

Spotlight on Albany... 1976

Being a roving trans journalist in the 1970s took me to many interesting and exotic places, including ... Albany, New York. At that time, Albany had a very active chapter of the TVIC group (Transvestite Independence Club) run by Wilma and Helen Thordsen. They hosted monthly meetings for trans folks in their home, usually in their well-appointed family room/bar. They had quite a following, and it wasn't unusual to have 15-20 trans folks there on any given night. Members came from all over New York State, New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Canada. They kept their members and friends informed by publishing a monthly newsletter, the *TVIC Journal*. It was a chatty, informative, and funny publication, and I am very glad that copies have been digitized and made available at the Digital Transgender Archive.

<https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/>



Figure 1. Pam, Kathy and Elanda at TVIC

Getting there for me was a haul, made easy by Wilma Sharman, an older trans friend of mine. I would bus from Philly or New Jersey into

Manhattan, where Wilma would pick me up, and we would drive to Albany. It always seemed like a holy trek to me, like a pilgrimage to a holy site to meet my tribe. Crossdressers would either stay in a motel nearby where they might change into their finery and then make their way to Wilma and Helen's cozy abode for a meal, some camaraderie, some music, some liquid libations, and most importantly, the sharing of experiences, rumors, and news... It's how we connected before these internet days.



Figure 2. Andrea Malick at TVIC

TVIC was an offshoot of Virginia Prince's FPE (Full Personality Expression) group. The FPE had a lot of rules and regulations, and tended to attract more affluent, middle- and older aged "heterosexual transvestites." FPE was not an open and welcoming place for younger, poorer, and transsexual individuals. Conversely, TVIC pitched a big tent that welcomed any and all of us on the trans spectrum.



Figure 3. A very travel-exhausted Sandy Mesics (left) with Pam Nolan at TVIC.

In 1975-76 I visited Albany TVIC on a few occasions, usually along with Wilma Sharman, but also to rendezvous with Ariadne Kane, Pam Nolan, and Andrea Malick. I made some amazing friends there, and was so impressed with what they were doing, I wrote a piece about TVIC Albany in *Female Impersonator News*. Fortunately, a copy of my article survives, reprinted in the *TVIC Journal*.

I can't say that I ever became a "regular" at Wilma and Helen's, but I got there when I could, and even after almost 50 years, I still think fondly of that group. As I was one of the youngest folks who attended TVIC Albany, I'm probably one of the few who survive to tell about it. I am so glad that the Digital Trans Archive has preserved many of their newsletters... they are quaint, informative, and worth a read.

PRES: William M. [redacted] Albany, New York
PHONE: [redacted]

NEWSLETTER EDITORS Helen and Wilma [redacted]

P A G E 6

By Sandy Maxwell 9 Feb 1976

SPOTLIGHT ON ALBANY SPOTLIGHT ON ALBANY

As my car sped through the seemingly endless ribbon of asphalt commonly known as the New York Thruway, winding as a snake from the city to the foothills of the Catskills, my mind drifted to all the unusual places where crossdressers have congregated, forming, as it were, a mobile subculture. It seems that almost every week, the scene changes — one weekend it is Albany, the next Hartford, sometimes Philadelphia, Washington, or perhaps the Jersey Shore.

Crossdressers seem to rely upon their cars as much as women's clothing to express themselves, finding solace in numbers greater than one. Gatherings of TVs have occurred in a variety of places, some lively, others unusual, apartments in cities, homes in the country, farms, out-of-season resort areas, and bars. There is a certain breed of TV who finds solace and enjoyment in meeting with others to sit and chat.

One of the mainstays of the transvestite social network for almost twenty years has been the Albany TVC group. This is one

monthly gathering that has withstood all the forces that contribute to the demise of other such social groups. The Albany group is so stable, it has even outlasted the national organizations that it has been affiliated with over the years.

Originally, the group's nucleus started in the heyday of Virginia Prince's FPE organization for heterosexual transvestites. A few of the original group still linger, but as the national FPE group has faded into a mere two or three clandestine chapters, Albany grew and blossomed. It was clear that there would soon come a parting of the ways.

FPE is a type of social sorority that has a very rigid structure and set of laws. Members had to be screened prior to joining, and guests at meetings were strictly forbidden except for a few exceptions. Group meetings were secretive, and blackballing members for improper behavior was common practice. It was clearly an organization that had its own eventual doom built into its governing policies. When the inevitable split came

between the Albany chapter and FPE, there were no hard feelings. Times had changed and the group felt stifled under the rigid rules. Like a flower needing to reach for the sun and blossom, Albany needed to reach out and embrace other people who did not necessarily agree with the dictates of FPE.

That this was the right thing to do was proven by time, with the decline of FPE, and the rise of the Albany group.

The next affiliation came with James [redacted]'s TVIC. To this day, the Albany chapter still bears the TVIC title, even though the national organization has faded into oblivion, beset by troubles, financial and otherwise. From here, the Albany group embraced a wide variety of individuals: transsexuals and transgenderists as well as heterosexual TVs, and all were enriched from the mingling of these diverse individuals.

That has been five years ago, but the fires of dedication and service still burn in the hearts of Helen and Wilma [redacted], who have taken over five hundred crossdressers of

all types into their homes and into their hearts. Where many would have grown weary of carrying this burden for so many years, this remarkable couple has thrived on such a social milieu.

Fame of the Albany group has spread through the years, mainly through word of mouth. Members constantly bring in new TVs, who grow and mature in their femininity within the group and, in turn, bring in more fledglings. It is almost impossible not to learn something as one of these gets together, as the older members share their wisdom and experiences with their young sisters. At the same time, the youngsters add to the total vibrancy and energy of the group consciousness.

This constant give and take, combined with the lasting friendships that are developed from within this group, make it one of the most valuable social and learning milieus available to the crossdresser. Albany has become the mecca of the crossdresser world, and many TVs have made that long, arduous journey from the desert to that tiny oasis in upstate New York.

The newsletter published by the group is a gem in its simplicity; five or six mimeographed pages complete with typographical errors and cartoons dipped from magazines. It almost radiates the warmth that emanates from the hearts of Helen and Wilma. It is mailed to members all over the world, many of whom will never be able to attend a meeting in person, but who take solace in knowing that Albany TVIC is there. One can almost get the vicarious feeling of the group by reading through the newsletter.

The monthly meetings are conducted with decorum. I was warmly greeted by Wilma herself, an earthy, fun-loving person who mimes no words, but has an intimate rapport with all the members of the group. As I watched her sitting in her easy chair during the meetings, I could see an expression of satisfaction on her face — almost a feeling of fatherly pride as he watches his children maturing before him. I learned that Wilma is a bus driver by profession, and I marvel at the tremendous amount of patience the man must have.

And then there is Helen, Wilma's wonderful wife. She might be considered the den mother of the group, as she listens to the members' problems and offers an occasional word of advice or encouragement. She tells me that she takes pride in her group and that through the years, everyone has been well behaved.

DEAR ABBY



Transsexual problem

DEAR ABBY: About three months ago my son, who is 27, divorced and the father of two, introduced me to his favorite, a nice-looking, intelligent, red-haired person. I took to her right away, and we call her "Agnes."

My son said me that Agnes was a "transsexual." I never knew such people existed. Abby, he explained that she was born a male and lived as a male for 28 years, but always felt she should have been a woman. She had a sex-change operation two years ago and is now a normal woman, except that she can't bear a child.

Agnes looks as much like a woman as I do. Nobody would ever know she wasn't a born female. Anyway, I had a hard time accepting all this, but when I saw how happy she is making my son, I couldn't hold it against her.

Nobody in our family knows her background, and I don't want them to. But Agnes is going on a national TV show to tell her story. (She says I will help with the transsexual.) If she goes on TV, all our friends and relatives will investigate her, and I don't think I could hold my head up. My son says he won't mind, and he's considering going on TV with her!

Don't you think they should consider the end keep the whole thing a family secret? — ASHAMED

DEAR ASHAMED: Agnes' first consideration is to let you all know she's up to them, so go on TV. It's up to them, not you. Agnes is not your daughter. Nobody would know she's a transsexual, but God is always in the background. He'll let the angels know when to contact them. Hold up your son if you have nothing to be ashamed of.

