

Fantasia Fair 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 130 attendees, joined together at the Fantais Fair Conference 2009 in Provincetown, Mass. (way out on the outer tip of Cape Cod) from Sat. Oct 17 to Sun. Oct 26, 2009. I normally ask other attendees from my support group to share their experiences but only Andreia from MHVTA attended so I asked others who I know 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
Andreia	NY	TS	MHVTA member, 1 st time attending a TG event
Jan	NY	CD	MHVTA; program chair; presenter
Sandy	Buffalo, NY	TS	Friend from other TG events
ChrissySue	Daytona Beach, FL	CD	Friend who I met at Fantasia Fair
Jamie Ghee	Va.	TG	1 st time attendee who attended on Jan's recommendation

From the Fantasia Fair website: <http://fantasiafair.org/>

“Fantasia Fair is a week-long transgender event that attracts people from the entire range of the LGBTIQ community. Crossdressers, transsexuals, intersex individuals, M2Fs, F2Ms, and their significant others are all welcome.”



Jan at the banquet



Attendees out to dinner



Dallas Denny presenting her keynote

“Fantasia Fair is a week-long transgender event held every October in the GLBT resort town of Provincetown, Massachusetts. The Fair is a “full immersion” experience, meaning that attendees can and usually do spend an entire week living 24/7 presenting their gender as they wish.



PTown is a quaint town which is close to the ocean which means sand, sand and dunes

Started in 1975, “FanFair” is the oldest and longest-running gathering of transgender persons for mutual education, support, collaboration and socializing. Every year the Fair grows in its scope, character, and assistance to the gender explorer. FanFair continues to be the leading



PTown prepared for Halloween and does karaoke

annual program promoting an individual’s ability to thrive in a real-life situation, and receive

positive reinforcement and encouragement. This allows the cross dresser, MTF transsexual, FTM transsexual and all the gender diverse to experience life in an open and caring environment — something unique in a world that typically has difficulty understanding and accepting gender diversity.”

Featured Speakers at the Conference

(those in magenta have visited MHVTA in the past)

Day	Speaker	Keynote Topic
Monday	Dr. Christine McGinn	Papillon Center Dr. McGinn is a plastic surgeon whose formal training was tailored specifically to transgender surgery in addition to all aspects of both General and Plastic Surgery. Since her own transition at NASA in 2000, she has been an activist and speaker on many aspects of gender variant issues. She is frequently called upon by television on print media as an expert in her field and was most recently interviewed by PBS to comment on transgenderism as a diagnosis in the upcoming DSMV. She is the founder of Papillon Gender Wellness Center; a comprehensive gender support center that includes many professional services in addition to Plastic Surgery. Dr. McGinn is on staff on two hospitals in the Philadelphia area and is often called upon by Universities and Medical Schools to help train students and faculty about transgender medicine. Her focus is not only on providing plastic and reconstructive surgery, but also to promote the importance of a holistic approach to the care of gender variant individuals to include preventive medicine, research, community outreach, primary care and therapeutic support systems. Of special interest to Dr. McGinn are long-term outcomes to gender confirmation surgery and contra- hormone therapy as they relate to improved quality of life and sexual health for gender variant individuals.
Tuesday	Dallas Denny	First Contact - Transgender Community Educational Efforts in the Late Twentieth Century Before about 1995, transgender education was done one-on-one, in presentations at churches, civic organizations, and schools; at small gatherings for support and at conferences; by magazines and books; by brochures sent through the mail; and occasionally through television and film. The educators were motivated individuals and small educational nonprofits. The people and organizations in this pre-internet age have left a rich legacy, not only in documents and memoirs, but in the many, many people whose lives were enriched and transformed by their efforts.
Wednesday	Dr. Richard Docter	A Conversation with Richard Docter Efforts to understand transgender these questions: 1. Do fetal hormones influence brain structures that subsequently pre gender identity? 2. What is the role of gender identity in cross dressing? 3. Are transsexuality and cross dressing two versions of the same syndr 4. What part is played, if any, by sexual orientation in the etiology of tra The goal is to invite in conversation on these topics.
Thursday	Dr. Jeffrey Spiegel	Mechanisms of Facial Gender Determination In his lecture, Dr. Spiegel discusses the important differences in the facial anatomy of males and females, theories in recognition and the complex and interwoven connection between gender, youth and attractiveness. Last, he will examine what key changes are needed in transforming a

		male face to a female face and why. Of course, Dr. Spiegel will be happy to address any questions from the audience following his presentation.
Friday	Tony Ferraiolo, Dru Levasseur	The Jim Collins Foundation - Taking Our Health Into Our Own Hands The Jim Collins Foundation raises money to fund gender-confirming surgeries for those transgender people who need surgery to live a healthy life, but have no ability to pay for it themselves. We recognize that for those people who require surgery for a healthy gender transition, lack of access to surgery may result in hopelessness, depression, and sometimes, suicide. The Jim Collins Foundation is a community-based initiative promoting the self-determination and empowerment of all transgender people.
Saturday	Mona Rae Mason	The Coming Out Party Is Over. Where Do We Go From Here? The past 10 to 15 years has seen transgender people coming out of the closet and bursting on to the scene, and public awareness of transgender has never in history been greater than it is currently, but now what? Where does the greater transgender community go from here? Citing the incredible diversity of 'transgender', Mona Mason offers up a thought provoking look at our individual and collective pasts and life experiences, and where as a community we are headed.



Tony and Dru at the Keynote on Friday



Mona Rae presenting her keynote on Saturday

I asked a few FanFair attendees for their responses for trip report and they are reported below.

I asked them to answer the following questions:

- What were your expectations going to Fantasia Fair and did you think those expectations were met/ Why?
- What else do you think would have helped improve your experience?
- What presentations were good for you and which ones weren't?
- Anything you can think of to improve the Fair?



A night on the town with friends (couples and groups)



Sandy:

Jan, my expectations on arrival were quite different than those on departing. On arrival the thought was "this is the last year". At the time of departure, I signed up for next year. What was the change factor? **SOCIALIZATION** that can only be obtained at Fantasia Fair. Someone said that the fashion show turned it around for them last year. Well, it did the same for me. I had FFS last year and I was at another convention and people recognized the change. But it really sank in at the fashion show and I became "alive". I would not say it's the Fair itself, but the people around me and the interaction, the tips and



Sandy modeling 3 different outfits at the Tuesday evening Fashion Show

the socialization..... The best presenters where the down-to-earth people who made a direct connection..... I'd like to suggest getting some heaters as it gets cold, especially for Crissy Sue (she's old and she's from Florida.. LOL!!). I think it would be good to give presenter's more control as some people who comment tend to ramble on with their personal stories. They are all interesting but sometimes trivial matters are given precedence.

Andreia:

I had no idea what to expect from Fantasia Fair. I'd never been to a transgender conference before. Going in, I thought the main benefit would be the simple act of living as a woman for a week. For personal reasons I wasn't able to get the clothes and make the other preparations I wanted, so I had to get by with the meager resources I had on hand (and some gifts from Sage, which came in very handy), but I was right anyway.

That's the basic truth of Fantasia Fair.

The experience was a sort of time bomb. At the time it seemed very laid back, more like a vacation than a conference, but unexpectedly it's had a huge and growing impact on me in the weeks since I came back home. For the first time, presenting female in public is fulfilling instead of an ordeal, a major benchmark for me since I plan to transition permanently. So any specific criticisms I have of Fanfair should be viewed in that light.

My biggest criticism is that Fanfair felt very diffuse. Partly this is due to its small size, but I think it needs a focus, some physical location where people can hang out and find each other, like the "con suite" at a science fiction convention. That would also be an ideal distribution point for the daily newsletter, which could be left in a pile on a table, saving volunteer labor, perhaps with other stuff (such as leftover copies of previous daily newsletters, since I noticed some people were collecting these.) It would also be a good place for a message board. In general, Fanfair needs a focus besides going out to restaurants, which are very expensive in Provincetown. The food was very good, too good to resist, but even that is a mixed situation since the last thing any of us need is vacation pounds. Actually the best dinner I had was some humble spaghetti in my own rented apartment with a number of guests, who got to interact in a more intimate and personal way than in public, and if I go back next year I will do this more often.



Sandy, Andrea and Jan stayed here



Andreia doing her exercises

The programming was very sparse and not well attended, though what there was of it was good. I favored nuts and bolts programming, like how to do makeup and the presentations by surgeons, over more abstract topics.

Still, the experience isn't defined by this kind of detail, but the simple reality of living female for a week in a safe, supportive environment (meaning Provincetown s a whole, not just the fair), and for any transgender woman who isn't already full-time, that experience is priceless.

ChrissySue:

Fan Fair was lots of fun, as usual. Things that went well? The health testing was a welcome event. It was a very important function for a very important area of our lives. The two sessions of "Tranny-talk"



Pictures of the Follies (Major ChrissySue, Phyllis Diller and the entire cast)



(which ChrissySue led) were very important to the new people and we maybe "saved" one or two of those who "just didn't feel they fit in". Next year maybe we should have three sessions of "Tranny-talk".

From my view, we seem to have an attendance problem. We attract some new and lose some old each year so our net attendance remains flat. Maybe we should recruit at other events throughout the year. Southern Comfort etc. Nothing fancy, but possibly some brochures, announcement from the stage etc.



Local Attractions.. both are hmmm good!!!

There was nothing I can think of that I would improve upon with the exception of the weather. Can you warm it up next year? I'm from Fla. you know. The highlight for me, incidentally, was the Shelly Mars show. She was fabulous!!

Jamie Ghee (First timer who attended the 1st half of the Fair):

Expectations for me was to see most of the first part and the T time talk. The workshops and addresses that I was able to get to worked for me. What didn't really work for me was the big sister program. I think an improved orientation just for newcomers would be in order.

Funniest thing which wasn't that funny was about my trying to wear flats but having to default to my sneakers.

Jamie provided a narrative how she arrived at Fantasia Fair which is interesting in which we find Jamie Ghee at a jumping-off place and landing in Fantasia and feeling Fair.

"It is a long journey, literally and figuratively, to Fantasia Fair. I have calculated it to be more than a one-day drive. When I leave on Saturday, it is raining heavily in Virginia, and as I progress further north into the Pennsylvania mountains, it becomes mixed with wet snow. It finally clears in northeastern PA, and I settle for the night in mid-south Connecticut. On Sunday morning there is a howling nor'easter battering New England, and the wind and rain slow the trip to an intense mid-afternoon arrival in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

Registration for the Fair seems like chaos, in a small, noisy room. I am finally processed out and headed for my accommodations. The first activity is an evening reception, fortunately in the same inn where I am located. The nor'easter continues to whip outside, as I dress in a pastel pink blouse with a long black, velvety skirt and a white, knit, poncho-style overlay. I am experiencing something of that same feeling of a year ago, at my first transgender event, but in some ways I sense that this is different. I am trying very hard to meet and greet, yet also finding myself socially challenged as usual. I return to my room a little exhausted and with mixed feelings. I tuck in for the night still feeling wobbly from the trip.

I already know that Fantasia Fair is different from many events of the same kind. Instead of taking place entirely in one venue, one hotel, it takes place all over central Provincetown. You choose your own lodging, and then navigate yourself to the activities. Thus begins the figurative part of the journey. I have never been out in “public” dressed en femme. The prospect is a little disorienting and self-consciously challenging. I have no illusions that I “pass,” nor do I imagine that I will meet anyone that I know on the narrow, uneven streets of town. I’ve just never done this before. I feel the need for help, but instead I feel left on the edge of the diving board on my own.

So, with the same fear and trembling of a year ago, I chose to do this..to actually present in public as Jamie Ghee. My decision is complicated by only recently arriving at a new consciousness about my female self. Oh sure, I’ve been dressing as long as everyone else claims, but I now have to reach even further into the closet and into the “me” that is the feminine “me”. The socially challenged part of both me’s long to belong, to be accepted, to participate, and that is the deeper anxiety beyond just walking around dressed as the person I have come to know in the mirror and inside the skin that we both inhabit.

Age, travel and dietary indiscretions catch up with me on Monday morning, and I run out of time to dress for the orientation breakfast. I arrive en homme, and feel very out of place. The details of orientation seem a little boring and repetitive, but it is interesting to hear from a sergeant from the town police, who makes it clear that there are two things that are not tolerated in Provincetown: Parking violations and intolerance. If there is a problem with the latter, call 911, you will get a response. As I depart to return to my room to change clothes, I also have more of a sense of the environment.

This IS a different place. I am a different me.

The Fair is also different in that it is about both beauty and brains. There are workshops and seminars during the day. You choose what you want to do, attend or do other things. Dressed now as Jamie, I attend a workshop in the mid-afternoon, and meet a kind and supportive person whose name is Jan. She takes on the role of a sort of guardian angel. Evening brings a casual dinner out on the western end of Commercial Street. I heeded the warnings on the Fair website about traversing the streets in high heels. I purchased a pair of flats as well as a tote bag to carry heels and necessities. My first venture with the flats is not funny. Even with my thick athletic socks on, I keep walking out of them. It is one of those rare wardrobe errors, so I choose to walk back to my room after dinner in my high heels, avoiding the chunky brick sidewalks by taking to the smoother asphalt of the street. From now on I will wear my sneakers for ground travel.

Day one closes.

Day two is not off to a good start again, and I miss the morning workshops. I finally exit my room dressed to go to lunch, and on the way explore the sights and shops of the eastern part of the main drag. I am surprisingly less self-conscious about walking into a shop dressed in a red plaid, knee-length dress, and long outer coat. Lunch turns out to be a pleasant experience at one of the local restaurants. I make it to the early afternoon seminar on transgender education and the development of the TG community, then to another workshop labeled “T” Time Talk. This small group setting intentionally offers an opportunity for me to express some of my inclusion frustrations. I find out that at one time there was a more intentional effort for newcomers, including a “big sister” program for those who needed one. That would be me, but it didn’t work, so I move on.

It is getting to be a little amazing to me, as I walk back to my room and later to the evening event, encountering people on the streets. Most people, locals I’m thinking, smile and say hello as I do if we make eye contact. Tourists seem to be the only ones who notice, with an occasional double take. So far

I haven't had to dial 911.

Tuesday evening is the grand awards banquet, which calls for one of my evening dresses. I have brought a peach colored polyester draped dress. Fantasia is apparently the longest established event of it's kind, begun in 1975. (1975! I lived in an entirely different world then.) Most of its founders were pioneers in the transgender world at the time, even facing criminal laws in most places just for wearing women's clothes in public. The award is now named for Virginia Prince, one of those leading ladies. By now I have at least met and become acquainted with a few more people, and am finally beginning to feel a part of something, feel more connected.

Day two closes.



Dr. Docter's keynote

Wednesday morning does not get off to a good start for me yet again, mostly due to lack of sleep, and I miss the morning activities. I arrive for lunch in an even further part of the western side of town. I am wearing black stretch pants, a rarity, and a long, black polyester jacket-style top. I attend the afternoon seminar and follow-up discussion presented by Dr. Richard Docter. This is an excellent learning experience in the realm of transgender conducted by an expert in the field. I am surprised to learn that among other things, I am part of a "tribe," which has it's own rituals and recognitions. He also talks about some recent scientific studies, which indicate that sex and gender are not necessarily as fixed and rigid as we seem to think. A very rewarding afternoon.

The fashion show is the big event for Wednesday evening, and though not in the show, I wear my long black skirt again, with a white blouse and my red Oleg Cassini jacket with the velvet trimmed collar. This is more of a fun event, bordering on silly for some of the participants. One of them, it turns out, has just turned 81. Oh my gosh, I think she looks better than I do, and I'm only 65. I am also surprised to find two people that I met at an event last year.



The Tuesday evening Fashion Show finale

I decide to skip the after-event wine tasting, and take one final hike up the steep hill to Bradford Street. I begin packing. Fantasia Fair runs for an entire week, from Sunday evening to Sunday morning. I have only signed on for half of the week. I am wishing I were not leaving so soon, yet feeling more uplifted, more expectant, looking more forward to being more of me.

Day three closes.

As usual, I begin processing my experience as I drive off on Thursday. I feel frustrated by what I missed, but also changed yet a little more. I have taken steps further down the mysterious path of transgender, learning more about myself and others. I am still socially challenged, still feel left out in some ways, but I also begin to understand more about belonging to a unique group that is so often hidden within the rest of our culture. I wonder now, more than ever, why that should be.

I am also now keenly aware that Fantasia includes a very broad spectrum of transgendered people. I met two people who are transsexual, and two trans-men, women who want to make the transition in the other direction. I find this amazing. There it allso a very broad presentation of the feminine. I am surprised by the number of significant others attending, which I attribute to the workshops focused on their lives. It is a truly unique experience, which lives on within me. Yes, I hope I can return. But if not, I will treasure it forever.

I am home on Friday, and it is raining again as I land back in my driveway."

Jan:

I enjoyed the Fair this year but it was totally different. The last 2 years I stayed in a guest house which was close to everything but expensive; this year, I stayed in a condo about 1/2 mile from where a lot of the Fair takes place. It was nice, not too splashy, had a small kitchen and smaller bathroom but it was inexpensive and I was able to stay with Sandy and Andreia. We had a good time even though they think I hog the bathroom.



Working at the Fair Office (Barbara, Jan, Lynda)

The other thing which was different was I was asked to help with the Fair as part of the staff which meant I attended most of the events in the evenings but didn't go to many seminars and presentations. I attended 2 presentations and presented 1 which seemed to be well received. One presentation was supposed to be a tongue in cheek talk by Sage and Sue about the things you enjoy about having a transgendered spouse and was well done but struck a sensitive nerve in that my spouse doesn't come to the fair and I was blown away.

I think the fair is special in that it is part of the community and is run very different from other TG events. At the other TG events, you don't have to leave the hotel silo but here, you are walking down the streets of Provincetown with everyone else. You mingle and mix with everyone else. The weather was rainy for the early part of the Fair but everyone seemed to have a great time. The keynote speakers were great and the evening events like the Follies and Fashion Show were well done and received well by attendees.



The 3 Amiga's (Jan, Sandy, Andreia) and Provincetown Harbor

Gee, I think I'll be back again and I feel good about that!