

Liberty 2009-- a trip report by Jan Brown

Whenever I go to a TG conference or big group get together, I try to write a trip report to show the members of my support group, Mid-Hudson Valley Transgender Association (MHVTA), how it went. I, along with 120+ attendees, joined together at the Liberty Transgender 2009 in Philadelphia, Pa. from Thurs. April 30 to Sun. May 3, 2009. I asked other attendees from our support group (Edie and Jennifer) and others who are somewhat local to our area if they'd provide their views to flesh out the report from their own experiences.

Name	Where you live	How do you identify	Group Involvement
Edie	S. Dutchess Co.	CD	MHVTA; vice-chair
Jan	S. Dutchess Co.	CD	MHVTA; program chair
Jennifer	S. of Dutchess Co.	TG/TS	New MHVTA member
Bobbi	Albany area	CD	Longtime MHVTA friend
Jamie	Ct.	TG	MHVTA friend; involved with Fantasia Fair

From the Liberty website: <http://www.transeventsusa.org/liberty/>

Transgender 2009 — The Liberty Conference is an annual TG conference in the great city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania! The conference ran from April 30 to May 2 with some pre-conference activities earlier in the week. There were daytime workshops addressing all aspects of transgender experiences and concerns. After dark, there was three nights of fun — a Delaware River Dinner Cruise and two nights of musical entertainment with Melissa Clark at the Friday Dinner Buffet and headliner Georgie Jessup at the Gala Banquet Saturday Night.

Spring is a great time to be in Philadelphia. Flowers are blooming, the scenery is beautiful, and the city is welcoming to the Trans community. But there was lots of rain this week too! There's lots to do — shopping, sightseeing, fabulous high and low (*mmm-cheesesteaks!*) dining, and great art and entertainment. As befits the *Cradle of Liberty*, the city center reveals important historical landmarks around almost every corner.

Featured Speakers at the Conference

(every one of these speakers have visited MHVTA in the past)



Stephanie Battaglini - Thursday Morning Plenary Unity in Diversity: A Need for Connectedness

The transgender community is, without question, the most uniquely diverse community within a diverse community. If we are to successfully "move the needle" with respect to equality for all transgender persons, we simply must embrace our collective uniqueness and to do that we must be more *connected* with each other.



Mona Rae Mason - Friday Luncheon Speaker
Generativity Within The Transgender Community

If we knew then what we know now, and what can we offer to our younger transgender sisters and brothers? Citing generational and other differences within the greater transgender community, and narrative response data from participants in The Transgender Project, a thought provoking conversation on what we can each do to "give something back."



Helen Boyd - Saturday Luncheon Speaker
How We Love You: Let Us Count the Ways

This engaging keynote discussion by Helen Boyd will address the many ways partners display their love to their trans significant others. Helen's focus will center around issues of identity, intimacy, compromise, sex, family, and marriage.

Musical Evenings

Melissa Clark from upstate New York performed at the Dinner Buffet; and Saturday Night at the Gala Banquet Maryland's **Georgie Jessup** took center stage.



Melissa playing

What did you expect attending this event?

Edie: You must know what I'm going to say, by now, LOL! An educational yet party-ous experience.



Las tres amigas (Jan, Jennifer, Edie)

Bobbi: Exactly what I got. Over the past 20 years I have been to a number of these events and nothing has changed. I'd like to see some innovation, but then, the organizers are in a sort of rut and they neglected to recruit and groom any younger people to take over.

Jennifer: I did not know what to expect attending the Liberty conference. I had dreamed of going to one of these conferences for a very very long time.

Jan: I had been to similar events (IFGE, 1ST Event) so knew what to expect. Typically there are CD/TG topics on Thurs. into Fri. and then TS/TG topics later on Fri. into Sat. I had the same boat ride 2 years earlier but it was fun again. There weren't many long speeches so that was good. The hotel does a good job and is very accepting. It's like a cocoon where you don't have to venture out if you don't want to and it was rainy weather outside for most of the weekend.

What surprised you?

Edie: I didn't encounter any surprises.

Bobbi: Nothing...and that was disappointing.



Happiness is being Jennifer.. Yes!!!

Jennifer: I think once I was able to accept myself for who and what I am I was on my way to Philly, guilt and shame free for the first time in my life. Walking into the Hilton on Friday morning after waking at 4am to drive down I sure never would have imagined to talking to one of my idols, Jenny Boylan at lunch on Saturday or staying up till midnight at a sport bar with Edie, Helen Boyd, and Betty and having a most interesting conversation.

Jan: I ventured further out enroute to and from the event and got into more mainstream situations like going to a rest stop along the NJ Turnpike.

What 2 or 3 things did you most like, enjoy or appreciate?

Edie: I enjoyed the dinner cruise. I appreciated the efforts of the transgender performers at the Friday and Saturday dinners.

Thursday Night, A Special Outing!



Thursday evening brought a special treat: dinner with a view, and then some! About 40 of us came aboard the Spirit of Philadelphia as she went up the Delaware River from Penn's Landing. We socialized with drinks and sightseeing following by a multi-course dinner buffet, a live musical revue, and dancing to the music of the Spirit DJ's.



Dancing on the cruise

Bobbi: I most liked some of the people I met and got to know better, enjoyed time socializing, and appreciated the courtesy of the hotel staff.



Jennifer: Walking, Talking, Being Me!
being Jennifer!!!

Happiness is still

Jan: I enjoyed meeting new and established friends. Getting Jan out was fun.

What was more important to you now that you reflect upon it?

Edie: To me, the most valuable part of any conference is meeting and talking to other TGs.

Bobbi: Getting away from home for a few days. Even though I'm 'out', it's nice to be in another place for a bit.

Jennifer: The single most important part of the weekend was PRIDE and being around a great group of people who were so welcoming and proud of who we are.



Edie, Betty, Jennifer and Jan pose before the gala banquet.

Jan: I had a one on one conversation with Diane who will be having her surgery soon and it was so special when she shared her hopes, dreams, fears in the context of reality and I felt we connected well. Another interesting thing happened when Dr. Doctor announced that Virginia Prince, the person who was most influential in getting the CD/TG movement going had died that day. Dr. Doctor, who is Virginia's executor and recently wrote a book about her, got up and shared the news in a very simple way. There was a moment of silence. It was a simple but effective way to remember her. Diane who was sitting next to me was teary eyed as she remembered asking about Virginia that morning. I remember our own Felicity was one of Virginia's contemporaries.

Anything you didn't like about the convention?

Edie: Night time activities were lacking. On Friday and Saturday nights the conference activities ended at 10:00 when the previously mentioned performers were finished. True, there was a pub crawl on Friday night, but that did not appeal to me.

Bobbi: As mentioned above, the thing I liked least was that it was not much different from the first one I attended.

Jennifer: Nothing!

Jan: The keynote speeches were fine but there were problems with the sound system. The musical entertainment, both TG's singers, played during the meal and it was difficult to hear them over the chatter. After the meal, one entertainer played with her band which was good but loud and played only her songs so I didn't know any. Dr. Jennifer Burnett spoke about Christianity and Gender Identity Disorder but I didn't really learn much. She was passionate so it was mostly her faith view and quoting scripture to support her view which what the other side does too.

What was the funniest thing which happened?

Edie: I tried on a somewhat pricey bracelet at the jewelry vendor's table. I had her engage the clasp because I wasn't quite sure how it worked. After seeing that it fit well, I asked her to remove it. She had no idea how to get it off! Because of our lack of knowledge on how this thing worked, we inadvertently broke off a little tab that was essential for releasing the latch. We eventually figured it out and got it open with a push pin. I think we were both close to dying of embarrassment!

Bobbi: Jan, falling on her butt walking into the ladies room at a rest stop on the New Jersey Turnpike. (Sorry, Jan, but looking back on it, it was funny.)

Jennifer: Nothing!

Jan: I am not too sure my falling on my butt was funny.. more traumatic. The whole story was Bobbi and I came back via NJ Turnpike and it was rainy the whole way and slow. You have to understand when Bobbi gets a coffee urge, it's follow the urge so every time she sees a Starbucks sign, she turns and this time it was into the rest stop along the NJ Turnpike. We are dressed .. Bobbi more so than me but I was in jeans, top and sweater with cute brown shoes with the rubberized sole.. it's pouring and we go in with all humanity and head toward the bathroom. It's wet on the tile floor and I slide and go down on the floor to my knees. I get up saying I'm OK and this nice black lady came to help me up. I/we head into the ladies and there's a line out the door but I/we spy 3 stalls in another area and we (the black lady and I) head for those. I don't think people twigged on me so I got in and did my thing, washed up and waited outside (with all of humanity) for Bobbi. She came out & got coffees (they did taste good!). That was the most people I've ever been around in the real world as Jan. Scary but it was OK.

Coming down, Bobbi was using a Mapquest printout but got off the super highway when a Starbucks was just off the highway. We couldn't find it and kept going south in NJ farm land and we just ready to stop and use my GPS when another Starbucks lurked. We stopped, got coffee'd up and used the GPS successfully. We got to the hotel later than we planned. Another time during the event, I lost Bobbi's car keys and we thought we'd have to get to a new set on Saturday morning but someone turned them in. Whew!

Another unexpected thing was when Mona Mason paused during her talk about the Transgender Project and started talking about support groups and points to me saying "Jan's support group really works and is run well" and I go back to MHVTA saying you all make it happen.

What presentation(s) did you attend which was most meaningful to you?

Edie: The presentations I attended were:

- **Early Transgender Underground Networks,**
- **Communication Differences by Gender,**

- Screening of Award Winning Documentary: *Unraveling Michelle*,
- Seniors Handling Gender Discomfort,
- Addiction Theory and Transgender Behavior.

I enjoyed Dr. Docter's presentations (the "underground networks" and "addiction theory" ones) the most because he is a very engaging presenter; there was no snoozing during his presentations. I enjoyed the documentary screening because Michelle has a great sense of humor.

Bobbi:

- Dr. Richard Docter's *Early Transgender Underground Networks and Addiction Theory and Transgender Behavior*
- Lady Ellen's *Make-up - Beyond the Basics*
- Lynda Frank's *Seniors Handling Gender Discomfort*



Lady Ellen and Bobbi.. yes.. she was having a laughing jag!!

Jennifer: I attended a few presentations on SO and TG relationship which were all wonderful, one on workforce diversity given by a wonderful woman Dayna Walker, and my single favorite was a movie presentation given by an independent film maker and one of the quirkiest and fun loving woman I have ever had the pleasure of meeting Michelle Farrell and her film "**Unraveling Michelle**".

Jan: **Lady Ellen** did "**Make-up - Beyond the Basics**" was great because she asked the audience what's a problem you have.. and showed how to correct it.

Dr. Sandra Samon's "**The Ten Worst Fears of the Wives of Crossdressers**" was insightful which I hope to use to talk to my spouse. There was a showing a video called "**Unraveling Michelle**" where the Joe filmmaker announces to his crew "we are gonna film someone who's going transition from male to female and that someone is me" (Joe will become Michelle). The film was funny, touching and guts wrenching. The funniest sequence was just after Michelle had facial surgery and is being driven home with bandages all around her head takes over driving because they are lost and then goes and asks directions of someone while she is bandaged like a mummy.



Mona answering questions after her keynote address followed by Helen Boyd the next day.

The keynote presentations were good and connected with the audience.

What did you think of the hotel, accommodations and the staff?

Edie: Good, I've been there before. The staff did a great job keeping their pronoun usage correct!

Bobbi: As said above, they were excellent.

Jennifer: The hotel and staff were amazing from the house service to the front desk we were treated with the utmost respect and kindness.

Jan: Great.

Any changes you'd like to see made and would you go again?

Edie: I would have liked a DJ to close out the evenings at 1:00 A.M. The Trans Events folks have a history of not having a lot of vendors at their events. IMHO, every conference should have a couple of makeup artists and a hair dresser; there were none. I sometimes enjoy browsing the vendor area, but there were very few vendors at this event. Going again? Probably, it was the IFGE conference, without IFGE. I love going to conferences.

Bobbi: Update the presentations and bring in new 'experts' (especially those who are there primarily to sell their services.) Break out of the 'old girl network' and bring in some young 'T' girls to update us. Attend again? Probably not...for the reasons expressed above.



Jan gets in the picture.. with Jennifer and Stephanie..

with Jamie Dailey..

Jennifer: I'll let you all be the judge of that..... See you in Philly next year!

Jan: I'd opt for some better programming in the evening. Something with a little pizzazz! This is a forum for exchange of ideas and issues but it's limited to what you can do. I don't like things rammed down my throat so discussion and breakout sessions might work.

Depends if they have it again. Liberty fit into the schedule because IFGE was held in February and the new TransPitt conference in March. IFGE already announced it's moving it's dates to early April '10 so where does Liberty fit?



Jan with Edie and Cerise