

Kate's Talk for East Coast Trans Pride 08, Northampton MA

written to be read by Bet Power

Hello. What a wonderful day this is! Our family has come together and we are showing the world who we are. This is an historic moment for trannies of all stripes everywhere. Fucking YAY FOR US!

I wish it was me saying these words in person. I've got some surgery coming up, which should make my life a whole lot easier to live than it is right now. It's major surgery, but it's not dangerous surgery. There's no cause for worry. So, as to being here with you today: my heart says yes, and my body says, nope, can't do that right now. But lucky you! The charming, handsome Bet Power has loaned me his mouth for a few moments so that I could speak with you.

Is Bet blushing yet?

Bet and I are of a generation. We never envisioned the possibility of a day like this, not twenty-some-odd years ago we didn't. I'm sure Bet is conveying with his voice just how much awe I'm feeling, and just how much love that I have for each and every one of you. I'm proud to be an elder among elders here today, if only in my words.

What I'm really sorry about is that you can't see just how gosh-darned cute I am. If I were here right now, I'd be wearing a darling white hippie chick dress. VERY short, with electric blue fishnet stockings and perfect white pumps.

Is Bet blushing yet?

The first time in my life I thought I had a shot at being pretty was week two of what they called a "real life test." Do they still call it that? When the docs give you a year to see if you can really live in the gender you wanna live in? This was twenty three years ago. Some of you weren't even born yet, am I right?

It was early morning. I was leaving for work—dressed to the nines, of course, in stunning corporate drag: tailored skirt, white blouse, pantyhose and heels. Taking a deep breath, I opened the front door of the apartment building— and found myself standing face to face with two workmen who were just about to ring the doorbell. They seemed as startled as I.

I braced myself for the laughter, the cruel remarks. I wondered if I could run fast in the goddamned heels I was wearing. I felt like a deer on the highway, caught in the headlights of some huge SUV that wasn't gonna stop until I lay bloody and mangled in the road. The older of the two guys finally collects himself and speaks first.

"Good morning, gorgeous," he says.

My jaw dropped. Really, I was standing there with my mouth hanging open. He thought I was gorgeous. I'd lived my whole life to hear someone say something like that. Oh, wow! For the first few years of my transition from male to female, I lived for moments like that. They were few and far between, but now--22 years later, I get called pretty a lot, and that makes me happy.

Is Bet blushing yet?

Pretty makes me happy, but pretty has never given me any lasting peace. If I were in a beauty pageant, and they asked me,

"Miss New Jersey (that's me, a Jersey girl), how would you dedicate your reign as queen for a year?"

"I'd dedicate my reign to world peace," is what I'd answer—just like all those other girls. Hippie dippie me. I just want some fucking peace in the world. I just want some fucking peace in my life. I don't get much of it, but I am working hard at making peace happen in our little corner of the world.

Like when I realized that my insistence on being called "a woman" was creating discord in the lesbian and feminist communities, I managed to say oh fuck it then -- so I'm not a woman. But damnit, I'm still cute!

That was my second gender change, the one from woman to neither man/nor woman. That's when I realized that my gender wasn't ever gonna stop changing. That's when I realized I could no longer rely on my gender expression alone to give me peace. I had to find peace in change itself. Whoop-dee-do! There's a life task for ya, cuz we all know how peaceful change is, right?

I wanna share something important with you now. The only way to make real progress on a task you've got in your life—whether that task is to change the face of tranny politics, or simply to be pretty or handsome, or both—the only way you're gonna accomplish that task is with the support of your family, and your tribe.

Who's your family? Trannies just like you. You do get to hang out with folks who are just like you. Not exclusively—that isn't good for you anyone—but sure, I love being with people who think and act like I do. That's my family. You're not all my family, but each and every one of you is a member of my tribe.

My tribe is made up of all the families who are doing the hard work to become the kind of kind people they've always wanted to be. My tribe is made up of families who are doing the hard work to discover and practice the true nature of their desire. My tribe is made up of families who are fighting for equity within the oppressive systems of not only gender and sexuality, but also class, and race, and age. Members of my tribe seek equity in religion, citizenship, looks, education and ability.

Members of my tribe don't stop working until each and every one of us is free. And that's why we're here today—to celebrate the strides we've made toward freedom of gender and sexuality.

This is a day to be proud of all our political and social accomplishments. Every law that's passed, every positive piece of artwork that's made -- it all means a better life for folks like us. So, yes, let's be proud of strides made toward political and social equity.

But please—let's not accept as a gain any step toward transgender political or social equity that depends on leaving anyone else out in the cold.

And please, let's continue to be proud of our desire, our sexiness, and our delight in the life we make for ourselves when we mess with our genders. Sexy is a BIG part of who we are, so please let's keep all our Trans Pride days sexy and delightful.

In closing, I wish you a lovely day here in Northampton with family and tribe. I want to thank Bet Power for loaning me his mouth to say all this to you. Don't you think Bet is an amazing guy? Dontcha think Bet is super handsome and sexy? I sure do, and I'm sure Bet is blushing now. Go have a lovely day. Kiss, kiss.