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[Sirena Attends the Fair — FanFair 2014](#)

[Sirena Rivera](#) | Nov 10, 2014



I'm sure that most of us in the transgender coalition have heard of Fantasia Fair, which happened this year from October 19th through October 26th. For the one or two of you who haven't, it is the grandparent of all other transgender-related conferences that exist today. Fantasia Fair (also known as FanFair or FF) has been around since 1975, and occurs every October in Provincetown, Massachusetts, one of the most trans-friendly towns in the United States, if not the world. For me, it's an added treat that it is on Cape Cod, one of my favorite places to go on vacation.

I barely recall my first time attending FanFair — if you define "attending" by road-tripping from Waltham, MA, after going to a Tiffany Club meeting. Sometime in 1991, back when I was living in New England some friends and I jumped in a member's Jeep, and drove to P-Town. I really don't remember much except walking around and attending either a drag show in one of the venues or going to the Saturday Gala Banquet (which is part of the festivities), but we eventually crashed in a room at the Boatslip Hotel. It's a good thing I brought a change of clothing and some makeup. Ironically, Provincetown was the first time I was clocked as a man, or at least that someone yelled it out a car window as we were walking down Commercial Street (the main drag — pun intended — in town). We only spent one night there, but it was enough for me (at least, at the time.).

Else and I have been to two full Fairs in total, first in 2012, and again this year. We were fortunate to receive a couple's scholarship back in 2012, which includes coverage of all conference expenses, as well as accommodations (we had use of a wonderful condominium on Commercial Street — complete with an unobstructed view of Cape Cod Bay). We also met Karen J., who was our roommate in 2012. We struck up a friendship and we roommates again this year. Alas, this time, we had to pay for our own condo. It was well worth it.

Back to FanFair: given that it's been around since 1975, we celebrated its 40th (Ruby) Anniversary, which will have added significance later in my writing.

The week-long event is actually "part conference, part social gathering." Fantasia Fair bills itself as being different from your usual "meeting in a hotel" type of conference or convention. What is unique about FanFair is that one has full access to the whole of Provincetown. It is a "full immersion" experience. And given that it is in a queer-friendly atmosphere (believe me, they've seen it all in P-Town), once can be in their preferred gender presentation for as much or as little as they'd like. The only people who'd bat an eye would be the tourists who are completely unclear on the concept of Provincetown, Massachusetts. Even so, it's probably one of the safest places on Earth to be one's self.

The Fair offers workshops, activities and events throughout the week. In the mornings, there are workshops covering all sorts of topics, whether one is a crossdresser, transsexual or somewhere in between. They cover subjects such as appearance, activism, relationships, and gender theory. Couples of many combinations will find groups and opportunities to meet like-minded souls. One can learn from professionals and peers about the ups and downs of being with a transgender partner.

In the midst of workshops, meals are provided at restaurants throughout the town, which gives attendees a chance to mingle with each other and the public. Every morning, there are kaffeeklatsches for both newcomers and for non-trans spouses.

There are also keynote speeches almost every afternoon given by luminaries in the transgender coalition (including allies). On Tuesday and Saturday evenings, there are opportunities for dressing to the nines at two different award banquets. And, of course, there are a few other opportunities to glam it up (or down) on Wednesday during the Fashion Show (newcomers are encouraged to participate) and the Fantasia Fair Follies talent show (see previous encouragement).

The Fair runs from Sunday evening (starting with an informal mixer) and ends the following Sunday (with a brunch and subsequent service at the local Unitarian Universalist meetinghouse).

We got to Provincetown this year late Saturday night, before the Fair started. We rented a lovely condo unit on Bradford Street, which is right behind, Commercial Street and not as congested. We shared space again with Karen J. And every time I come to P-Town, I never want to leave. I wish I was able to find some way to establish and maintain a viable medical practice, but in contrast to the hustle and bustle of the tourist season on the Cape, it gets quite desolate in the winter. In fact, the year-round population of Provincetown is shy of 3,000 people. For a suburban girl like me, that's a pretty tiny village.

We were hoping to have a day to ourselves once Sunday morning came around, if only to go on a whale watch. Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate with us, and the watch was canceled, so we ended up doing some window-shopping in town. After a quick nap, I got fagged-up and we went to the mixer.

Over the course of the week, we did the usual events. For the most part, I was dressed "Cape Cod Casual." One reason is that my usual goal is to blend into a crowd. Yes, even in girl-mode, I'm wearing jeans and L.L. Bean duck boots. I know how to look and dress like a New Englander in October. I would just feel awkward for me walking around P-Town in a skirt or dress. I still did when it was banquet time, though, and yes I got sparkly on Saturday night, thanks to some help from a local consignment shop.

I mentioned that it was Fantasia Fair's Ruby Anniversary, which inspired a *Wizard of Oz* theme for Tuesday night's awards banquet. There were many Dorotheas, Wicked Witches, Glindas and a few scarecrows and tin men (and women). I went with simple color themes with my red ("ruby") flats, along with gold and emerald metallic eyeshadow.

Else and I attended the week's couples' sessions, run by Maureen Osborne, Ph.D., and Carole MacKenzie, LCSW. The sessions alone were worth the cost of FanFair for us. Else is quite accepting of my being dual-gender, but she still has her own struggles, as do I. Being in these groups helps us focus on what is important to us and our relationship. We've also bonded with many other couples in similar situations. I gather those couples they'll be friends for life.

I also had the opportunity to run my first-ever gender-related workshop this year. The topic was on the joys and challenges in being dual-gender, or as we call it on Helen Boyd's Internet board, "walking the Middle-Path." It tried to be as TED-talkish as I could, given that one of my pet peeves is reading off slides and following a strict script. I had my script, but I often get semi-improvisational and start riffing a bit from my own words. Apparently, it was well-received and a welcome to several of the attendees, so much so that I was inspired to submit proposals to at least two other conferences. I will be presenting my workshop at First Event 2015, in January in Waltham, MA. I am waiting on proposals from Transgender Lives, in Farmington, CT, as well as Keystone Conference in Harrisburg, PA. It looks like it played well in Peoria...I mean Provincetown.

(As an aside, Friday was one of those "awkward" days when I walked around town looking business-like in my black dress and gray cardigan. I would not have time to change clothes amidst the activities. I also had to be ready for my 1 p.m. makeover at Klymaxx Unlimited, a little shop run by our wonderful ally, Hera Navassardian.)

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I call Fantasia Fair my "New England *Brigadoon*." Yes, it comes around more frequently and lasts longer than the fabled village in the Broadway musical, but you get the gist. Fantasia Fair has a special magic for me. While I am able to present femme at home, not even a friendly place like New Hope has that level of protection and acceptance that Provincetown offers. I'm also very biased as I lived in New England for a period of time and came to fall in love with it. I would love to move back there someday and not just because it would be easier to get to the Cape or to Martha's Vineyard.

One is truly welcome, accepted and liberated at Fantasia Fair, and while, admittedly, it is on the more costly side compared to other transgender events, one needs to take into account the fact that there is a wide range of activities, as well as the fact that most meals are covered. And the food is wonderful, which is consistent with the whole experience. Else and I have met kindred souls and friends for life, we get some time to ourselves, as well as access to a pretty neat little town. And if the cost is too much, there are opportunities to apply for scholarships. There are also options to attend for half a week, if a week is simply too much.

We don't plan on going back for at least another two years, as we have already made plans for other trips which we've put off for various reasons. Maybe, though, I can come up with another workshop proposal and sneak in a day or two either next year and/or in 2016.

Fantasia Fair is a liberating and glorious experience, and I know I'm a better woman because of it.

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About the Author ([Author Profile](#))

I am a male-to-female transgender/dual-gender person, who has spent life oscillating between gender poles. I am a physician by profession. My interests include martial arts, 80s alternative and 70s funk music, hair and fashion, TLBG activism, and being an all-around geek-girl. I am happily married to my lovely spouse, Else Adler, and we are active members of Delaware Renaissance.

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