

Goodbye Furry: Sandra Faase

I've always liked dress ups. I went to work with my cat ears on. It gave people at work something to brighten their day. "What's up, pussycat?", "Would you like a bowl of milk?" – that and much more said in good humour. People have their quirks. But I wanted more.

I scouted the internet. I found a nice black cat costume. Furry, but not too thick. Fitted, but not too restrictive. It came with paw gloves and a cat cap with ears and whiskers. I was so excited when I tried it on. It fitted purr-fectly!

It was a bitterly cold winter and after a month or so of wearing the cat ears everywhere and wearing the cat costume at home, I thought I'd give it a public outing. People on the bus smiled at me politely but avoided eye contact and sitting next to me.

Kids wanted to sit near me and touch my fur. I didn't mind and even did the odd 'meow' to amuse them. But their parents bundled them away.

My work colleagues chuckled when I first walked in full costume. They thought it would be a one off. But I liked the attention. I now had three cat costumes on rotation. It gets hot under that polyester fur and I was already planning a cat costume for the warmer months.

One day, at a meeting, I was presenting some charts on how we could increase productivity, and one of my colleagues said: "Look, I can't take you seriously, Beatrice. Can you just leave the cat costume at home and dress normally. I'm sure I'm not the only one thinking this."

The others swivelled nervously in their chairs. It took me a while to regain my composure, but I finished my presentation and briskly left the meeting.

HR was called. I told them it was my right to dress as a cat: it did not affect my job. I was still one of the leading team members. There were many other meetings. I wore the costume defiantly. In fact, I'd upped the look with thick cat eye eyeliner.

I retained a lawyer who told me I was identifying as a furry and had suffered discrimination causing pain, suffering and the questioning of my ability to carry out my role. I got a big payout. I ditched the costume and lived happily ever after.