

Congress of Older People's Voices from the Margins

This story was documented for the #Embolden2023 *Congress of Older People's Voices from the Margins*. A full report on Congress is available at celebrateageing.com/margins

Congress is an initiative of Celebrate Ageing Ltd. Thankyou to our 2023 Congress Principal Partner, Elder Rights Advocacy and our other partners, the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, Older Person's Advocacy Network (OPAN), Australian Association of Gerontology, ADA Australia, The Older Women's Network NSW, QueerSpace Drummond St and Council on the Ageing.

Some comments about older TGD people, by Dr Clare Headland

I'm Clare Headland. I'm a woman. I know I'm a woman in the same way that you know that you're a man, or that you're a woman. There's no argument.

But I'm maybe a little different to you. I was born with a penis and testicles. And I was assumed to be a male baby, a boy. And at that time, also, there was no argument.

I was christened Anthony John, and I was expected to grow up to be a boy, man, husband, father. And like so many other trans people, I did my very best to fulfill those social expectations. However, although my body was masculine, my sense of self, my personality, was feminine.

Which resulted in a lifetime of fear, isolation, abuse, humiliation and shame. I didn't know how to be a man, but I gave it my best shot. Three marriages, seven offspring, and five grandchildren.

And I'm not Robinson Crusoe. The official estimate of transgender frequency in our society is 1-2%, but those of us with transdar can see thousands more trans people walking around with their sense of self completely at odds with their roles: in their family, in their friendships, in their jobs.

Not only is that infuriating, it's also exhausting. It's like having a war going on within you with no hope of success on either side.

I lived with fear, embarrassment, depression and deep abiding shame until I finally found on the internet other people who felt as awful as I. And for one good reason, I found the courage to honour my real self and begin a transition towards living fully as a woman.

My reason was to try to find enough peace of mind to stay alive for my children. And here I am, proud and unafraid and attempting to demonstrate to my children that it is sometimes worth to risk to fess up to our darkest issues and place our trust that those who love us will forgive

And there are huge risks involved. I have lost three marriage partners, seven children and all their children. I grieve for that loss.

I was a bloody good dad. I did my very best to love and nurture and teach and play with my children. But I know that if I had not honoured my real self, I would not now be here for them.

I believe that being here in this ... transgender state is infinitely preferable to having succumbed to the sadness and suiciding.

I need to add my thoughts about the support available for older transgender people. Sadly, my impression is that there is none. There are several organisations working to support and comfort trans people, but we the older ones, are pretty much on our own.

We tend to be deeply embedded in families, golf and bowls clubs, with grandkids needing babysitting. Where is there a place, a time, a forgiving witness that would give us the opportunity to open our hearts and tell our ... story?

With a few exceptions, there are very few older trans people visible, those who are out there, shopping and working and demanding their place in society.

But I believe that we get what we demand and expect to get it. I demanded my right to do what it took to stay alive, and I expected to succeed. In the process, I was bashed up twice, lost my family and friends.

And if you are sitting there with an unspoken desire bubbling inside you, you might think to weigh the risks against the joy, the freedom, the peace of admitting to whatever you need to.

However, civilization progresses, none of us are going to live forever. There may come a time for each of us to hold our head high, take a stance on the world, and proclaim our truth and be damned all the narrow-minded naysayers who fear any disturbance of their comfort zone.

We have the right to be the worthwhile person we were born to be. I speak for both genders, especially for the women who have devoted their lives to serving their family and now are feeling unworthy since the family has left the nest.

And for the men who had worked their way up the ladder of success only to find that ladder has left them with nowhere to go.

Yes, things have changed. But ask yourself, who made this world? Who has created this remarkably rich and wealthy civilization?

We did!

It doesn't matter whether you're trans, gay, lesbian, intersex or left-handed, we, our generation, have earned the right to hold our heads high and claim our seat on the bus, our rights and privileges in our society, our self worth.