

Family, friends, colleagues, invited guests, fellow explorers

I stand here tonight, excited, humbled, proud, moved beyond words, as we all witness this profoundly moving, beautiful, creative, historic event. The opening tonight of Assume Nothing.

I stand here would like to take a moment to remember all who are not here tonight. All those unable to be with us for family, sickness and other planet location reasons.

For those who can be here with us because they are no longer with us. For me I want to remember my parents Ruth and Doug Laird.

I stand here wearing this jacket and want to remember and honor its two previous owners. This Jacket was Heather MacAllisters, a beautiful, flamboyant, trans, queer, social justice, fat activist from North America. Heather established the burlesque troupe for large women. I first met Heather in 2001, our time together was short, she was one of those exploding stars that reigned star dust, laughter, fun and hope. We met again in 2006 a few short months before her death from ovarian cancer in February 2007. The jacket passed to my herm buddy, mate, mentor, fellow activist educator Max Beck. One of the original hermaphrodites speak crew, it was with and through and by Max and 5 other herms I learned to smile my hermaphroditic reality, to walk gently on the planet and sing the songs of change.

Max died also from cancer on the 12 of January this year. He knew about this exhibition, that I would speak at it. I know he would have been so proud of what has been done what has been achieved here.

My world intersected with Rebecca Swans in 1997, I had just started the intersex trust, had just emerged as the first visible out intersex person in Aotearoa, I was in my early 40's, I had only the year before met for the first time other people like myself, I was steeping out of away from the paralyzing fear, shame, silence that had gripped me since my birth in 1953.

I had NO idea that in agreeing to work with Rebecca my life, my relationship with myself, my own disenfranchised body was about to change for ever. The deep and complex work was done the day we spent doing the photographs. I used to joke I was a head that towed around a body, that day I started the journey to discover, own, celebrate this unique, special body I was blessed with at birth. I started to shed the layers of fear, of grief of shame that hung over it.

I could talk for hours about the remarkable qualities and gifts of this extraordinarily talented women. Instead I will say simply thank you Rebecca Swan for the gift you gave me and have given the world. There are a few people who walk this planet as shape changes; you are in my eyes our equivalent of Ed Hilary. A pioneer, an inspirational leader, some one with ethics, who treats those you work with, with dignity, respect and love.

When Assume Nothing was finally published and launched I thought you had succeeded in climbing your Everest. Indeed you had. The first to get to the top of the mountain. But like Ed there has been other adventures other expeditions other heroic firsts.

It is simply fitting that along should come Kirsty MacDonald film maker, with another medium that would enable this beautiful two dimensional word inside the beautifully crafted covers of assume nothing to explode.

For you the quiet behind the camera person to be exposed, to have your narrative captured and celebrated. I was the book subject who by chance, got the opportunity to work beside you as Kirsty made Black and White. A documentary, that has gone on to its own international acclaim and taken Assume Nothing out of bookshops and coffee tables into theatres all over the world.

I had the astonishing privilege of being in Austin Texas for the American premier, of being at a book launch in a small women's bookshop and seeing the shop unable to fit all the people who had traveled from across state and beyond.

The book does, what I know it always could. Provide a mirror, a reflection an echo of gender difference, in a world that up until your book was a void.

This book, this exhibition, has, will change and transform lives.

For not only does it show your talents as the incredible photographer you are, you had a vision, a capacity to enable us to tell our stories.

You captured, worked beside us to enable these stories, to find the page in authentic, powerful celebrations. In ways that honor, that celebrate, that inspire.

I love the fact that its been the Dowse that has given you a home to hold this gift.

I love the fact that kirsty has been able to complete her filmic narration, and expansion of the lives of those in the book and beyond.

That we stand here with the Human Rights Commission and their ground breaking transgender enquiry report. Much has changed in the 12 years since we took the original photographs – Much still needs to change. The Report provides a path forward.

In 2001 I was in America immediately after 9/11 it was a crazy, frightening time. I had to make sense of what I saw, and felt. I came to see the world faces two potential planet ending realities, one is to do with pollution and sustainability – that issue finally seems to be growing legs and acceptance.

The second issue is how we deal with difference on the planet. This remarkable exhibition, these photographs, these stories give a glimpse that given half a chance humans can dance with, celebrate, respect difference. My dream and hope this is simply the start of something Tsunami like in planetary significance – Finally I would like to say thank you, thanks to my family my supporters, thanks for the love the images of possibility and hope.

Mani