

## For Generation Women: *Throwing Caution to the Wind* - by Josephine Inkpin

Today, I reflect with wonder. How did I ever throw caution to the wind? How, as a supposedly male priest, did I ever commit the apparently terrible sin of revealing that I am a woman?! Outwardly I was seemingly a very good boy. As a child however, when I thought all was quiet, I'd steal into my parents' room and choose some clothes from my mother's wonderful closet. I'd sit at her dressing table and pick from her make-up, perfume, necklaces and other delights. I'd look in the mirror and see myself anew - truly alive - and I'd get up and dance: dance without care or consequence, utterly without caution...

Back then I never thought about convention, nor consequence. How could I? To do so is to be paralysed by fear. That's what I came to adopt. Children learn fear: that gift of adults, 'grown-ups'. No wonder Jesus said we need to be like a little child to enter the realm of divinity. A little child knows no fear. A child learns fear. My little child was simply herself. For, at such moments, I lived out of my inner depths, from that place of deepest love. And when I still enter that place of love, and live out of that love, I always discover my true reflection. I delight, and I dance. For that child *did* eventually become a woman, and now an ageing woman. But, at whatever age we are, we are only truly the women we can be when we embrace that child of love.

As a priest, let me make one biblical reference. For being a transgender woman is a bit like being Eve. Eve: you know, that archetypal foremother who, so the patriarchal tradition says, transitioned out of the rib of A'dam. It helps to remember that, in Hebrew, rather than binary thinking, A'dam simply means earth creature, not a gendered man. And the name Eve simply means life, not woman as such, and life, comes through trespass, sinning against the 'adults', as the young child in me knew. Don't eat the apple, they say: *you* are not Snow White. Don't put on those shoes and dress: *you* are not Cinderella; *you* can't go to the ball. Stay in your place. Stay in the ashes. Stay in the Garden of Eden, where it's safe.

My wife knew who I was, very early in our marriage. Finding lingerie that was not hers in our bedroom was one giveaway. Significantly, she assumed it was related to me, not to a rival lover. Over the years I tried to hide myself from others, she could also see it was slowly killing me. I grew more ill-at-ease and desperate, especially after coming to Australia. It felt like being in a Dr Who episode, with threatening angels behind me, walls closing in, and a dead end ahead. Yet how to get out? Australia for one thing is so much more religiously conservative than England. Also, as Dr Julia Baird once said to me, being a Minister of Religion has aspects of being 'a kept woman'. As my wife is also an Anglican priest, this was doubly so for our family. To come out, and to reveal

ourselves in a same gender relationship, risked loss of *both* our jobs, our house, our income, our careers and livelihoods, and an unknown number of relationships, as well as the questioning of our lives, marriage, life purposes and sanity.

When the walls completely crashed, I rang a help line and the young counsellor said 'I think you are looking at this too bleakly. Aren't there people in your church who would be supportive?' 'Oh yes', I admitted, 'but you don't know churches. I know that they can be quite brutal as well as beautiful.' We were both right. When I came out publicly, there was national and local media attention, as well as Christian response and scrutiny. It didn't help that I came out publicly just before that horrendous marriage postal survey. Some people later alleged I did so for the cause of marriage equality – as if! Subsequently, as queer folk know to our cost, it has been a rollercoaster of emotions through continuing political and cultural wars. I could see that coming and that, as a public religious figure, I was right in the middle of the ridiculous 'God versus the queers' nonsense. Almost ten years on, I sometimes therefore find it unfair that the great Greek hero Hercules only had to complete seven years of labours – but then I guess Hercules was only male and divine, and I, fortunately, am a woman, and therefore capable of much more!

When I first told a bishop that I was a woman, he essentially fell off his chair. When I walked into a national conference of Christian university lecturers, after coming out, some were transfixed, as if, even in the face of manifest embodiment, they still could not acknowledge that women like me exist: in full biological, not hypothetical, form! I've been ostracised by some, ridiculed, and abused – in various ways. But I have also been so welcomed, so loved, so empowered by so many. I remember sharing my truth with staff and students at the Brisbane seminary in which I taught. At the end, almost every single woman came up and greeted me with huge warm embraces. It was extraordinary. I was overcome. The men were also generally supportive, but took a little longer to respond quite as warmly – maybe they thought that if they came too close they might catch something!

There are consequences attached to eating life's apple, and putting on our dancing shoes. Fear keeps us perpetually self-sacrificing, lest we are thrown out of the garden. But, perfect love *does* cast out fear, and there *is* life beyond the garden: life in all its fullness. I continue to be inspired and encouraged by others who have lived out of love not fear. For, as great women of all generations have always taught us, if we honour our *own* child of love, none of us stands alone. And as *we* cast off fear and throw caution to the wind, so we too, in our turn, pass on such courageous life to others. So bring me an apple and some dancing shoes. At any age, I *will* go to the ball.