the makeup. While lying on a bed, I lost count the number of items she applied on my face, including false eyelashes. Then came the wig. The big moment I had been waiting for finally came when I looked at myself in the mirror. Wow! I was speechless. To say that Ophelia had done an amazing job was an understatement. The only unfortunate thing was the pair of glasses I had, which I regularly wear, looked too masculine for Alanna. I dislike contact lenses. Getting a new androgynous-looking pair of glasses is now at the top of my to-do list.

Given that this was Alanna's "baby step out", I wasn't mentally ready to venture out for a walk along the promenade of Coogee beach. I will save this for my next visit to Ophelia's apartment, or sanctuary in the eyes of Alanna. For the 20 minutes or so that I had left before the time came for me to return to my male mode, I sat in the living room dressed completely as a woman, with my legs crossed, chatting with Ophelia like two educated women who just got to know each other talking about a broad range of subjects. In the five hours I spent in the apartment, those 20 minutes was the highlight for me.

It's clear by now that I have a high regard for Ophelia and the work she does for cross dressers, even though I have only known her for a few hours. Providing a service like CDWC is not without its challenges. Her clients generally have limited opportunities to see her and I would imagine her frequent travel between Melbourne and Sydney would be taxing for most people. Notwithstanding that, she does her job with great enthusiasm and sense of humour. The generosity of the teacher in her is plain to see. So is her intellect. Such combination of qualities in a person is a rarity, and rarer still for a genetic woman who has such great empathy and understanding of men who cross dress.

It was a great day for Alanna, and there will be many more of such days to come as she continues her journey of self-discovery and learning with the only girlfriend she now has.

Alanna
April 2016