

Southern Comfort 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 600 - 800+ attendees, joined together at the Southern Comfort Transgender Conference 2009 in Atlanta, Ga. from Tues. Sept. xx to Sun. Sept. xx, 2009. I normally ask other attendees from my support group to share their experiences but no one else from my group attended so I asked others who I know or met if they'd provide their views to flesh out the report from their own experiences.

Name	Where you live	How do you identify	Involvement
Dayna	Tampa, FL	CD	Helps TG's with job situations, presenter, friend who I met at Liberty
Jan	Poughkeepsie, NY	CD	Co-founder of local support group and current program chair, presenter
Bobbie Jane	Milwaukee, WI	TS	Friend who I met at First Event
ChrissySue	Daytona Beach, FL	CD	Friend who I met at Fantasia Fair
Sandy	Buffalo, NY	TG	Friend & roomie; met at Fantasia Fair and First Event
Teri Reese	Atlanta, GA	GG	Recent college graduate; wants to do research and advocacy for the transgender community

From the Southern Comfort website: <http://www.sccatl.org/>

Southern Comfort Conference 2009 — **Southern Comfort Conference** is an annual TG conference in the great city of Atlanta, Georgia! The conference ran from September 22 to September 27 with some pre-conference activities earlier in the week. There were daytime workshops addressing all aspects of transgender experiences and concerns. There was a special career expo where companies were available to talk with about potential jobs. After dark, there was nighttime fun as well including a Friday Heros Dinner and a Gala Banquet Saturday Night.

Featured Speakers at the Conference



Stephanie Battaglino - STEPHANIE BATTAGLINO is a Communications Director at New York Life Insurance Company. She successfully transitioned on the job in 2005, and she is the first transgendered person to do so in the 163 year history of the company. In 2007, Battaglino spearheaded the formation of NYLPride, an LGBT employee network group. She is active in Out & Equal Workplace Advocates, serving on their Transgender Advisory Committee, and she is a Board Member and serves as Communications Director for IFGE. Recently, she was named the sole transgender representative for Oasis Commission of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, NJ, whose mission it is to foster a greater awareness and understanding of LGBT issues throughout its 120+ congregations. MHVTA visitor.



Donna Rose - DONNA ROSE is a nationally recognized author, speaker, and advocate for transgender and transsexual issues. Her memoir, *Wrapped in Blue*, remains a helpful tool for people facing the prospect of gender transition. Her leadership role in LGBT advocacy and corporate equality efforts is extensive. She has an active media presence, and her website remains a valuable source of information and support for/about the transgender community.



Jamieson Green - JAMISON GREEN writes and speaks eloquently about the various aspects, issues and challenges of the transgender and transsexual experience, especially those associated with the female-to-male transsexual process. He has written for numerous professional journals, and his book, *Becoming a Visible Man*, a must read, was the recipient of the Sylvia Rivera Award (2004) and a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award (2004). Green is respected world-wide for his tireless efforts to bring legal protection, medical access and civil liberties to the transgender community while bringing education and understanding to all people.

SCC '09 trip report responses

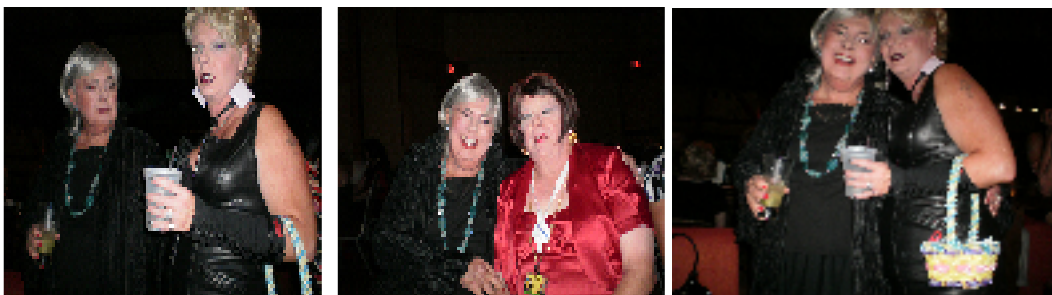
Special responsee Teri Reese: My name is Teri Jo Reese, and I'm a recent college graduate looking to do research and advocacy for the transgender community. I'm 22 years old, and this was my first time attending the SCC. I've lived in Georgia nearly all of my life, and from my experiences I know the South needs a lot of work when concerning the transgender community. I currently date a great guy in the US army, which I thought might be a hindrance to my interests and advocacy, but after attending the conference I found out otherwise. I'd love anyone to feel free and contact me at tjrees3830@student.ngcsu.edu,



Teri

What did you expect at SCC? What was your feeling about the conference?

ChrissySue: What did I expect? Actually, I didn't know what to expect. This was my first time, and I went because I wanted a venue where I could be my true self and socialize with others I could relate to. Frankly, Jan.. you and Jennifer Barge gave me added encouragement.



ChrissySue and Jennifer (wonder what she was thinking??)ChrissySue and Jan

I have attended only three other conferences in my short "out" life (two Fan-Fairs and one IFGE), and, without a doubt, this was the best! Others were fun, but SCC was empowering, impactful, uplifting, educational, enlightening, encouraging, professional, adventurous, and fabulous!

Bobbie Jane: I expected to meet old friends and make new ones while at SCC. I also wanted to investigate doctors which I might use for my grs. I also expected to have lots of fun dining out with friends and at some of the SCC lunches and dinners. I also was hoping to meet some friends I only chatted with online so I could put a real face and get a personal experience talking with them. All of these things came about just as I expected. The dinners were great both in the hotel and away from the hotel. The friends I chatted with were just as nice as online. A good experience was I made friends with someone from London and another from Canada. You never know where they are from until talking with them.

I think most girls at SCC had a great time and made new friends. I noticed many gatherings of girls just chatting or going out together. Overall I think everyone came away from SCC richer than they when they came, with memories they will cherish for a long time.

Teri Reese: Honestly, I tried not to have expectations because I didn't want to be disappointed. It's kinda like a movie... I never want to hype a movie up so high that when I actually go and see it...it's just a big disappointment.

I really didn't know what I expect, especially being that I'm just a genetic girl with no real connections to the transgender community besides my own advocacy and research interests. Ever since I got to college, I have felt a strong connection to the transgender community as if transgender rights were my own. I didn't know how many cis individuals I would find at the conference or if I would be accepted by the transgender attendees. I also didn't know if my research interests would offend people...as if I was Dr. John Money here to exploit the community. Through my research I hope to bring about awareness and education, especially in the south, to individuals who judge this community without really knowing anything about it.

I ended up feeling great about the conference. It was amazing, and it was more than I could have asked for. Everyone was so warm and inviting, and I could only hope that other communities could be as nice and forthcoming. I met so many individuals at all of the events, movies, seminars, and just sitting around in the lobby. So many individuals gave me their cards and email addresses which is encouraging considering I thought I might have a difficult time making contacts for interviews and research. And I also gained new friends which is always a plus!

Jan: I was expecting a fun event with several interesting new experiences allowing me to see more of the greater transgender spectrum. It thought the event was a great party and had several interesting presentations (which I like). It was a unique experience to say the least and I met a lot of wonderful new friends.

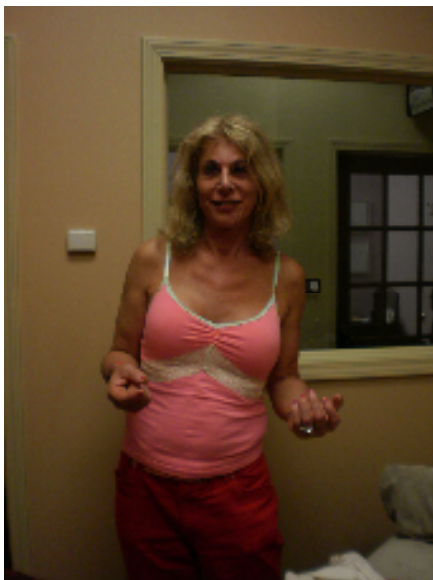
I don't know how many attended but it appeared all attendees had a great time. Given the numbers of attendees actually allowed a decent number of attendees to presentations

(assume if you had 600 attendees and if 1/3 of attendee went to presentations, 200 would attend.. clever!!).

I really liked the "hero" idea as I was able to put some of my heroes on the wall.

I thought most of the speeches were short but they seemed to get longer on Saturday and if you weren't part of the SCC crowd, they weren't effective.

Sandy: I met a lot of old friends and made some new friends. The conference was very good. While the amount of people and the diversity (M to F, F to M, Crossdressers, Genderqueer and others), there was a wide variety of topics and usually something for everyone.



Sandy

Dayna: SCC was exactly what I expected, this having been my 3rd time there. I thought that the entire event went very well and was pretty well organized. I think Blake Alford, the Chair of SCC did an outstanding job. I think that this and Be All are very close in regards to which event would be considered the best.

Anything funny happen? Anything unexpected?

ChrissySue: You asked if anything funny happened. Well, when I returned home I discovered I had left my night gown in the room. I phoned the hotel explained my plight; a young lady found it and mailed it back with a cute little note.

Jan: Christine was one of my roommates who arrived at 2 AM on Tues. night / Wed. morning and she was so excited that we couldn't quiet her down and get back to sleep until 3 AM. I wanted to attend one of the career talk presentations but couldn't find the

room until it was late. As I walked in, the presenter said "welcome.. we just finished.". But the last laugh was there was a drawing for a job search CD set door prize and I won it (which I can definitely use in a job search).

Sandy: The funniest thing was me thinking that 3 girls can use 1 bathroom.



Jan, Christine and Sandy shared a room so we made nice & tried not to make a big mess

Teri Reese: I thought it was funny how interested people were in me...probably because I was different. I don't know if it was really obvious that I wasn't transgendered or that people wanted to find out if I was... I had so many people come up to me asking me why I was at the conference...I think mainly they were trying to figure out or feel out if I was transgendered without just flat out asking.. ha ha. I even had some people just assume and told me how well I passed. One woman asked me flat out, "What the hell is a 'normal' girl like you doing here?" which was pretty funny, and another woman came up to me in the lobby and said, "Girl, please tell me that you are no transgender!" But it was instances like this that got some good conversations started. I loved it because it gave me a great chance to meet people and tell people why I was there. Everyone was really open and accepting of why I was at the conference and many people thanked me which I did not expect. I'm doing something that I am passionate about, and I know is right. It's sometimes unexpected for people to thank you for that.

I found that the number of people in the military was a lot higher than I had anticipated. Considering this is an research area of interest for me...I was encouraged. Being that my boyfriend is in the military, and I have a few military pins on my purse...I had a lot of individuals share their military stories and experiences with me. Some had served in the military...while others had been openly welcomed by military members. I was very encouraged by this while shocked at the same time!

I also had an unexpected experience when it came to the seminars. I was having a great time at the seminars. I was learning a lot and hearing eye-opening personal stories that were very much encouraging. That is until I attended a seminar titled "Genderqueer". Most of the seminars I had been attending consisted of older more experience speakers, with older more experienced attendees. I knew it was more common for the younger

generation to identify as gender queer, but I wanted to know a little bit more. Sure enough this seminar consisted of younger speakers from my generation...and nearly the whole audience or attendees consisted of younger individuals. So I was like...ok good... I can gain some insight here on the younger generation...people my age...what their thoughts and experiences are. The seminar didn't go over so well for me. I was extremely disappointed. The presenters and young audience (I say young audience... they're around my age...probably 19-24) were very immature and unprofessional. They had a very..."we-know-everything" type attitude. They proceeded to tell everyone that therapists knew nothing and how they were helping their therapists not the other way around. I felt like I had regressed back to middle school. Come on now... 13 year olds think they know everything...not 22 year olds. They made comments about hating academics and how worthless academic research was. This was hard...because that's what I'm trying to do. It was discouraging, and I try not to stereotype the younger generation, but they certainly weren't doing any favors for the group they are trying to represent. They almost seemed just as ignorant as people who knew nothing about the community. And these are the future individuals who are going to lead and shape the community? Perhaps I give myself too much credit...or them not enough, but overall it was a disheartening experience for me. Perhaps I'll write to the SCC and let them know of my experience?



Sandy, Dayna and Jan



Dayna: I thought Jenny Boylan's reading was pretty entertaining and she surprised me with her range of talent. Other than the catastrophe of my hair, I can't think of any laugh

out loud moments, but obviously some of the attendees are quite colorful and I always find the people fascinating.

Another thing which was not fun at the time was I had a flat going home on Sunday. The problem was I left early early (3 AM) so I could catch a football game and I had a flat tire 12 miles down the road and blew out the right rear tire of the truck. It's dark and raining on a hill on I-75. I jacked the truck up, got all the lug nuts off and then a semi came by.... Whoosh! and blew the truck off the jack! Miraculously (or so I thought at the time) the tire stayed on and the truck didn't drop to the hub or axle. I retightened the nuts so I could try and get the jack out and prayed the tire was on good enough that the truck wouldn't drop on me. I could just imagine them finding me dead, squashed under the truck with all these women's cloths in my truck! lol... This whole time I'm just happy I'm not dressed, ya know? So anyhow get the jack back in place, take the lugs off again and this damn tire won't come off to save my life. I thought dropping it may have caused the studs to bend or something but everything looked straight. Anyhow, because it already came off the jack once, I'm a little intimidated about jerking too hard on the damn thing, but couldn't for the life of me, get this damn tire off!

After an hour of that, I finally called AAA. When they guy showed up and got a floor jack under it, he had to knock the damn tire off with a hammer! It apparently had bonded from all the condensation and such from down here. So anyhow, two and a half hours later I was finally on my way. I did make it to the game on time, but just barely. I can tell you I'm still exhausted from the trip.



Bobbie Jane and Zoe and another picture of Bobbie Jane

Bobbie Jane: I guess it was funny but couldn't have happened at the worst time. Cocktails were to begin on Saturday around 6pm and right around 5:30 the fire alarm went off. Now I was only half way prepared to leave my room and uncertain what to do.

Should I leave the hotel as I was or wait for the hotel to state we should evacuate. As it turned out it was a false alarm and we could continue to get ready for the Glam dinner.

As to unexpected, that would be the attention I got just walking around the hotel. I was prepared for some watching me but not to the extent I got. I know my looks have changed dramatically since my FFS and breast augmentation surgery but didn't think it would bring my way the looks I got. Just walking across the lobby eyes would follow me and if sitting anywhere girls would come to me and start a conversation. It was flattering they thought me so beautiful and natural. One wife even asked me who my husband was. And then to see the jaws drop when I changed for partying on Saturday night when I walked outside for some fresh air and to talk to someone I saw outside. All so unexpected.

What things did you think worked well? What didn't? What would you change if you could?

Jan: I liked the choices of Donna Rose, Stephanie Battaglini and especially Jamieson Green as keynote speakers. One person who spoke from the heart was Monica Canfield who showed a new valuable resource to help parents of trans kids (done on behalf of Colage) entitled "Kids of Trans Resource Guide". I attended 2 vocal workshops put on by Kathe Perez were great as she was very animated and fun but totally into helping with TG Vocal modification. I presented a talk with Marisa Richmond from Tenn. about running a TG support group which turned out well; we had 20 attendees in our session and had a lively discussion with several really good questions asked.

There are a ton of talks you can attend and you have to pick and choose which to attend. Other presentations I attended were "One-ness in Our Two-ness", "Diversity Acceptance and Integration of the Transgendered Employee" and "Femme Wig Care and Styling", "Tgirls and Triangles - or Girl, She looks like a Guy in a Dress" (about foundation garments), 3 different vocal sessions. I went to 2 different Kathe Perez vocal sessions and recommend Kathe. The one session Beth put on about wig care was great but the makeup session put on by Beth was a disappointment as all she did was say this is good makeup and that's not so good. It was good to see and hear Donna Rose speak at lunch. The banquet theme was "Hero's Among Us" and a few people dressed as their favorite hero of the evening. I found the food acceptable but not extraordinary.. the hotel staff was extraordinary in their efforts to make our time meaningful.

Sandy: The most interesting session was the one on Satori World Medical, empowering you to take the final step for transition. Before, it was just a dream far off and now it still may be far off, but now there's hope.

Bobbie Jane: I thought the karaoke night was a great hit. The area was packed and those singing did a great job. The seminars were well run and easy to get to. They were varied in topic and allowed everyone something they might be interested in, from MTF going

through transition, cross dressers learning how to be more feminine, general topics about history or running a support group, and FTM also going through transition.

I understand the pool party was not that good but I wasn't there to verify that statement.



Jan and ChrissySue as Super Hero's

As to what would I change, that's a hard one. So much of the conference was just great as I expected. If I had gone out to the club for dancing, I would liked to see postings of transportation related information and it would have been good to have a bus. This may have been available but I didn't know about it. The only other topic would be the scholarships. They came out late and some had no chance to come because they had no room or no time to get a roommate in time. They should have sent out the scholarships as available instead of waiting to send all of them out at the same time. I know some cancelled going that got a scholarship because of such a late notice.

Teri Reese: I think the seminars were one of the best parts of the conference. There was such a variety for all types of individuals seeking all types of knowledge. I also thought the extra meetings and activities...i.e The Stuffing Party, The NCTE Reception, and The Newcomers Reception were great. I met a lot of people at these events...and they weren't so formal. It was a relaxed atmosphere that wasn't awkward. Everyone wanted to talk and share. I found it hard to leave when I had to go at the end of the day.

I also thought all the information, resources, and handouts....like the conference booklet and everything were great as well. For someone like myself... I was wanting resources and individuals who I could talk to...and these things gave me that opportunity. I was very impressed.

If I could change something...I would have found a way to pay the higher fee so that I might have been able to attend the meals and everything. I feel like I missed out on a lot of chances to meet new people and have great conversations because I couldn't attend the meals. But...I had to go with what was best for my means. I was just lucky enough that I

live right outside Atlanta and was able to attend the conference at all. Maybe I would have applied for one of the scholarships... or tried a little bit harder to pull the money together. I know next time...I'll have my money saved hopefully!



Everyone at the banquet

Dayna: This is the second year I have participated in the career fair. Behind the scenes this has caused me a lot of stress and anxiety as I feel I have something of value to offer the community, yet it has been an up-hill battle to participate or at least get confirmation of participation.

As you know, my workshop was a last minute add-on, but despite that, I felt it was pretty well attended. I think the workshops they have represent a wide range of topics, but I was made aware that there may be less for those that would label themselves 'cross dressers' vs. that of the trans crowd.

If I could change anything it would be a more integrated approach to the CD/TG thing and work to streamline the career fair process some. I would like to mention that Cat Turner was highly instrumental in making positive things happen for me and also to extend a thanks to Chuck Obina with Out and Equal for his positive and significant contribution in time and effort for the career fair.

Would you do SCC in the future? Why?

Dayna: Absolutely! I would consider SCC and Be All 'must do' events. SCC's location is ideal, I think. While the hotel is a little expensive, the location in an area that is mostly positive towards the CD/TG crowd is definitely a plus. The ability to get out to the mall and surrounding stores is such an awesome experience! I really enjoyed this event and

enjoyed the people I met and spent time with. I can honestly say I met nothing but great people with one exception and in a group that large, I think that's a pretty good ratio!

Jan: I would love to attend future SCC's but I am not sure I'd be to swing it due to finances. I was able to attend SCC '09 on a scholarship which I much appreciated. For now, it'll be on my radar screen wishfully.

Sandy: I would like to return, but finances may say no (at least now).



2 views of Stephanie singing

Bobbie Jane: Would I do SCC in the future is a most definite YES. The entire event was filled with laughter, joy, learning, fabulous food, good seminars, nice speakers and run with efficiency. There was almost too much to do in the time available to me.



Mara & Jenny at the SCC talent show

Teri Reese: Definitely! Great experience, and I can't wait to go next year. Attending the SCC really has led me to start looking at other conferences. It's given me the boost I needed to know that doing research and advocacy is definitely a possibility. Who wouldn't want to be apart of such a great and accepting community?



ChrissySue.. elegant as always..

ChrissySue: Darling, I found the conference to be awesome cool and I can't wait for my return visit next year!

Jan's Week in Atlanta – as I was coming to SCC on a scholarship, I tried to be economical in everything. I came down and back in a RV and was pretty thrifty about everything including staying 3 persons in a 2 person room. I very much appreciated that Sandy and Christine allowed me to room with them even if I did hog the bathroom (well.. it takes me longer).



Sandy & her chariot

After arriving on Tues. and checking in, Sandy and I were rooming together waiting for our other roomie, Christine Hockberg, who arrived at 2 AM Wed. morning and kept us awake for a hr. jus talking. Back to Tues. after we settled in, we went across the street to Macy's and shopped the entire plaza and then went to the Marshall's Plaza and hit Marshall's.

We noticed a sign on the 2nd floor which said something about a salon center so we trooped upstairs into the salon space where many separate vendors work out of small

shops (men's hair salon, massage, etc.). We had a great time talking with the receptionist who directed us to the lash and makeup salon ("Lash Couture") run by Thierry.



Jan, Thierry and Sandy

We had a fun time speaking with her about Southern Comfort and she was totally unaware of SCC in the immediate vicinity. As we left, I arranged to meet Thierry the next day for a tour of the hotel and to see the vendor area. It was surprising that local vendors didn't know but you can't tell everyone but she is interested to participate next year (see the paragraph below).

I attended the stuffing party on Tues. evening, smoozed with several and actually met several girls I knew from other conferences... and the pizza was good! That was a fun time just working, talking, laughing and enjoying.

Hangout Wed. I attended the Pink Essence lunch and got to meet some new friends. The lunch was in a great Italian restaurant across the street from the hotel with about 20 in attendance. I had to leave early to meet Thierry, the local Atlanta makeup artist, to show her SCC and specifically the SCC marketplace. She was fascinated with everything and is interested to be a vendor in '10. I took her all over including the vendor area, your command center downstairs and even walked thru the seminar area. Sandy and I went on the Murder Mystery evening at Agatha's in downtown Atlanta and it was a hoot. There was a buffet which was pretty good and I met several new friends including Isabel who is from Kuwait and thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Everyone had a part in the performance (fun fiasco) and we had great fun making new friends and reciting our part... and they got the murderer in the end and it wasn't the butler (there wasn't a butler in the play).

Thinking back on it, I wished there were more tours of Atlanta. I was hesitant to visit places I don't know about and going to a the city is perilous if you don't know it. I guess a daily tour in the afternoon might be optional but worthwhile.

Sat. had a few different twists for me. I walked in just as the Career talk was winding down but what was interesting was I won the door prize of a set of CD's to help with job search (which I can definitely use). I also attended the Career Expo where a few companies were available to discuss that they offer jobs for transgenders but it didn't appear that they were actively recruiting. I brought my resume down which was reviewed and critiqued



Jan had a makeover with Thierry and her makeup artist Moonglow

gracefully. I also attended a 2nd vocal presentation by Kathe Perez and she is so good! One talk I went to surprisingly was "Managing Conflict" which turned out to a great talk by 2 experts. Maybe more talks of a general nature would help round out the program. I decided to call up Thierry, the makeup artist, who I invited to look at the convention for a makeover and she and her makeup artist were delightful and I got several nice comments at the evenings' Gala Banquet. There were several speeches which tended to drag on followed by a dance. I actually attended Dr. Z's party and got to talk to my friend Bobbie Jane who I hadn't seen in 2 years so we caught up on things. I think I sort of pooped out after that.



Had fun talking with Bobbie Jane

All told, SCC was a wonderful experience. I found I kept going down to the lobby to use the free internet there as the internet in the room cost about \$10 / day. I think the need to

be connected back home was understandable as we did have a special concern about the group meeting on the Mon. following SCC.

We left Sun. morning and traveled all day and got back to where I left my car in NJ on Monday.



Lunch with Roadside Sandy

Jan's Other Observations

I understand there was a Significant Other get together events which I can't comment on how well they were attended. I didn't really know much about the Significant Other breakout room and it wasn't on my radar screen.

There was a good number of transmen including on the SCC organizing committee. I took the opportunity to meet with several after I sat with 4 men at one of the meals. I had never really spoken to transmen specifically so I took the opportunity and they were interesting in that their concerns are the same concerns transwomen have. These men did look a little butch or feminine and were really concerned about which restroom to use. Gee, that's the same as moi.

There were a few TransYouth presentations and I understand these were done toward the weekend when the kids were able to attend. I think this and Elderly TG's are definitely things which need to be discussed more included the impact of being TG on families. It also occurred to me to discuss hormones long term impact which may be discussed in transition presentations.

The whole SCC team was well trained and was very supportive for those who had questions. One thing which was innovative was the scanners the staff used to allow guests into the meal times and that improved waiting time immensely.



Beth demo'ing wig / hair care and Jan was a model (before and after with a new do)



I would like to see more TG presentations (meaning these apply to everyone) vs. transition (read TS) presentations. There seems to be a whole sense of what it means to be a woman which should be explored. There are lots of things my mother never taught me.

I attended 10 presentations (including mine) which met my needs mostly. The best ones were TG focused which to me means they apply to the entire TG community and were instructive. I attended the 3 vocal classes, 1 hair styling class, 1 makeup class, 1 presentation on foundation garments, 1 general purpose presentation on conflict resolution, 1 TS focused class on being at one with your dual self and a seminar on workplace diversity. I wanted to attend other sessions but you can't do everything and there were other things which needed to be done.