

From Imogen d'Orsay

It's been over four weeks since I first met Ophelia & Jill and experienced first-hand a truly life changing experience. I've been reflecting on the day I spent at Ophelia's incredible beachside studio, and I've realized the stand-out experience was not the one I expected.

While it wasn't the first time I'd indulged in a makeover, it was certainly the first time I'd experienced one that made me feel confident enough to venture out into public. With phenomenally applied makeup and a stunning outfit that hid some of my more masculine features, I felt for the first time that I could actually pass – the ultimate achievement for any cross dresser! But having never even considered going out in public, it took the sincere encouragement of Ophelia and her partner-in-crime Jill to convince me to venture down to the beach and stroll along the promenade dressed in a sexy black skirt and blouse and a pair of my own Manolo Blahnik sling back stilettos. For a six foot tall, broad-shouldered and overweight man to walk along the beach dressed this way without causing any double-takes still blow my mind! I now spend my days thinking of all the places I can go dressed as the beautiful woman I always knew lurked inside.

But that isn't the experience that stands out the most.

Having been obsessed with women's shoes since my earliest memories, I quickly found I was in heaven browsing through Ophelia's huge collection of sexy & stylish shoes. Even though many of the shoes I was drawn to were her own, she still encouraged me to try on whatever pairs I liked. I had found a kindred spirit and probably would have been happy just to talk shoes all day, but that isn't the experience that stands out the most either.

When it came to the makeup and wigs, Ophelia and Jill don't keep all the trick of the trade to themselves. Jill had arrived moments before my transformation had commenced, and as one of the founding members of the Seahorse Society, she brings with her many decades of experience in the area of turning plain looking guys into beautiful women. The two of them fussed over me for about 45 minutes, ensuring everything from the application of concealer, through to the blending of eye shadow was perfect. As I already mentioned, they both talked me through every stage, doing their best to ensure I would have some hope of repeating their success when next applying makeup by myself. Nothing was too much trouble. More eyeliner? No problems. Longer hair? Try this wig instead. French polished nails? Here, let's apply this set of perfectly manicured fake nails. False eyelashes? Here's a selection; take your pick and we'll show you how to apply them the best way.

But as amazing as all this was, it's not the thing that stands out the most for me.

With a background in science, it's hardly surprising that Ophelia brings a scientific approach to all things cross-dressing. That's not to say that it is a highly clinical experience. In fact, quite the opposite is true. I'm not sure I've met a more vibrant, excited and passionate person as her. She's involved in this business because she loves it. She is so passionate about everything she does with the cross-dressing community, but she does it with a huge measure of understanding & compassion. She's researched and understands the scientific, factual background, as well as the emotional and social impacts of our "hobby". At no point

did I feel like anything other than a regular guy who has a passion for all things femme. She has the unique ability to make you feel normal; something that is not a common feeling for many cross-dressers. It was this reassurance and encouragement, along with the fabulous makeup job that gave me the confidence to go out into the real world dressed.

But even this isn't the thing that stands out the most.

The thing that has stayed with me is my experience of something uniquely feminine that guys simply don't normally get to experience. In fact, I'd never even thought about it, let alone went along to my appointment expecting to encounter it. So just what is this uniquely feminine thing that I got to experience firsthand? It is the feeling a being a girl and having a "girl friend". I'm not talking about having a girlfriend in the way that guys do. Having been happily married for over twenty years, it's been a while, but I still remember what it was like to be a guy with a girlfriend. But this is different. We all hear girls talking about their friends, and the special relationships they have with certain girls who they know as their "girl friends". That is the relationship I got to experience as I sat and talked to Ophelia. As I tried on her shoes. As we sat in a coffee shop being naughty by eating high-calorie banana bread together. As we talked about makeup and clothes. As I shared with her stories of my marriage and told her about my kids. As I shared some very personal things with her. You see, before I'd even met her, we'd become friends over the phone as we planned the big day. But by the time I'd finished that truly life-changing appointment, I knew what it meant to experience the special friendship that women are lucky enough to experience with a handful of people throughout their lives.

Simply spending time with their girl friends.

That's the thing that stands out the most.