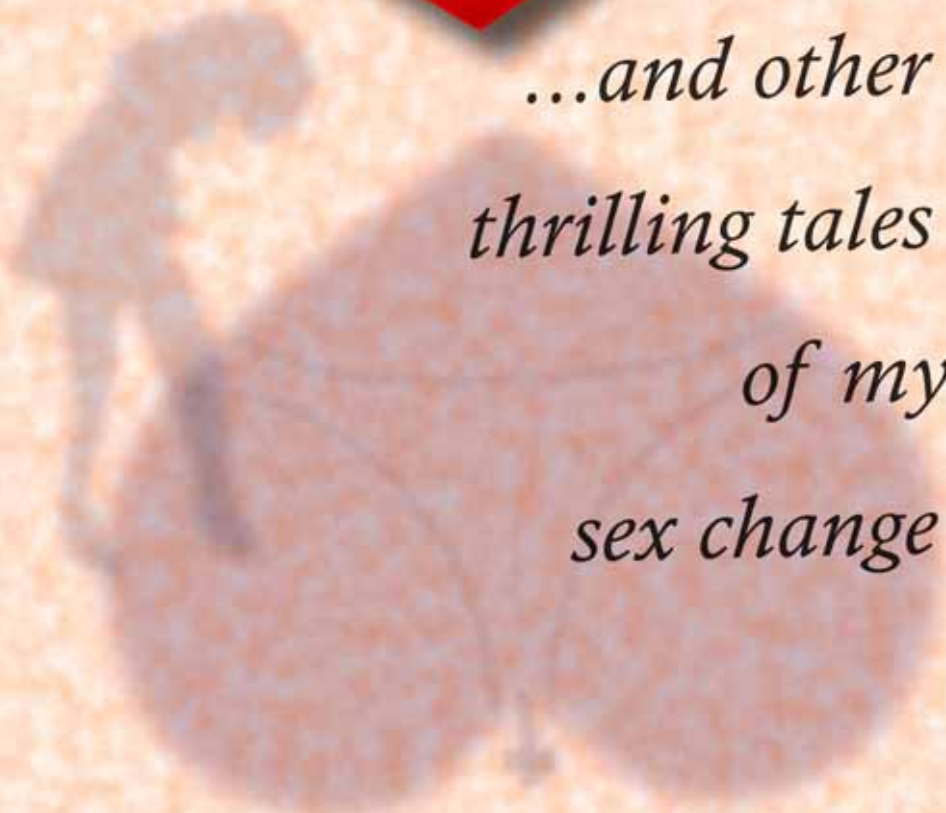




Dirty Panties



*...and other
thrilling tales
of my
sex change*

...by Lannie Rose



Dirty Panties

...and other thrilling

tales

of my sex change

...by Lannie Rose



To my evil twin brother, Eddy

Many of the pieces in this volume previous appeared, in slightly different form, in the online magazine Transgender Forum (www.tgforum.com).

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DIRTY PANTIES AND OTHER THRILLING TALES OF MY SEX CHANGE.
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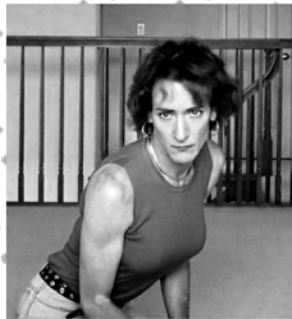
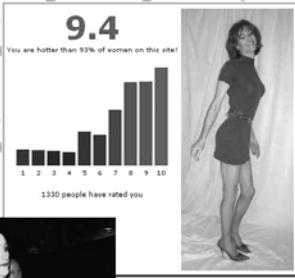
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Where it all began—the Psycho Vince outfit



Jamie Faye Fenton and Lannie Rose at Southern Comfort 2001



Lannie Rose



Before



After



↑
The family. I'm in the center.

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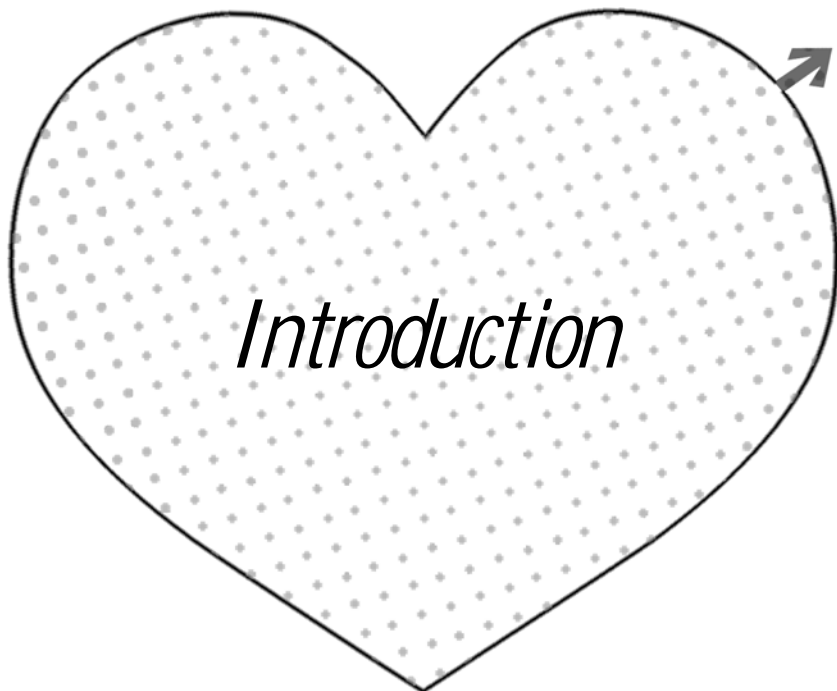
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Do you know about the great gender divide over clean underwear? I didn't either, until I changed my sex! When I stopped living as a man and began living as a woman, I learned about dirty panties and many other remarkable things, such as:

- ▶ What goes on inside the women's locker room.
- ▶ I could spend two hundred dollars on a single pair of blue jeans and a thousand dollars on cosmetics, and thoroughly enjoy the experiences.
- ▶ Guys can be jerks but they can also be charming.
- ▶ A rose by another name does NOT smell as sweet, Shakespeare notwithstanding.
- ▶ I wish I were gay.
- ▶ Monkey Brains can get their feelings hurt.

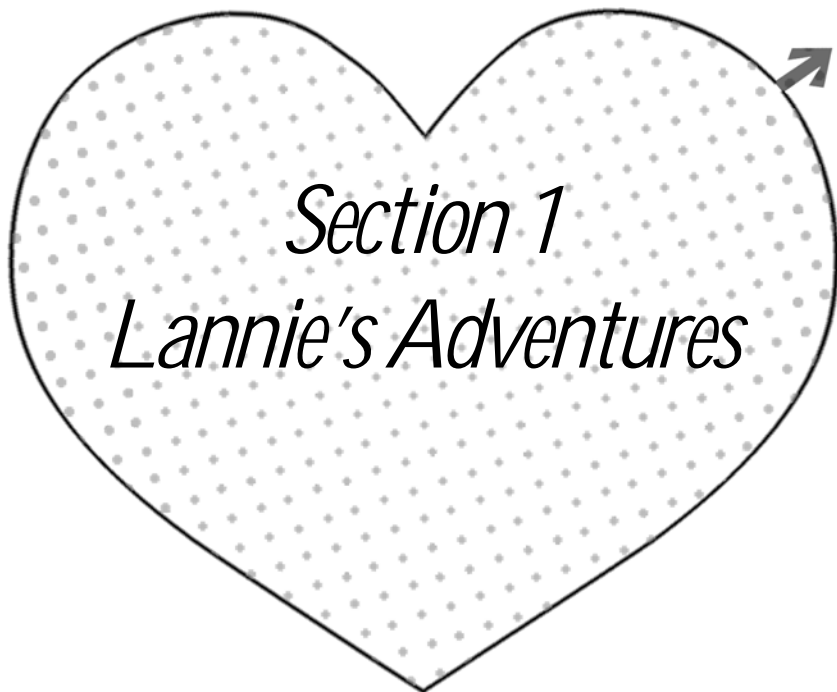


- ▶ What makes a woman a woman and a man a man (hint: testosterone has a lot to do with it).
- ▶ A family's love may not be all it seems.
- ▶ Sex reassignment surgery hurts! So does electrolysis.
- ▶ You truly can become anything your heart desires, as long as you are true to yourself.
- ▶ Love is like the wind.
- ▶ Sometimes, if you're lucky, life lets you have do-overs.
- ▶ I even learned to suck ... well, you'll read about THAT in the very first story!

Dirty Panties is about me, but in a larger sense, it's about the differences and similarities between women and men. I invite you to join me on my journey of discovery as I grow from manhood into womanhood. Maybe you too will learn some remarkable things along the way. I'm sure you'll have a few laughs, anyway!

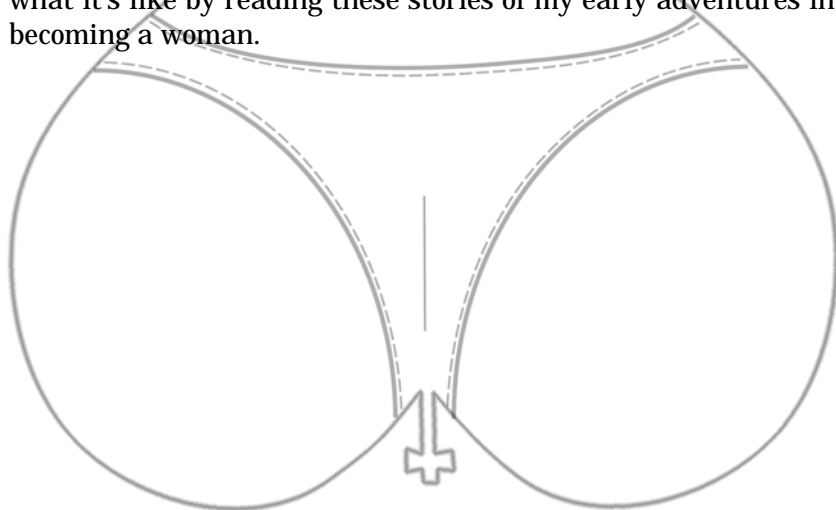
I wrote the pieces in this collection during the period I went from thinking I was just a cross-dressing man until well after my sex change surgery. Each piece stands on its own, so feel free to jump around to the parts that pique your interest. The book progresses roughly in chronological order, but some pieces are placed out of sequence to maintain a consistent theme in each section. If the opinions I express in some places seem to contradict my opinions in others, it's because I was growing, changing, and learning a lot during this period.

These events took place primarily in and around Silicon Valley (San Jose, California) and San Francisco from 2001 through 2004.



Section 1
Lannie's Adventures

What's it like for a man to go out into the world dressed as a woman? What's it like for a person who lived forty-six years as a man to suddenly begin living as a woman? You can get an idea of what it's like by reading these stories of my early adventures in becoming a woman.



Song: American Boy

(To the tune of Tom Petty's *American Girl*)

He was an American boy,
Raised on images.
He couldn't help thinking that there
Was a little more to him, deep inside.
Down the road there was a great big thrift store,
With lots of dresses and ball gowns.
Yeah, and if he had to die,
Trying he
Had one little promise he was gonna keep.
Oh, yeah. All right.
He was an American boy.

It was kind of cold that night,
She strutted alone on her balcony.
She could hear her heels click-clack,
Like Heidi Klum, walkin' on the runway!
And for one desperate moment there,
She felt whole and sexy.
God it's so painful, when somethin' that's so close,
Is still so far out of reach.
Oh, yeah. All right.
Take it easy, baby.
Make it last. (Make it last all night.)
She was an American boy.

Note: Some people interpret Tom Petty's American Girl as the story of a suicide. Petty denies this was his intention when he wrote it. Suicide, tragically, is the fate of many transgender people who often find little understanding and acceptance in the world around them.

Psycho Vince Deflowers Lannie Rose

A brunette with eye-catching good looks, tall and thin like a model, walks quickly down the aisle of a large suburban shopping mall. She is wearing a short black skirt, matching jacket with faux-leopard trim at the hems, black stockings, and black pumps with low heels — could she be a Macy's saleslady hurrying back from a break? An observer might notice the woman furtively glancing at her own reflection in the glass of the storefront windows, as if uncertain about her appearance. Closer inspection would reveal a surprise. The woman's face has masculine features and the brunette bob is a cheap wig. Why, she's not a

woman, she's a man! She is, in fact, a middle-aged man cross-dressed as a woman. I know this because she is me, Lannie Rose.

I had been cross-dressing as a woman for quite some time. (Actually, a lot more was going on for me than just cross-dressing, but I wouldn't figure that out until some months later.) For years I had confined my cross-dressing activities to the privacy of my own home. I eventually decided I had gotten good enough at my clothes and makeup to venture out in public without scaring the horses or making small children cry. I was not particularly pretty or feminine, at least not up close, because I was not yet on hormones and such. My six foot one inch height also worked against me. But I had discovered if I dressed conservatively, wore low heels, and kept to myself, few people would notice me at all. Fewer still would "read" me, that is, realize I was actually a man.

I was surprised and delighted to find Macy's and JCPenney were happy to let me come in and try on all the pretty outfits. I rapidly became addicted to shopping. Nearly every weekend found me irresistibly drawn out to the stores. I would rotate between four or five malls, hoping to avoid becoming known as the local transvestite.

How I enjoyed shopping! I finally had the chance to model some of those lovely cocktail dresses that would look so nice at a company Christmas party. (Ooh, I was so tempted to go to my company's holiday party in my femme persona. That would be a grand way to lose my job, wouldn't it?) I even bought some things from time to time, although dealing with the checkout people was scary, especially if they were pretty, young women. But in fact they were always very kind to me, and never said anything to embarrass me.

That particular Saturday, I went to a mall I had never been to before. It was in Fremont, a bit of a distance from my usual stomping grounds. The midday crowd at the mall was surprisingly thin. I tried on a few things in one store, but didn't find anything I liked. I headed toward the other end of the mall, periodically catching my reflection in storefront windows to enjoy

how cute I looked, and to check surreptitiously whether I was attracting any unwanted attention. Well, I should have been looking straight ahead, because a fellow walked right up and started talking to me. He was almost as tall as me, lanky, and appeared to be in his mid-thirties. He wore his curly, blonde hair rather short and had probably not bothered to comb it when he skipped shaving that morning. He was clad in jeans and a T-shirt, your basic Saturday casual attire. A weak chin and a very nervous attitude detracted from his otherwise good looks.

"Excuse me, do you know where I can find a decent restaurant?" he asked, without making direct eye contact.

"No!" I snapped as I tried to make my way briskly past him.

"So are you just out shopping?" he persisted.

"Yes."

"Would you like to have lunch or maybe a drink?"

"No."

"So I guess you just want to be left alone?"

"Yes!" While he stood there a little bit stunned by the bluntness of my reply, I managed to get past him and flee into the sanctuary of a nearby Sears store.

Using the oldest dodge in the book, I located the women's restroom and went in. I stayed a little longer than necessary. As I left the restroom area, I carefully scouted my environs. The pesky guy was nowhere to be seen. To further obscure my trail, I took the escalator down to the ground floor, where I conveniently found myself in the women's clothing department. I looked around and saw neither the guy nor any clothes that appealed to me.

As I headed back out into the mall, I was startled to find the guy suddenly walking in lock step next to me. He had cleverly staked out the women's clothing department, figuring I would wind up there.

"Oh, here's my stalker again!" I said brightly to him.

This seemed to take him aback, as he apparently hadn't realized he was stalking me. After a moment he regained what little composure he had ever had. In a low, confidential voice, he

nervously recited a line he had obviously rehearsed carefully. It turned out to be exactly the right thing to say: "I'm sorry if I'm bothering you, and I'll go away if you want. But I just wanted to tell you I like cross-dressing too."

His admission took me by surprise, but, after a moment's consideration, I decided to run with it. After all, I had been cross-dressing alone for a long time, and I had a strong desire to share the experience with another person. Besides, I had fantasized about being with a man. Who knew where this might lead? It was important to me, too, that I now knew he knew I was a cross-dresser, so there would be no awkward and possibly dangerous "Crying Game" moments. (Men sometimes turn violent if they discover a girl's secret in an intimate moment. In the movie, "The Crying Game," the situation did not end in violence, but it wasn't pleasant.)

"Walk with me!" I commanded and set off down the mall. He froze for a startled second, then quickly caught up and walked beside me. I began firing incisive questions at him, starting with, "So, do you think I'm cute?"

"If I didn't," he replied, "I never would have approached you!"

After a bit I was satisfied he probably wasn't a psycho. In retrospect, I guess asking him, "Are you a psycho?" and getting "No" for an answer probably isn't a very reliable test, but it worked for me at the time. I decided to let him buy me a drink.

The still nameless guy said there was a nice restaurant with a good bar in the mall, so we went there. It was a Red Robin hamburger joint, proving the fellow's standards weren't particularly high. (So much for his thinking I was cute!) The bar was wide open, not the dim-lights-and-private-booths kind of place I was hoping for, but I figured, "In for a dime, in for a dollar." I gamely hoisted my tight little butt onto a tall bar stool at a tiny, round table, crossed my long legs, and checked that my slip wasn't showing beyond the leopard-trimmed hem of my short skirt. My date ordered us a couple of gin and tonics, and he paid. Whee! Boy buys Lannie Rose a drink, a VLE (virgin life experience) for me!

We talked. Actually, for the most part I asked and he answered. I got his name, Vince, and his story. He was in town from Sacramento for Cisco administrator training, computer stuff. He was stuck here over the weekend and had decided to go shopping to kill time. His own cross-dressing, he told me, was limited to pantyhose and stockings —nothing, really, as far as I was concerned. Transgender girls (T-girls) excited him even though his sexual preference was basically straight. He was not married, nor had he ever been. He had trolled gay and transvestite bars trying to pick up T-girls, but without positive results. The girls usually turned out to be pros, and he was not into prostitutes. He couldn't believe his good luck in spotting me, a T-girl, all alone, loose in the world on that lonely Saturday morning in that sterile mall. No matter how painful it was — and I could tell it was very painful indeed — he just had to force himself to overcome his shyness and introduce himself to me.

“Why don't we buy a bottle and continue the party at my hotel room?” he finally asked, displaying an otherwise unrevealed boldness.

I looked him in the eye and asked, “Vince, do you have any weapons in your hotel room?”

“Of course not!” he said, startled.

“I just want to make sure you're not a psycho,” I explained. “OK, let's do it.”

As we entered the mall parking lot, he asked me where my car was. “You're driving me!” I announced, and we headed for his car. More VLEs: Boy opens car door for Lannie, Lannie rides in boy's car! I liked it.

As soon as we sat down on the car's front seat, Vince put his hand on my knee. I asked him, “Vince, if I was a GG (genetic girl), would you be so forward?” Sheepishly he shook his head and removed his hand.

We stopped at a liquor store. Vince ran in and bought a bottle. Then we headed to a nearby Embassy Suites where he was staying. His suite was just a smallish hotel room with a kitchenette and a couch. I quickly scanned the room. No weapons in

sight. Books, briefcase, even a nametag revealing his full name and address lay in plain site. *This will be OK*, I reassured myself.

It was more than OK. I tortured poor Vince by making him chat with me for two hours. We discussed all sorts of transgender issues that were weighing heavily on both our minds. The quality of the conversation crept steadily downward along with the level of gin in the bottle. Several times poor Vince made advances, trying to peep down my bosom and the like, but I cautioned him to treat me like a lady. "Don't go psycho on me, Vince!" I kept warning him.

I did allow Vince to slowly make some progress. This was fun! Eventually I let him get to first base, which is breast fondling over the clothes, as I learned the bases.

"Does that feel good?" he asked.

"It doesn't feel like anything," I told him, "because they're fake." *Not too bright, my dear Vince!*

Finally I screwed up my courage and decided it was time to put up or shut up. I handed Vince my glass and asked him to mix me another drink. I went to the powder room where I disposed of a good deal of tonic and fixed my makeup. When I returned to the main room, I eagerly accepted the drink Vince handed me. Then I gently pushed him down on the couch and sauntered across the room, strutting my long, shapely legs, and wiggling my sexy ass. "Is this what you want to see, Vince?" I teased.

Slowly I unbuttoned my jacket and took it off. There was really not much to see because I was wearing full-coverage, long-line bra, but Vince seemed appreciative. I slipped off my short black skirt. Again not much to see, just a black rayon half-slip, but Vince was in heaven. I walked over to him, leaned over, and gave him a gentle kiss on the lips. He wanted tongue, but I was too refined for that! Not too refined, however, to kneel on the floor in front of him, reach up, stroke his face, and give him more kisses. I massaged his neck and chest, unbuttoned his shirt, and removed it. I caressed his chest and kissed his little man-nipples. Vince was as happy as a kid on Christmas morning. I worked my way down, stroking his inner thighs, and firmly touched his

crotch area. Oh, yes, proof positive, Vince was really enjoying himself!

At that point I got up and walked away. "Are you having a good time, Vince?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, this is my fantasy come true!" he assured me.

I sashayed back and forth across the room a couple of times. "Vince," I said, "I need you to tell me how cute I look."

"Oh, you look fantastic!" he exclaimed. "I can't believe how beautiful and feminine you look. I never imagined I could meet a T-girl as beautiful as you. I am so-o-o-o lucky!" Lannie knows the right time to fish for compliments!

I returned to my former position kneeling between Vince's legs. I rubbed his naked, hairy chest and then his crotch. I undid his belt buckle and unbuttoned his jeans, but when I started to pull them off, his shoes presented a problem. Rookie mistake! I removed his shoes and socks, and then the jeans, and then the tighty whiteys.

Finally I saw the beast. There it laid, halfway engorged. It was, maybe, an inch longer than my own and twice as fat. I suddenly realized how generous my old girlfriends had been when commenting on my equipment!

I touched the thing with both of my hands. I cradled and caressed it like I would a small, furry animal. It responded in a friendly way and began growing. It liked my gentle kisses. Now it was just between Lannie and the little beast. Vince was irrelevant.

I was there. The beast was rearing its ugly head in attack position. It was time.

I kissed the little critter. I sucked just the tip between my lips. It was soft and spongy. I sucked it quickly, like trying to pull a milkshake through a McDonald's straw. I let it pop back out of my mouth. I was now literally a cocksucker. I took it into my mouth again, and this time I sucked deep down the shaft until the head hit the back of my mouth. I gagged a little; alright, I had found my limit. I sucked harder, in and out, like I'd seen in porn videos. Except this time, it was me, Lannie Rose, doing the dirty

work! Good girl! I worked it in and out, in and out, adding some kisses from time to time, caressing the ball sac, and stroking the inner thighs. I even blew gently on it, because this was, after all, a blow job. The beast was a happy little fellow. The meat-puppet attached to it, Vince, was moaning. *I could get to like this*, I thought. *In fact, I do like it!*

After ten minutes, I put my head in Vince's lap and took a break. He asked me, "So, do you like that?"

"Yes," I replied, "but when the hell are you going to come?" The liquor had worked its bad mojo, and it was not going to happen. In fact, we had killed the entire quart of gin.

"Maybe later," Vince said. "I've got an idea. Why don't I go get us another bottle, and we can party some more?"

I was suddenly hit by the realization that Vince was very drunk. He had been gulping down a couple of drinks to my every one all afternoon.

"No," I declared, "I think it's time to end this party."

Vince started to go a little bit psycho. "Let me suck you now!" "Let me get another bottle!" "Stay the night with me!" On and on ... the more bright ideas he got, the more insistent I was about leaving.

"You're becoming psycho, Vince!" I warned him a few times. He finally got the message and agreed to take me back to where my car sat in the mall parking lot. After he dropped me off by my car and I began to drive away, I saw him heading back toward the liquor store. Bad idea, Vince!

Before I left the suite, I had written down my phone number. Vince had said he would call me. Of course, being a typical guy, he never called. Boy doesn't call — another VLE for Lannie.

From this experience I learned how much fun I could have sharing my femme self with a playmate. So I put together a little Web page and began surfing the Internet to find some friends for Lannie. Friends I did indeed find, and I experienced many more VLEs, as you shall see if you keep on reading. Meanwhile, I just want to say to Psycho Vince from Sacramento: If by any chance

you are reading this, do give me a call. I know how to show you a much better time now!

Two-Hundred-Dollar Jeans

I had a couple of hours to kill at the big, fancy Westfield Valley Fair shopping mall before our regular Wednesday night transgender social. I bought a cappuccino and sat down at a little table outside Nordstrom. My feet needed a break from my slightly-too-tight, gold alligator pumps with three-inch heels. As I sipped the steamy pick-me-up, I watched people go by, studying how the women walked, dressed, and held their bags. After a while I decided I would check out the recently opened shops in the new wing of the mall.

The first shop I came to was a classy looking boutique with a sign that read, “MaxMara.” I had never heard of MaxMara

before. The store was brightly lit, open and spacious, with some intriguing, stylish clothes on display. I thought I would walk through and see what I could see, perhaps broadening my fashion palate a bit.

As a cross-dresser, it hadn't been long since the first time I shopped in the ladies' department or used a ladies' changing room. Abandoning mail order to start shopping in person for my feminine wardrobe had taken all the courage I could muster. In return I got quite a few thrills and eventually, some nice clothes that actually fit. I started at the Ross and Mervyn's level, progressing after a while to Macy's and JCPenney. I would skulk shyly, slyly around the racks, circumspectly slipping in and out of the dressing rooms in an effort to attract as little attention as possible. I had to like an item a lot before I dared brave the checkout counter. One time at JCPenney I felt I was being particularly intrepid because the checkout counter was attended by a couple of cute young ladies chattering away like magpies. I was sure they would read me, that is, they would realize I was a cross-dressed man. When I got to the counter I had to laugh to myself. They never even glanced at me. Nor did they pause in their stream of gab, which was entirely in Croatian as far as I could tell.

I was terribly intimidated by Nordstrom and, Lord help me, the little boutiques. In those places, the salespeople were bound and determined to be helpful and I could not easily avoid them. They might even speak languages other than Croatian! As I came out of the closet more and more, however, I experienced kindness and acceptance everywhere I went. My self-confidence grew and grew. Before long I was shopping the sale racks at Nordie's and enjoying the sales associates' attentions immensely. I found the more classy the place was, the nicer they treated me, which isn't surprising, is it? My fashion sense gradually improved thanks to the helpful saleswomen ... while the impact on my credit card grew as well.

As I gained self-confidence, I learned to love the little boutiques. Ann Taylor, Wet Seal, J. Crew — they're delightful! So

waltzing into MaxMara and poking through the racks was no big deal for me.

My first impression of MaxMara was the clothes were beautiful but not really my style. Besides, everything was surely far beyond my price range, and I wasn't even checking tags. I like to browse in the high-end stores to study the fashions, but I'm not an actual customer. No, ma'am, not me!

I was able to browse the entire collection in short order because it wasn't very extensive. The clothes hung on racks along all the walls, but only a couple of racks were out on the floor. The space was mostly open and airy, all white with bright lights. A big, free-standing mirror without a frame dominated the center of the floor. Scattered about were a few large black and white posters of models showing off some of the fashions — or were they color photos, and it was the fashions that were all black and white? The place absolutely sparkled with newness; perhaps the decorating was not even quite completed yet.

I was practically the only customer in the store. After a few minutes, a saleslady came over and asked me what I was looking for.

"I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to wear once the spring weather gets here," I said.

"We have lots of things," she replied. "Look over here, these white pants are very much in style this season." I soon learned this lovely, dark-haired Italian woman of about forty was the store manager, Valentina.

"I doubt if you'd have anything that would fit me anyway!" I laughed. "Your clothes probably run more to your size than mine." Valentina may have reached five feet four inches in heels; I tower at six one in stockings.

Valentina gave me a shrewd smile and replied, "Oh, I think we can fit you. These are all Italian styles cut for fashion models. Here," she continued, pulling a pair of faded blue jeans off a rack, "try these on." They were nice but plain — straight cut with small tan stitching, silver rivets, and a silver button at the waistband. There was no obvious designer label on the back (good, that's

something I don't like), just twin M's for MaxMara formed by the pocket stitching. A belt of raw leather featuring twin rows of silver rivets accented the waist.

"I bet they'll be too baggy and too short," I told her. "I'm 29," I said, my hands on my waist, "and 36," moving my hands down to my hips.

Valentina put the pants back on the rack and selected another pair. "Not a two then; a four should be about right." Don't you just love European sizes?

I was sure the experiment would be a failure because nothing ever fits me off the rack. Only at Tall Etc. have I found any pants that fit me well. But I love trying on clothes, so I was game. "OK," I smiled, and let Valentina lead me to the dressing area.

In one corner of the store, an open area held a big three-way mirror and three private, spacious changing rooms with three-way mirrors in each. Valentina put me in a room with the jeans and closed the door. "Be sure you show them to me!" she ordered.

Off came the pants I was wearing (tan wool slacks from Tall Etc., as a matter of fact) and on slid the jeans. And slid and slid and slid ... my goodness, my feet barely popped out the bottom. They were long enough! I pulled up the waist and brought the ends together to do the button. Nope, they were going to be too small. *Wait a minute ... they're coming together alright.* Could I zip them up? It took a little effort, but up came the zipper. *I'll be darned, they fit perfectly!* Snug but not constricting from the waist through the derriere, then close-fitting but not tight down my skinny legs. A smile broke out on my face. I slipped on my pumps and went out to show Valentina.

She smiled that shrewd smile again. She knows her product line and she knew the jeans would fit my figure. She knew I would be surprised. She knew she had me hooked. "Look at you!" she crowed. "You look wonderful! Have you ever had anything fit you so well before?" I had to admit I had not.

"Here," she said, handing me the matching jacket which she had already removed from the rack, "put this with it." We had to go up a couple of sizes because of my broad shoulders. "I noticed

that," Valentina confided. But we got one that fit, and it was quite an outfit.

Every time I turned around, Valentina brought me new things to try on. White linen pants. A matching jacket. A dark blue, denim halter top. A suit in a fine yellow and brown plaid. Each thing I tried on, I had to show Valentina. She would coo over me, "You look so lovely! You have the perfect build for these fashions! You're so tall and slim, I envy you." Of course, I had to parade through the store and check myself out in the big mirror, walking toward it, looking back over my shoulder as I walked away. One of the other customers even chimed in, "You're so beautiful! Are you a model?"

I knew Valentina was flattering me to rack up a sale. She probably wouldn't have been lavishing so much time and attention on me if other hot prospects had been browsing in the store. But I was pretty much it at the time. (In fact, the customer who complimented me may well have been a store shell.) But I didn't care. It felt wonderful! And if I chose to believe all those kind words for a little while, where's the harm in that?

Well into the spirit of the fashion show, I became a little bolder. "Valentina?" I asked demurely. "I was looking at that dress over there ... do you think I could try it?"

"Of course!" she grinned.

The dress was like a cloud ... pure silk, smooth and glistening, and light as a summer shower. The dark brown color was good for me, as I'm an autumn, and big white polka dots made it a party dress. A billowy skirt stopped mid-calf; buttons in front ran from hem to neckline. If a girl left the bottom few buttons undone, she could flash some leg as she walked. For symmetry, she could leave the top button or two open and show a little cleavage as well. The ethereal dress sported a collar that could be worn up for a punky, sassy look. The shoulders were square, leaving room for pads, but there were none in the dress; perfect, because my shoulders filled them out nicely. The half-sleeves came just below the elbow, so I didn't have to worry about

my long arms. A matching sash would show off a slim waist, were the wearer lucky enough to have one!

The dress felt like a little piece of heaven. It felt like wearing lingerie, all slinky and slidey. In this dress, a woman cannot walk; she automatically struts. It was classy enough to wear to a fine restaurant, yet simple and casual enough to wear to a birthday party or even the office. I loved the dress.

Back in the dressing room, I realized my fashion party had reached its pinnacle, and I should start thinking about winding down. I really did love the dress. Maybe it was time to look at some prices. Maybe I would even splurge on something. I looked. The dress's price was hidden in small print in the corner of the tag. Oh, my god, was that really the price? Is this like buying a car, where that's the sticker price and you negotiate from there? Was that in U.S. dollars or Italian lire? No, US\$ was printed on the tag. The simple silk dress was four hundred eighty-five dollars!

I caught my breath. I knew things would be expensive, but this was way beyond anything I had encountered in my limited experience. This beat Nordstrom by a long shot. (I had bought things only from Nordie's sale racks, but I'd checked prices on their regular merchandise.) Well, it turns out MaxMara is a major Italian designer label, and I was a Philistine for not knowing I was shopping in the stratosphere. I wonder if it was my ignorance that allowed me to walk in confidently with my head held high and fool the manager into thinking I was in the same class as her regular clientele.

I tried on a few more things, now checking prices as I went. I tried a blouse that was the same material and general cut as the dress I loved, but with a wide sash waist. I really didn't have anywhere to go to properly show off the dress, but I figured the blouse could go with lots of things. It was lovely and it, too, fit very well. But I wasn't wild about the wide sash or about tying it in a big bow behind my back the way Valentina said was all the rage just now. Anyway, just for fun, let's check and see what the

blouse version of a five-hundred-dollar dress fetches. Only three hundred dollars, what a bargain!

As I finally drew my fashion extravaganza to a close and changed back into my drab slacks and blouse, I debated what to do. I certainly had the sales resistance to buy nothing, and that was the wise course of action. But Valentina had been so kind and spent so much time with me and lavished so much flattery on me, I felt inclined to get something. Besides, the clothes looked great and fit superbly. I finally decided I would purchase the blue jeans that had started the whole thing off two hours earlier. I knew I would get a lot of use out of them, unlike the marvelous five-hundred-dollar dress. The jeans just happened to be the least expensive thing I had modeled — only \$185, \$200.26 with tax.

I know that a two-hundred-dollar pair of jeans is absolutely absurd, unless they are diamond encrusted. But I gladly would have paid two hundred dollars just for the opportunity to spend two hours trying on all those beautiful clothes and being treated like a wealthy celebrity. The evening had been one of the most enjoyable of my life, and I didn't mind paying the money.

An hour later I was having dinner with my girlfriends to kick off our social evening. I told them the story of the two-hundred-dollar jeans. They were aghast. Gina said, "That's funny, I was at the grocery store today debating whether I could afford to splurge on steak for dinner." She was not joking either.

"But," I told them, "the jeans came with a belt."

"Oh, then it's OK!" they all chirped sarcastically.

When I got home late that night, the light was blinking on my answering machine. I hit the message button and a familiar voice with an Italian accent greeted me. "Ciao! This is Valentina from MaxMara," the machine whirred. "I have a little problem here. The boy who rang you up tonight, it was his first night you see. It seems he forgot to charge you for the belt. Would you please give me a call about this?"

I checked the belt. There was indeed a tag on it — \$174.99. I can tell you this: I will be returning the belt.

Lannie Did a Bad, Bad Thing

Poor Lannie had no one to play with on a Sunday night. *But that won't stop me from going out, I thought. I'll just go by myself!* I put on my light blue, Heartbreak High — Ditch 'em Cum Laude Club T-shirt (two sizes too small, of course), an elegant, red pleated skirt, bare legs, and red, two-inch, strappy sandals. The outfit worked in a funky sort of way.

At six o'clock Phoebe and I headed downtown for the San Jose Afribbean Music Festival, a free festival held outdoors in the beautiful California summer weather. Phoebe was my trusted companion of many years, a 1989 Buick LeSabre I had purchased off the showroom floor. I named her Phoebe because, with her

conservative styling and dark blue color, I fancied she looked rather like an FBI car. FBI, Feebie, Phoebe, get it?

I had to park Phoebe a good distance away and hike to the festival. The evening was warm and the walk was long, so as I passed Original Joe's restaurant, I decided to pop in for a quick refreshment. Phil, the bartender, made me a wonderful martini: straight up, and you get to drink what's left in the shaker, just like a milkshake. It was Gibson, actually — the one with a pearl onion instead of an olive. Phil asked where Heartbreak High was and I told him, "We've all been there, baby!"

Fortified, I made my way to Guadalupe Park. As I neared the park, my ears picked up the beat of a great Caribbean samba band. I couldn't help but start dancing! The crowd thickened, and everyone appeared to be having a wonderful time. The festival goers were the usual San Jose jambalaya of whites, blacks, browns, and some Asians; many folks wore traditional African garb.

I walked around and perused the vendors' booths. I bought a couple of silver toe rings and a few other pieces of jewelry. I even found a nice red purse, something I had been looking for forever. Genuine Gucci (sure it was) and it only cost thirty dollars! Not only that, it went with my skirt; how could I resist?

More bands were everywhere playing wonderful music. I danced, danced, and danced some more. Almost everyone was very nice to me, although I was getting read (as being a T-girl or "trannie") like crazy. I asked one vendor if she had seen any other trannies there, and she said some had been around that afternoon.

A few guys did have some problems with me. I just walked away from them, sometimes ducking into a vendor's booth as a safe haven. I noticed a funny thing: black guys in particular seem to think an amusing way to humiliate a trannie girl is to trail after her yelling, "Mister! Hey, Mister!" They seem perplexed that I don't turn around and acknowledge them.

At eight o'clock I headed over to Post Street for the South Bay Association of Dee-jays (SOBAD) street dance. My route passed

Original Joe's again, so I stopped in for more refreshment. Phil was busy so the other bartender made my Gibson. Playfully, I told him, "You'll never guess what I have in my purse!" showing him my nice, new, red Gucci purse.

"What?" he asked.

"Another purse!" I laughed, and showed him I had shoved my little, silver disco purse into my new purse. He was mildly amused.

Fortified, I headed for the event on Post. They had the street blocked off and I had to dig ten dollars out of my new Gucci purse to get in. It was worth it — it was fantastic! As darkness fell, the street lit up. The main stage was just off Market Street and a large canopy covered the main dance area. As the pavement released the daytime heat, the weather became comfortable for dancing. The party was pretty full, but not uncomfortably so. The crowd thinned as I moved away from the stage; I was able to pick the density I liked best.

The main stage was spinning heavy techno-industrial sounds. Smaller stages farther down the street blasted other varieties of rave music. The crowd was younger and less ethnic than at the Afribbean festival, but still quite diverse. Again, I was the only tranny around. Nobody hassled me, proving that ravers are a friendly bunch.

Again I danced, danced, and danced some more. After a while I thought it would be a good idea to get something to eat because I hadn't eaten all day. I spotted my favorite Mexican restaurant, but they had just closed. I found a barbecue place, but it had a long line spilling out the door. So I went into a bar. A gay bar. A very, very gay bar. I did not figure that out until after I sat down. The bartenders pointedly ignored me. I began talking with a guy sitting on the barstool next to mine. He was very nice. We compared notes about various gay bars around town. I told my new friend I needed his help to get a drink, and he kindly obliged.

When the bartender put the drink down in front of me, I decided to win him over with my matchless charm. I asked him, "Can you guess what I have in my purse?"

“It had better be \$3.50,” he replied. Sometimes my charm does not work so well.

I found out the dancing would be over at ten, not midnight as I had read in the paper. I excused myself and left the bar so I could dance a little more before the music shut down. I was having a great time.

I spotted a break-dancing circle up front near the main stage. I wiggled my way into its periphery. I had never witnessed a break-dancing exhibition before; I found it quite entertaining. Guys took turns jumping into the middle of the circle to show off their moves such as headstands and back spins. Some of the kids were very good. Although the dancers were predominantly male, a couple of gals participated too. I was seriously considering taking a turn myself — nothing fancy, just repräsentin’ the trannies, you know — but then the music stopped and the party was over.

I headed back to my car, when what do you know, there was Original Joe’s yet again! In I went for a final nightcap. Fortified, and with the pearl onions constituting dinner, I headed home.

But no, I couldn’t leave well enough alone. The night was still young, so I popped in to see what was happening at a nearby gay bar I knew. I couldn’t dance because a drag show was in progress. I did have another drink, but nobody was particularly sociable. It was half past eleven when I headed home again.

At that point I was too drunk to drive! But foolishly, I did. As I was driving along highway 280, I noticed I had missed my turn-off onto 880. I got off at the next exit, intending to turn around and get back on the freeway heading the other way. Somewhere on those unfamiliar streets, I encountered a fork in the road. I could not decide which tine to take, so I drove over the island in the middle instead. Unfortunately, there was a pole on the island with a “Yield” sign. I did not yield.

BLAM! BLAM! I bumped over the curb. CRASH! SLAM! I drove right through the sign. My car knocked the pole clear out of the ground and it sailed over Phoebe, crashing down on her

rear end. The pole took out Phoebe's rear window and smashed her trunk. God help me!

God did look out for me. I did not get injured. I did not get arrested (the drunk tank is not a good place for a guy in a dress!). Poor Phoebe was still drivable, although just barely. I never stopped. I drove directly home and thanked God many times. I called some of my dearest friends and blubbered to them at length.

Poor Phoebe was totaled. It didn't take that much to total her, actually, because she had 110,000 miles on her. I had been thinking of putting her out to pasture anyway, so that decision became easy.

I went out the next day and got a new set of wheels, a black '97 Mustang GT with a 4.6-liter, V-8 engine, five-speed manual tranny (pun intended), and only 45,000 miles on the odometer. I don't know if I got the best possible deal, because I wasn't exactly negotiating from a position of strength, shopping *en femme* in a mused Buick!

All's well that end's well, but I can assure you I took this experience as a serious wake-up call. And now you know just why it is that Lannie Rose quit drinking.

Not Gay

I am not gay. Not that there's anything wrong with that, as Seinfeld famously said.

I'm just not gay. I've never looked at a cute guy and thought, *I'd do him in a minute!* In fact, I've never even thought a guy was cute. Well, maybe Tom Selleck, but he's got that twinkle in his eye, doesn't he? I've never kissed a guy, except my father. Never wanted to. Can't imagine having sex with a guy, yuck! Not that there's anything wrong with that, if you're gay, I suppose.

I was married to a woman for five years. I had a couple other long-term, sexual relationships with GGs. That doesn't sound very gay, does it?

I am a transgender (TG) person, a cross-dresser, a genetic male who prefers to dress in women's clothes and present myself to the world in a feminine persona. That doesn't make me gay. Not that there would be anything wrong with it if I were. However, it turns out that the majority of cross-dressers are heterosexual.

I did read *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*, the wonderful book about the AIDS epidemic by Randy Shilts. But AIDS is a national health crisis, for goodness sake. Didn't everybody read it? I must admit, though, the book did teach me some interesting things about gays and gay lifestyles.

I also read *Conduct Unbecoming: Gays and Lesbians in the U.S. Military*, also by Randy Shilts, about the horrible discrimination against gays in the military. It's a national scandal and a terrible waste of lives and talent. Every American should read this book and then write their congress people and senators. It's not just about gays, you know. If we discriminate against one group, we may discriminate against any group. They could be coming for you next. Besides, society must make progress on gay rights if we are to have any hope for transgender rights, right?

No too long ago I hooked up with another cross-dresser. We had a lot in common — sense of humor, liberal politics, love of sexy feminine clothes, obviously. As s/he changed into her femme clothes, s/he walked around with her penis hanging out. That made me uncomfortable. I am not particularly comfortable with my own penis, much less somebody else's. (After all, I'm not gay you know, as I may have previously mentioned.) She asked me if I do ecstasy, the happy love drug. "No," I told her, "but I'd like to!"

We did some ecstasy. We partied. We tried on lots of cute outfits. The drug made me very affectionate, physically. We made out. At some point, she was sucking on my penis, for a long time. It felt nice. I returned the favor. I had done it before, but now I was really starting to enjoy it. We agreed this did not mean we were gay, however. After all, GGs perform oral sex on men, and it doesn't make them gay. Besides, we were both wearing sexy

dresses. Even when we slept together (and I do mean sleep, as in snoring), in my mind I was sleeping with an attractive woman.

As time went on, I had sexual encounters with several TG's and also with some gentlemen. I had a couple of threesomes. I had a five-some at The Power Exchange, San Francisco's infamous sex club. I was enjoying myself. Most of all, I enjoyed cuddling and being told I was pretty and sexy and desirable. It felt good, whether it was with a man, a woman, or a TG. I became comfortable around penises. Oral sex became more and more enjoyable, both giving and getting. My keister experienced a dildo. Yow! That hurts! Then it felt pretty good ... very good! I penetrated a couple of trannies with my own penis, sheathed for safety, of course. But a penis never penetrated my own keister. After all, I'm not gay. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

It's true that I have been watching "Queer as Folk" on Showtime. I had to check it out; everyone said it was groundbreaking television. Is it ever! Oh, so that's how gay men fuck! The show is very well written, you know. I got caught up in the lives of the characters. Brian is very cute and sexy. I think I'd let him do me. Hal Sparks is awfully cute too ... but that would never work, we're both bottoms.

Sometimes I go to gay bars. They tolerate transgender types, and they usually have very good dance floors. I like talking with gay guys; we get along pretty well. But flirting, well, that doesn't work. I think they're into a "Wham! Bam! Thank you, sir" kind of sex, and they can tell that's not what I'm looking for. What do you know, it turns out I'm actually not gay, after all! (Not that there's anything wrong with that.)

So finally I've figured it out. I'm bisexual. I make love with both men and women. I enjoy it. It makes me feel wanted, admired, loved. I need it. But here's the problem, you see. Gay guys don't like me that way because I present as a woman. Straight guys aren't interested because I have a penis. Women aren't interested because I wear a dress.

Poor bisexual Lannie, with no one to love! I wish I were gay.

Inside the Women's Locker Room

Six months hence I would have my sex change surgery, and I felt like a big, fat blob. I had stopped going to the health club six months before, when I began living full time as a woman, because of the obvious locker room dilemma. But now I was feeling quite comfortable in my female gender role, and I decided I was just being silly missing my workout program. I decided return to the gym.

I still worried about the locker room situation, but I thought I could get by. *After all*, I thought, *women do not parade around totally naked in the locker room!* (In this, I was wrong, as you shall soon see.) I had a good, firm tuck, cock back and balls up like

the big girls, and I never showed an unnatural bulge in any of my clothes. The more I thought about it, the more I thought I would have no problems. Nevertheless, I decided I would take the precaution of choosing a different health club than the one I had been going to for years. I didn't want to take the risk of somebody recognizing me, or even getting that curious look on their face and asking, "Where do I know you from?"

So it was that I packed my gym bag at noon on Friday and headed for a health club I had never been to before. I paid for a day pass, saying (truthfully) that I wanted to check out the facilities because I was interested in becoming a member.

A lot of guys and gals from the local business parks were rolling into the club for their lunchtime workouts. I walked into the women's locker room and looked for an open locker.

Oh, my, was I surprised! Contrary to my expectations, there was a lot of nakedness on display. All around me, women were stripping down to their underthings and less, and pulling on leotards and sport bras. I suddenly understood why Victoria's Secret and Fredericks of Hollywood were so successful. Lacy brassieres, satin panties, bustiers and thongs were much in evidence. I presume many of the ladies were wearing their good undies because they planned to head out for Friday evening dates directly from work.

I could not help but notice I was in the minority with my AA-cup breasts. Most of the women were quite well endowed in that area, and more than a few were candidates for breast reduction surgery. Nipple jewelry proved to be quite popular, sales spurred, perhaps, by the recent Janet Jackson Superbowl incident. Downstairs, Brazilians outnumbered bushes, and labia rings winked and twinkled here and there.

The women ranged in age from early twenties to late fifties, but most of them appeared to be in their thirties. Regardless of their ages, most of the women were in good shape, which makes sense, because they work out. A few needed to do some more work on their bellies and thighs — okay, some needed a lot more work!

Having experienced all my life how surreptitiously men check out women, I was surprised to notice the women openly gazing at each other, appraising each other's bodies without embarrassment. I began to get nervous — very nervous! — as several women looked me critically up and down. Would they notice anything wrong about me? Worst case, would someone shriek, “There's a MAN in the locker room!” I relaxed when I realized they approved of what they saw; in fact, some seemed jealous of my tall, thin physique. But I got nervous again when I realized I would have to change under possible watchful gazes.

I had worn my workout shorts and tennis shoes to the club, so I didn't need to worry about my downstairs just then. I pulled my Tee shirt up over my head and unhooked my generously padded bra. I knew I had enough breast development from being on hormones for almost a year that my chest would not be a reveal, though it would certainly not be envied! I pulled on my sport bra and I was good to go.

I was not surprised to see that the women chatted gaily with their neighbors as they changed their clothes. A lot of the talk seemed to be about husbands and boyfriends, and sex, sex, sex! I overheard one pretty, petite redheaded recounting that she had taken home one of the girls from the purchasing department the night before, as a mid-week treat for her husband. Apparently the buyer was happy to have dinner and quite a bit more. The woman the redhead was talking to, who apparently had just met her, giggled and said, “You should invite me over for dinner sometime!”

On the other side of me I heard a woman asking, “Where's Felicia?” Another pretty voice answered nonchalantly, “She won't be here today. The boss is boning her for lunch.”

I also overheard several conversations about the club's trainers, and which ones were happy to provide private, after-hours “training” sessions, and who was hot and who was not. I made a mental note to find out which trainer was Rick.

Slightly giddy from the experience so far, I wandered out of the locker room and joined a jazzercise class for an hour. Most of

the other women in the class wore skin-tight, lycra shorts and matching tops or sport bras, but a few wore “regular” baggy shorts like me. The class was fun, but I nearly died, I was so out of shape! I also learned painfully that tucking is not the way to go in a jazzercise class. I decided I needed to find a more comfortable solution the next time I worked out.

When the class finished, we took our “glowing” bodies back to the women's locker room. My mind had been fully occupied with sweating to the oldies for the prior hour, but now I started to worry about how I would accomplish a shower and a change without a devastating reveal.

Back in the locker room, a few women were just arriving, but most of us had been in the jazzercise class and were stripping off our sweat-drenched workout clothes. I saw that most of the women headed for the showers wrapped in towels, but some just carried their towels in their hands, unembarrassed by their nakedness. A few women were going to the showers with their panties still on, and I figured that solved part of my problem. I left my panties on and, with my large bath towel wrapped around my body, I headed toward the showers too.

I had expected to find private shower stalls, but that was not the case. The shower room was one big, open area, with tiled floor and walls. The shower heads were on several poles free-standing in the middle of the room. Women left their towels on hooks in the anteroom and took their soap and colorful net scrubbers into the shower room. Some women went into the showers still wearing their panties or swimsuit bottoms, so that's what I did too. I prayed that my tuck was as good as I thought, that it stayed put, and that none of the women observed me too closely. I hung my towel on a hook and strode quickly into the shower room.

The hot showers kicked up a goodly amount of steam which served as camouflage for me. I breathed a sigh of relief and said a silent thank you to God. Women continued to chat with each other as the steaming hot water streamed over their bodies and they soaped up. I saw some women soaping up each other's backs — and fronts, too, in a few cases. It didn't seem to be anything

sexual, mind you. It just seemed once you started soaping up somebody, why stop at her back?

As I was rinsing shampoo out of my long, wavy, red hair, I was startled by a loud rapping sound. I nearly jumped out of my skin! I looked around and saw women not startled, but surprised and smiling. Then I heard the deep, resonant voices of some of the club's trainers. "Panty check!" they yelled. "Panty check!"

As three handsome, ripped trainers invaded the shower room, a half-dozen women shrieked and ran over to the walls, hands-up and feet spread in the classic search-me pose. Other women looked on with amusement, while the rest looked bored and simply went about their business. Panty check? I had no idea what this ritual was, but I had a feeling it could have very bad consequences for me and the little friend in my panties. I froze with terror, hoping that by remaining motionless, I would be invisible to the muscle-bound, male trainers storming into the shower.

The women who were spread-eagled and giggling against the walls called out taunts like, "Check me!" "I'm hiding something!" and "I've got something for you!" And let me tell you, it was not just the younger women who were choosing to participate in the panty check. Quickly it became clear to me that the trainers were interested only in the women at the walls, but my heart continued to pound.

Much to my amazement, the grinning trainers strode over to the women against the walls and searched them quite thoroughly — probably a consequence of 9/11, I suppose. In some cases, the searching was not done with hands alone; in fact, it appeared that a fairly thorough search could be conducted with no hands at all! I watched with astonishment, water streaming down my naked body, as the panty raid went on for about ten minutes. Then, satisfied that no weapons or contraband were present in the showers, the trainers stormed back out of the women's locker room. *Ha, some panty check*, I thought. They hadn't found the one thing that clearly was not supposed to be in the locker room, and that thing was in my panties.

The woman next to me, a gorgeous blond with very nice breasts, must have seen the scared look on my face because she told me, “Don't worry, honey, that only happens about once a week, and you don't have to play if you don't want to.” I thanked her and talked with her some more about this being my first time at the club. She even soaped my back.

The panty check was the pinnacle of the excitement for me in the women's locker room that first day. I found it easy enough to change into fresh clothing while keeping my towel wrapped around me so there was no danger of showing that which must not be seen. Once I stopped worrying about being outed, I relaxed and enjoyed my time chatting with other women as I combed out and dried my hair.

I did join the club and I've been going back regularly. I don't feel like a big, fat blob anymore, but there is still about four inches and eight ounces that I want to lose — not in my tummy, but just below it. I've yet to encounter another panty check, but I have learned some other games they play around there, and I found out which trainer Rick is. He's very cute and hunky. I've been flirting with him like crazy, thinking I may try to find out if his reputation is well earned, after I've lost those four inches and eight ounces. In the meantime, I can tell it's driving him crazy that he can't have me.

I can hardly wait for six months to go by, so I can get those inches and ounces taken care of. Then I'll have six weeks of healing and I can go back to the locker room without worrying about concealing anything. When that day comes, I've even been thinking that maybe... when I happen to be present at another panty check, perhaps I'll lean against the wall, hands above my head, feet spread, and call out, “Better check out what I've got!”

Note: This has been a totally fictional account of what goes on inside the women's locker room. For the true story, read Inside the Women's Locker Room (Part Deux), later in this volume.

Christmas Eve in Reno

I planned to drive to Carson City, Nevada, to visit my parents for Christmas. I was looking forward to the trip for a completely different reason. I had been exchanging e-mails with a fellow who lived in the hills not far from Lake Tahoe. We decided to meet in person. I booked a room at the Eldorado Hotel and Casino in Reno for Christmas Eve and arranged to meet him. He promised to put together a very entertaining evening for us!

I was quite excited about my big date. Although I'd like to say suitors are lined up deep and wide at my door, the truth is, I don't get asked out very often. I'm not complaining (yes I am!). I'm sure

it's my own fault for being too picky. But when I find a good guy, I value him. This one seemed like the real thing. Single, too!

A couple days before my trip, I got an e-mail from my beau. So sorry, he said, but he had to cancel. His father had had a stroke, and he needed to take care of him. I wrote him a sympathetic response, but I made a mental note to keep track of exactly how many strokes the old man survives. I never heard back from Mr. Right. Should I be skeptical about his story? You tell me.

I spent Christmas Eve in Reno anyway. I ate in a buffet and walked around the casinos of "The Biggest Little City in the World." It was terribly cold when I was outside! I had a good winter coat, but it was stupid of me to be out in a skirt, even a long denim skirt. All the other women I saw were in jeans.

I got read at least once: As I was walking through a casino, I heard a young woman stage whisper to her fellow, "That's a man!" I just smiled to myself, because I knew in my heart she was wrong.

Later I sat in a bar (not drinking — Lannie is dry these days) under the big mining rig in the Silver Legacy and listened to the piano player pound out some hot boogie-woogie. I didn't get picked up, but a nice young man came over and gave me an ugly, little stuffed mouse he had won at Circus Circus. He said to me, "You look like you can use a friend." I was touched. I thought of replying, "You look like you could use a blow job!" But, I'm not like that.

The next day was Christmas. I put on boy clothes for the very last time and drove my Mustang down to my parents' house in Carson City. But that's another story.

Chanel!

Girls who are lucky enough to be raised as girls learn about makeup from their friends and female role models when they're young. Colors, brands, how to apply ... my goodness, there is a lot to learn! Transgender girls, who missed the whole experience of growing up female, need to take advantage of other resources like those on the Internet and books such as *Color Me Beautiful* by Carole Jackson, the late, great Kevyn Aucoin's, *Making Faces*, and Jane Campsie's, *Marie Claire Hair & Makeup*. And, of course, there is Oprah — I happened to catch a great segment on eyebrow waxing one afternoon, for example. These resources are wonderful for explaining it all and showing beautifully made-up

faces I would die for, but they don't talk about my particular face (an egregious oversight on their part!). I thought I had already achieved a fairly good look for clubbing and such but, when I decided to transition to living as a woman full time, I wanted a more natural look for everyday wear. My color sense isn't very good, so I needed help.

Fortunately, I knew where I could get that help. I had recently spent a gloriously fun afternoon with Denaë Doyle of FemImage (see her Web site at www.femimage.com), working on my feminine poise and deportment. I remembered Denaë had mentioned a makeup expert she knew, who I might consider consulting when I was ready. Now I was ready! I gave Denaë a call. She told me she was thinking of Debi at the Chanel counter at Gottschalks in the Capitola Mall near Santa Cruz, where Denaë's business is headquartered. When I said I would go to see Debi right away, Denaë generously offered to accompany me and oversee the process.

We planned to meet for lunch the following Saturday at Chili's restaurant in the mall. I arrived a little early and did not see Denaë, so I took a quick tour of the mall. Quick is right! Compared to the fabulous Silicon Valley malls like Westfield Valley Fair and the Stanford Shopping Center, the Capitola Mall seemed like a little playpen of a mall. Ten minutes was sufficient to walk the length and breadth of the crisscross layout, ducking my head into a few shops along the way, but moving quickly so I wouldn't miss Denaë. We just missed each other several times, but we eventually linked up for a relaxing lunch at Chili's, with lots of girlie chitchat.

After finishing lunch, we sauntered down to the Gottschalks end of the mall, window-shopping along the way. When we arrived at the Chanel counter in Gottschalks department store, we were greeted with big smiles by Debi and her young, porcelain-skinned comrade-in-cosmetics, Linse. Denaë introduced me to Debi and Linse, and they seemed genuinely happy to meet me.

At that point I began to understand the wisdom of trekking all the way down to Santa Cruz for this venture. I'm sure charming and talented makeup pros can be found at Chanel counters everywhere, but here in this little mall, without the press of big-city crowds, these two lovely ladies lavished their undivided attention on me all afternoon. By the way, Chanel is not the only choice for a girl's first makeover; other T-girls have reported similarly kind treatment at other cosmetics counters as well. I suspect the clerks spend so much time helping little old ladies select just the right shade of blue eye shadow, they're sincerely glad to work with a fresh, new face — especially one that is eager to drink deeply from the fountain of their expertise.

Denaë and the ladies caught up on their gossip a bit. Then the focus turned to me, me, me! Debi sat me in the tall makeup chair in the aisle and used some potions to clean off the light cosmetics I had put on that morning. She applied some magic restructuring creams and moisturizing lotions that use the most modern chemical technology to extract huge sums of money from my pocketbook, and that may possibly help me achieve softer, more youthful skin. On the serious side, I decided if good skin care would delay the need for a face-lift by some number of years, the investment was worthwhile.

Starting with the fresh palette of my naked face, the first and most important task was to select a foundation. This was the part Denaë had particularly wanted to oversee, as it's so important to get this just right. She had confided to me she had, on occasion, gone back and forth with Debi over some "slight" differences of opinion about the best choice for certain girls. Sometimes this process could be quite lengthy. As luck would have it, I was easy. Debi hit my color just right on the first try with "Soft Bisque Intensity 3." Denaë and Linse agreed this shade looked very natural on me. Debi deftly applied the foundation with a medium-size brush. I watched her technique closely as I had not been a brush user up to this point. I was impressed with how smoothly the brush applied the foundation, and how it filled in all

the pits and crevices I deny having. I was hooked. I decided, henceforth, I would use a foundation brush.

Debi dusted my face with a silky powder using a large, puffy brush, just removing the shine from my skin. She used a little bit of concealer and highlighter to cover what remained of my upper lip stubble (most of my facial hair having been eradicated with laser treatments by this time). I was amazed at how little concealer and powder she used, because I had been caking it on. I realized I had developed this habit when I still had quite a bit of facial hair; I no longer needed to do that. The light application of makeup gave me a much more natural look, a fortunate turn of events, as the price of Chanel's foundation is a great incentive to apply it with a light touch!

Debi selected an auburn pencil to fill in and define my eyebrow arch. She and Denaë decided I needed a waxing up there ASAP. "Yes! Yes!" I eagerly agreed. Waxing my eyebrows was something I had been longing to do, but had not felt comfortable doing it while I was still presenting as a man part time. Denaë and I ran over to her regular manicure parlor and got this done right after we finished at Chanel that afternoon.

From a Tamises Trio eye shadow kit, Debi used a light, almost invisible shade over my whole eyelid, all the way up to the eyebrows, to set off the arch. She added a dark blue — almost a gray — on the outside halves of the lower portion of the lids to make my eyes look a little wider apart. For eyeliner, a dark purple shade replaced the black I had been using. Debi made a much thinner line than I had always done, and smudged it so it was nothing more than a shadow. I thought this would not leave enough color to bring out my eyes sufficiently, but when she curled my eyelashes and coated them with dark brown-black mascara, I had to agree with the ladies that my baby blues looked plenty cute!

I mentioned to Debi I had never been able to find mascara that completely pleased me. They never seemed to go on quite right; they were either too clumpy, too gluey, or too thin. I was pleased to find I love the Chanel mascara. It's thick, yet it goes

on smoothly and looks quite natural. The Chanel foundation also strikes me as substantially richer and nicer looking and feeling than what the ladies disparagingly referred to as “drugstore cosmetics.” As for the rest of the products, I need more experience with them before I form an opinion as to whether they are substantially better than less expensive alternatives.

Denaë had previously cautioned me against red, red lipstick, which, of course, had been my idea of “with it” up to that point. Debi chose a light sienna lip liner and lipstick for me. I noticed the lipstick matched the liner exactly, and I recalled Kevyn Aucoin declared the dark-liner/lighter-fill look was out of style. Of course, Kevyn also says there are no rules. I saw the control Debi was able to achieve using a tiny brush to apply the lipstick, and I resolved to become a brush gal in this also.

Debi finished me off with blush high on my cheekbones, a gold hue with peach undertones. She swept the blush up higher toward my temples than Denaë thought prudent, but when we saw how subtle the shade was, we agreed it worked well. Finally, a deeper plum blush was used to sculpt the hollows of my cheeks just a bit. Debi skillfully blended the blush with her fingers, so it transitioned smoothly and looked simply like a trick of the light.

The girls all picked at my hair to fluff it up a bit, and declared I was a beauty. I wasn't inclined to argue!

All this expertise, attention, and love did come with a price tag. While you are not obligated to buy anything when you have a makeover at a cosmetics counter, the ladies work on commission; taking up their time and not compensating them would be rude. In my case, I had deliberately let my makeup supply run down in anticipation of this event, and I had let Debi know that as we got started. When we finished, lovely Linse presented me with a big drawing of a face she had annotated with the exact descriptions of all the products we had used as we went along. Debi asked me what, if anything, I wished to purchase. I told her, “I need everything. Load me up!” In this, I was not to be disappointed.

A girlfriend had forewarned me this could be a pricey experience. She told me she had spent three hundred dollars on her initial trip to the cosmetics counter, so I thought I was prepared. I asked Debi to ring me up but not to show me the bottom line — I just signed the credit card slip. It was not until I got home that I saw the damage. It was not quite one thousand dollars — but it did reach that stratospheric figure by the time I picked up a couple of things they had not had in stock just then. I was glad I had not looked at the total cost of my purchases in the store, because it did rather shock me. Bear in mind, however, this included not just cosmetics, but a full set of brushes and the complete line-up of those pricey, high-tech skin care products. Chanel is, no doubt, a top-of-the-line brand, about the most expensive cosmetics you can buy. I was, fortunately, in a position where I could afford it, so why not the best? I figure it's like cooking — I will use the very best ingredients, at least until I get good enough to achieve the same results with more economical ones.

This little adventure took place over the Christmas holiday. If I had any regrets about the money I spent, they would have disappeared once and for all at 8 a.m. on January 2, 2002. That was the moment I walked into the lobby at my new job, working for the first time as a woman. I approached the receptionist with a bright, "Good morning, I'm Lannie!" Whatever other doubts and uncertainties faced me that morning, at least I had confidence my makeup was fine.

Trannie Lib, One Comedian at a Time

The call to defend transgender rights can come at the most unexpected times. I got the call at my company Christmas party.

My company held a lovely holiday party at the Sheraton Hotel in Sunnyvale. Because I was just finishing my first year of living full time as a woman, I had the opportunity to fulfill a long-held fantasy of showing up at the company Christmas party in a beautiful Jessica McClintock gown. Chalk up one more VLE!

The party organizers wanted to do something different, so they hired a stand-up comedian for after-dinner entertainment.

(Oh, we still got the executives' speeches. The comic followed them.) The comedian was a cute guy, a delicious six feet seven inches tall. Because I am six feet one inch myself, I had been checking him out all evening. He had a great, deep, booming voice, and he was in desperate need of a good gag writer. His set lasted thirty long minutes. He imagined himself an impressionist, but he was not a good one. At least he was smart enough to follow the Rich Little rule: "Always tell the audience who you are going to do before you do it. Don't make them guess!"

At one point the comic launched into a bit featuring his fabulous impressions. The set-up was that various Hollywood celebrities (the impressionists' usual bunch: Johnny Carson, Jimmy Stewart, Woody Allen, etc.) would advise George W. Bush on his Iraq policy. I was startled to hear the routine's wrap-up: because none of the advice was any good, George W. decided simply to have a sex-change operation and leave the country! Mild yucks arose from the audience. I didn't notice anyone looking my way. Frankly, I'm not sure anyone was really listening to the comic at that point.

I left and went to the powder room. As I returned, the comic had finished up his set and was standing in the hallway making a call on his cell phone. I waited for him to complete his call; then I introduced myself. I thanked him for entertaining us and, to be nice, I told him one of his routines was pretty amusing. Then I said, "I know it ruins it to explain a joke, but could you tell me what was supposed to be funny about the thing with George Bush getting a sex change?" He explained George didn't get any good advice; he couldn't think of anything else to do, so he just got a sex change and left the country. This, of course, was no explanation at all, so I interrupted him.

"Excuse me," I said, "but let me tell you, I am having a sex-change operation on February 17, and it's a very serious thing to me. I don't think it's funny at all!"

He was surprised but not taken aback. "Really?" he said. "I never would have suspected." Granted, I enjoyed hearing that.

I explained to him there were some funny jokes a clever person can make about the predicaments transsexual people find themselves in, but the idea that simply saying “sex change” is good for a laugh offends me. I told him a sex-change operation is quite a serious thing for us, as well as our friends and loved ones, and it was rude to make a joke of it. He said, “Well, I guess I won’t use that joke anymore then.” I thanked him for that and told him I thought that was appropriate.

“So, I guess this is the first time you’ve been called out on this one, is it?” I asked him.

“Actually, this is the first time I used that joke,” he claimed. I think he was lying, but I let it slide.

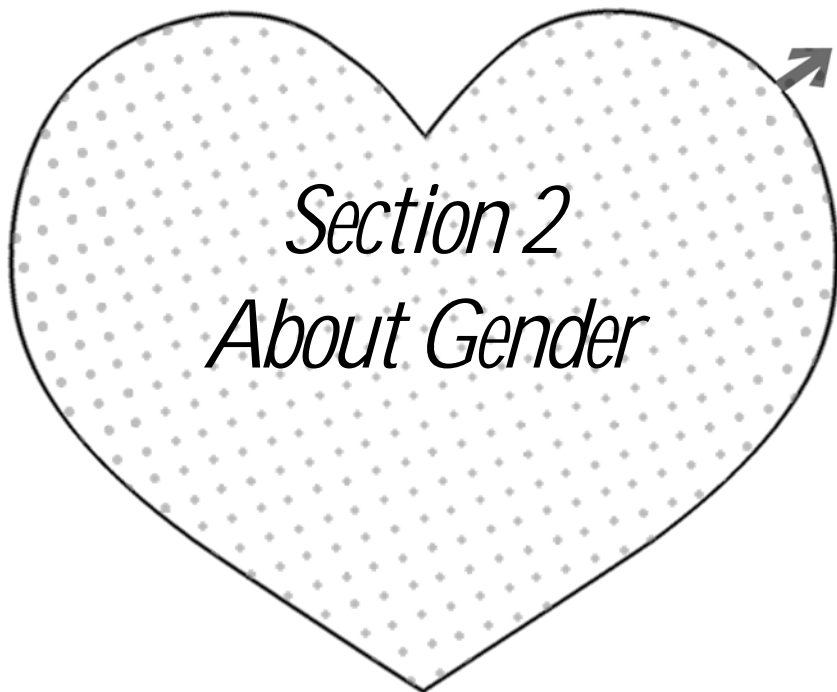
He took it all in good spirits (unfortunately — I would have preferred to see some embarrassment and contrition), but at least he promised not to take cheap shots at transsexual people again. I only hope he thought more about it as he drove home that evening.

As I was leaving, he said, “You know, you are very pretty!”

“Thank you!” I replied. “You are quite handsome yourself. And you can tell your wife I said so!”

He laughed. “I will.”

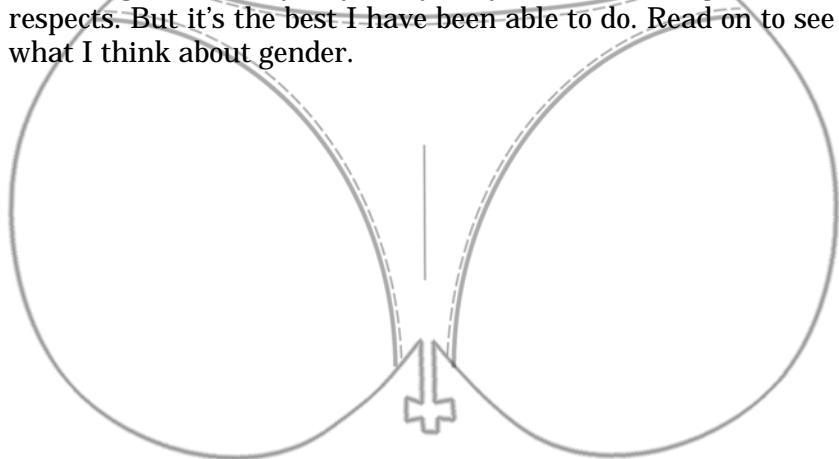
On the way out of the hotel, my boyfriend and I happened to bump into another transsexual woman we know. She was just leaving her company party and was dressed in a stunning, sexy, silver and black gown. I wished the comedian had run into her as well. That would really have blown his mind, meeting two gorgeous transsexual women in one evening!



Section 2

About Gender

What's all this stuff about gender and sexual orientation anyway? It's a complicated subject, and I don't think anybody has all the answers. I've figured out enough to feel certain about my life's path as a transsexual, bisexual woman. My answers surely aren't right for everybody; they may even be wrong in some respects. But it's the best I have been able to do. Read on to see what I think about gender.



Song: Mistaken for a Boy (Don't Want to Be)

(As sung by Gwen Stefani — in my dreams!)

I'm just a tall, skinny, funny-lookin',
No tits, no hips, no back there,
My lips are thin, my hair is stringy,
And sometimes they think I'm a boy.

Chorus:

I'll wear some high heels,
I'll throw my hips out,
I'll stuff my brassiere,
I don't want to be taken for a boy.
I'll put on lipstick,
I'll pluck my eyebrows,
I'll grow my nails long,
Don't want to be mistaken for a boy.

I want the boys to like me,
Even though I'm taller than they are.
I'll even get down on my knees,
So they don't think that I'm a boy.

Chorus:

I'll put on earrings,
I'll pierce my navel,
I'll paint my toenails,
I don't want to be taken for a boy.
I'll wear some nylons,
And satin panties,
A matching brassiere,
Don't want to be mistaken for a boy.

Another chorus:

I wiggle, wiggle, wiggle when I walk,
I giggle, giggle, giggle when I talk,
I'm fickle, fickle, fickle when I love,
I don't want to be taken for a boy.
I'll ask directions,
I'll stop for potty,
I brake for squirrels,
Don't want to be mistaken for a boy.

Yet another chorus:

I do Pilates,
For a flat tummy,
Even do Kegels,
I don't want to be taken for a boy.
I use the skin cream,
The eyelash curler,
Lip gloss and liner,
Don't want to be mistaken for a boy.

A final chorus:

I'll wear pretty dresses,
And short, short, short, short mini-skirts,
Even those hot pants,
I don't want to be taken for a boy.
I'll laugh at nonsense,
I'll stop at every shoe sale,
I'll be bulimic,
I don't want to be taken for a ...
Don't want to be mistaken for a ...
I don't want to be taken ...
FOR A BOY!

Wavy Gravy, Transsexual Role Model

Wavy Gravy made me a transsexual. Well, he didn't actually make me a transsexual, but he inspired me to be one. More accurately, he provided a model that helped me understand my transsexuality.

Like many people struggling with gender issues, I first became familiar with the transsexuality in the form of the classic male-to-female transsexual. The classic TS is a person born with the mind of a woman and the body of man. From her earliest memories, this person knew she was a girl and a terrible error

had occurred, leaving her with a male body. Her sexual fantasies always starred her in the woman's role. She cross-dressed at a very early age and kept on doing it except, possibly, during her teen years. Maybe she tried to make it as a man, joining the marines, getting married, having kids, and so on. But it never felt right, and she always knew she could never be happy except as a woman.

I did not fit this model. It never occurred to me I might prefer to be a woman until mid-life. I made love as a man just fine, thank you. I didn't cross-dress much until I was thirty-five. I have trouble defining exactly what it means to be a woman or a man at some sort of fundamental level, much less to classify myself in such a system. Yet there I was, living more and more of my life as a woman, and feeling very, very good about it. How could this be?

I attended my first transgender conference, Southern Comfort, in September 2001. There I met Dr. Anne Lawrence, a smart and strikingly handsome trans woman. I subsequently discovered her famous Web site, www.annelawrence.com, which is full of helpful information about transgender issues, especially about medical care. Browsing this resource, I found some scholarly papers Dr. Lawrence had written on the subject of autogynephilia (drawing from the work of Ray Blanchard). In brief, autogynephilia describes a man who is sexually excited by the idea of himself as a woman. Dr. Lawrence asserts this is a form of gender dysphoria, and that sex reassignment can be an appropriate treatment for extreme cases.

I thought about it and decided I was not autogynephilic. But Dr. Lawrence's papers changed the focus of the questions I was asking myself. I had been getting nowhere contemplating, *Am I fundamentally a woman at my core, and what exactly does that mean?* Indeed, these questions may simply be unanswerable. I decided the more relevant question was, *Is living my life as a woman what I need to do in order to be happy?* Or, twisting it around slightly, *If I choose to live as a woman, will that increase my ability to build a happy life?* I felt, based on my experience

spending time as a woman, I could answer that question with a confident “Yes!” I felt Dr. Lawrence’s papers on autogynephilia supported the idea that, if I truly felt this way, then transitioning to living as a woman is an appropriate and medically legitimate course of action.

But in my gut, I was still worried. Can I be a woman just because I want to be? Is it reasonable to ask the world to accept and respect me as a woman just because I say I am?

That’s when Wavy Gravy hit me. Well he didn’t actually hit me — but if he had, it would have been with a big floppy bladder that went “Pffffffttt!” and it would have been very funny. What actually hit me was the fact Wavy Gravy lives his life as a clown. Now certainly he was not born a biological clown, so he must have transitioned to it. Apparently he decided, somewhere along the line, that presenting himself as a clown was the best way to express his true self. It allowed him to do things he could not do — or do as effectively — as a mere man. He was able to live a happy, productive, meaningful life only as a clown. So that’s what he did. He did it so sincerely, lovingly, and thoroughly, the world accepts and respects him as a clown. I’m sure it was not an easy journey, but he undertook it enthusiastically. I wonder if he even considered it a choice, or if it was simply what he needed to be.

And what a life that clown led! In the sixties, he and the Merry Pranksters liberated the minds of a generation with the Acid Tests. Wavy was a familiar face in the peace movement that stopped the Vietnam War. He hosted both Woodstock concerts. He formed the Seva Foundation to bring much needed medical care to third-world countries. These days he runs Camp Winnarainbow, teaching performing and circus arts to kids of all ages and economic backgrounds. You see, being a clown is not what Wavy Gravy is all about. It’s just what he is.

I’ve never met Wavy Gravy. I really don’t know much about him. My concept of what he is may be quite different than his own. I did read his Web site; he barely mentions clowning. That makes sense. When my transition is completed, my Web site will not need to mention I’m a woman!

So there you have it. If Wavy Gravy can be a clown, surely I can be a woman. And if I do it sincerely, lovingly, and respectfully, then I am confident the world will accept me.

Thank you, Wavy. You are my hero. I only hope your example can inspire me in what I do, as well as what I am.

What Is a Woman?

*What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice,
And everything nice,
That's what little girls are made of.
What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails,
And puppy dog tails,
That's what little boys are made of.
—Nursery rhyme*

Everybody knows what a woman is and what a man is. Gender, *n'est-ce pas? Vive la difference!* It's the first thing we size up when we meet a stranger, and the thing we are most certain about. Or, if we are not sure, we are bound to be very uncomfortable. *Saturday Night Live* played on this discomfort amusingly in Julia Sweeney's gender-ambiguous "Pat" sketches a few years back.

Even those of us who are transgender ourselves feel a strong need to "read" the gender of everyone we meet. "I can read any tranny fifty yards away!" we often claim.

Yet, it turns out nobody really knows what makes a woman or a man a woman or a man. When push comes to shove and gender needs to be established precisely and unambiguously in a court of law, we don't have a satisfactory definition crafted. When science homes in on the X and Y chromosomes or dissects collections of human brains, the answers only retreat further and further away. When we meet a "Pat" in real life, we are baffled. The evil Reverend Phelps simply condemns to Hell anyone who challenges his personal gender preconceptions. So what the heck is this thing we call gender?

On my first visit with my gender therapist, I told her my reason for being there was I felt I might be transsexual. A better way to have stated the problem would have been to say that, although I had lived my forty-six years as a man and I thoroughly believed that's what I was, I wanted to explore the possibility that maybe I was actually a woman.

Logically, one of the first issues my therapist helped me explore was this: What is a woman? What is a man? What makes a person one gender or the other? It's been a while since I explored these issues with my therapist. I even had my sex change surgery. But I still don't have good answers to those difficult questions.

I have learned a few things about gender, which I will share with you. I will touch on the hard science of chromosomes and brain sex, but not very deeply, as no answers lie there. I am inter-

ested mostly in the softer area of perceptions and the gender molded into our metaphorical hearts.

Class, let us move quickly through Gender 101, where we will find no answers, only further questions. Lesson 1: Gender Is Not Sex. Sex is between your legs. Gender is between your ears — does your brain say you are a woman or you are a man? Furthermore, sexual preference is neither gender nor sex. Sexual preference is who gets you sexually excited. Most women are attracted to men, but some — lesbians — are attracted to women. Vice versa for men — most are attracted to women, but gay men are attracted to other men. Bisexual people are attracted to both. The same is true of sexual preference in transsexual women and men. Perhaps 40 percent of trans women identify as lesbian and 30 percent of trans men identify as gay men. The rate of bisexuality is fairly high in the trans population as well. So, although sexual preference is up there in our heads along with gender, it's a different thing entirely.

Gender 101: Lesson 2, Gender Might Be Chromosomes. Chromosomes are pretty good indicators of gender. XX is a female. and XY is a male. That seems clear enough. But it isn't. When Olympic athletes started undergoing chromosome testing, we discovered some people are XXY, XXYY, XXXY, XXXXY, and XY/XXY. And that's just the folks with Klinefelter's syndrome. We can also look at Turner's, androgen insensitivity, and adrenogenital syndromes. Moreover, some XXs are born with penises, and some XYs are born with vaginas. Some XXs are born without vagina, uterus, or ovaries. It turns out nature creates every variation you could think of, and then some. No easy gender answers here, I'm afraid. Besides, who among us (other than Olympic athletes) knows what the heck our chromosomes actually are?

Gender 101, Lesson 3: If Gender Is in Our Brains, Why Can't We Find It? Gender is not just a feeling, but is in our brains in a very real, physical way. To understand how gender in the brain can be mismatched with sex in the genitalia, we need to jump back to the chromosomes for a moment. The way it seems to work

is this: As fetuses, we all start out as females. For “normal” boys, around the twelfth week of gestation, a wave of hormones washes through the system, kicking off the development of male genitalia. Around the sixteenth week, another wash of hormones causes the brain to develop male gender identity, rather than female. So it’s easy to see that if the second wash of hormones doesn’t occur, the baby winds up with male chromosomes and genitalia, but a female brain. That seems to be what happened to me (though I don’t actually know what my chromosomes are). OK, if this is the case, we should be able to find some physical differentiators of gender in the brain, right? Indeed, in 1995 the transgender community got excited when researchers J. N. Zhou and company announced they’d found just such a marker in the BSTc region of the brain. In 2002, however, other researchers (Chung *et al*) showed the BSTc marker does not differentiate until well into adulthood. How then can it mark the brain gender, which is clearly fixed much earlier? Moreover, nobody believes BSTc actually is the brain’s gender center, but only that it may track with gender. Although many researchers are searching diligently with the best modern technology for positive physical evidence of gender differentiation in the brain, it remains to date controversial, at best.

Nevertheless, almost everybody has a perfectly firm knowledge of their own gender, don’t they? Clearly, gender identity is there in our brains, somewhere, somehow.

Gender 101, Lesson 4: It’s the Plumbing, Stupid! Ah, the plumbing, that’s where all the trouble starts, isn’t it? Baby has a penis, he must be a boy. Baby has a vagina, she must be a girl. My parents, the doctors, and I were certainly fooled. We’ve already noted the plumbing doesn’t always match up with the chromosomes and the brain, so what then? And about 1 percent of babies born are born intersexed, with ambiguous genitalia. What of them?

Beyond the genitalia itself, the rest of the plumbing may be considered. In particular, transsexual women are often confronted with this argument: “You will never be a real woman

because you don't have ovaries and a uterus. You can never have children." But wait a minute; many women can never have children. They are still women, right? Does a woman stop being a woman when she undergoes a hysterectomy and her uterus is removed? Is she then a man? Of course she isn't. What if she is born without ovaries and a uterus? Some are. No one thinks they are men. So the plumbing may be a good approximate indicator of gender, but it's lousy in the details.

Congratulations, class. You have passed Gender 101. You are now thoroughly confused about what makes you a woman or a man.

If science is unable, for now, to tell us what a woman is and what a man is, let us fall back on common sense. Stop thinking so hard and just list the qualities that seem to be manly and womanly. Maybe your list looks similar to mine:

| ————— | MAN | ————— | WOMAN |
|----------------|----------------|-------|------------------|
| Masculine | Aggressive | | Feminine |
| Responsible | Strong | | Vulnerable |
| Perfectionist | Rebellious | | Frail |
| Smart | Likes sports | | Emotional |
| Funny | Loud | | Dependent |
| Hard working | Joins the army | | Domestic |
| Provider | | | Caring |
| Emotional rock | | | Not sharp-witted |

Examining my lists, two things jump out at me. One, it's obvious to me my "Man" list is a description of my father and my older brother. (The brother part is the second column.) Likewise, the "Woman" list describes my impression of my mother. Holy Freud, developmental psychology works! So that easily explains where I got these ideas of what gender meant to me.

The other obvious point is that, while we may tend to assign qualities such as these to one gender or the other, none of these characteristics are the exclusive province of either gender. A man can be domestic and caring, and it doesn't make him any less of

a man. A woman can be a responsible, hard-working breadwinner, but she is still a woman. Indeed, a man can be very feminine (for example, Quentin Quisp or Richard Simmons) but he is still a man, jokes notwithstanding. And a woman can be very masculine (take Margaret Thatcher or the butch lesbian of your choice), and yet, she is still fully a woman. To look at it another way, a female impersonator may embody all the womanly qualities we can imagine, including beauty and grace and elegance, but nobody will argue he actually becomes a woman when he is on stage.

What my lists describe, then, aren't really about gender at all. At best, they are about gender presentation, which is to say, the behaviors we exhibit to the world that give others clues about our gender and about how we wish others to perceive and treat us. An important lesson from my therapy was to recognize this: If my cross-dressing and gender confusion were about a need to express qualities and emotions I took to be female in nature, I should feel free to express them as a man. I don't have to actually be a woman, or to present myself as a woman, to indulge those aspects of my personality.

So gender is not defined by specific qualities, even though certain qualities may tend to be identified to a greater or lesser extent with each gender.

Gender is not chromosomes. It's not plumbing. We can't find the brain structures. It's not any of the qualities of our personalities. So what the heck is left? What is gender? I feel it so strongly in my mind, both my own gender identity as well as my identification of the gender of others (either of which I may be mistaken about!), that it must be real. It must be something!

I guess what it is, is that very feeling itself. It's part of the self. It's fundamental.

How do people know what they feel about their internal, true gender identity? I spent most of my life thinking — assuming, really — I was a man. Was I a man back then, and now I am woman? No, I don't think it works like that. For the large majority of people, their true gender identities match their

genitals and the way they were raised. Knowing their true gender identities is never an issue. For those of us who are not so blessed, the problem reveals itself in a number of ways. Perhaps 80 percent of transsexuals “just know” from early childhood they should have been born as the other gender. Others, like me, don’t realize it until much later in life. Some never know. For all of us, though, living in the wrong gender, or trying to live up to our conception of what that gender should act like, inevitably produces a feeling of unease, of not fitting in. Often the consequences are very serious, including clinical depression, inability to sustain healthy social relationships, alcoholism, drug abuse, and even suicidal tendencies. Of course, any of these symptoms can be caused by other problems, so connecting them to gender identity is never easy.

For me, the ultimate proof I am indeed a woman is simply that, once I transitioned and began living fully and completely as a woman, it felt right — in ways I never knew were possible before. I was like a blind person miraculously seeing light for the first time, it felt so wonderful and different and natural. Prior to transition, I only had clues indicating my gender identity was a problem. When I cross-dressed as a woman, I felt good; and, when I went back to acting like a man, I felt bad. As I investigated my possible transsexualism, I spent more and more time living in my femme presentation, testing how it felt. By the time I decided to transition, I was living as a “128 girl” — 128 hours a week as a woman and 40 hours (at work) as a man. I became completely certain that transition was the right thing for me to do — but I couldn’t know how very right it would be until after I did it.

Gender, then, is that fundamental internal sense that it feels right to be a woman or to be a man, or perhaps something in between or different, for that matter. This is the minimum composition of gender, the necessary and sufficient determiner, if you will. Gender cannot be determined from physical properties, such as, chromosomes or brain chemistry or whether somebody wears a dress or likes to tailgate at Raider games. Like transsexualism, gender is a self-diagnosed condition. Only you can say

what gender you are. You might be wrong if you haven't looked deeply into your heart, if you haven't examined the proposition and tested your conclusions. But certainly nobody else can properly claim to be more right.

And yet, there is more to gender than that, just as human beings are more than merely *Homo sapiens* with certain physical characteristics. Human beings are also love, ambition, courage, compassion, and so many other amazing things. Isn't a woman more than just her gender identity, and a man more than his? A woman does wear pretty dresses, cry at weddings, bear children, and so many other wonderful things. A man does bring home the bacon and cheer on his favorite team and laugh when he belches loudly.

Oh, not all women and all men do these things. But in our culture, most of us do, and all of us can appreciate those things, even those who don't do them. Even the woman who is sadly barren can know the joys and pains of childbirth, to some extent, by sharing the experiences of her sisters and friends. Even the man who has lost use of his legs to polio can dream of hitting the winning grand slam in the seventh game of the World Series. These commonly shared experiences, real and imagined, form the fabric that sets the warp and woof of our relationships with the other women and men in our lives.

For me, being a woman is more than just my inner sense of, *yes, I am indeed a woman*. I do like short skirts and sexy shoes and a wiggle when I walk. I adore when a man opens a door for me. I love the confidence and camaraderie I share with other women, even strangers. I do feel so right walking through the door marked "Women" instead of the one marked "Men." I do feel free to be vulnerable and emotional, domestic and caring, and to let myself be cared for. I have not abandoned my ability to be responsible, smart, and strong, either. These things are not what make me a woman, but they are certainly part of what makes my life as a woman rich and enjoyable. Other women may not share exactly the same preferences and styles, but we respect and understand each other, and we are all women nonetheless.

In the most limited and fundamental sense, then, gender is simply that inner sense of your true self, as a woman or a man or whatever you feel your gender to be. In the larger sense, this is my definition of what it means to be a woman. The definition is circular, but I like it all the same: *Being a woman is the sum total experience of living as a woman.*

That's all there is to it, I believe. I wasn't born with a vagina or a uterus, and I wasn't raised as a girl. I will never have many of the life experiences that are shared by most (but not all) women. But every day I spend living as a woman, my experience grows and I feel closer to my sisters. That's what a woman is, if you ask me.

Libido and Women of a Certain Age

A man is walking down the street when a pretty young blonde in a short skirt crosses in front of him. Unless that man is with his wife, and he has been extremely well disciplined by her, that man's eyes will follow the blonde. They will run up and down her body. If she is facing him, the eyes will pause (and perhaps freeze) at her bosom. If she is walking away, the eyes will be frozen on her ass. The man will think things he will not dare mention to his wife. If the blonde is particularly cute, the man may walk into a telephone pole, just like in the cartoon. For a few seconds, the man's libido has taken over his entire mind and body. This process is repeated many times each day.

The male libido is a powerful and much misunderstood force of nature. Only now that I've lost my own libido, am I starting to understand it in any meaningful way. This, in fact, may be one of the few areas where transsexual people really have seen the world from both sides.

I'm not an expert in biology, but libido is clearly caused by testosterone. When my body stopped producing testosterone (a welcome effect of taking female hormones), my libido disappeared. Men who take female hormones as treatment for prostate cancer report the same phenomena, and are usually much distressed by it. Conversely, pump a female body full of testosterone, like female-to-male transsexuals do, and a libido is sure to appear. There are exceptions to these rules, but that's the way it is for most of us.

What is surprising to me after spending half a life with a libido, and now a short time without one, is just how powerful a force the libido is. Oh, we're all aware of libido, and we have a certain amount of respect for it, but it's such a constant force in our lives (its presence directly affecting men and indirectly affecting women *through* its mysterious presence in men) that we take it for granted. We never really examine it. Look how long it was before Isaac Newton noticed gravity! But when it suddenly disappeared (my libido, that is, not gravity) the world changed so much for me I had to take a close look at it. I had no idea how much my libido colored my view of the world or controlled how I reacted to it.

Basically, the libido is a lens through which man views the world. It focuses and distorts everything he sees. Does a man have a hard time respecting women as human beings? You bet he does! This is because his body reacts to us primarily as sex objects. (I assume normal heterosexual males here and leave it as an exercise for the reader to extend it to the rest of the population.) It's not his fault. It's libido, and libido rules. It's only through a supreme effort of will and self-control — mind over matter, really — that men can give women the respect we deserve.

By the way, if you feel men don't respect you as a woman (and you're right about that!), don't feel bad. Men don't respect each other either. Look at their behavior ... all that competitiveness, the insults, and the fighting? That's disrespect, and it's because of libido. Of course, men don't respect each other — another man does nothing to satisfy a man's libido. It's sad, really, because men rarely feel that close personal bond women, without those nasty libidos, commonly share with each other. Do you want proof? Look at how hard the military has to work to forge bonds of respect between men, putting them through hell together in basic training.

I don't think women-raised-women can ever quite understand the mysterious force of libido that lives like a dominating spirit in a man's body. To them, it must look like a form of insanity. In fact, it may be exactly that. Libido is a totally irrational impulse that controls a man's thoughts and actions — how is that different from insanity? Insanity has also been defined as doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome. Doesn't libido do that all the time (expecting that pretty girl to say yes to you this time!)? To know what insanity is, however, is not to know what it is to be insane.

Do woman have libido? Nope, sorry. Well, a little bit. Women have testosterone, too, just not nearly as much as men. The normal range in males is 270 to 1070 nanograms per deciliter with 400 to 600 being a healthy range. In females, it's about 50 to 100. Women with low testosterone may experience depression and loss of sex drive. But the point is, libido is not an overwhelmingly powerful force that dominates our lives, like it is for men. This is a beautiful thing. It's what creates that special dynamic between men and women. Like our mothers taught us, men want it and women got it. The secret is women don't really "got" anything. It's all in men's minds, amped up on testosterone.

Perhaps you don't believe me about libido being substantially different between men and women? The proof is in the pudding. Put two men together — you'll want to use gay men for this experiment — and what do you get? Two libidos — it's orgy time,

baby! Put two women together and what do you get? No libidos, and I'm afraid all too often it's lesbian bed death, baby. The libido gap even explains the phenomena of trannie chasers. The prey of a trannie chaser is the cross-dresser, who expresses the femininity the chaser's libido targets while also possessing a strong male libido, so the two of them can have as much sex as gay men while still satisfying their libidos' heterosexuality.

What about women who have very strong sex drives, who seem to have male-like libidos? Is it the same thing? Something different? I don't know; that's a mystery to me. I don't deny these women exist, I just don't understand what drives them.

The next tricky and wonderful thing to understand about the male libido is that it's remarkably selective. Certain things trigger it and certain things don't. Usually it's tuned to pretty young women, the blonder the better. But some men go for redheads. Some are breast men, some are leg men. Some like BBWs (big beautiful women). Some, God bless 'em, like T-girls. Some like boys — oh, my! Some, unfortunately, like young children or farm implements or, God knows, anything. But whatever the libido is tuned to, that's what it's tuned to. The poor man has no control over it. This targeting seems to happen prenatally. Basically I'm talking sexual orientation here. But this is not the same as the man's sex drive. A man will have sex with a much broader range of, uh, let's call them partners, than just what his libido is tuned to. How does that work? Simple: Fantasize about what the libido wants while screwing the nearest available accommodation.

Libido explains why sexual orientation is strong in men and weak in women. A man's libido is tuned to get turned on by men or by women or both, so he is homosexual or heterosexual or bisexual. Libido is constant, so he doesn't switch. Woman's libido is weak, so she chooses her lovers based on other considerations, like whether she can stand being around the other person, and is not so bothered if they happen to fall outside of her weak libido's target zone.

Is man motivated by anything other than his libido? Yes, certainly. Most men have strong desires to have families of their own, to be good fathers and good providers, and to be good husbands. Most men succeed in this endeavor, working gallantly through the fog of libido. Men also have a need to bond with their own; this, I think, is a blessedly libido-free zone for them — libido-free in the sense their actions are not controlled by the libido when they're in the "guy zone." They certainly spend a lot of time in the "guy zone" exercising (exorcising?) the libido by talking ("Look at that babe! wouldn't you like to ...?") and even skirt chasing, but in much the same mode as a dog chases trucks, never expecting to actually catch one. Many men are driven by the need for money or power, but these are usually either in service of libido (if I make enough money, I can get the prettiest women) or in sublimation of it (I may not be able to get the women, but at least I can get the gold-plated Hummer!). And then there's the sports thing, which I cannot account for in any way, shape, or form.

Does a man's libido ever go away? Oh, yes; at least, it takes a breather, usually right after sex. Sex is the all-powerful goal of libido, and it's also the anti-libido. Once a man has sex (or more particularly, an orgasm) his libido goes into remission, and he wants to roll over and go to sleep. Or, if he's not tired, that second hunger kicks in: hunger for food; he wants a pizza or fries. (It's never for decent food.) It takes different amounts of time or circumstance for the libido to revive itself, but don't worry, it will be back, as surely as the Phoenix rises from the ashes — first thing the next morning, most likely. Libido is normally in remission for such a short period, men never learn to actually experience life without it.

A man's libido may also go away during times of sickness or stress. This in itself is distressing to him, and it may cause a downward spiral of problems. A man's libido also ceases at death ... but seemingly not a moment before, no matter how little follow-through he is capable of mustering.

Previously I discussed how the libido is tuned to a selective group of targets, which brings us to the part about women of a certain age. One thing is pretty clear: Libido craves youth. It's obvious to see why this would be. Libido arose through millions of years of evolution as an engine for propagating the species. Naturally it drives men to choose women in their healthy child-bearing years. Back in the caveman days (not that we don't still have cavemen around) people didn't live very long. Prime child-bearing years were ages twelve to twenty. Is it any wonder women over age twenty-five fall out of the libido's crosshairs even to this day?

The realization that libido craves youth took me by surprise, perhaps because my libido surely was never typical, since I was never really a man. I was always attracted to a pretty woman, regardless of her age. I suppose the real attraction was I wanted to be her, not to have sex with her, so it really wasn't my libido acting — at least not in isolation. But it's become quite clear to me now, most men simply are not turned on by women of a certain age, and that age is quite young. Women-raised-women are very aware of this phenomenon, but it escapes most trans women. This fact is a source of great resentment among women. They blame it on men's vanity and on our youth-oriented culture. But it's not that at all. It's libido. The culture is simply echoing libido's implacable demands. Until we understand it's not a matter of men being stupid or misogynist and women being competitive and youth-lusting, that it's simply a matter of libido, this issue will continue to plague our society.

Women-raised-women must go through a heart-wrenching time in their late twenties and early thirties when suddenly, for no apparent reason, men's heads no longer turn when they walk by, their derrieres no longer attract surreptitious pinches, and drinks stop appearing for them at bars. Maybe it's not quite so bad for women who are securely married and are beginning to raise those 2.4 kids. But for women who are still single, it must be hell. They must study their images oh-so-closely in the mirror, looking for that new wrinkle, those extra pounds, that hair out of

place, wondering, *What changed?* What a mystery! But the answer doesn't lie in the mirror. It's not you, Honey, it's the men. It's libido. You just aged out of the target zone. And you can do *nothing* about it. It's too bad too. Just as they say, "Youth is wasted on the young," I'd add, "Sexual attraction is wasted on young women!"

For trans women of a certain age, which is to say for me, the libido-craves-youth thing is also quite puzzling. All my life I longed to be that sexy woman stepping out of the cab. Now, through an absolute miracle of God, I have become that very woman. Why aren't the men staring? Where are the wolf whistles? Why aren't the drinks appearing at my table? Oh, the trans woman's first reaction is, *it's because I'm a trannie! I'm not passing, that's the problem.* And we go through all manner of hell doing our best to pass, getting our skulls chiseled, working the bass resonance out of our voices, padding this, unpadding that, buying the most expensive cosmetics and wigs, and, ultimately ... convincing ourselves we still don't pass. It's not passing, Honey. It's libido. Having a slightly masculine body may be a strike against me in libido's eye (actually, odds are better it's a strike for me, but that's a different discussion) but it doesn't matter. I've already been called out on a technical foul: *I am too old!* That's it. I can't do anything about it. Not only did I miss my chance at girlhood and all those precious, woman-to-woman bonding years, but I also missed any chance of ever having men think I am sexy. Thank you, transsexualism!

But all is not lost. I still think of myself as a sexy, desirable woman, and I value that immensely. We women of a certain age also appraise each other's presentation, appreciating both class and sexiness. Men appreciate us, too, even if we don't set their libidos on fire. They still want to have sex with us, if only because they can't get the seventeen-year-old hotties. The finer we are, the easier it is for them to feed their libidinous fantasies. This, I think, is one small area where trans women have a life advantage over women-raised-women. Having ourselves been slaves to libido for many years, we trans women viscerally understand the

libido's mysterious power. We can enjoy our liberation from libido, and we can accept our reduced role in men's lives without blaming it all on our own shortcomings, or theirs. It's not us, darlings. It's libido!

You'll Never Be a Real Woman

My mother finally laid this one on me: “You’ll never be a real woman.” All transsexual women get this at least once in their lives.

It’s not true. I *am* a real woman. Am I exactly like other women? No, I am not. I could talk about the decades of socialization as a male, the testosterone poisoning, and the genitals. All these things influenced my development and have made me different from most other women. But do you know what? None of that matters — not in the least. Not as to whether I am a real woman, because women aren’t all the same, period. We women share a certain bond just because we are all women (real

women!), but no woman feels completely at home in every situation. Lots of things make women different from each other. For example:

- ▶ Very beautiful women versus average-looking or unattractive women
- ▶ Very rich women versus middle-class or economically disadvantaged women
- ▶ Young women versus middle-aged or mature women (versus mature women who dress like young women ... guilty!)
- ▶ Mothers versus childless women
- ▶ New Yawkers versus Angelenos
- ▶ Urban-raised versus suburban versus country women
- ▶ Athletes versus couch potatoes
- ▶ Career women versus wage slaves versus domestic goddesses
- ▶ Amazons versus women of average height or small stature

Amongst all this wonderful diversity, trans versus genetic is a small thing. When I find myself feeling like an outsider in a group of women, I can easily jump to the conclusion that it's because I'm transsexual. But instead, I try to remind myself many other possible reasons exist. The important thing is to concentrate on what we have in common. Our differences need not divide us. Instead, they can add richness and excitement to all our lives. And if I really want to feel like I don't fit in, why then I just hang out with a group of men!

Trannies in the House! (Prevalence of transsexualism)

Just how many of us transsexuals are there? Does it even matter? We're here, we're — uh, not exactly queer, get used to it! Right?

Maybe not right. I found out there might be a hundred times more of us than I had previously thought. *A hundred times!* That's a lot. It was enough to change the way I feel about certain things.

How many transsexuals? The most commonly accepted figures have us at 1 out of 30,000 natal males and 1 out of 100,000

natal females. Millie Brown mentions these numbers in her excellent book, *True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism—For Families, Friends, Coworkers, and Helping Professionals*, pointing out it refers to adults who seek SRS, not all transsexuals. Jennifer Rietz’s popular Web site, transsexual.org, simply states: “The exact number of transsexuals in any given population will probably never be accurately known (the best current estimate is 1 per 30,000).” I googled up this reference from *The International Journal of Transgenderism* (“Reflections on ‘Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment’ 1969–1999: Presidential Address,” August, 1999): “Considering that the incidence of transsexualism is 1 in 30,000 females and 1 in 10,000 males ...”

If these estimates are correct, transsexualism is pretty rare indeed. Let’s see, in the fifth game of the 2002 World Series when the Giants pummeled the Angels 16 to 4, there would have been only one or two transsexuals in the stands at Pac Bell Park, statistically speaking. (The park holds 40,800 fans.)

I mentioned these figures on an Internet discussion board and somebody more astute than me replied: “I have heard those figures, too, but I think it has to be more common than that. If this were true, San Francisco would have 23 transsexuals in the city limits. I’m quite sure I know more than that myself. New York City would have only 266 transsexuals and the entire United States only 9,000.”

She’s right, of course. I thought the reason I saw trannies everywhere was simply because I’m immersed in that culture at this point in my life. But even so, I see more of us than those commonly used figures support.

Someone else sent me a link to an article, *How Frequently Does Transsexualism Occur?* by Lynn Conway, the renowned computer scientist. Ms. Conway performed her own analysis and came up with startlingly higher numbers. Counting the number of SRS operations performed during the last four decades, “We discover to our amazement that at least 1 out of every 2,500 persons born male in the United States has *already* undergone

SRS to become female!” Because many transsexuals have not yet undergone SRS (and many may never), she concludes an accurate figure for the rate of transsexualism may be about one in two hundred fifty. This is *one hundred twenty times* more transsexuals than the commonly accepted figures! Ms. Conway points out this is much higher than the rates of occurrence of muscular dystrophy (1 out of 5,000), multiple sclerosis (1 out of 1,000), blindness (1 out of 350), and other common conditions.

What about types of transgenderism besides transsexualism? What about all the cross-dressers, drag queens, androgynous folks, and everybody else who doesn't strictly conform to the traditional male/female gender binary? A good guess is the overall transgender population may be ten times that of transsexuals or 1 to 2 percent of the population. My therapist told me she believes maybe 50 percent of all men have some amount of gender confusion — that they may have tried cross-dressing to some little extent or at least been interested in it. Has your husband ever tried on one of your bras or a pair of your panties just for a laugh? Did you notice those Budweiser commercials where the guys put on dresses to get into the bar on ladies' night? You can be sure that is not just a joke. Budweiser is quite deliberately aiming at *something* in their target demographic!

So transgenderism and transsexualism is much more common than I had previously thought. At that World Series game in Pac Bell Park, there were probably 120 trans women and 40 trans men in the stands — and quite possibly a cross-dresser or two on the field or in the dugouts! These facts changed my feelings about some things:

- ▶ I guess I'm not as freaky — or as precious — as I thought I was.
- ▶ I find myself inclined to be more accepting of transsexuals and transgender folks who aren't trannie in exactly the same way I am, now that I realize how big our tent really is.
- ▶ I've sometimes been accused of wanting everybody to transition, and I confess to some tendency that way. But perhaps that is not as misguided as it seemed. I may be meeting a significant number of true transsexuals after all.

- ▶ It seems all the more important to educate the public about us. We really are everywhere, like we've been saying all along. It's even more important to demand our human, legal, and political rights, as well as with appropriate medical care.
- ▶ I have a lot less sympathy for those who doubt or deny the reality of transsexualism (such as my parents, for instance). Our condition is not rare enough to justify your ignorance!
- ▶ I'm less worried about understanding my own nature. I think my desire to figure it all out was driven by my incredulity that something so rare should happen and happen to me in particular. But whatever and however it is, it turns out it's not all that rare after all, so I feel better about just accepting it.
- ▶ I was surely motivated to proceed with all due speed to get my SRS done. One in 2,500 have already done it; what was taking me so long?

I'd like to conclude by giving a big shout out to all those transgender brothers and sisters I never knew I had. Rock on, trannies! We're in the house!

My Transsexual Lifestyle

I live in a two-story house in an executive suburb. I don't have a tennis court or a swimming pool, but I do have whirlpool jets in my bathtub. I drive a black, '97 Mustang GT with the 4.6-liter engine. I don't have any other gasoline-fired engines — no boats, SUVs, or snowmobiles. I eat off dishes I bought at Mikasa at the mall. I'm embarrassed when I have three people over for dinner, because I broke one of the dinner plates so I can't set a matched table. Is this my transsexual lifestyle?

I shop at Nordstrom, but I also pick up a few things at thrift stores. I use Chanel cosmetics. My scent is Opium by YSL. Is this my transsexual lifestyle?

I work as an engineer at a computer company. It pays very well, but I'm bored with the whole high-tech thing. I'm looking for new directions in life, perhaps something where I have more interaction with people. Is this my transsexual lifestyle?

I attend services at a Unity church on Sunday, but only now and then when the spirit moves me. I like to go out dancing on Friday or Saturday night (which makes church on Sunday that much more difficult!). Dance clubs I enjoy include the DNA Lounge and Ruby Skye in San Francisco, Backbeat and The Forum in the South Bay. Sometimes I go dancing at gay or lesbian clubs too. I visited the San Jose Museum of Modern Art a couple of weeks ago. Is this my transsexual lifestyle?

I do some Pilates, fifty sit-ups, and two hundred pelvic thrusts each morning and evening, on a fairly regular basis. I eat meat, but not very much and not very often. No burgers since I read *Fast Food Nation!* I take a handful of vitamins and supplements every day, including Echinacea and folic acid. I wonder if they do any good. Is this my transsexual lifestyle?

I have a boyfriend, Mike, I've been dating for eight months. He treats me wonderfully. But unfortunately, this doesn't seem to be true love for me. We do not have an exclusive arrangement, and frankly, I'm shopping for an upgrade. But Mike has set the bar awfully high! Is this my transsexual lifestyle?

I have friends I see on a regular basis. We meet for drinks and gab, dancing, shopping, lunch. Some of my friends are transgender. Some are not. Most of them, I am happy to say, are very smart and have great senses of humor. Is this my transsexual lifestyle?

I'm trying to figure it out, because so many people I run into speak so confidently of the "lifestyle I have chosen." I can't see that my lifestyle is any different from that of many other women. Can anybody help me with this? What, exactly, is my transsexual lifestyle?

DOMA, FMA, the Olympics, and Me

A funny thing happened in 1968 when the International Olympic Committee began testing athletes' chromosomes to prevent men from unfairly infiltrating women's events. The funny thing was, they found out not all men are XY and not all women are XX. What did this mean? We now know XXY, XXYY, XXXY, and other arrangements of the sex chromosomes naturally exist in people we classify as intersex. One out of every thousand babies is born with non-standard sex chromosomes, according to statistics from The Intersex Society of North America (ISNA).

That brings me to the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA), which would amend the Constitution of the United States of America to define marriage as a union between “a man and a woman;” and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which already does the same thing with regard to federal benefits and the application of the Full Faith and Credit Clause of the Constitution. My question is this: How do we determine who is a man and who is a woman if we cannot depend on our chromosomes, as the International Olympic committee discovered?

“Wait a minute,” you might say, “quit confusing the issue with chromosomes. Just let me see a person naked and I’ll tell you if he or she is a he or a she!” No so fast, bucko. The intersex classification also includes babies born with anomalous genitalia and reproductive structures, including genitalia that are sexually ambiguous. (Most such babies are surgically assigned to one sex or the other as infants. Tragically, many of these children develop an opposite true gender identity as they mature into teenagers.) If you start inspecting people naked to determine their gender, you will see some surprising things. The International Olympic Committee tried this approach, too, before they developed chromosome testing.

What about me? If you were to see me — even naked — you would swear I am female. Indeed, I’m often told I am a very feminine, attractive woman, I blush to say. My driver’s license, passport, and birth certificate identify me as female. Yet in the year 2000 the Texas Supreme Court ruled in *Littleton versus Prange* that a woman just like me was legally a man and, therefore, her marriage to a man was invalid. Why? Because many years earlier someone had written “male” on her birth certificate, just as someone wrote “male” on mine forty-nine years ago. Christie Lee Littleton, the plaintiff in the Texas case, is a transsexual woman; like me, she needed to undergo what is commonly known as a sex change to bring her physical body into congruence with the gender in her heart and mind.

How will DOMA and the FMA treat me, Christie Lee Littleton, and forty thousand other transsexual American

women and men? Are we the gender we appear to be or are we the gender someone wrote on our birth certificates when we were born? If the latter, will you come to my wedding if I marry a woman — both of us resplendent in beautiful white wedding gowns?

The truth is DOMA and the FMA are attempts to turn back the clock to a time when we thought gender was simple and it was clear who was a man and who was a woman. But science and society have progressed; we now have a more sophisticated understanding of gender. The arguments against same-sex unions are really part of the same thing. They hearken back to a naïve belief men and women must be heterosexual or else something is wrong with them. But our understanding of human sexuality is more sophisticated than that now too. We know diversity of normal human sexuality is much broader than simple heterosexuality. Our laws must embrace our diversity of gender and sexual expression just as we embrace diversity of race, creed, color, religion, and equality of the sexes. In diversity lies our nation's strength.

The clock cannot be turned back; the bell cannot be unringed. The International Olympic Committee no longer does chromosome testing; they even rewrote their rules to allow participation of transsexual competitors. Likewise, we must embrace a gender-neutral definition of marriage like the one Assemblyman Mark Leno introduced in the California state legislature defining marriage as a “personal relation arising out of a civil contract between two people.” It's right; it's fair; and it treats all Americans citizens as equal under the law, regardless of gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation.

LGBT Pride

I just returned from the San Francisco Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Pride Celebration. The focus of Pride is the internationally famous Pride parade on Sunday. Pride also takes over the Civic Center area for a huge outdoor festival. And, of course, the city is full of parties from Friday afternoon until late Sunday. I stayed Friday and Saturday nights at the Ramada Inn on Market Street just across from the Civic Center, so I was right there for the parade and festival and a short taxi ride to everywhere else that mattered.

The weather could not have been nicer. The sky was clear and sunny and the temperature was warm enough for tank tops or G-

strings, but not hot enough that people were passing out (like at the previous year's Folsom Street Fair). The wind was a bit too strong on Saturday and ruined my plans of wearing a really cute hat and not worrying about my hair. So I fell back to Plan B — let my hair blow in the wind and don't worry about it. Frizz ball! But Sunday was calmer, so I got to wear my hat then. The goddess takes care of us.

Friday night I had dinner at the Cosmopolitan Café down near the Embarcadero. As usual the food was superb, the jazz was cool, and the crowd was, well, cosmopolitan. But rather to my surprise, there was no evidence of Pride. I had expected Pride to dominate the city all weekend, but it did not penetrate the Embarcadero on Friday. In fact, all weekend long, once you got a few blocks away from any Pride activity, the city was pretty much back to normal — if you can ever call San Francisco normal.

After dinner I dropped into the Fencesitters Ball at Jezebel's Joint, as a tip of the hat to the B's (bisexuals — get it, fencesitters?) in the LGBT community. I found tiny Jezebel's to be overcrowded and the people not particularly sociable, at least with me, so I didn't stay long. As it was already getting late, I finished the evening off at Diva's, San Francisco's premiere tranny club. Diva's seemed to be having its regular Friday night.

Saturday the Pride Festival was very emotional for me. I felt wonderful being in an environment where unconventional (somehow the term "queer" doesn't seem to fit in this context, even though we've gaily co-opted it) sexuality and gender are the norm. Like some kind of Bizzaro world, the few straight people around were the ones who seemed out of place. I experienced a rare and profound feeling my gender identity, my sexuality, and my life were not something simply to be tolerated or accepted; rather, they were normal, natural, and deserved serious treatment. On the other hand, I was the only transgender person I noticed anywhere, except for a few Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence and a trans woman who made an appeal from the main stage protesting police abuse of transgenders. As happens from time to time, it again struck me how much T's are the queer of the

queer, if you get my meaning. A few times I overheard exclamations of, "Look at that man!" from tourists, but overall I was treated with respect and fondness. That is, if I was noticed at all. Mostly I seemed to be invisible.

The festival was reasonably full on Saturday, especially as the afternoon wore on. Little did I know how incredibly crowded it would be on Sunday. I'm glad I spent Saturday seeing most of the festival, even though a certain number of booths, like Transgender San Francisco and the female-to-male transsexual group, weren't even set up until Sunday. One side street was blocked off for a techno-rave dance area, and I danced for a while with only a dozen other ravers. But Sunday the entire street was packed and throbbing with dancers.

The booths represented a lot of the run-of-the-mill, summer festival kitsch merchandising (sunglasses and jewelry seemed most popular), food and drink, and business promotion. There was some controversy about the commercialization of Pride. Personally I was struck by the irony of the heavy sponsorship by the San Francisco Chronicle, as I had recently sent them a letter objecting to a radio ad for the Chronicle Classifieds that used a transsexual woman's transition as the brunt of its blunt humor.

There were also a goodly number of only-in-San Francisco, kinky attractions like Society of Janus (a private BDSM club I have visited), various gay organizations and media, and vendors of intriguing leather accessories. But what makes Pride special was the heartwarming number of support, charity, and health booths featuring organizations involved in things like sexually transmitted disease (STD) treatment and prevention, housing for aging LGBTs, and foster parenting. This last group, the PRIDE Foster Family Agency, has done a lot of work in Southern California placing foster children into LGBT homes, including single-parent homes. They are expanding their presence in the Bay Area now. I took some pamphlets, because maybe, someday ... The group that is my personal favorite is Parents and Friends of Lesbians And Gays (PFLAG), probably because I long for the

time when my own parents will see their way to become members. (PFLAG includes a small transgender group.)

All day long the main stage in front of City Hall provided a collage of song, dance, spoken word, and other events. The acts were kept short so nothing got too boring. Usually I don't have much patience or interest in this sort of thing, but I was drawn in by what I saw and heard. For example, a bisexual man grabbed my attention with the story of how he came to be aware of his sexual nature. I was intrigued at how similar it sounded to my own story and those of many of my transgender friends. He acknowledged we all hate labels because they cannot ever describe us very thoroughly or accurately. Nevertheless, he urged bisexuals to give the label a try and see what good it can do in the work of bringing bisexuality out of the closet and into the public eye, which is a crucial first step toward gaining acceptance.

I was overwhelmed by a poem honoring the transgender sisters who led the Stonewall revolt many years ago. The poet, a lesbian I suppose, was named Tiger Something-or-other. (Ain't I the ace reporter?) She told how the T's "battled bullets and billy clubs with champagne glasses and high heels," and stood strong for our right to be ourselves. She thanked them for helping to expand the boundaries of what is accepted as normal gender and sexual behavior. She concluded if we T's have lost family, friends, or loved ones because they cannot accept us, then they simply don't understand what precious gifts we are. As the crowd cheered and shouted their support, the mascara began running out from beneath my sunglasses. (I think it must have been the heat.) I looked around and noticed I was the only T to be seen and nobody was looking back at me. It made me wonder if their support is stronger in theory than in practice — because I was one precious gift who surely could have used a big hug just then.

A little later two hundred same-sex couples gathered on stage to DP — commit to each other as domestic partners. This they do for love and, importantly, for legal rights and protections. State Assembly Member Carole Migden, who had been a prime mover

behind the DP legislation, hosted the ceremony. Supervisors Mark Leno, the transgender community's great friend, and Tom Ammiano administered the vows. Mark, handsome and sexy as ever, made his standard joke: "People ask me why I'm not getting DP'd today. Heck, I can't even get a second date!" The crowd responded with good-natured laughs.

The commitment ceremony was brief but touching. The San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus sang as the couples processed in and again as they proceeded out at the completion of the ceremony. The love was palpable as the couples looked into each other's eyes and repeated the vows. All around me in the crowd, I saw other couples, man and man, woman and woman, holding hands and repeating the words to each other as well. I was moved, but I felt quite alone without a partner and no other T's even in sight. Once again, my mascara started running. Damn heat!

Three Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an outrageous and photogenic group of drag queens who dress as nuns, gave a touching and ribald blessing to couples, explaining "Love is holding the bucket for your partner. Love is an unexpected trip to the ATM. Love is feeding your partner chocolate when they need it least." They ended with their standard benediction, "Go forth and sin some more!" I hope we all did just that.

Saturday evening I went early to the Castro, San Francisco's most notoriously gay district, where a huge street party would take place. I started with a drink at Twin Peaks, right on the corner at Market. I spotted a guy with a great multi-colored box-purse. I went up to him and asked, "Can we please trade purses?" holding out my drab little black disco purse. He looked me up and down and said, haughtily, "Honey, this purse cost more than anything you've got on!" I laughed and replied, "I'm sure it cost more than my entire wardrobe!" He laughingly agreed, and then we were friends.

Heading up Castro Street, I had dinner at a splendid little restaurant named Caffe Luna Piena. It doesn't look like much from the outside, but you can dine on a lovely outdoor garden deck in the back, under gas heaters so you won't be chilled in the

cool San Francisco night air. The food is marvelous. I said hi to a couple of T-girls I knew who happened to be eating there as well.

As it got towards nine, the street began filling up. The beloved Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence were collecting donations at both ends of the block. I asked a Sister what the donations were for, and she told me about Healing Waters. They send people who are living with AIDS on white-water rafting trips. Hmmmm, that sounds reasonable to me. I commented to Sister that my mother hates the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, even though I told my mom they are wonderful people who do great charity work in the community. My mother said, "Good works mean nothing, unless they accept Jesus into their hearts." I told this to the Sister, and she answered, "Who said we don't accept Jesus into our hearts? We accept him there and a lot deeper!" I don't think I'll relay this to my mother.

It was fun wandering through some of the bars and sex shops of the Castro and mingling with the crowds in the street. In the sex shops, I was a little embarrassed to have to ask what some of the toys were for exactly, but how else is a girl to learn? By ten it was getting too crowded for me, so I moved on. I headed for the South of Market Area (SOMA) to Cherry Bar, the venue of a lesbian dance club called G-Spot that night. I was surprised at how crowded it was at G-Spot because I thought everybody in the world was packed into the Castro. Tonight was clearly a night to party. The group at G-Spot was almost exclusively women (duh!), but there were a few men and maybe another T or three. I saw two mixed couples I took to be heterosexual. After a while I started thinking they might be graduates of a gay de-programming camp, because the two guys seemed to enjoy dancing with each other a lot. I joke! Goddess bless them, I love them for being out partying with us, whatever their story was.

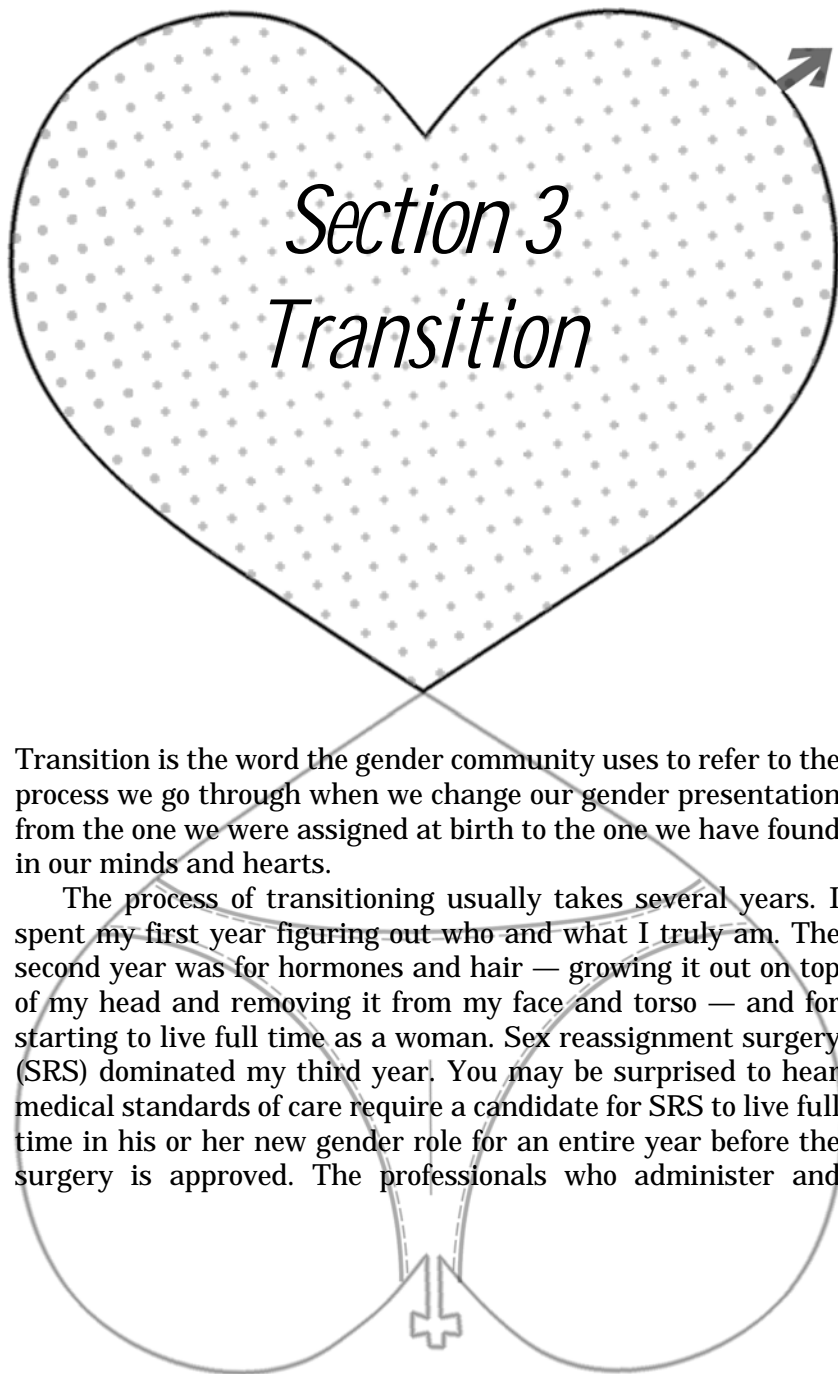
Sunday was the parade and — oh, my! — it's some parade. Actually it's more than a parade; it's an activity that goes on all day long. The Dykes on Bikes (officially the "San Francisco Women's Motorcycle Contingent") led off, as is the grand tradition. No matter what you've heard, there are far more of

them than you can believe. And, sorry to say, fewer of them than you would be led to believe ride bare-breasted. Anyone who witnesses this display has to be left with the impression women come in all shapes and sizes, they are beautiful, they can ride bikes, and they not only deserve your respect, they can damn well demand it!

Celebrity Grand Marshall Sir Ian McKellan, who I simply adore, appeared early in the parade. As his car approached the spot where I was standing, Sir Ian hopped out and pranced around working the crowd like a joyful pixie. He came within ten feet of me and I bathed in that glorious smile. He was obviously having the time of his life. The other Celebrity Grand Marshall was Sharon Gless, Michael's mother on Showtime's *Queer as Folk*. She was not working it like Sir Ian; but I love her too, anyway!

There were far too many groups in the parade to write about them all, but I do want to mention TGSF. Transgender San Francisco did a fine job representin', in my humble opinion. Traveling behind a banner proclaiming, "Transgender and Loving It!" they had an exciting Hawaiian-themed float crawling with beautiful bikini-clad girls — T-girls, of course. I felt it showed T-girls as both sexy and dignified, effectively counterbalancing the image of the flamboyant drag queens who dominated the rest of the parade and at whom the public so loves to gawk. This filled me personally with more pride than anything else at the festival. Go TGSF!

The festival grounds were so packed on Sunday it seemed like Disney World on the day after Thanksgiving — except the crowd was rather unlike your typical Disney crowd! I elbowed my way through the throngs for awhile, reveling in the wonder of it all. But soon I had enough, so I headed home, contemplating my place in the world, and wondering what the future might have in store for me.



Section 3

Transition

Transition is the word the gender community uses to refer to the process we go through when we change our gender presentation from the one we were assigned at birth to the one we have found in our minds and hearts.

The process of transitioning usually takes several years. I spent my first year figuring out who and what I truly am. The second year was for hormones and hair — growing it out on top of my head and removing it from my face and torso — and for starting to live full time as a woman. Sex reassignment surgery (SRS) dominated my third year. You may be surprised to hear medical standards of care require a candidate for SRS to live full time in his or her new gender role for an entire year before the surgery is approved. The professionals who administer and

oversee our medical care want us to be very certain about what we are doing before we take this irreversible step.

Sex reassignment surgery was the final step in my physical transition, but I will still be growing into my role and identity as a woman for several years to come. Some women tell me they consider their transition to have continued ten years beyond their SRS.

Often *transition* is used in another sense, referring simply to the day a person begins living full time in his or her new gender presentation. As in: Lannie transitioned on New Year's Day, 2002. Transition is a big deal! The magnitude of this change is comparable to what most people go through when they become parents. Everything changes, doesn't it? It affects our personal identities, our goals and priorities in life, and all of our day-to-day routines. And not just for us, but also for our spouses, our friends and loved ones, our employers and co-workers — it affects everybody around us. And yet, in some ways, nothing changes. We're still the same people we were before, but with new responsibilities and a new view of life.

Most of you reading this will never change your gender presentation. This section, however, will give you an idea of what it would be like.

Song: Hey, You've Got To ...

(To the tune of the Beatle's,
You've Got To Hide Your Love Away)

Here I stand head in hand,
Turn my face to the wall,
If he's not gone I can't go on,
He's six inches small.

Everywhere people stare,
Each and every day,
I can see them laugh at me,
And I hear them say ...

Hey you've got to hide your cock away.
Hey you've got to hide your cock away.

How could I even try?
I can never pass,
Hearing them, seeing them,
Me, they just harass.

So I'll tuck, shave and pluck,
Each and every day,
Johns and Jeans, all you queens,
Let me hear you say ...

Hey you've got to hide your cock away.
Hey you've got to hide your cock away.

Lannie Gets Her Ears Pierced

I got my ears pierced. Big deal. Well, it was a big deal to me.

Why did I get my ears pierced? So I could wear cute earrings, of course! Oh, I owned some cute clip-ons, but few stores carried them. When I lost or broke one of my favorite earrings, it was frustrating trying to find a replacement. Besides, I'd been wearing clip-ons for such long stretches, they were starting to hurt and damage my earlobes.

I'd been seriously toying with the idea of getting my ears pierced for several weeks. One Saturday I decided piercing day had arrived. I dressed casually in jeans, a blue sweater, and my short auburn wig, and off to the mall I went.

I'd been going out dressed for quite a while, and very little intimidated me anymore. I got read from time to time, which is to say people sometimes recognized I am a transgender woman. It didn't particularly bother me. I would just smile at people and they would smile back. They were always very nice to me. (Sometimes I think it may be in the same way they're nice to insane people, but I'll take it.) I have to admit I was intimidated by the idea of walking up to a clerk — most likely a cute young GG — and asking to get my ears pierced. Oh, well, it was actually kind of interesting to feel that old nervous tingle again!

I went to the Great Mall of Milpitas (which my friend likes to call "Le Grand Mal"). First I walked the entire mall and checked out the places offering, "Free ear piercing with purchase of studs." I found these signs at a few jewelry kiosks in the main aisle and in a couple of accessory stores. I stalled by dropping into Charlotte Russe and buying a sparkly, blue sweater for seven dollars and a cute halter top with a cowl collar for three dollars.

Out in the mall again, I passed by Claire's accessories shop. I noticed they had a piercing station in the front window. A customer was in the high chair chatting with the operator — a cute young GG, as I had anticipated. I noticed the customer had a series of piercings in her eyebrows and her nose, as well as in her ears. I thought, *Here's somebody who knows her piercings!* That seemed like a good sign so I chose Claire's for my procedure. I stalled a bit more, walked by a few more times, checked out one other place for the third time, and finally got up the courage to go into Claire's.

By the time I got inside, the multi-pierced customer was gone and the piercing operator was no longer at the station. I went up to the counter and asked the cute, twenty-something girl, "Is your ear-piercing person here?"

She said, "That's me. Step right over here," leading me to the high chair in the front window. "Are you a little nervous?" she asked.

"A little," I admitted.

“Don’t worry, it really doesn’t hurt much at all,” she reassured me.

“Oh, I’m not worried about the pain,” I said. “I’m nervous about how I’m going to explain it at work on Monday!” She gave me a double take and went silent ... I think she had just realized I was a transgender woman. But she continued to be extremely nice and professional. It was all over in two minutes. We chatted a little about how different piercings produced varying levels of pain. She said nipple piercings sting, but she didn’t even notice ear piercings anymore. She even lets new girls practice on her. At one point she had ten holes per ear! Indeed, it didn’t hurt me at all. It was just a quick pinch, barely noticeable.

That’s all there was to it, from a practical viewpoint. I picked out a couple pairs of pierced earrings to give me something to look forward to and as a reward for finally having the courage to get it done. When I paid for my purchase, I received a bottle of antiseptic lotion with care instructions: I should swab my ears and rotate the studs three times a day for six weeks ... Egad! I thought I would only need to do that for ten days. Oh, well. The instruction sheet said to leave the studs in continuously for five months, lest the holes heal up. OK, I could do that. At least I could start wearing some cute earrings (posts, not wire) after the six weeks were up.

Psychologically, there was more going on for me. This was the first relatively indelible body modification I made to support my gender transition. There had been earlier milestones that held similar weight for me, of course: the first time I shaved my legs and my entire body; the first time I had the nerve to wear short sleeve shirts to work, exposing my shaved arms; when I started growing out my fingernails. But all these changes could easily be reversed. The ear piercings would be with me for a while and wearing the studs would certainly (I assumed) draw some attention — if not at work, most definitely from my parents!

Monday arrived. I have to say, when I dressed in guy mode that morning, I liked the look of the little silver studs in my ears. What a pleasant surprise! I felt I should have pierced my ears

years ago. At work, only a couple people mentioned my studs. One fellow commented he once had an ear pierced, but he had let it close up. The receptionist told me my studs looked good. All that worry was for nothing — as usual.

What my parents would have to say about my pierced ears at Thanksgiving remained to be seen. In the meantime, I would be out shopping for some really cute earrings!

Transsexual Panic Attack

“If I took steps to transition on the job I think it would drive me crazy! I know someone who wrote a letter to their employer, and another to all their colleagues, explaining the situation. I would have to face close friends who suspect nothing, as well as the not-so-friendly ones — the ones I KNOW are transphobic. How do I approach them as a transsexual, when I can’t even approach them now? The really scary part would be when the day came to walk into work as Michelle. It wouldn’t end there, either, would it? Because I would need

to work with, talk to, and interact with them without going to pieces. The stress would be enormous.

“I would be paranoid about looking right. Each morning the same fear would come back, checking how I looked walking into work, facing up to them each day, the stress and fear returning, every glance making me wonder, *Do they think I look weird? Are they laughing at me when they make a joke in the lunchroom? Do they think I am a pervert?* Oh, my god, the thought of it all is too much stress! How on earth does ANYONE survive this at all? They do, I know, but I don’t think I could.”

I found this lament posted on a discussion board in an online club for T-girls, and I was taken aback. This person had somehow crawled inside my mind! She had captured precisely the thoughts that had run through my brain exactly one year earlier, when I first seriously considered the possibility I might be transsexual. Now I am not a person who is prone to panic attacks. Indeed, I cannot think of any other occasion when I’ve had one. But that was a panic attack all right. I’ve since discussed the experience with several other transsexual women, and it seems the transsexual panic attack is a common phenomena. I’ll tell you about what happened to me, and you can see if it sounds familiar.

I had been cross-dressing for a number of years. I considered myself to be a typical heterosexual cross-dresser. After too many years spent in the closet, I finally happened to wander into the Brigadoon-like LGBT (lesbian gay bisexual transgender) community and began making friends. One day I met a beautiful, blonde, transsexual girl. She was some years younger than me and far prettier than I could ever hope to be. Sensing this was a person with whom I could become friends, and with just a hint of lust in my heart, I pursued an e-mail correspondence with her. One day she asked me if I would mind coming over to her place and helping her set up a Web site. Mind? I would be delighted!

Saturday came and I headed over to my new friend's house, just as thrilled as could be. The opportunity simply to go out *en femme* was still exciting — it felt absolutely daring to be driving somewhere without a stitch of boy clothes in the car, even in case of an emergency! To be going to meet a new friend, that also was great. That she happened to be a super hot, young chick ... well, let's not even go there! I didn't have any specific plan in mind — but I brought along a bottle of sparkling wine, just in case.

We worked on the Web site for a few hours. Then the cork popped out of the sparkling wine bottle and *deep discussions* ensued. We talked a long time. We got along just wonderfully; in fact, we are friends to this very day. We had a lot in common: our upbringing, our professions, and our philosophies and attitudes. Oh, yes, there was that trannie thing too. But she was transsexual, not just a cross-dresser like me. She had transitioned only six months earlier. I didn't know much about transsexualism, and she was more than happy to teach me all about it. She told me the story of her transgender journey and her transition. She read me passages from Millie Brown's book *True Selves*. She shared her joys and fears with me.

We talked about my cross-dressing too. Had I ever considered whether I might be transsexual? It was pretty obvious to me I wasn't. For starters, if I was, I would know it, wouldn't I? We went through the list of symptoms my friend thought was typical for a transsexual, and I didn't score very high. Did I think I was a girl when I was little? No. Did I always cross-dress? No. Did I fantasize I was the woman when I made love? No. Did I hate being a man? No — in fact, I thought I made a pretty good man!

Eventually I said goodbye, went home, and went to bed. I slept soundly, dreamlessly. As soon as I awoke, my head still heavy on the pillow, intense thoughts and memories flooded my brain, things I hadn't thought about for years, things that had been buried away somewhere deep inside my brain. I realized I had been mistaken in a lot of what I had said the night before. I simply had not remembered. I realized that while I may not have cross-dressed a lot over the years, I always had a fetish for nylons

and pantyhose. I didn't think I was a girl when I was small, but I remembered being sad when my pubic hair first started showing up because "I couldn't look like a girl anymore." (That doesn't seem to make much sense, does it? It must have come about like this: The only time I had ever seen a naked female was when I was a baby and was bathed along with my kid sister, who, of course, had no pubic hair. As far as I knew, women didn't have any pubic hair. Of course, this was in the days when Playboy magazines were kept hidden out of the sight of minors.) In my early teen years, my only neighborhood friend was a tomboyish girl ... did that indicate anything? Wasn't there a teacher in my high school who transitioned male-to-female? Why hadn't I remembered that? Haven't I been incapable of maintaining relationships with women? Could it be, could it be, I am transsexual?

Thus began the panic attack. Because it was Monday morning, I got myself together and went to work. (The alert reader may think a day has gone missing — but I told you we talked a long time!) I considered staying home for the day — truth be told, I should have — but frankly, I was afraid of how far down into the pit of panic I would descend. I thought the familiar environment and routine of work would help me regain my stability. It did not. All day I sat like a zombie staring at my computer terminal, a busy-looking spreadsheet up on the screen, and did nothing but worry and mull over the TS question. When a co-worker walked by or when I went to the kitchen for a calming cup of coffee, I wondered how I could possibly cope with even that simple situation if I needed to transition. The lament from the discussion board echoed through my mind. Several times, I nearly walked into my boss's office and resigned so I could go off and start dealing with my transsexual life in private.

By the end of the day, the sharpness of my feelings became more muted and I started to regain my balance. I called my new friend and told her what was going on with me. God bless her, she immediately canceled her evening's plans and rushed over to my house to hold my hand and talk me down. She helped me look at

things a bit more rationally, and I convinced myself I had greatly overreacted. Ha, me? Transsexual? Eventually it seemed quite unlikely, even laughable. But my friend left me the name of her therapist and recommended I schedule a session or two with her if I found I still had any doubts or confusion in my mind.

It was a couple of months before I called the therapist, but it took only a dozen weekly visits before I figured out what was going on inside me. The therapist encouraged me to focus on my feelings and my identity, rather than on symptoms and stereotypes. I didn't have any more panic attacks, and some very meaningful experiences helped me find my way. I figured out I am indeed transsexual. I transitioned to living full time as a woman on New Year's Day 2002. Announcing my transition at work was not stressful or traumatic at all, as I had feared during my panic attack. In fact, it was a great release of stress because everyone was kind and supportive everywhere I turned (except my family, but that's a story for another chapter).

This essay isn't about how to figure out if you are a transsexual. Rather, I wanted to document the phenomena of the transsexual panic attack so you won't be quite so terrified when you have one. Come to think of it, the scariest thing about it may be this: Perhaps the transsexual panic attack is, in and of itself, a good indicator you, too, are destined to travel the road of the transsexual. Congratulations, sister! That road is challenging, but it can be unbelievably fulfilling and joyous as well.

Note: One year later, the girl who wrote the post that opened this essay committed suicide.

Transition Diary

Here are some excerpts from a diary I kept as I went through my gender transition. They show how my thinking evolved over the period of a couple of months before I even came to the conclusion I was transsexual, until a couple of months after I began living full time as a woman. At the time, these six months seemed like a very long while indeed. Looking back on it now, however, it seems like the blink of an eye.

September 18, 2001

I've come to learn something about transsexual folks. Some know from their very earliest age their true gender does not

match their genetic sex. These people are transsexual, of course. Other people do not figure it out until much later in life. These people are transsexual as well, just as completely and truly as the others. In fact, they've been transsexual all along; they just didn't recognize it or understand it. This could be me because, at age forty-six, I still haven't figured it out.

What has happened to me lately is this. I'd been cross-dressing for quite a while. From a very early age I cross-dressed to some small degree, swiping my mom's bra or pantyhose from the clothes hamper and surreptitiously trying them on behind a locked bathroom door. If I had had the luxury of my own private bedroom, who knows how far I might have taken my youthful cross-dressing?

In the last ten years, I have been cross-dressing completely and often. You would say I was in the closet, because I was always alone when I did my cross-dressing. I did not share it with anyone else. I often went out shopping, to the movies, and on walks *en femme* (in women's clothes), presenting myself to the world as a woman, but it was still a private pastime.

About six months ago one thing led to another [the one thing is recounted in *Psycho Vince Deflowers Lannie Rose* at the beginning of this volume] and I started meeting other cross-dressers and some transsexual women and men. Things began to change for me. Gradually it became less and less about dressing up and more and more about just living my life as a woman. And a wonderful thing happened. Suddenly there was joy in my life, a joy that had been missing for a long, long time. Suddenly there were friends, and I had not had friends in years. Suddenly there were interests, activities. Suddenly I was dancing.

I fairly panicked. Joy? I didn't know how to deal with that, or even if I could accept it without feeling guilty. But it was a good thing. I wanted to capture it. I didn't want to screw it up. I sought help. I made an appointment with a transsexual girlfriend's therapist, a remarkable feat for me. I had done rather extensive couples and personal therapy years before when my marriage was breaking up. I knew what therapy was all about. For years I

had chosen not to engage in it because I didn't believe I could turn my miserable, depressed, pointless life around. But now I saw a ray of hope — indeed, a broad shaft of light. I intended to bask in it.

I began therapy in July, just a few months ago, with this simple mindset: my guy persona was miserable and depressed; my girl persona was joyful. With help from my therapist, I quickly worked through that one. There was no guy persona and girl persona, there was just me. I gave my guy-side permission to share Lannie's joy and lose his old depressed guy identity. I became a whole, happy person. Gee whiz, that part was easy enough! (I am simplifying. I had other issues to deal with as well, but I won't bore you with them here.) Now comes the hard part — how do I hold onto the joy and grow it? What do I do with Lannie? What do I do with that guy?

These things I know. I certainly enjoy presenting myself to the world as a woman. Currently I spend all my time outside of work *en femme*. I go everywhere and do everything that way. I feel better thinking of myself in a woman's role. I like it when people treat me as a woman. It doesn't bother me particularly that I get read. As long as they give me a friendly smile and treat me respectfully (as almost everyone does), I feel great. After all, I'm not trying to hide what I am. I want people to know me and like me — the complete me. Being transgender is part of what I am. My whole, true self just seems to align more naturally with the feminine role than the masculine. I believe trying to live up to my concept of a man's role in society and suppressing my feminine qualities brought a lot of stress and unhappiness to my prior life.

Some of the questions I'm asking myself now are: Will I be happy if I transition? Can I be happy without transitioning, perhaps by continuing to live a dual life, part of the time as a man, and part of the time as a woman? Given my new understanding of my life and attitudes, is it possible I can simply be happy as a man, if I choose to define that role in a way that's comfortable for me?

The fears I dread the most are: Will I repeat my old patterns in my femme life and wind up depressed and friendless again? Will I be unable to find people to love me? This applies to both my femme and masculine personas ... but will it be even more difficult living as a woman? Will this whole femme thing get tiresome for me after a year ... or a decade? It so happens I do not greatly fear the reactions of my family and friends, because I am fully confident of my family's love and understanding, and I don't have any close friends (besides the ones I've made recently within the gender community).

I have a feeling I know what the answers to these questions are going to be, but I'm in no hurry. I want to get this right. I'll spend however long it takes to explore these issues, to experiment, and to work with my therapist. I will continue to enjoy life while this is going on. I'm confident that wherever I wind up, it will be a better place than where I was before. Something is working for me, and I'm determined not to screw it up. Goddess help me!

November 1, 2001

It has been six weeks since the last entry. Since then I have decided I do, indeed, choose to live my life as woman. I've given up driving myself nuts with questions like, *Am I truly a woman at my core?* and *What does it really mean to be a woman or a man?* These were important questions for me to explore, but it's not important to be able to answer them. This is not about me being a woman or being a man. I'm just being me, a person who happens to be happier presenting myself as a woman. I have gotten my ears pierced, started laser beard removal, and begun growing out my hair. I've even been dating a very nice man! I'm not taking hormones — I'm doing just fine without them, thank you. Maybe I will later on. I've been educating myself about SRS, but I'm not sure I'll ever go that route (certainly it would be years down the road, if I ever do it). I would love to start living as a woman full time, but I love even more the nice salary my current job pays me, so I think I'll milk that for a while longer. I have not

made any absolute decisions. I intend to remain open-minded and take things day-by-day, week-by-week. As long as I'm happy, I'm not in a hurry to make further changes. For now, the important thing is I am no longer questioning who or what I am. I am a transsexual person who has begun the process of transitioning.

December 27, 2001

Another eight weeks have passed. Here it is just after Christmas 2001. Before leaving for the holiday break, I announced my transition at work! To my great surprise and relief, management and my fellow employees were totally accepting and supportive of my announcement. So as of December 22, 2001, I am a full-time trans woman. I will return to work on January 2 as Lannie (actually, as Elaine — that sounds a little more professional). In January, pending resolution of a minor medical impediment, I will start hormones. It's pretty clear in my mind now that I will somehow grow up to be an old lady with breasts and a vagina. Hurrah for me, if I may be so bold!

January 3, 2002

One week later ... I just finished my second day at work as a woman. It's more wonderful than I had imagined. It feels so natural to me. I feel whole in a way I never felt before. Everything about my day has a new sparkle. I'm starting to get moments where I forget I ever lived as a male, and I expect them to grow into forever.

Everyone at work has been just terrific. The women are warm and welcoming. The men are studiously nonchalant, but friendly. The only uneasiness I noticed was when a couple of men asked me about SRS. When I explained there were no surgeries happening at this time, they relaxed.

When I went in that first morning, I was hardly nervous at all. Certainly it was nothing like the first time I went out dressed as a woman, or when I first used a ladies' restroom, or a ladies'

dressing room. At work, the receptionist gave me a big smile and a “Hello!” and chatted with me for a while. It was all smooth sailing from then on. Nobody has mentioned my transsexual status at all, even obliquely.

Today I had two wonderful VLEs. I stood up in front of a group of two dozen executives, most of whom had never met me, and presented status on a couple of major programs. I wore my best Garfield and Marks, sienna power pantsuit (I’m making the guys wait a bit before they get to see my legs!), a pale yellow silk shell, and dark brown alligator pumps with two-and-a-half-inch heels. I felt great, and it went off without a hitch. It felt, for all the world, like the closing scene of *Just Like a Woman* where Adrian Pasdar, *en femme*, takes over the board meeting (except I was not petrified like Adrian was at first). I wanted to pull off my wig and yell, like Pasdar did in the movie, “Grab ‘em by the balls, Miles, and their hearts and minds are sure to follow!” But no one named Miles was present, and besides, it would have ruined the professional image I wanted to project. Seriously, the meeting was a great confidence builder for me — I’m ready for anything now.

My other wonderful, new experience occurred when I wandered into the kitchen after the meeting ended. Three ladies I had just met were sitting around a table chatting. They greeted me with smiles and invited me to join them. There I was, just one of the gals, discussing a little of this and a little of that (clothes, boys, bosses, etc.) for half an hour. I loved it! God bless the women for being so nice about including me. You know, they probably would have been just as nice to me had I been presenting as a man — it would have been me that just couldn’t join in.

I can see a true change in my personality. I no longer feel obliged to voice my opinion and argue for it. I’m not interested in competing with men — let them figure out what they want, and I’ll just do my part. I’m sure I’ll still stand up to be counted when something is important or seriously wrong or my responsibility, but I don’t need to own everything anymore. My priorities have changed. Perhaps before, I was just doing what I thought I ought

to be doing and not feeling what I really wanted. Now I am in touch with my feelings, and that's all I need to do. I don't know if this will last, but it feels right. Maybe what happened can be described this way: I got a life.

March 1, 2002

This will be my final entry in this transition diary. I've been living as a woman full time for two months now. I'm still simply thrilled. There hasn't been a moment when I considered presenting as a guy for any reason. I love interacting with people as a woman at work and socially, shopping, and just going about my life. At work I've met new people, old co-workers, customers, and vendors. I've made presentations to executive staff, and I traveled to Redmond for a meeting in the bowels of mighty Microsoft. I went to jury duty (I didn't even get interviewed), had my liver scanned in the hospital (I'm fine, thanks), and got cute, new feminine glasses prescribed by a new lady optometrist. I did a lot of shopping — they know me by name at Nordstrom already! And I did a lot of dancing. I seem to have coasted through the bathroom issue at work, at least for now, quietly and politely using the ladies' facility after an uncomfortable couple of weeks sneaking into the men's. I came out to my family, and sadly, it did not go very well; this is the one negative thing for me so far in my transition. But it will not defeat me, and I'm confident they will come around soon enough.

What is most important and most telling is I feel profoundly happy and peaceful. In my prior life, I never actually hated myself, but I never knew what it meant to really like myself. It reminds me of something that happened to me years ago when I was a student at U. C. Berkeley. Someone told me Berkeley had an excellent optometry school where I could get a first-rate eye exam done for free by the students, so I took advantage. I found out my vision was lousy; I needed glasses badly. When I got them, everything became so much clearer. Literally! I had never realized things could be so clear. I had simply lived in a fog. Finally I understood why I always had to sit in the front row in

class to see the board and why my best friend could always read the road signs miles before I could. It was very simple and obvious; I just hadn't had a clue. That's how I feel about my life now, living as a woman. When I look in the mirror, I recognize the person I see as me. Before, that person somehow seemed a stranger. My clothes really seem to be mine and express my personality; male styles had never felt like they suited me. When people call me "Lannie," it feels like they're calling me; but I had never particularly liked my boy name or felt it fit me.

Some transsexual women complain about the loss of male privilege. I revel in the freedom from male responsibility and, as I mentioned earlier, from feeling I must compete with men. I bask in feminine privilege — when I get to go through the door first, when I ask a clerk for help in the hardware store, when I get a free pass after doing something stupid (like driving the wrong way down a one-way street), or when someone smiles at me for no reason whatsoever. A few times at work, people have hesitantly made little boorish jokes about letting the woman — me — get the coffee or the copies. I smile and do it and feel great about it! It makes me feel good to be able to be of service and to be appreciated for it. Am I being a floor mat? No, I don't think so. I'm a committed feminist. Heck, I even saw Gloria Steinem lecture last month! I'm a professional making a six-figure salary, and my expertise is respected. But I carry it in a feminine manner.

Do I regret I didn't do this much sooner? I have my fantasies. God, I would have had a great time in my twenties or thirties! But no, I'm not going to anguish over that. What is, is. Besides, I would not have been so well prepared for it then, so maybe it would not have been so great. Anyway, at least I get to spend a good part of my forties as the woman I truly am. For that I am grateful.

Is my journey over? Hardly. Transition will continue for two or three more years. This year is about hair and hormones. The following year, God willing, will be SRS. These will be exciting, growing times, and I plan to value and enjoy every moment. But

after three or four years, transition will start fading into the shadows of memory, and I will be just another woman making her way in the world. A healthy, self-confident, kind, fun, attractive woman. A very happy woman. A very, very lucky woman.

Spring Cleaning (Lannie purges her boy clothes)

Over the Christmas holiday I spent a happy Saturday afternoon purging the boy clothes from my closet. I would be returning to work after the New-Year holiday as a woman, so there was no need to clutter up my closet with boy stuff. It was about time too. My femme wardrobe needed room to spread out. Even more space would be required for the many work and day wear outfits I would soon be acquiring. My forty-some pairs of shoes alone were already in a space crisis!

The clothes didn't travel very far that Christmas, only from the giant walk-in closet in my master bedroom to the small walk-in closet in the guest bedroom. It was one small step for the clothes, but one giant leap for me, psychologically speaking. Now I was a woman full space as well as full time! The boy clothes were out of sight and out of mind, except not quite out of mind. They hung unseen in that other room, like ever-present skeletons in the closet. In the back of mind I kept replaying this old tape: "Whatever you do, don't ever look behind that door!" warned Bluebeard the Pirate."

Fast forward six months. The time had come to haul the boy stuff down to Goodwill. What changed? Everything, and nothing. One thing that did surely change is the weather. Spring arrived and new clothes started appearing in my closet. It was time to move the winter wardrobe to storage and make room for spring. When I opened the door to storage, oh, dear! There was the boy stuff. I had been hoping it would have dissipated naturally, but I guess it doesn't work that way. I would have to do something about it.

I spent an afternoon bagging boy stuff. I got two-thirds of the way through the closet, filling five large plastic bags. That was the easy part, because I bagged all the things I had absolutely no qualms about parting with. Truth be known, I should have gotten rid of most of this lot years ago because so much of it was worn and ragged and out of style. Dropping the bags off at the big yellow Goodwill truck was a relief.

A couple of weeks later I bagged the rest. The exercise was more interesting this time. Would I purge everything, or should I save an outfit or two for emergencies? I'll bet my cautious therapist would advise me to save a few things. But no, I didn't, and I didn't feel I was making any kind of commitment or cutting off a lifeline. I felt in my heart I would never again be inclined to present myself as a male under any circumstance. The only two situations I could imagine even considering it were going on job interviews and visiting my parents. Interviewing was not an immediate issue because my employer had been fully supportive

of my gender change, thank goodness! As for the future, I was sure I'd seek new employment one day, but I had no worries about doing so as a female. If I had trouble getting hired as a woman, so be it. I'd deal with it as a woman, and that was that.

The other relevant circumstance was my father, who still refused to see me *en femme*. Well, he'd just have to learn to accept me or not see me at all. It wasn't a big deal; we rarely saw each other except maybe at Christmas. OK, that's wrong. It was a big deal to me, despite our infrequent visits. At least he still talked to me on the phone. I was confident he'd come around soon.

What about saving some boy clothes for dress-up or for an Annie Hall look? Here, my insecurity showed. Frankly, it scared me. I wasn't that confident of my femme presentation, so I'd do everything I could to be as feminine as possible. Please understand this choice was mainly for me and only secondarily about how others saw me. When I looked in the mirror, I was uneasy about seeing hints of that boy person looking back at me. I was too scared to even try on any of these old clothes before I purged them, even for old time's sake. (I also hated to be reminded of how big my waistline used to be!)

Did I really own seven suits? They were all pretty nice. A couple of them, I recalled, cost upwards of fifteen hundred dollars. (Why did two hundred dollars seem like a lot to spend on a dress? I'd have to give myself a little longer leash at Nordie's!) I had some nice blazers, too. Funny thing — none of those stylish, high-quality, well-fitting clothes ever really felt like me. Why do you suppose that was?

Ha, ha, I found some nice trousers and custom-made shirts still on hangers from the dry cleaners. I suppose transition did come upon me rather suddenly. It reminded me of how archeologists found dinner still laid out on tables when they dug up Pompeii.

Oh, god, the neckties! I found sixty-two of them. A lot of them cost thirty, forty, fifty dollars. What was all that about women spending more than men on clothes? I decided to pick out a few of my favorites and see if my boyfriend would like them.

Hmmmm, this one? This one? I wound up with only three ties I really liked: the “Shredder” tie, which had vertical wavy lines that made it look like it had gotten caught in a paper shredder; the “Lost Souls” tie, which had some weird disembodied feminine faces floating around a field of flowers (I thought they looked like lost souls crying out for salvation — could that have had some personal meaning for me, do you suppose?); and a red and blue blocky thing I had always enjoyed wearing. Well, maybe my guy could use the tie hangers.

Finally I pulled a few cardboard storage boxes down from the overhead shelves. For many years, ironically, these same boxes had concealed my femme wardrobe when I was a closet cross-dresser. Now they held the last remnants of my masculine wardrobe. After I emptied them, I broke down the boxes and put them out for recycling. No more concealing things for me!

The first box yielded ... shoes! Oh, I had forgotten about boy shoes — one pair of black wingtips, two pairs of burgundy loafers, and a pair of sneaks. I threw a pair of dusty, well-worn Topsiders straight into the trash. The others, for the most part, were in pretty good shape, so into the Goodwill bag they went. What could I wish for their next owners? *For those who walk a mile in my shoes, may you have a less exciting journey than mine?* No, that’s not quite right. How about something like this: *May these shoes carry you safely along your true path.*

The next box had socks and underwear and belts. Last December I had trashed most of my socks and undies, so this was just the emergency stash. Into the trash they all went now. (I know you’re curious, so here it is: neither tighty whiteys nor boxers, but that European kind George Costanza once wore on a Seinfeld episode.)

The belts went to Goodwill. I held back a brass belt buckle with an old steam locomotive engraved on it. I thought my friend Jamie Faye, the self-proclaimed “train-sexual,” would enjoy having it.

The final box held sweaters. I had already salvaged the couple of sweaters that seemed gender-neutral to me, so all of these went into the Goodwill bag.

That was that! All I had left to do was drop off the bags at Goodwill.

How did I feel about it? Mostly, I felt relief at getting a nasty chore out of the way. In terms of my transition, I had reached another milestone, but a minor one. I felt good to have the skeletons gone from the closet, to not have that vestige of my former life hanging around. It felt good to know I could purge it all without a doubt or regret. But mostly, I felt kind of sad and stupid. Looking at all those things, handling them, remembering them, I asked myself, *How could I have been so wrong for so long? How did I miss this huge truth? Why didn't I think to question the simple, central, critical fact of my gender? Why wasn't it obvious?* If only I had taken seriously the Firesign Theatre declaration those many years ago: "Everything you know is wrong!"

A Rose by Any Other Name (Changing my name)

*What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.
—Romeo and Juliet. Act ii. Sc. 2.*

Transition wasn't all fun and pretty clothes. For one thing, there was the matter of my name — legally changing it on all my identifying documents and contracts. This task wasn't something that needed to be done right away, but I wanted to make sure that old name would pop up as little as possible in the future.

Five, ten, fifteen years down the road, I don't need that old boogiemanager coming to visit. So I tried to cover everything. Besides, life is sweeter for me when I am called by my real name — Shakespeare notwithstanding.

My first order of business was to choose a new name. How cool, to be able to pick my own name! Everybody ought to do it!

I decided to change only my first name and keep my last name. I could have changed my last name, too, if I had wanted to; but keeping the original one is a little less work. Sometimes I wished I had changed my last name because it would symbolize a clean break from the past. But I really am still the same person I was before, and I still belong to the same family, even if some of them don't want to see me. So I feel preserving my last name was the right choice.

When I chose my new first name, I picked one with the same first initial as before. My old name was Edward. My new legal name is Elaine, but I go by Lannie most of the time. Keeping the same initial is particularly convenient in situations where I can use a first initial plus the last name, such as my work e-mail address.

I dropped my middle name completely because I'm tired of being confused as to when I need to use it and when I don't. In fact, right after I transitioned I got summoned for jury duty twice in the same week — once with my middle name, once without! (The court clerk did not bat an eye when a woman appeared to answer the summons for Edward.)

Once I had settled on my new name, Elaine (Lannie) Rose, I found plenty of resources on the Internet and in the library to walk me through the tedious process of legally changing it. Once I jumped into it, I was pretty much done in a few months. I won't cover the mechanics of the process, but in general, here's what I did.

My first step was to have my bank add my new name as an "a.k.a." ("also known as") onto my bank account so I could cash checks in either name. I left the a.k.a. in place until I was no longer receiving any checks in my old name. (I guess that's one

case where the old name would always be welcome — when it's on a check for me to cash!) My bank also issued me an ATM/debit/credit card in my new name and a book of paper checks, before I had my legal name change. Thank you, B of A, and especially to Lynn, my customer service rep!

Next I headed downtown to obtain a court order to formally change my legal name. Judge Catherine Gallagher does all the name changes in San Jose, California. I affectionately dubbed her “Mary Catherine Gallagher” after Molly Shannon’s Saturday Night Live character. I would love a trans woman in San Jose to change her name to “Catherine Gallagher” and see the look on the judge’s face!

After Judge Gallagher approved my petition, I paid for five certified copies of the signed court order. As it turned out, I used only one certified copy plus a few others that were not certified. Then I started down this checklist:

Miscellaneous identification and property documents

- ▶ Social Security
- ▶ Driver’s License (This was the big one, gender-wise — I got my “Sex: F”!)
- ▶ Voter registration
- ▶ Pink slip (automobile registration)
- ▶ Deed for home (I deeded the home from my old name to my new name.)
- ▶ Phone listing in the telephone directory (Actually, I chose to become unlisted.)
- ▶ My current employer’s Human Resources records (My work ID was my first femme photo ID, and it was very thrilling when I got my first paycheck issued in my new name!)
- ▶ My will

Insurance

- ▶ Homeowner’s
- ▶ Automobile
- ▶ Health
- ▶ Dental

▶ Life

Monthly bills

- ▶ Mortgage
- ▶ Telephone (three different companies: long distance, local, and cell)
- ▶ Credit cards
- ▶ Power company
- ▶ Water
- ▶ Trash and recycling service
- ▶ Newspaper subscription

I wrote letters to my high school and to three colleges I had attended, asking them to change my name and gender in their files. I also asked them to send me new transcripts and re-issue diplomas. All the colleges had procedures for this and they gladly complied, with varying amounts of paperwork and a small monetary charge. One college required a notarized document and a certified copy of the court order. A very worried young man called from my Catholic high school and said he couldn't alter the records, but he could amend them with a note. I told him that would be fine.

I wrote letters to former employers who might be contacted for references or background checks. I did not bother with several former employers who were tiny, or out of business, or where I had worked only a short time. I wound up contacting four employers: two well-known Fortune 500 companies and two lesser-known but major high-tech companies. I addressed each of the letters to the Director of Human Resources. I did not receive as much as an acknowledgment from three companies, and one of the Fortune 500 companies claimed they had no record I had ever worked there. Bastards!

Finally, I changed my passport and my birth certificate, although I was required wait until after my SRS to change these documents. The policy on changing sex on birth certificates varies from state to state. I was lucky; New Jersey issues a new birth certificate in the new name and gender. Some states will

make only a visible amendment; some will not change the birth certificate at all.

I was surprised at how simple most of this process was. For instance, a quick phone call was all it took for most of the creditors. I was appalled at how difficult a few of them were, like my New Jersey birth certificate, which took over a year to accomplish, and one college that required one of their forms to be notarized. And my Visa® card — first they sent me a card with my old name and my new picture, then my new name and my old picture. It took a third try before they finally got them both together correctly! I involved my lawyer with the deed to the house and my will, just to be certain they were handled correctly. The rest of it was easily handled on my own.

That's how I went about changing my name. It looks like a lot of work, but it really wasn't so bad. Besides, this was one of the few parts of my transition that did not involve physical pain or a recuperation period!

*... I'll be new baptiz'd,
Henceforth I never will be Romeo.
— ibid.*

How I Changed My Body

If you had met me a few years ago, you probably would have described me as a middle-aged, tallish, somewhat overweight, grumpy, moderately good-looking man. Today you would meet a very tall, thin, happy, strikingly attractive woman. You would probably guess I am in my late thirties. You might wonder if I'm a fashion model. (I get that a lot — owing more to my height than my looks, I believe!) The physical transformation of my body is just one aspect of how I changed my life in transitioning from a male to a female gender presentation. Changing my body is a project that, in and of itself, has been painful, expensive, and

time-consuming, but also interesting and rewarding. To begin with, I wanted to get thin.

Weight and Exercise

The first thing I did to transform my body had nothing at all to do with being transsexual. In fact, it took place a year before I had even a glimmer of an idea about the truth within me. But people always ask me how I got so skinny, so I'll start with that.

On my forty-fifth birthday I had a complete physical. I told the doctor I was worried about my blood pressure, because it often ran quite high and my family has a history of high blood pressure. I thought (well, my mother thought) I should probably be on blood pressure medicine. The doctor suggested before taking that step, I should try going on a low sodium diet. I had no idea what that entailed. I soon found out it meant eliminating all the foods I loved so much — canned soup, microwave TV dinners, cold cuts, potato chips. I started reading labels and discovered almost any prepared food — anything in a can or a bottle or frozen — is loaded with salt. So I began eating mostly fresh foods, but eating very little because there wasn't much I particularly liked. Within six months, I dropped 20 pounds. Then I came down with a bad case of bronchitis. It left me barely able to eat for six weeks. I dropped another 20 pounds, which got me down to 135 pounds, the weight I was at when I transitioned. However, I was too thin at this weight; I looked gaunt and all my doctors were worried about me. So I consulted a dietician and put 20 pounds back on.

While the weight was coming off, I also began to exercise. Mainly I did stomach crunches and pelvic thrusts to develop my abdominal muscles. The idea was to keep my stomach flat for appearance sake and to strengthen my muscles for the sake of good sex! I also danced a lot which helped fulfill my aerobic needs. About a year after my SRS, I really got inspired. I joined a health club and began working out regularly and properly.

I believe all the pelvic thrusts and dancing I did during transition were instrumental in loosening up my hip joints, so I

now walk and stand in a feminine manner. A couple of sessions with Denaë Doyle helped in that area as well.

Just as I began to get serious about my transsexualism, I gave up drinking for one reason or another (as recounted in *Lannie Did a Bad Bad Thing*). This has many health, beauty, and safety benefits. If I were a smoker, I would give that up too. (Hint hint!) Fortunately, going on the wagon was fairly easy for me, even though I had been a heavy drinker all my life. This confirmed for me what I had been telling people all long: I was not an alcoholic. I've been completely dry for two years now as I pull together this book.

How I changed from a tallish man to a very tall woman is simple — I just kept my six-feet-one-inch height the same! (A strong affection for three-inch heels helps too.)

Ears, Nails, and Hair

The first change I made to my body specifically related to being transsexual was to get my ears pierced. While this did not constitute an irrevocable commitment to transitioning, I felt it was a pretty big deal the time. I was relieved it did not cause any stir at work or elsewhere, and it gave me a great deal of pleasure to finally be able to wear real earrings. A few months later I got my navel pierced as well. It hurt enough that I decided I was done with ornamental piercings for good!

At the same time I got my ears pierced, I began to let my fingernails and hair grow. These gradual changes also went by without creating any problems at work or elsewhere.

In my first real outing of myself, I explained my situation to my long-time hairdresser and begged her help in developing a nice hairstyle for me. Fortunately Beverly cuts both men's and women's hair, and she was delighted to help me with this. These days when I visit her for a cut, color (oops — that lets the cat out of the bag — I'm not a natural redhead!), or a perm, Bev laughs and says she can barely remember what I was like as a guy.

Being able to wear my own natural hair is a great asset in passing as a woman. Before my own hair was grown out enough,

I invested in a very expensive, custom human hair integration system (like a wig, except my own hair pulls through and becomes part of it) from *Charle ... a hair studio*. I still wear it when I want to look especially nice. I strongly recommend one or both of these approaches for any girl who is worried about passing. Nothing gets you read as quickly as a cheap wig.

The next thing for me was to begin removal of my facial hair. This felt like a big, scary commitment. In retrospect, getting started on it is easy; but the follow-through is a bitch! I chose to go with laser hair removal, which fortunately works well on me. For some people it just isn't any good, depending largely on skin type and hair color. The alternative to laser is electrolysis, which may leave your skin pockmarked, requiring you to follow up with an extremely painful laser or chemical skin resurfacing. The laser wasn't able to get all my gray hairs, even using the melanin enhancer Meladine, so I had to finish up with a hundred hours of electrolysis.

Facial hair removal is one of the most important factors for a trans woman to achieve a passable female presentation. It's also the longest and one of the most expensive and painful processes to complete. By either laser or electrolysis, a complete course will take at least two years and cost five thousand dollars or more. Girls who do electrolysis alone often spend three hundred hours under the needle; that's two hours a week for three years. At fifty dollars an hour that adds up to fifteen thousand dollars!

Laser hair removal and electrolysis both hurt. For me, the pain was about the same for both techniques — enough to bring tears to my eyes and make my mascara run. However laser sessions were only fifteen minutes every five weeks, while electrolysis was two hours every week.

I also used the laser treatment to remove all the hair on my chest, belly, and underarms. It went quickly and easily because I didn't have much hair there to begin with. I pity girls with thick, heavy leg and arm hair, not to mention hideous back hair. I was lucky to be blessed with very light hair growth on my limbs,

which I take care of by using an epilator once every week or two. Thanks to the epilator, there will be no more razor cuts for me!

Going Full Time

Soon after I realized I am in fact a transsexual woman, presenting myself as a man part of the time became intolerable. So I transitioned to living full time as a woman. This did not change my body at all, but it was the biggest change ever in my life. Hooray!

Before going full time, it's important for most girls to develop a feminine-sounding voice. This is one of the most challenging aspects in all of transitioning. (As a consolation, it also happens to be the cheapest and least painful, if you do it without surgery or a voice coach, as most girls do.) I got very lucky on this one, because the funny high voice I was cursed with all my life turned out to be a huge blessing in the end. I had always gotten "Ma'am'd" on the telephone; in fact, it was one of the things that originally lit up the idea of cross-dressing in my mind. So I didn't need to do any work at all on my vocal pitch or resonance. However, there was still plenty to learn about other aspects of sounding female, including dynamic range, enunciation, word choice, and even body language.

A few months after going full time, I began my hormone regimen. (I would have started sooner but was delayed by a minor medical problem.) Some girls tell me beginning hormones had a great and immediate impact on them: the sky turned blue, birds began singing, and they felt all girlie inside. Personally, I didn't notice anything at first other than feeling *extremely* irritable for a few weeks. After six months I had modest but unmistakable breast development, about an A cup, which is all I can expect since the women in my family are small-breasted. (A good rule of thumb is that you will be one cup-size smaller than your mother.) After a year on hormones, my skin was softer and smoother; regular use of expensive skincare products presumably contributed to that as well. My body hair was sparser and more vellus, and there has been noticeable fat redis-

tribution to my hips. Hormones are definitely working for me, but their impact has not been as dramatic for me as they are for many girls.

Surgery

Soon after going full time, it was obvious to me I would spend the rest of my life, joyously, as a woman. I began to consider surgical options to further increase the femininity of my body. It was as plain as the nose on my face that I ought to start with the nose on my face. So I had a rhinoplasty. It was done by Dr. Robert R. Brink in San Mateo, California and cost six thousand dollars. I didn't experience any pain at all. Of course, the procedure was done under general anesthesia and I was on pain pills for a few days. I was fully recovered and back to work in two weeks, with hardly any noticeable swelling or bruising. In three months the swelling had gone down enough to get a good idea what was accomplished; in six months my nose reached its final shape. I am pleased with the result.

A couple months after the rhinoplasty, I went back to my nose doc for an upper lip shortening. He hadn't done this procedure at the same time as the rhinoplasty because he was concerned with keeping good blood flow in the area. Working this time under local anesthesia, a horizontal incision was made directly below my nose. A section of skin eight millimeters high by the width of my nose was removed. The remaining lip was pulled up and the incision sewed closed right below my nose. This decreased the distance between my upper lip and my nose from nineteen millimeters to eleven millimeters, producing an aesthetically pleasing proportion. What was more important to me was that it pulled up the center part of my upper lip, exposing more lip in a "Cupid's bow." I previously had an almost invisible, flat line of an upper lip, so this was quite feminizing. Again, I am quite pleased with the result. It cost three thousand dollars and recovery time was only a few days. Unfortunately, with the shortened upper lip, it now appears the nose could be a bit smaller and more upturned too. That is something for me to consider some time in the future.

The nose job and lip shortening constitute the extent of my facial surgery. Many transsexual women have much more extensive facial surgery. San Francisco's Dr. Douglas Osterhout (affectionately known in the transsexual community as "Dr. O") is the best known and most aggressive surgeon in this area, although several others, including some Thai surgeons, practice in this field as well. An extensive menu of procedures may be included under the rubric of facial feminization surgery (FFS). I, for example, would be a candidate for a brow-bone shave, eyebrow lift, scalp advance, lateral orbit reduction, and jaw reshaping. Other procedures include cheek and chin implants, facelift, and more. Most transsexual girls need a trachea shave; I didn't need one because I have almost no Adam's apple, which also accounts for my naturally feminine voice. I even know one girl who had feminizing dentistry — replacing twelve of her teeth with smaller ones. (I did have my teeth whitened — the business where you sleep with bleach trays in your mouth for a month.)

Some of these FFS procedures involve peeling back the skin (rather like in the movie *Face Off*) and grinding down bones — serious stuff! FFS surgery can be very painful and very expensive — I know one girl who spent eighty thousand dollars for FFS. For my part, I'm satisfied with the way my face looks today. Dr. Brink pointed out to me that many of the high-fashion models have quite masculine-looking jaws and other features. Models also tend to have pretty small breasts, which helps me feel content with my smallish endowment in that area. Of course, about half of all trans women get breast implants to improve their figures.

While I was happy with my face, there was one other part of my body I felt could benefit from surgical change. That, of course, was my genitalia. So very soon after I completed my Real Life Experience (per Harry Benjamin's *Standards of Care*, meaning I had successfully lived a full year as a woman), I underwent SRS. Some people prefer to call it GRS or genital reconstruction surgery. Sometimes I try to give it a humorous, high-tech spin and call it genital repurposing surgery. Whatever name you choose to use, it was pretty expensive — fifteen thousand dollars.

I had my procedure done in Palo Alto, California by Dr. Annette Cholon. Girls who travel to Thailand, which famously has made a small industry out of SRS surgery, spend about half as much.

Sex reassignment surgery was a very painful experience for me, but many girls report they didn't have much pain at all. The recovery time is long; most girls take six weeks off work. My new vagina initially required extensive care and feeding, mostly in the form of several-times-daily dilation sessions. (Dilation consists of stretching the vagina by inserting plastic stents of increasing diameters.) Dilation must be continued for the rest of my life, although my frequency is now down to once a week. Once a month dilations should be sufficient eventually. I'm happy to say that, once again, I'm very pleased with the result of my SRS!

Conclusion

That sums up my two-year project to transform my body. I've always considered myself a rather lazy person and I still do today. How in the world did I manage to undertake and complete such an elaborate program? I suppose it was mainly because I wanted it very badly — indeed, I needed it to survive. But another part of the answer is I never viewed it as a single massive project. I took it day by day, step by step. I started each task when I became enthused about that particular thing, and I considered that each thing I did could very well be the last. Maybe I'm not done even yet. Maybe next year I'll get excited about bigger breasts or a smaller nose or more arch to my eyebrows. If so, I may make some more changes. For now I feel good about my body exactly the way it is. The daily grind of skin care, exercise, and dilation is a drag, but I have only to look in the mirror to get the motivation to continue.

To any of my budding transsexual sisters out there who may be nervous about beginning to transform your own bodies, I urge you not to be discouraged. If I did it, you can do it too. Meanwhile, why not think about heading down to the mall and getting those ears pierced?

Advantages of Transitioning Later in Life

Ah, if only I had transitioned at sixteen, before the testosterone began poisoning my system, or in my twenties, when I would have been so very cute. Or in my thirties — wait a minute, I tell people I'm thirty-nine, so I'd better stop there! But I've come to realize transitioning later in life has its advantages too. At least for me it did. Here are some of them.

▶ I'm financially secure. All those years of collecting the big male salary, but not spending it on typical male stuff like motorcycles and RVs (or wives and kids) has left me with a nice, fat savings account. Drawing it down for hormones, surgeries, clothes, and cosmetics is a pleasure!

▶ I don't have to deal with gender dysphoria while simultaneously dealing with the other identity and life issues that afflict the young. For example, I am comfortable with my sexuality. I'm not worried about peer acceptance. I've found a spirituality that is joyful and guilt-free. Most importantly, I gave the man thing (and the penis thing) an honest, thorough try, and I know quite confidently it just does not work for me. Young people need to work out all those things, with gender confusion thrown into the mix. Yikes!

▶ I don't need my parents' approval, because I'm not living in their house or taking their money. (It would surely be nice to have their approval anyway, though.)

▶ I never had to compete with those gorgeous GGs in their teens and twenties. I think I hold my own pretty well against women my age — I often say changing my sex rejuvenated me by ten years!

▶ Young people tend to be — should be! — involved in sports, often organized team sports. For a transsexual person, this presents problems in areas of eligibility, locker rooms, physical contact, and injuries. Old-person sports like golf or tennis, or my personal favorite, no sports at all, have fewer of these types of challenges.

▶ Young people are deadly accurate at reading us (spotting that we are transsexual), aren't they? And they can be merciless in letting us know it. But they leave me alone. I'm completely off their radar screens because I'm an old person. On a more serious note, youthful misunderstanding and disdain of transgenders leads to violence more often than it does among my older crowd.

▶ By the time I transitioned, my marriage and other serious relationships were over. For other people who transition later in life, their marriages may be entering the empty-nest phase, so

changes need to be negotiated anyway. Dealing with transition while still in the early or middle phases of a marriage or relationship is a difficult, difficult challenge.

▶ My friends have been very open-minded and supportive about my transition. Besides being wonderful people, I think this has to do somewhat with their being at an age where they have been through many ups and downs. They know anything that makes a person's life joyful and worthwhile is something to be treasured.

▶ I don't have to pierce my eyebrows or get any tattoos.

▶ I don't need to agonize over turning thirty— or, to be honest, forty. Those ships have sailed. Bon voyage!

Wow, what a list! It kind of makes me glad I transitioned late. Kind of ...

Pollyanna

Call me Pollyanna. I'm always happy to tell you about how being transgender brought so much joy into my life. I love to share how smoothly my transition to living full time as a woman has gone and how supportive friends and even strangers have been. I'll tell you about how confident I am my parents and siblings, although currently unaccepting, will eventually come to embrace me, and how every day I say this prayer: "Thank you, goddess, for letting me be a woman today!"

Please do not mistake me. I quite understand the transgender road is arduous for many, if not most, transgender people. I realize I am one of the lucky ones. My heart breaks when I see

my transgender sisters and brothers struggle to do right by their spouses and kids. When I began my transition, I conveniently had no significant other or children to worry about. I suppose families bring many joys and rewards of their own, but they certainly complicate life for a person dealing with gender dysphoria.

When transgender people begin to bring their true selves out of the closet, friends are often hurt or lost. I was fortunate to have no friends when I came out — if having no friends can ever be fortunate.

I am extremely lucky my employer fully accepted and supported my transition. How many of my transgender siblings have lost their jobs and even careers just for being true to themselves!

I was blessed to have no great internal psychological struggle when I began to suspect I might be transsexual. I had already completely proved, to the very depths of despair, that life would not work for me in a male presentation. I can barely imagine the pain and confusion young transgender people experience as they grapple with their gender dysphoria while simultaneously trying to fit together so many other pieces in the puzzle of their lives.

Yes, it has been a pretty easy road for me.

Once I was speaking with a woman who deals quite a bit with the transgender community. In the course of the conversation, I mentioned I had just spent an hour in my therapist's office crying my eyes out because my father can't bear to have me in his presence. A look of sympathy came over the woman's face as she replied, "How difficult that must be for you!" I cried on her shoulder for a while. Her concern was so genuine and so deep it brought up a feeling that was new to me. Yes, I am lucky, but my path is not all roses either. I got to thinking, however smoothly my transition went, it was one helluva process, something of a magnitude few people besides transsexuals ever experience. No matter how nice people are to me, it's a helluva thing to go through my days feeling apologetic for making others uncomfortable and being grateful for the smallest crumb of tolerance or

support. Those wasted decades of emptiness and despair, which are thankfully behind me now, will always be my heritage. I got to thinking, whatever your or my opinion about my true nature might be, be it male or female or something else, this transition and this state of existence are a hellish thing for a girl to bear.

So I'll continue to thank the goddess for my good fortune and joy, for smoothing out a lot of bumps in my road, and for bringing me friendship, love, and support when I needed them most. But I'll not deny myself the right to now and then shed a few good tears, or even a flood of them, over Pollyanna's fate.

Many years from now, when my transition has been long complete and the times when I presented myself as a man are distant, hazy memories, I see myself engaged in an intimate late-night conversation with a close friend. She asks me what it was like growing up as such a tall girl. Smiling, I take a hit and pass her the marijuana joint (Virginia Slims, now completely legal) and say, "I didn't grow up as a tall girl; I grew up as an average boy!"

She is amazed, and then a look of dismay comes over her face. "That must have been horrible for you!" she blurts out, stubbing out her tobacco cigarette (hand-rolled, very illegal!).

"It was," I sigh. "I can't begin to tell you ..."

Song: I Thank the Goddess

The six o'clock news rolls me out of bed,
I shake the cobwebs and dust from my head,
A few Pilates keep my stomach flat,
I jump in the shower, and feed Kitty cat.

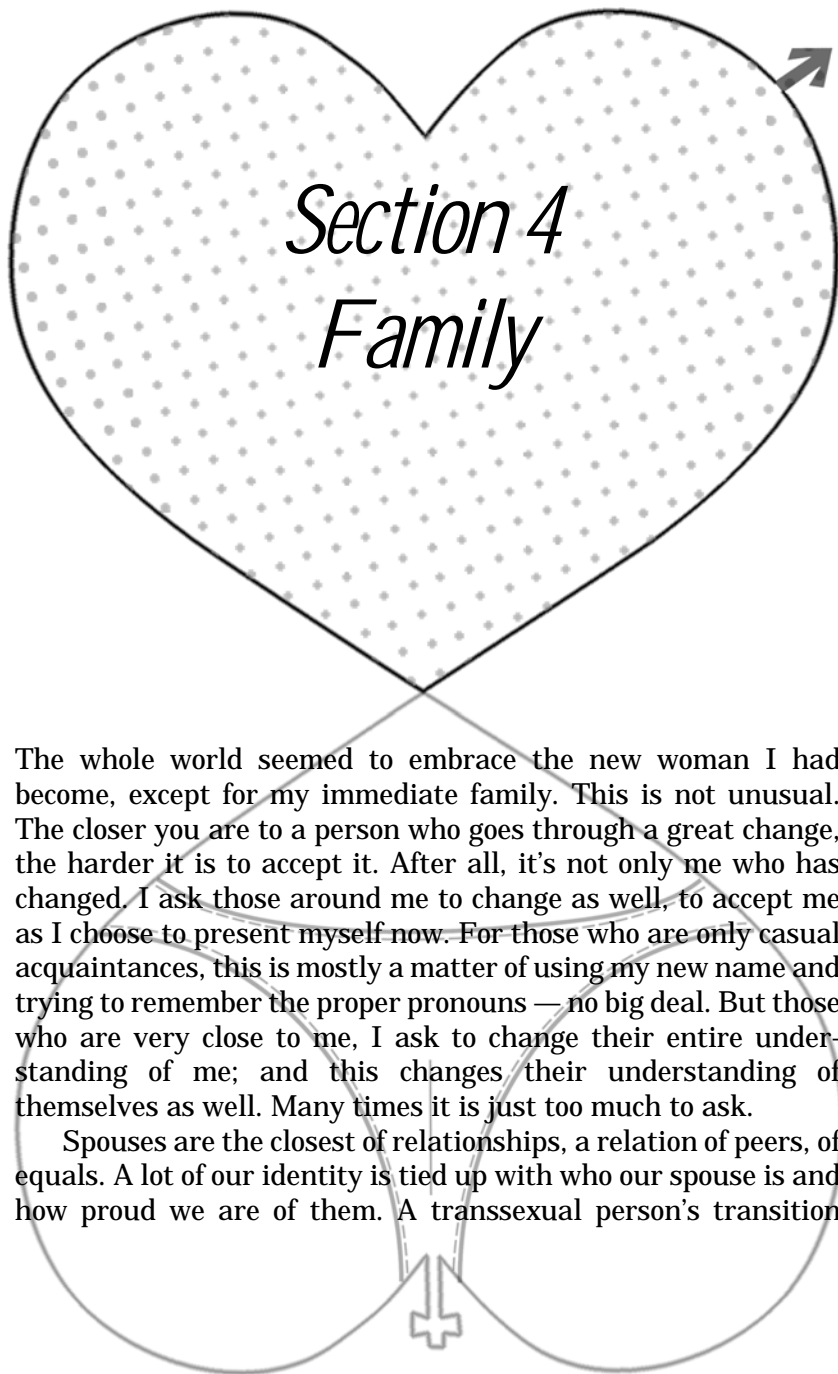
An hour at the mirror puts face and hair right,
A skirt not too short, and a top not too tight,
Some juice and a Powerbar, and a moment to pray,
Thank you goddess, for letting me be a woman today.

As I drive to work, I think about my life,
I could be a mother, I could be a wife,
For now I'm just me, and just me is OK,
And I thank the goddess, I'm a woman today.

Work's not exactly a basket of thrills,
But I'm glad to have a way to pay my bills,
I do a good job and I do earn my pay,
And I thank the goddess, I'm a woman today.

I meet my friend at the bar for a drink,
She whispers, "That guy's checking you out I think!"
I flash him a smile, he's cute I must say,
And I thank the goddess, I'm a woman today.

Later that evening, just Kitty and me,
There's a knock on the doorway, now who can that be?
It's my boyfriend with roses, he asks if he might ...
And I thank the goddess, I'm a woman ... tonight!



Section 4

Family

The whole world seemed to embrace the new woman I had become, except for my immediate family. This is not unusual. The closer you are to a person who goes through a great change, the harder it is to accept it. After all, it's not only me who has changed. I ask those around me to change as well, to accept me as I choose to present myself now. For those who are only casual acquaintances, this is mostly a matter of using my new name and trying to remember the proper pronouns — no big deal. But those who are very close to me, I ask to change their entire understanding of me; and this changes their understanding of themselves as well. Many times it is just too much to ask.

Spouses are the closest of relationships, a relation of peers, of equals. A lot of our identity is tied up with who our spouse is and how proud we are of them. A transsexual person's transition

often results in the break-up of a marriage — even when the two people share a deep love. “I’m not a lesbian,” a grieving wife will cry, and it’s a fair and truthful statement. Children have a similarly close bond with a transitioning parent, but they usually do OK. I think this is because young children are resilient and older children do not have as close a bond. Besides, children are even more self-centered than transsexual people and that’s really saying something! In my case, I had neither spouse nor children to accompany me on my journey, so I’ve only just touched on those issues with my parable, “The Accordion.”

But parents and siblings ... ahhhhh ...

The Accordion

Sometimes married cross-dressers seem to expect their spouses should simply accept their little peccadillo. But how would those cross-dressers feel if their spouses decided to take up cross-dressing? Or worse yet, the accordion?

“I’m divorcing her.”

“Why man? I thought you guys were doing great.”

“She’s decided to take up the accordion!”

“No, really?”

“Yes. She says she’s discovered it’s the only way she can truly express herself.”

“I hate the accordion as much as anyone, but I don’t see why it has to be such a big problem.”

“I know, I know. We talked about it, and I tried to be reasonable. I asked her if she would only practice behind closed doors, when me and the kids were out of the house.”

“That sounds reasonable to me.”

“Yeah, but that wasn’t good enough for her. She says she feels she needs to practice at least three or four times a week, and she doesn’t see why she should have to plan around our schedules.”

“Wow, that’s a lot of accordion.”

“Yeah, and the damn thing is loud. The neighbors are bound to find out.”

“Couldn’t you say it was one of the kids’ crazy things?”

“I wouldn’t want to hurt the kids that way. It’s bad enough their friends will make fun of them because their mom plays the accordion. Besides, she says she wants to play in public! She wants to play right out in the park and let people hear her!”

“Oh, Jesus, that is pretty bad. But I think most people will understand. After all, she’s not the only accordion player in the world.”

“That’s what I thought. But it didn’t stop there. I’m embarrassed to say this, but ...”

“What, man? C’mon, we’re buddies, you can tell me.”

“Well ...”

“Yes?”

“She says she wants to play the accordion while we’re having sex!”

“Oh, jeez man, divorce the bitch!”

Telling the Family

I accidentally outed myself to my family. What happened was, I got a new e-mail address at work and I wanted my family to have it. So I sent a message from work to my brother and my parents. In a flash, I got back a reply back from my younger brother in Indianapolis.

“Hi Ed,” he wrote. “I just got an e-mail from you, but it said it came from Elaine. Is there something I should know about?”
Oops. Why, yes, there most certainly is!

My e-mail address used just my initial, not my entire first name, so I had thought my message was safe. But Bill Gates had

automatically signed the message with my full user name, Elaine Rose. I hadn't realized that would happen. I was busted!

If you've read the earlier sections of this book, you know I'm a transsexual woman who transitioned at work as of New Year's Day, 2002. As the result of a merger, I was starting at a new office with mostly new people, and a new e-mail address. Everybody at work was just fabulous about accepting me as a woman, even those with whom I had previously worked as a man, and I was happier than I ever remembered being in my entire life. But I had not yet told my family about my gender issues and my transition.

My family members live out of state, spread over the country. My parents are retired in Carson City, Nevada. I have a brother and a sister in Oregon, plus the brother I already mentioned in Indiana. We all love each other and have no on-going family feuds, but we have never been a close family.

I had been anxious to share the fact of my transgender nature with my family for some time, but my therapist, Cynthia, urged me to delay this. And rightly so! My coming out might be good for me, Cynthia told me, but it would only be hard for them. It would be better to put it off as long as possible. She suggested I should wait until I began hormone therapy. After that, physical changes in my body would betray my secret, so it would become necessary to come out.

But there I was, betrayed by the e-mail system. I chuckled to myself. My smile turned into a frown as it dawned on me my parents would be receiving the same message my brother had gotten. Maybe they had already received it! Oh, my goodness, what to do?

I decided to call my brother right away. I found a deserted conference room and phoned his work. It was lunch hour in Indiana, but I hoped I could catch him in his office. He runs his company's Information Services department so he doesn't get away from his desk much. Mike picked up the phone on the first ring and recognized my naturally funny, high-pitched voice immediately.

“There is something you should know,” I told Mike. After a few preliminaries, I told him I was transsexual, and I had been living full time as a woman since New Years.

Mike took the news calmly. He was very surprised. (If you ever want to really surprise someone, this will do it.) But he took it well. “If that’s what makes you happy,” he said, “then I am happy for you.” I hear that a lot, and I always appreciate it deeply.

Mike said he would need some time to think about it. I gave him the URL of a Web site where he could see some pictures of the new me. I had prepared the site with a few rather conservative pictures — nothing too shocking I hoped — specifically in anticipation of this day.

I talked with Mike for a half an hour. Afterward, I felt pretty good about it. He seemed to be OK with my news. I wondered what he would think of my pictures.

... Now for the parents

I debated what to do about my parents. Maybe they wouldn’t notice the name in the e-mail? Maybe I could make up a story like, “The company e-mail system must have messed up.” But I didn’t want to. I wanted to share my story with my parents, and here was the perfect opportunity — or at least a decent excuse. Besides, I was confident they would be OK with it. They are very tolerant people. Growing up, my siblings had put them through the wringer with all sorts of mischief both as teenagers and as adults. My parents came through it all like champs. Except for my divorce and drinking a bit more than they thought prudent, I was the golden child. And they did love me, I was confident of that. I decided to call them right away. I went back into the conference room and dialed.

My mother’s voice answered, as usual. “Eddy, it’s you! Is everything OK?”

“Yes, Mom, everything is fine. In fact, it’s great! Is Dad there too? I’d like to talk to both of you.”

“He’s picking up the other line now.” I heard the line click. My Dad greeted me, “Hi, Eddy, how’s it going?”

I said, “Fine, fine. Everything is fine. Listen, did you happen to get an e-mail from me this morning?”

“No, Honey, we didn’t get anything from you,” my mom answered.

“Well, good,” I said, “because there’s something I want to tell you about first.” I began by reminding them some of the details of my life leading up this moment. As I neared the good part, my mother interrupted me.

“Honey,” she said, “I know where this is leading. When you were here at Christmas, I noticed there was something different about you. I even told your sister how much you had changed. You looked very happy, and healthy, and had lost a lot of weight. I told her I knew something was going on with you. So I know what you’re telling us now.”

“Uh ... OK, then, what exactly is it, Mom?” I asked.

I knew what was coming and I bet you know too. She said, “You’re going to tell us you’re homosexual.”

“Well, uh, no, Mom, that’s not it,” I mumbled. “It’s sort of in that direction, but that’s not it. Actually, I am transsexual. I have been living as a woman since the beginning of the year.”

They were surprised, of course. But they seemed to take it pretty well. They said they were confident I must have thought this through carefully and I knew what I was doing. They didn’t know much about transsexuality, they admitted, and they couldn’t say they were happy about it; but they would support me. They were just worried I was making a poor choice and my life would be very difficult. They didn’t ask any specific questions about transsexuality or what was going on with me other than, “Do you wear dresses to work?”

They asked me if I had a female name. “I go by Elaine at work,” I told them, “but my friends call me Lannie.” I explained how Mike had noticed the name, Elaine, on the e-mail, and that I had called him. Ironically, my parents had, in fact, received the e-mail, but they simply deleted it because they didn’t know any

Elaine Rose. I could have just ignored the whole thing! It was just as well. I was happy to finally have it out in the open.

I ended the conversation feeling pretty good about it. They weren't happy, but they didn't panic and they didn't disown me. I felt they took it OK, and everything would be fine.

To follow up our conversation, I put a Valentine card in the mail to my parents. I enclosed a few photos of my new femme self. This may have been a mistake, as we shall see.

I related my coming-out-to-the-folks story to my therapist. I felt a slight urge to say something like, "I told you they would be fine with it!" But I resisted. Cynthia was happy things had gone well, but she cautioned me that my parents' second reaction, once reality set in, might be a lot harsher than their first reaction. Once again, Cynthia was right!

Little sister, big brother

At home that evening, I called my sister, Mary Anne. She is two years younger than me and I have always felt close to her. I had heard sisters were often the most supportive family members in a transition situation, and I expected Mary Anne would be just that way. And she was. We had a nice long chat. She was surprised but happy for me. It turns out we both love shoes.

Reluctantly, I dialed my big brother, Bob. I had heard brothers often have bad reactions due to their closeness and similarity, not to mention that guys are simply grossed out by girl stuff. But I was not particularly worried how Bob would react. We had never been very close. I didn't expect him to feel very deeply about whatever might be going on in my life. Likewise, I didn't expect to care deeply myself about whatever his reaction might be.

Surprisingly, he seemed to take my news pretty well. We had the longest, nicest chat we'd had in many years. He said he was very surprised, but trusted I knew what I was doing.

I joked, "You always expected weird stuff like this from me, didn't you?"

“I sure didn’t see this one coming!” he assured me.

The second reaction

The aftermath of coming out grew more disappointing as the days went by. I waited for someone in my loving family to call me back and check how I was doing. I wanted somebody to tell me they had looked at my pictures and maybe even say I looked nice. I had gotten this sort of support from co-workers and acquaintances to whom I had come out. I would have valued hearing the same from my loved ones even more. But the days went by and the phone did not ring.

Five days later I received an e-mail from my father. It was not good. I could not remember his ever having written to me personally before in my life. He obviously felt very strongly about this. The reality of the pictures I had sent was too much for him. He wrote:

It was when we saw the pictures the full significance hit us. I found them repulsive. ...If this is what makes you happy, you will do what you have to do. We have never interfered in our children’s lives and will always love you and be there for you. I ask only one thing of you — please don’t come to any family functions dressed as a woman. I doubt we all could handle it. If our son, Eddy, comes he will be welcomed with open arms.

So there it was. I was formally ostracized from my parents’ home. Never mind that we never actually have any family functions! (The family Christmas was exactly me showing up at their door.)

This shattered my illusions that my parents were taking it well. I was surprised at how strongly I was affected, because I thought I was ready for anything. But this shook me up. I’m still hurting today even as I write this. Nevertheless, I could understand why my father had reacted this way. I had been warned by Cynthia. People hold extremely tightly to their conceptions of gender, and they are very uncomfortable when these preconcep-

tions are challenged. Fathers in particular are hurt to discover a transsexual "son." My father was in shock. I would give him time to adjust. I had heard it often takes six months to a year. Some parents never accept it.

I tried to put my own hurt feelings aside and compose as sympathetic a reply as I could. My father did not respond to my reply.

My mother sent me a note too. Her words were more gentle, but the feelings she expressed were similar to my father's: "The pictures saddened me, as I cannot relate to the person in the photos, nor can any of the family." She commented some flower bulbs I had sent at Christmas were "opening up and look very pretty." I felt sad she didn't see that I, too, was opening up and looking very pretty. Maybe she did, but she just could not bring herself to express that directly.

My brothers had negative second reactions to my news as well. Bob, the older one, told me he had thought things over and decided he couldn't handle it. He didn't know much about this transsexual stuff and he intended to remain ignorant. I should please let him know if I'm going to show up anywhere, because he doesn't feel he can handle being in the same place with me. He said Mom cried when they were talking about me on the phone. "If it had been me instead of you," he said, "I wouldn't have told our parents about it at all."

Mike told me he felt the whole thing was particularly hard on him because, as the little brother, he had always looked up to me as a role model. Apparently he felt I was no longer worthy. But he did say he respected the fact I had the strength to do what I believed to be right for myself.

My sister, God bless her, thinks I'm just fine. She can't understand why the others are making a fuss over this. I was certain my family would come around to accepting me before long, but Mary Anne wasn't so sure.

A year and a half later, I was still waiting for my family to accept me as a woman and welcome me back into their homes and their lives. Their attitudes did not seem to have changed a bit —

except for this: When we were on the phone for Father's Day, my Dad called me "Lannie" for the first time. Little steps like this keep my hopes alive.

I Can See Clearly Now (Lannie gets glasses)

“That’s our exit coming up,” my friend said.

“How do you know that?” I asked.

“Don’t you see the sign down there?”

“Of course I see the sign,” I snapped, “but I can’t read it. Don’t tell me you can.”

“Sure I can,” my friend replied. “You ought to get your eyes examined.”

So I did. It turned out I was nearsighted. I needed glasses pretty badly. How do you like that? I had no idea. The world had

always looked a little bit fuzzy to me. I assumed it was that way for everybody. What an idiot I was! That explained why I always had to sit in the front row in my college classes; why I liked the large-size fonts on my computer screen; and why I bumped my nose on the television set.

I got glasses. It was fantastic. It literally changed the way I looked at things. Suddenly the world had a crispness and clarity I had never imagined possible. I could pick out faces in a crowd. I could read posters from across the room. I could hold books in my lap instead of against my nose. I could understand the fine print. (At least, I could read it.) The world even seemed brighter and more colorful, though I guess that was just psychological.

But I was reluctant too. What would my friends say? Would they call me “Four-eyes?” Would they think I look hideous in my glasses? I certainly thought I did!

I needn't have worried. Few people noticed my new glasses at all. A couple people made comments like, “You've changed something. Did you used to wear your hair differently?” When they noticed my glasses, people usually said they looked good on me. Sometimes I thought they might be lying. If so, I silently thanked them for it!

Why should anyone have a problem with my glasses? Almost everyone has either worn glasses themselves or has family members or friends who do. They understand it's just something some people need. I was surprised to discover that many of the people I see around me every day wear contact lenses, and I wasn't even aware of it. And a large number of people wear reading glasses in the privacy of their own homes. Apparently vision problems are much more common than I had thought!

My parents live out of state; I only see them at holiday time. So I called them up and informed them of my vision problems. I told them I had gotten glasses, and how that fixed up the problem so wonderfully.

Much to my surprise, my parents did not share my joy. In fact, they were shocked by my news. “You went your whole life

without glasses!" they exclaimed. "Why would you suddenly need them now?"

I explained my vision had been fuzzy my whole life; I just hadn't realized it or known it could be fixed.

"You seem to have done just fine with your fuzzy vision," they said. "Can't you just keep on living that way?" And, "We never expected to have a child with glasses. We just aren't prepared for this. None of your brothers and sisters has glasses. Are you sure you really want to do this?"

I told them, "Now that I see how clear and beautiful my vision can be, I cannot go back to my old fuzzy way of seeing. I am truly sorry if you have a hard time accepting this, but would you please take some time and think about it?"

Then I did something that possibly was a mistake. I sent them a photograph of me wearing my new glasses. After they got the photo, I telephoned them again. Things were worse than ever. They sounded so sad. My mother was in tears. "We just don't recognize that person in the picture with the glasses!" they moaned. "It seems like our dear, beloved child with the beautiful blue eyes is gone."

Despite their sadness, my parents did their best to support me. Bless their hearts! "We understand you are an adult and this is your decision," they told me. "We can't stop you from choosing to do what you want. All we ask is this. Please don't wear your glasses when you visit us. You will always be welcome in our home, but we just don't feel we can cope with seeing you in glasses. So please stay away, unless you feel you can visit us without your glasses." And that's where it stands to this very day.

Oh, wait. I'm sorry. I was confused. That wasn't when I told my parents about my glasses. That was when I told them I'm transsexual. Come to think of it, they didn't have a problem with my glasses at all.

Three for My Dad (A story, a poem, and a song)

A Story

Once there was a man who had three children.

When the first child was born, the man looked at the infant and saw a tiny penis there below the belly. "I have a son!" the man beamed. "A son who will make me proud. Perhaps he will build strong bridges, or defeat great armies, or rule mighty nations! But if he is a good man and righteous, I will be proud of him and hug him to my bosom!" And it happened just as the man wished. The child grew up to be good and righteous, and he

learned to fix automobiles and install safe tires on them, and manage the retail establishment. The father was indeed proud. "You are an industrious and reliable son," he said, "and you are welcome in my home. Come share in my joy and prosperity!"

When the second child was born, the man looked at the infant and saw there was no penis there below the belly. "I have a daughter!" the man beamed, and was filled with joy. "A daughter who will make me proud. She will promulgate her mother's joy and beauty in the world. Perhaps she will heal the sickly and comfort the forlorn. Perhaps she will bring me grandchildren. But if she is a good woman and righteous, I will be proud of her and hug her to my bosom!" And it happened just as the man wished. The child grew up to be good and righteous, and she bore him grandchildren, and she comforted the forlorn, and she healed the sickly. The father was indeed proud. "You are a compassionate and beautiful daughter," he said, "and you are welcome in my home. Come share in my joy and prosperity!"

When the third child was born, the man looked at the infant and once again saw a tiny penis there below the belly. "I have another son!" the man beamed. But in this he was incorrect, as we shall see. Nevertheless, the man continued, "A son who will make me proud. Perhaps he will solve great scientific problems, or sing beautiful songs, or write touching poetry. But if he is a good man and righteous, I will be proud of him and hug him to my bosom!" But it did not happen quite as the man wished. The child did grow up to be good and righteous, even something of a prodigy. At an early age the child solved minor scientific problems, composed and sang songs of no great moment, and wrote light verse. But the child examined her soul and discovered she was a woman, penis notwithstanding. So she underwent electrolysis, and took hormones, and had her genitals corrected with surgery. And she lived her life as a woman — a good and righteous woman — as best she could. But the father was not proud. "You have confused and shamed me," he said. "I cannot accept you as my daughter, because I saw your penis. I love you still, as my child, but you are not welcome in my home, because I

cannot deal with this distress. I will happily welcome you back if you again become my son.”

But she never was his son, you see, and she never would be. So the story, I’m afraid, has no happy ending.

A Poem

Father, why have you forsaken me?
I am flesh of your flesh, blood of your blood.
I am chromosomes of your chromosomes, genes of your genes.
I am created of your DNA.
I am raised by your guiding hand.
I am the baby you held on your lap, whose dirty diapers you happily changed.
I am the toddler who wouldn’t talk, and then would never stop talking.
I am the child whose little hand you held in your big strong one, as you showed me the world.
I am the adult who made you proud — so you told me —
A loving person, generous, open-minded,
Smart, responsible, handsome,
A person in your own image, it seems to me.

I am your daughter.
You thought I was your son.
Oops.
It was an understandable mistake.
When I was born, you counted my fingers, and saw ten.
You counted my toes, and saw ten.
You looked below my belly and saw a little penis.
(Perhaps you looked below my belly before you counted my fingers and toes.)
You thought I was your son.
You didn’t know you have to look deeper.

How could you know?
The doctor did not tell you.
Dear Abby did not tell you.
Dr. Spock did not tell you.
The womenfolk are supposed to know about babies, but this they
did not tell you.
I myself did not figure it out for forty-six years.
The mistake is understandable.

I forgive you.

You raised me well, with love and care and discipline.
I seemed a little different than your number one son, didn't I?
But no one knew why. Not you, not I.
I didn't play sports or fix cars or cause mischief like number one
son.
But I didn't wear dresses or play with dolls.
Who knew?
I hung on my mother's apron strings and read and read and read,
And put things together and took them apart.
Well, more the taking apart and less the putting together — I
wasn't so good at that part.
I put together a life for myself — but I wasn't so good at that
either.

Dad, you supported me through school and college with encour-
agement, praise, and money.
You stood up for me — literally — when I got married.
You picked me up — figuratively — when I got divorced.
Twice.
You cheered for me as I built my career,
And sympathized as it plateaued and declined.
You visited my various homes and always welcomed me into
yours.
Whether I was healthy or sick, sober or drunk or high, I was
always welcome.

But not now.
Now I am not welcome.
Because I am a woman?
No, that's not it. You are no misogynist.
You treat my mother, my sister, all women with respect.
All women, I guess, except for me.

Father, I am not insane.
I am not a pervert.
I am not playing a game.
I am simply living, at last, as the women I have always been.
And I need my father's love.
I am grateful for your tolerance, but I need more than that.
I need your approval.
I need your acceptance.
I need you to rejoice in the wonderful gift you have in me.

I am flesh of your flesh, blood of your blood.
I am chromosomes of your chromosomes, genes of your genes.
I am created of your DNA.
I am raised by your guiding hand
Jesus hung upon the cross, spikes piercing his hands and feet,
 blood and water flowing from his side;
I hang upon your disapproval, misunderstanding piercing my
 heart, tears flowing from my eyes.
Father, I am your daughter and I need you.
Why have you forsaken me?

A Song (An Irish jig)

Oh, now what have you done, my son?
My son, what have you done?
You grew your hair and pierced your ears,
A hippie you've become, my son,
A hippie you've become.

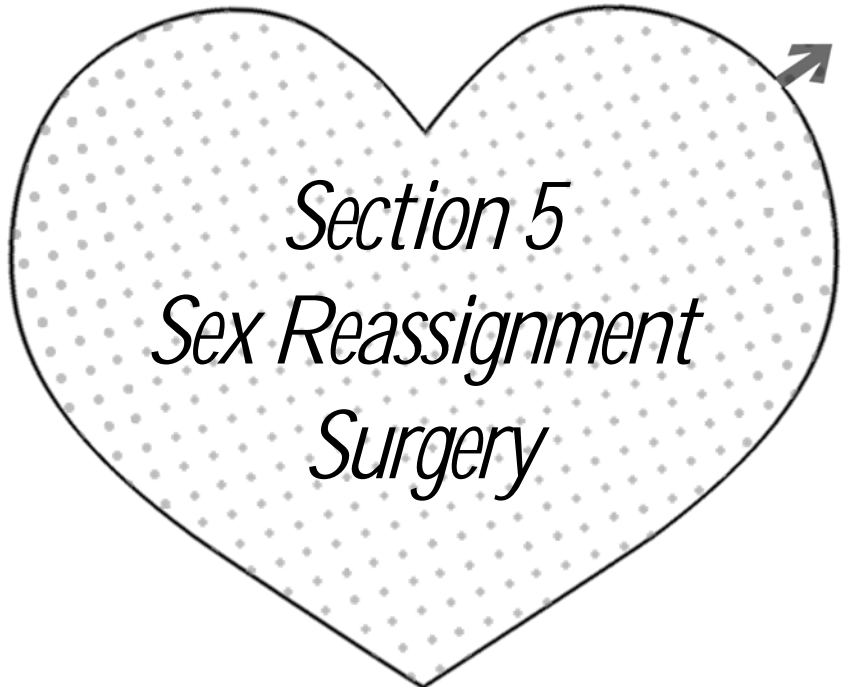
Oh, now what have you done, my son?
My son, what have you done?
You carry a purse and you're kissing men,
A gay man you've become, my son,
A gay man you've become.

Oh, now what have you done, my son?
My son, what have you done?
You shaved your legs and you're budding breasts,
A woman you've become, my son,
A woman you've become.

Oh, now what have you done, my son?
My son, what have you done?
You let them cut your genitals,
A eunuch you've become, my son,
A eunuch you've become.

Oh, now what have you done, my son?
My son, what have you done?
The leopard does not change its spots,
Please give me back my son, my son,
Please give me back my son.

Oh, Da, I never was your son,
I never was your son.
I know it's hard to fathom, but
Your daughter's what I am, Da,
Your daughter's what I am.
And I love you just the same, Da,
I love you just the same.

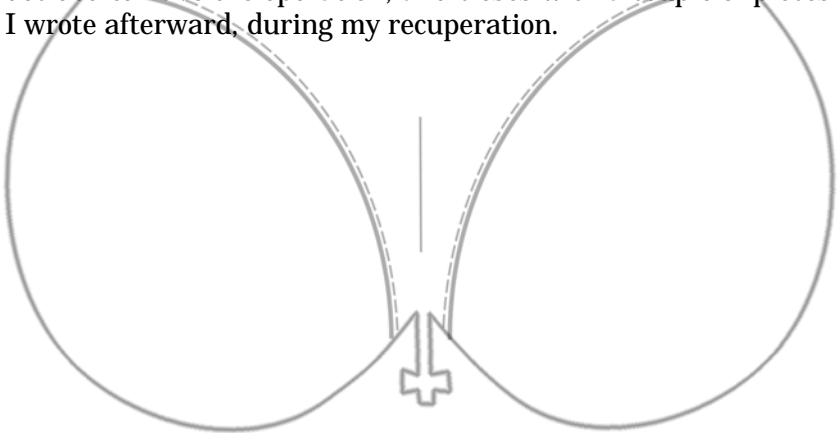


Section 5

Sex Reassignment Surgery

Yes, I have had it — the famous SRS. Dr. Annette Cholon performed my procedure on February 17, 2003 in Menlo Park, California.

What can I say about SRS? I can say a lot, and I did. This section opens with several pieces I wrote before I had even decided to have the operation, and closes with a couple of pieces I wrote afterward, during my recuperation.



Song: Recuperation Song

chant: I'm better than yesterday, worse than tomorrow.

I ache.

I cry.

I sweat.

I sigh.

So hot.

So weak.

So cold.

So bleak.

I groan.

Can't sleep.

Surgeon sewed,

I weep.

They purged me.

They shaved me.

They cut me.

They saved me.

I pray.

I feel.

I smile.

I heal.

chant: I'm better than yesterday, worse than tomorrow.

A Chick with a Dick

I want to get rid of my penis. I am a chick with a dick. But I'd rather be a chick with a vagina.

I was born with a male body, with a dick. I knew how to use it. I did use it, every chance I got — which was not, unfortunately, as often as I would have liked. When I decided to live the rest of my life as a woman, the question arose, what about my dick?

My dick still works. It still gives pleasure to others and to me. I'm surprised at how many men like my dick. Back when I was a man, I would have been appalled to find a dick on a woman, I think. I can't say for sure, because I never ran into the situation.

These days I am more broadminded about it. So are a lot of other people, it seems. And I guess some people are just kinky.

Back when I thought I was a man, my dick worked liked this: If I saw a beautiful woman, my dick would start to get hard. If she had big, beautiful, rounded breasts, blood would rush into my dick, and it would get bigger. If those breasts were exposed, or nipples were evident, my dick would get even bigger and harder. If I saw a pretty woman with long shapely legs and a short skirt, dick again. If I thought I could get a glance up that skirt when she sat down, big-time dick!

Nowadays, if I see a beautiful woman, I check out her shoes. If they're cute, I want to know where she got them. If she has big breasts and a nice ass, I will admire them, even be jealous, but it does not cause blood to pump into my dick. I'm not sure why it doesn't. I would still like to make love to beautiful women. At least I think so; I haven't had the opportunity in several years. Maybe these women seem so unobtainable to me my dick can't be bothered to make the effort.

I do make love with men these days. But the sight of a tall, strong, handsome guy does not send the blood rushing into my dick. Sometimes when I let myself imagine how nice it will feel when he is holding me, stroking me, wanting me ... that can cause a dick uprising, indeed. Usually I try not to let that happen, because I don't like the sight of my dick tenting the skirt of my dress. (Some men do love that particular sight.)

When I make love with a man, I love his dick. I like to hold it. I like to feel it grow in my hand or in my mouth. I like to suck on it and hear him groan. I like to feel how turned on the guy is, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. When I'm giving a guy oral sex, I usually get the impression he feels very lucky, like he's really pulling something off. Maybe it's because his wife (ex-wife, I hope) or girlfriend (ex-!) wouldn't do that for him. Whatever. Good for him! I'm glad he feels that way.

Often guys want to grab my crotch, feel my cock, suck on my dick. I don't get it. I don't want to suck on a woman's dick. I don't even understand why I don't get it. I like sucking on theirs, why

shouldn't they like sucking on mine? Because I'm a woman, dammit! Maybe somehow it makes me feel like less of a woman.

I sometimes let guys do what they want with my dick. If they really like it, then it's OK with me. I have reservations, but I try to put them aside and enjoy it. I love the attention. And yes, it feels good. Sometimes I even come.

I don't let guys fuck me in the ass. I wish I could, but my asshole is just too damn tight. I'm working on it. Maybe someday I'll be able to do that. I've had things in my ass, and I know it can be a wonderful sensation. It's not unwomanly, you know. Some women take it in the ass. Heck, I've seen them do it in movies!

So far, nobody has been upset because I won't let him fuck me in the ass. I'm pretty selective about my sex partners, so that's not too surprising. Besides, plenty of other fun things are available for our pleasure. Dry humping is one of them: rubbing, but not penetrating, over clothes sometimes, but also naked; just not penetrating anything. I even made up a limerick about this kind of sex play:

There once was a trannie named Lannie,
Who had a most delicate fannie,
She said, "Sex when done,
Without penetration,
Can be fun. You'll see, Hon. It's un-cannie!"

One night I was making love with my boyfriend. He was on the bottom. I was lying on top of him, not supporting my torso on my arms, like a man would, but laying all my weight on him in a big hug. I began moving my hips so my erect penis rubbed in his groin. It felt good. I rubbed and rubbed. I closed my eyes and enjoyed the feeling. He held me tightly and, with just the warmth of his embrace, encouraged me to enjoy myself. I drifted away and shed a few tears of happiness as I came. It was wonderful. But even as I enjoyed it, I wished that, instead of a penis, I had a vagina. I wished his penis could be throbbing and erect inside my vagina, his groin rubbing on my clitoris, creating the sensations I was feeling in my body. I wished we could be doing it like normal people. I thought that would feel better for me and for

him. Better in our minds, I mean. Maybe better in our bodies, too, but that's secondary.

So that's really why I want a vagina. Yes, tucking is a pain in the ass (sometimes literally) and a constant reminder I'm not a real woman. And it's awkward if my dick flops out of my panties and dangles around under my skirt or if it develops an erection. Wearing a bikini bottom at the pool would be nice. But mostly, I want to make love as a woman. Not as a chick with a dick.

Balls

My mother persists in referring to my transsexuality as the “lifestyle I have chosen.” Transsexual folks chuckle at this. Here is our wry reply: “Yes, I’ve chosen to be laughed at and ridiculed everywhere I go for the rest of my life. I actually like it when homeless bums on the street crawl out of their cardboard boxes to hurl abuse at me. I don’t mind that family members and close lifelong friends will no longer talk to me. I look forward to the series of painful surgeries. Having my penis removed is a good thing. It’s downright fun to tell every new boyfriend, ‘Honey, before we go any further, there’s something I have to share with

you ...' Yes, this transsexual lifestyle is surely something people would jump at, if they only knew."

But I'll let you in on a secret. Those are not the worst parts of being transsexual. Here is the dirty truth. The worst thing about being a transsexual is this: electrolysis of the balls!

Oh, nobody likes to talk about that one. It's just too horrible to contemplate. But there it is. When the surgeons construct my neovagina, they will use the skin of my scrotum to line its inner walls. Now nobody wants hair growing inside her vagina. It's uncomfortable, unhealthy, and damn hard to shave. Therefore the scrotum must be made hairless prior to the operation. You do that by electrolysis.

Electrolysis hurts. They don't just poke hot needles into your skin. After they poke the hot needle in, they send an electrical charge into it, a charge that's strong enough to kill the hair follicle (about 80 percent of the time, anyway). This hurts when it's done on your chin. It hurts when it's done on your chest. It hurts like hell when it's done on your upper lip. I've got to believe it hurts when it's done on your balls.

In fact, it hurts so much it's often done under anesthetic. But do you know what? I still don't like the idea. I don't even like the idea of the anesthetic needle in my balls. I'm gonna outsmart them! I've got a plan. I'm epilating my balls.

You know epilating? They sell a device called an epilator, used by ladies to remove fine hairs from their legs and underarms. The Epilady[®] is one well-known model, several others are out there. Epilators have sets of spinning discs that grab the hairs and yank them out. It's like tweezing, but a bunch of hairs are removed rapidly, much like waxing. Does it hurt? Of course it does! It hurts like hell the first time you go over an area. But maintenance is pretty easy after that first pass.

I've epilated my legs and arms and chest. It works great. I run the epilator over them for ten minutes or so each week, to catch any regrowth. I hope one day the little buggers will take the hint and stop coming back, and I can retire my trusty epilator.

So now I'm epilating my pubic hairs. I do a little bit every day, just until the tears stream down my face. I have to be really careful to stretch the skin tight otherwise the epilator will pinch it — ow! But when this happens, it doesn't break the skin, thank goodness. The only blood is from the occasional tough-guy follicle. I'm making progress. I almost have everything cleared.

I hope epilating works. I hope I don't have to have electrolysis of the balls. And yes, Mom, this is the lifestyle I have chosen.

Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS)

I'll tell you who knows more about vaginas than anybody. Toby Meltzer, Eugene Schrang, and Pierre Brassard, that's who. These skilled plastic surgeons, and a precious few others around the world, know vaginas so well that, godlike, they can create them. They can make a vagina, a new vagina, a neovagina, where none exists — namely, in a male body. These surgeons are so skilled even gynecologists may not notice that some vaginas are the work of, not God, but man.

In a year or so, after hormone replacement therapy has had an opportunity to work whatever magic it can, I will pay some thousands or tens of thousands of dollars to one of these

gentlemen. In return he will create a vagina in me, of me, a vagina that will become part of me. A new me. A neo-me.

An anesthesiologist will stick a needle in me and ask me to count backwards from one hundred. I will say one last quick goodbye to my little lifelong friend, my penis, and start counting. 100, 99, 98... I will not reach ninety. My part of the procedure will be done. I will sleep through the next five hours of surgery.

The surgeon will remove my scrotal sac and testicles. The testes will be sent to a lab to be checked for abnormalities and then disposed of as hazardous waste. (I'll say they're hazardous. They turned me into a boy!)

My scrotal skin will be carefully preserved to later construct the inner walls of my neovagina. Because of this, I will have previously had all the hair removed from my scrotum, probably by electrolysis. The surgical team will scrape or cauterize this skin to ensure there is no potential for hair regrowth.

The surgeon will peel my penis like a banana, a little, gherkin-like banana. He will — oh, so carefully — cut away every last bit of erectile tissue and discard it. (No woman wants erectile tissue in her vagina.) While dissecting the erectile tissue, the surgeon will preserve the urethra tube, the blood vessels, and the nerve bundle going to the tip or glans of the penis, as well as most of the glans itself.

The surgeon will create a hole in my perineum between the base of my penis and my anus. The hole will continue through my pubococcygeus (PC) muscle, the muscle I will use for my Kegel exercises. This hole will become my new vagina. My penile skin will be sewn back together into a tube, to which my scrotal skin will be concatenated to achieve greater length; this will dictate my neovagina's depth. This tube will be turned inside out and positioned within the vaginal hole. Thus my penis will have been inverted, as we sometimes speak of it.

Next the surgeon will whittle down my glans penis with its blood vessels and nerves and reposition it to create a functional and visually pleasing clitoris near the top of my vulva. My urethra tube will be rerouted and positioned below my clitoris to

support normal urinary functions. Everything will then be sewn up and held in place with stitching, packing, and tape. Silicone tubes will allow blood and fluid to drain for a few days after surgery.

At this point I will have a vagina and, thankfully, be rid of my penis and testicles. I'll return for secondary surgery in six months to create the labia majora and labia minora, giving my vulva a complete, pleasing, and natural appearance.

I won't be done with the creation of my new vagina yet, however. My body will not understand it has a vagina. It will think it has a wound, and it will try to heal itself. For six months I will have to instruct my body about its new organ. I will do this by inserting into my vagina dilators — dildos, if you would — white acrylic rods, eight inches long, of progressively wider diameters. The largest dilator I will use will probably be one and a half inches in diameter. I will insert them three times a day, keeping them in place for a half hour at a time. I will continue this routine for six months, by which time my body will have learned to accept its newest addition. I will need to keep dilating, about once a week, for the rest of my life, or my vagina will shrink.

I will probably have some minor complications from this complex surgery. Almost everybody does. Most are taken care of quite easily.

My neovagina will be a real vagina. It will be functional and sensate for sexual and urinary activities. Unless I am very unlucky, I will be orgasmic. I will be susceptible to yeast infections, and I will probably get them. I will be susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases but I will practice safe sex and do my best to avoid them — should I be lucky enough to have boyfriends!

I will learn more about vaginas than I ever wanted to know. I will learn more about vaginas than most genetic women ever know.

Of course, I cannot ever become pregnant. But that will not be my vagina's fault. That will be the fault of my uterus — or

more precisely, my lack of a uterus. In this regard, I will be in the same condition as those genetic women who have no uterus, either through hysterectomy or rare birth defect. None of us will experience the joy and pain of having a baby pass through our vaginas.

Is it peculiar that almost all of the surgeons who perform this procedure are men? I don't know if we can make anything out of that, but it's a curiosity. Of course, plastic surgery — in fact, all surgery — is overwhelmingly dominated by men. But it seems to me this particular specialty, like gynecology, should attract a number of brilliant women, genetic or transgender. The therapist who assures me I am not insane for choosing to live as a woman is, herself, a genetic woman. The physician who supervises my hormone therapy and treats my sniffles is a transgender woman. But for this oh-so-major procedure, I have no choice of having it performed by a woman. Humph.

Dr. Meltzer and company know an awful lot about the physical attributes of the vagina, just as I will become intimately acquainted with mine. But they will never have the experience of living with a vagina. So maybe they don't know so much about vaginas after all. That is an education I am anxious to begin.

Note: After writing this essay, I found Dr. Annette Cholon, who became my surgeon. In addition, Dr. Marci Bowers has taken over the SRS practice of the legendary Dr. Stanley Biber in Trinidad, Colorado. I believe at least one female surgeon is performing the SRS procedure in Thailand, too. So girls who are transitioning now can choose from several female surgeons, if they so desire.

Why I Am Going to Have Sex Reassignment Surgery

I am going to have my SRS in a few months. It seems to me I ought to be able to articulate clearly the reasons why I want this procedure. It's not that I need to justify it to myself or to anyone else. It's not that there should necessarily be a rational argument showing it's a logical thing to do. The reason could be as simple as, "I feel like it." But whatever it is, I ought to be able to set it down clearly in pen and ink. I ought to know exactly why I am doing what I am doing.

Let me state at the outset I do not hate my penis. The little guy has been a decent companion all my life. I even named him: Dr. Jekyll. Sometimes he gets nasty and turns into Mr. Hyde. Funny thing, mostly he's been Mr. "Hide" lately!

When I first began to seriously consider I might be transsexual, two years ago now, I was appalled at the idea of having SRS — same as most people! But even then, it occurred to me that if I did decide to live the rest of my life as woman, I would probably have SRS some day. One of my personality traits is that I don't do things by half-measures. If I were going to live as a woman, I would want to do it as thoroughly as possible. This was the first opening of my mind to the possibility of having SRS, but my reasons for doing it turn out to be somewhat different.

I began living full time as a woman nearly a year ago. Since then, Dr. J. has been falling further and further out of favor with me. I still don't hate him, but he's more of a nuisance to me than anything. I've decided to put the hit on 'im! But it's not that big of a deal for me. Transitioning to living full time as a woman was the big deal. Without that, I would die (literally, via booze). If it were to turn out I could not have SRS, because of some medical condition for instance, I would be disappointed, but it would not be the end of my world. I would not die. I would still live a happy, fulfilled life as a woman. I don't need SRS to complete myself as a woman. It's icing on the cake. I think.

If it's no big deal, as I brazenly claim, why bother? Why take on the risk, expense, and pain of a major surgery? OK, perhaps it's no big deal, but it's not trivial either. I'll get to my motivations shortly. But these are legitimate issues, so let's take a quick look at them.

Risk: SRS is a mature surgical procedure with a very high success rate. It's not nearly as complex as open-heart surgery or brain surgery, although it is equally life-saving. Realistically, the risk of major complications or death is pretty low — assuming I go to a reputable surgeon and I carefully follow all of my doctors' orders.

Expense: SRS is not that expensive, really. It's about like buying a car. Quite a range of prices are available in both cases. I've bought several cars over the years; I can afford one SRS!

Pain: Before I started transitioning, I thought I was a wimp about pain. After electrolysis and laser hair removal, high heels and corsets, and guys dancing on my toes, I know I can tolerate pain to achieve my goals. Besides, lots of other girls have made it through OK and so can I.

I can bear the risk, the expense, and the pain to achieve my goal. But why is it my goal?

While I do not believe having SRS will make me a real woman in any profound philosophical or biological sense (I already am a real woman!), having a penis does make me an abnormal woman in an obvious physical way. I mean no disrespect to my sisters who have penises, but here it is: I do not want to be a chick with a dick. I know I will never *not* be transgender. I will never be completely normal (as if anyone is), but I believe SRS will make me more normal and, more importantly, help me feel more normal. This is mostly about how I feel to myself, how I feel when I look in the mirror, how I feel when I go potty, how I feel (physically and emotionally) when I cross my legs. To a lesser extent, it's also about how other people react to me, how I have to (or should I say choose to?) explain myself to others, and how that makes me feel. But mostly it's just for my private self.

That alone, wanting to be more normal, is sufficient reason for me to undergo SRS. I really do want that. But there's more, some of it also quite important to me.

When I transitioned, I was certain I was doing the right thing. I knew it was a necessary step to allow me to achieve a happy and fulfilled life. I went through a lot of deep thinking about various aspects of it all, but mostly it came down to the obvious: I was depressed, miserable, and socially non-functional as a male; but cheerful, optimistic, and socially functional as a female. So I'm better off being a female. Soon after I began living as a woman, it became clear what was happening in my heart was something deeper. At some fundamental level, this is what I

was meant to be. Am I the same as a GG in my brain? In my heart? This I cannot say for certain. But I am sure I am a woman in my soul, and that is how I shall live.

I found the more womanly I became, the happier I became. (And healthier, and more productive, etc., as these things all flow together). When I transitioned at work. When I grew my hair out and I could stop wearing wigs. When I sent my boy clothes to Goodwill. When using the women's restroom became second nature. When I could bond as a woman with other women. When my poise became polished and natural enough that I could regularly pass as a woman. I have a simple, circular definition of what it means to be a woman: being a woman is the sum total of the experience of living as a woman. I have rapidly been gaining that womanly experience.

The more female life experience I gain, the happier I become. The more womanly characteristics I embody, the happier I become. Thus, SRS seems obvious. Womanly, female experience generally involves vaginas, not penises; so I will be happier after SRS. To be more womanly, and thus happier, is my second reason having SRS. This is subtly different from saying it completes me as a woman. It isn't the final, magic piece; it's just one of many different pieces, each of which is optional.

Let's talk about femininity. Femininity/masculinity is distinct from gender, isn't it? We know men can be quite feminine and women can be rather masculine. Why do some women choose to present themselves in a very effeminate manner, while others do not? Why do some transsexual women? I've thought about this a lot, and I've come up with nothing to explain it. *C'est la vie*. But it so happens I am a very effeminate woman. I always dress nicely and a bit sexy — not extremely enough to be out of place at work, for example, but enough that people take notice. I act a little silly and flirty. I wiggle when I walk. I never leave the house without makeup. I only own one pair of flats (out of over sixty pairs of shoes). I like being femmie. I like the effect it has on other people. But mostly I like the effect it has on me. I won't go as far

a to say it turns me on, but I do get a thrill out of it, every single day.

What is more masculine than a penis? (A beer? Ha, ha. Well we could go lots of directions with this ...) Sex reassignment surgery will certainly increase the femininity in that particular area of my body. Not many people will ever see this; it's mostly just for me. I cringe a little every time I go potty and then have to fix my tuck — yuck. It's not a life-or-death issue, but it's important to me. Dammit, I want to be feminine down there!

So those are my big motivations for SRS: to be more “normal,” to increase my total life experience as a woman, and to increase my femininity. Other legal and practical considerations weigh in at a lesser degree of importance.

On the legal side, proving I am a woman is an issue. Say, for example, I got hassled for using the lady's room. Or if I got arrested, to determine which lock-up they would put me in. In fact, it could be a safety issue. There might be an occasion when some violence-prone jerk decides to check if I fit his definition of a real woman. Crocodile Dundee even demonstrated how to do this, remember? I could be in trouble if I have the wrong equipment down there. These are real issues, to be sure. But for me, it's like the “wear clean underwear in case you get hit by a truck” argument. Realistically, the risk of one of these things happening to me is probably smaller than the surgical risks, so they don't make for a compelling argument.

Another legal issue is getting my identification changed to female on my passport and on my New Jersey birth certificate. But these things are not important enough to me to influence my decision about SRS.

A practical issue is I feel I can't go certain places or do certain activities as long as I have a penis. Locker rooms come to mind as the prime example. But guess what? I don't play any sports. I can't remember the last time anyone saw me naked outside of sexual or medical situations. Who am I trying to fool with this argument?

An important health issue should be considered. A pre-op trans woman takes high dosages of female hormones to counteract or reduce the testosterone produced by the testicles. The long-term health effects of this are not well understood, but are likely to be negative, especially in light of the recent findings on hormone replacement therapy for menopausal women. After SRS, hormone dosages can be cut way down, and that is very likely a good thing. However, the same effect can be accomplished with an orchiectomy (removal of the testicles), so the argument does not support the penectomy (removal of the penis), vaginoplasty (creation of the neovagina), and labiaplasty (creation of the labia majora and labia minora).

Two practical issues that do figure in my life are tucking and fucking. Tucking, the practice of concealing the penis by pulling it back toward the ass, is not a huge deal for me. It works pretty well — I can even wear thongs and bikinis. But tucking is unfeminine, and more or less uncomfortable from time to time. It does ruin the lines of certain outfits, and has been known to pop out at awkward moments. Actually, the worst thing about tucking is the feeling I'm hiding something. In fact, I am hiding something, in a physical sense — that's the whole point of tucking! But I mean metaphorically. My whole transition is about expressing myself truly and openly. I don't want to hide anything. I don't want to have to tuck. (I'm not even interested in talking about keeping the penis but not tucking, although some girls are fine with that approach.)

And then there's sex. Does it surprise you it's the last thing on my list? It's not that I saved the best for last. It's really the least important part of it for me. I think.

Often we like to say gender and sex are separate issues; this is true in many ways. It would be hard to argue, however, SRS has nothing to do with sex. It will certainly change the mechanics of how I can have sex, and it will change the pool of partners who want to have sex with me. It will probably also change my sexual responses in certain mysterious and, I hope, great ways that I just don't know about. I do think I will enjoy sex very much with

my own vagina; again, I don't know, so I'm trying not to pin great expectations on it.

When we make an important decision, it's often a good idea to draw up a balance sheet to examine the positives and negatives. I've just discussed the positives SRS should bring me. On the negative side, I mentioned risk, expense, and pain. What else goes on the negative side of the balance sheet? There's ... uh ... not much. There just isn't anything I find particularly useful or appealing about Dr. Jekyll. I take no pride in him as an appendage. He adds nothing positive to the self-image I'm striving to achieve, the image I have of my true self. He brings a certain amount of pleasure during sexual activity, but that is more than offset by the annoyance of having him at the party at all. I'm afraid the balance beam tilts very heavily to the positive side. Goodbye, Dr. Jekyll!

That's pretty much it then. I want SRS so I can become more normal, more womanly, and more feminine. What is more, as my SRS date approaches, I find it is a big deal to me after all. Not life-or-death, but very important nonetheless. Am I brainwashed by the stereotypical woman/man gender binary? Is it simply a weakness of my mind that I think I need SRS to achieve my feminine and human potential? Perhaps with therapy, hard work, and a good attitude, I could become perfectly happy with my womanly self without SRS. Perhaps so. But I spent my whole life trying to live up to an image that wasn't right in my heart, the image of me as a man. I'm not going to do that again. I'm going to listen to my heart and get my SRS.

Thoughts on the Eve of Sex Reassignment Surgery

I was born a woman, nearly half a century ago. I was born a baby, as we all are. Flesh molded around seeds of goodness, kindness, even greatness. As we all are.

What kind of person a child becomes depends on many things. The best results are obtained when the child is raised in harmony with her true nature, her true self. Only then can the seeds flower to their full potential.

I was raised with good values, discipline, and lots of love. Many fine qualities flourished in me. But there was a problem, a

big one. A vital part of my true nature — my gender — was terribly misinterpreted. I was raised as a boy, and I lived as a man. I could not reach my full potential. I could not find happiness or meaning in life.

A couple of years ago I discovered the dreadful mistake. I set about correcting it. I was like a monstrous topiary, twisted and pruned into a grotesque shape. I began untwisting and reshaping my psychic limbs. Fortunately, I was not fatally damaged. I quickly sprang into my natural and beautiful shape. For over a year I have lived as woman. As I was born. As I shall live the rest of my life.

Tonight I swallow bitter drink to cleanse my physical passages. I meditate to cleanse my spirit. Tomorrow I go under the knife. The surgeon's delicate skill will finally and gladly rid me of that most visible vestige of my manly past — the nasty little trickster who misled us all from the very beginning. I will acquire womanly genitalia — a reward (after a fashion) for having solved the puzzle of my troubled life.

The procedure will rob me of that fundamental, mystical creative power that is the birthright of nearly all human beings. No longer will I produce tiny swimmers for the great race only one or two out of millions can win. Nor will I gain the womanly kiln within which new life may be fired and baked. While my new body will be capable of receiving (most pleausably!) a manly lover, his ardent exercise will not in me serve the divine procreative purpose. In birthing my womanly self, I relinquish the power to birth others. It's a trade-off I make willingly, but reluctantly. I cede my right to participate in the great genetic contest, but that's OK. The world has plenty of children crying out for love, should I choose to indulge my motherly instincts.

I wish the surgeon's scalpel could excise every evidence of my manly misadventure, somehow leaving behind or fashioning from skin grafts the complete woman I would have been, had I been born with a vagina. But that woman does not exist, and I have, sadly, no way to know who she would have been exactly. That's OK too. I am proud of the woman I have become, and I like

her just fine. Perhaps the crucible of a half-century of male socialization and testosterone poisoning has forged a stronger, more compassionate, and more interesting person than would have been the product of a more common, easier path. Perhaps I am exactly what the world needs me to be right now. Perhaps I am exactly what I need to be right now. I expect to spend the next half-century joyously and excitedly finding out. But first I need to take a little nap and let the surgeon do her careful work ...

Sex Reassignment Surgery Hurts!

It hurts. SRS — Jesus, it hurts.

I don't remember anyone telling me how much it hurts. Did I miss something? Am I talking out of school? Am I a wimp? Do I hurt more than everybody else? Some of my sisters say they didn't have much pain at all, but others share knowing grimaces when we talk about it — they felt the pain too. Most of all, we want to forget it, to put it behind us. I write, that's how I purge. I need to write about the pain.

I awoke a new woman, so to speak, around two o'clock on a Monday afternoon. I don't remember going to sleep. I never saw

the operating theatre. I just woke up and it was all over, all except the pain.

Tris — Tristan, a handsome nurse — was by my side. He smiled at me, and I smiled at him. Then I noticed I hurt. I can't recall specifically how that particular hurt was. Just bad things happening down there, and fear it would get much worse. "It hurts," I whined to Tris. He said, "Don't worry, this will take away the pain." He began fussing with some tubes and needles. "Hmmm, we have a few options here," I heard him mumble.

Goddammit, hurry! I screamed internally. Finally he added something to my IV and the pain went down to a dull throb. But I still hurt. And I was so weak, so weak.

At three o'clock my best friend, Jamie Faye Fenton, arrived to shuttle me to the Surgical Hospital of Menlo Park, formerly known as the Recovery Inn. I was scheduled to stay at that facility for three nights, though my visit could (and would) be extended if necessary. My actual surgery had been done in a modest OR called the Plastic Surgery Center of Palo Alto, saving one thousand dollars over having the same thing done in the OR at the Surgical Hospital of Menlo Park. In exchange, I had a delightful two-mile car ride that afternoon. I had imagined this trip would be done in an ambulance, but apparently my condition was serious only to me. They wheeled me to Jamie Faye's SUV and helped me into the passenger seat and onto my rubber blow-up donut cushion. I tried to assume a Zen-like state as I tolerated the bumps and hour-long stoplights along Middlefield Road.

The Surgical Hospital of Menlo Park is like a Holiday Inn with a twenty-four-hour nursing staff. They wheeled me to a lovely private room and bundled me into the bed which I would not leave for four days and nights. They hooked me up to an IV with a morphine machine. They put a button in my right hand to activate the morphine, and another in my left hand to call the nurse. I immediately began thumbing the morphine button like I was playing Pac Man, but the machine only allowed a hit every fifteen minutes. A little beep let me know when I scored. Fifteen minutes has never seemed like a longer interval. I never got to

the point where I could accurately gauge the elapsed time; I just kept thumbing the button.

By late afternoon, the morphine was doing its job and I became quite comfortable. Surprisingly, I remained clearheaded. Apparently the morphine was able to direct its effects specifically to the pain. I felt so good, I started to think, *This is a piece of cake! No wonder the other girls never complained about the pain.* I had some visitors and made some phone calls. All seemed to be peachy.

Every couple of hours a nurse came by to check on me. I was not allowed so much as a sip of water all that day and my main discomfort was that my mouth, lips, and throat were parched. Later I discovered I could use some moist swabs to relieve this condition, or I could rinse with water and spit it out, but that didn't occur to me that afternoon. This parched mouth condition persisted all week. My lips were terribly chapped also.

The nurses checked my dressings. I was surprised to see I wasn't all bandaged up like my face had been after my rhinoplasty last summer. I just had an absorbent pad over my vulva, held in place with a medically attractive pair of disposable mesh panties. As I looked down, I could see there was no penis, sure enough! Just some flesh and blood and stuff. I didn't ask for a mirror to examine things closely at that point.

On my left hip, a clear cellophane bandage covered the skin graft donor site, a three- by four-inch, raw, red patch. The surgeon used this skin graft to construct the extension of my vaginal canal, obviating the need for the much dreaded scrotal electrolysis. My scrotal skin was used to form the labia majora and labia minora, which were created during my "one-step" procedure. (Some surgeons prefer to form the labia in a second operation some months later.)

I felt good on Monday evening. My good feelings persisted until early Tuesday morning when my "vet" (ha, ha — like I'm being spayed by a veterinarian), Dr. Annette Cholon, visited me to check on my progress. Dr. C. is a cheerful, pixie-ish, young, blonde woman. She reminds me of the actress Tea Leoni, but

without the penchant for physical comedy. She greeted me with a big smile and a happy, "Good morning! How are you feeling today?" as she checked under my dressing. Everything looked great, except there was a little more blood seepage than she liked. She said this annoyed her because everything else had gone just perfectly, but she didn't see anything in particular bleeding. I asked her about depth and she told me I had thirteen centimeters. I quickly converted in my mind: five inches. That sounded pretty good, although I had heard six inches most often mentioned as a goal, and eight inches as the Holy Grail. Perhaps I would gain a little more depth over time, with proper dilation discipline.

Tuesday afternoon things started to go badly for me. I began having hallucinations from the morphine. The hallucinations were very interesting because they seemed to be completely real, yet if I tried, I could tell hallucination from reality. For example, I would tell a real visitor, "Two hallucinations are standing right beside you!" I often found myself reaching for things that weren't there, stopping myself before I actually moved a muscle.

Then there was the itching. Not at the surgery site, but all over my body. It was not terrible, intolerable itching, just annoying. The doctor told me it was from the morphine. Then I noticed every time I scored with the magic morphine button, the itching became pronounced. I squirmed and scratched a little, but not too much, because it really didn't help.

When I had first been put to bed on Monday, they had encased my legs in attractive white thigh-high compression stockings to prevent blood clots in my immobile legs. Really, the stockings were quite attractive. I was going to keep them, except that by the time I left, the blood stains grossed me out. In addition to the compression stockings, they wrapped each of my calves in something like a big blood pressure cuff. These cuffs were hooked to a machine that rhythmically pumped air in and out of them on a twenty-second cycle, continuously massaging my calves. I liked the way it felt, though the nurse told me some people hated it. I felt sorry for them. But after a few days, I got

tired of it myself. Besides, the tubes from the cuffs to the pump would get tangled in my sheets and pillows when I tried to shift or roll over onto my right side. (There was no turning onto my left side because the skin graft donor site was there.)

A sharp pain continuously jabbed the backs of my heels, especially my left heel. The pain may have been caused by the calf massage machine, or maybe it was simply due to the constant pressure on my heels since I was lying on my back most of the time. This pain worsened as the days wore on. A heel massage from a compassionate visitor helped a little, but not much. I expected to develop a big blister or bruise on my left heel, but no visible problem developed.

All of this was nothing compared to my overall misery from a constant state of chills and overheating — simultaneously, it seemed. I was sweating profusely, continuously. The nurses monitored my vital signs, and I was never more than a degree off 98.6, but it felt to me like a terrible fever. In fact I had suffered a fever of 101 degrees a month earlier, and this felt just like that. Finally one of my visitors, Judy Van Maasdam of the Gender Dysphoria Program of Palo Alto, diagnosed my condition. I was having hot flashes! I had discontinued my hormones a couple of weeks earlier on the advice of my general practitioner, who was worried about blood clotting during my period of immobility. So I had no estrogen coming in, and my testosterone producers were suddenly gone. I had no sex hormones of either variety, and I was going through menopause! Jamie Faye fetched my estrogen patches from my house and I went back on them Thursday. But this extremely miserable condition persisted through the weekend as my body struggled to attain a new hormonal balance.

Though I complain about the pain, through it all I kept in mind how small my pain was compared with what many suffer. At least I knew I would be better in short days and weeks to come. How much harder it must be for those suffering with terminal illnesses or, perhaps worse, those who do not know how long their suffering will last or what their outcomes may be. How much more it must hurt to be the victim of terrible burns. How horrible

it must be for those who suffer without good medical care, or pain relievers and anesthetics. (For example, how terribly the innocents of Iraq suffered under our decade of economic sanctions, not even allowing morphine into their country!)

Tuesday afternoon Dr. Cholon visited me again and continued to worry about my seepage. My blood pressure was fine so excessive blood loss wasn't an issue, but she was concerned it didn't seem to be stopping. Once again she examined the surgical site but couldn't see anything wrong. She decided maybe if she pumped up my stent a bit, it would pack the area more tightly and reduce the bleeding.

I guess I haven't mentioned my stent yet. Dr. Cholon formed my neovagina using the inverted penile skin plus the skin graft, formed around a surgical stent. The stent is six inches long by an inch in diameter, a white flexible foam core surrounded by a clear plastic balloon somewhat thicker than a toy balloon. Two tubes come out of the stent, one passing completely through the center for drainage. The other is a stem with a ball valve, which is used to pump up the balloon, expanding the diameter of the stent. This stent was inside my new vagina continuously from the surgery until Monday a week later. I slept with the stent in place overnight for another week after that. As my vagina was five inches deep, an inch of the stent stuck out. It was very uncomfortable, with a feeling like being constipated all the time. I remembered a friend told me she once was enjoying the feel of a butt plug so much she decided to leave it in as she went about her day's business. After several hours, she regretted her decision severely. Imagine leaving it in for a week!

Dr. Cholon produced a large hypodermic and pulled it out to twenty cubic centimeters. She hooked it up to the stent valve stem and delivered. YEEEEOOOOWWWWW! Oh, my god, it felt like she was splitting me in two. I grabbed for the morphine button and pumped. I got a beep, thank goodness. "Jesus, that hurts!" I yelled.

Dr. Cholon smiled and said, "Now you know what it's like to have a baby." (Dr. C. had had her first baby ten months earlier.)

I don't know if this was meant to comfort me, but it didn't. At that moment, I hated Dr. Cholon as much as I have ever hated anyone on this green earth.

Then she did it again.

Tuesday afternoon and night were a haze of pain and hallucinations. I could not in the vaguest way remember why this had ever seemed like a good idea to me. What was so bad about my penis, anyway? It never hurt me like this!

By Wednesday morning I was so sick and itchy from the morphine, each decision of whether to press the button was a struggle. I actually rode out a few intervals without it. Dr. Cholon came in early, as usual, and checked me. I could not believe what I heard her say. "We'll take her back into the OR today." Back in? Under anesthetic again? Starting the whole deal over again? Oh, my god.

But that is exactly what we did. I went back under at two o'clock that afternoon. This time we used the OR in the Menlo Park Surgical Hospital, so at least no car rides were involved. Dr. C. unpacked me and took a good look all around. She was pleased with what she saw, which was basically nothing. No "bleeders" that needed to be cauterized or anything like that. The seepage seemed to come from the area around my urethra where she had split open a bit of excess urethra and sewn it in place to create moist, pink mucosa in my vagina. Perhaps there was a little hematoma under it, as it was quite swollen. So she just sewed me up again, packed me extra tightly (it felt to me), and sent me back to my room. Two units of blood, which I had banked in advance of surgery, were put back in me, just to make good use of them.

It worked. Thursday the bleeding had stopped and I was permitted some solid food, which I, of course, vomited up. They told me I could probably go home the next day, but that seemed impossible to me. Thursday afternoon the nurse made me get out of bed and walk over to a chair and sit a bit. I only lasted two minutes. I objected mightily to this horrific torture, but I did it. They also took away the morphine machine and put me on oral

pain pills. I was glad to bid goodbye to the blessed-turned-evil machine.

Friday morning I still felt as horrible as I had for the previous two days. But I was fed up with the bed and the room and the staff. I longed to get home. Because my bleeding was stopped and I was off the morphine and on unrestricted diet, there was no need for me to stay. I decided if I could keep some food down and perform the walk-about, I would try to go home. It all worked out. It seemed to take forever for my friends to pack all my stuff and get me checked out, but I was finally home by three o'clock.

I still hurt like hell down there and I was totally weak. I still had those chills and fever throughout the weekend. Three dear friends arranged among themselves for twenty-four-hour coverage, and they took good care of me. Thank you so much!

On Monday morning my body snapped back into reality, more or less, at long last. For the first time in a week I didn't feel shivery. I had a slight, runny bowel movement — which felt wonderful!

On Monday afternoon I visited Dr. Cholon for a check-up. She said everything was healing well. Nevertheless, she would leave in the stitches, stent, and catheter (ha, I never even mentioned the delightful catheter and urine bag) for a while longer.

That pretty much ends this part of the story. The worst was over and the healing was well underway. It still hurt — but in different ways. Maybe I'll talk about dilating and about pissing myself and other such unpleasantness later.

One thing I now understand, which had always puzzled me before, is this: whenever somebody talks about whether they might be transsexual, the post-ops always nod sagely and tell them, "I dearly hope, for your own sake, you are not." Now I know why. Sex reassignment surgery hurts. Jesus, it hurts!

The Scariest Thing I Have Ever Done

The scariest thing I have ever done was introducing myself to my own vagina after SRS.

When I was young, I was scared of the dark, and monsters, and all that sort of thing. I was particularly scared that late at night I might look into a dim bathroom mirror and something else — not me — would be looking back. As I grew into adulthood, those fears dropped away. I came to believe most of the things we fear are reflections of our fear of looking inside ourselves, fear of the ugliness and pain we might find there. When my day-to-day life became nothing more than a state of deep despair, I

discovered I had become fearless. There was nothing left to fear, because I was already living the worst that could happen.

Miraculously, I discovered a single crucial key my life was missing, which was my gender identity. I had been living my life as a man, but I am, in fact, a woman! I rapidly climbed out of that pit of despair by applying Harry Benjamin's triadic therapy: I began living as a woman; I changed my body's hormonal balance to female; and I planned for the big one — SRS.

Living as a woman, I found life was beautiful and full of promise. My old fears did not return. I liked what I saw in the mirror, even late at night, because I knew I would see only me looking back. So I was unaccustomed to the feel of real fear I experienced eight days after my SRS — trembling, shivery fear.

I did not fear SRS. I would have, had I known how much it would hurt. It hurt like hell! But other girls never complained about it, so I didn't worry. Bitches!

I made it through the surgery OK. While I recuperated I still hurt in a variety of ways, but it was not scary, not intolerable. What was scary was getting to know my new vagina.

Exactly one week after the operation I visited my surgeon, Dr. Annette Cholon, for a check-up. Dr. C., a cheerful, pixie-ish, young blonde woman, greeted me with a smile. After a few preliminaries, she pulled out the inflatable surgical stent that had resided in my new vagina since the surgery. I expected it to hurt, but it was painless; I didn't even realize when it came out. The doc cleaned me up, handed me a mirror, and gave me the grand tour of my new vulva. But first she warned me it was extremely swollen, so I shouldn't expect it to look pretty!

At the top was my clitoris, which Dr. C. had formed from the nerve bundle that had lived at the head of my penis in a previous life. My new clitoris was not yet sensate; I'd been told it sometimes takes months for feeling to return to the wickedly insulted nerves.

Below my clitoris, I could easily see where the catheter tube left my urethra, which Dr. C had rerouted from its prior position in the now missing penis. Below that was a huge, ugly, purple,

swollen mess! Dr. C. explained she had split open an extra length of my urethra tube and sewed it in place between my urethra and my vaginal opening, where it will create moist pink mucosa after the swelling goes down. This will provide a little bit of lubrication and an attractive appearance. But for now it was extremely swollen and looked gruesome. A little hematoma had probably leaked fluid under it, causing excessive swelling. The swelling would either go down by itself over time, or it might require a little follow-up surgery.

Below the gruesome lump was my vaginal opening — which, frankly, I could not see at all — then another lump of skin, and then my anus — a familiar face at last! (Smile.) Labia majora and minora were formed from my former scrotum, ready to close up cooly once the swelling went down.

The grand tour was complete. It was my first good look at my new parts and I wasn't looking too closely even yet. Too many other pains and worries occupied my attention.

Dr. Cholon had me lie back on the examining table and I got my first real pelvic exam — feet in stirrups, speculum, etc. I had had my feet up in the stirrups once before in one of my SRS pre-exams, and I had been rather tickled by the experience. This time it held no charm! It wasn't painful or embarrassing (though I do like the fact my doctor is female). It was just something to get done.

The doc told me to relax and she would re-insert the stent. She asked me if I'd like to do it myself, but I declined. I took a deep breath and exhaled, and it was done. It didn't hurt at all. Doc inflated it with twenty cubic centimeters of air from a large hypodermic needle. That didn't hurt either, much to my relief, as it had nearly killed me (I had felt) a few days earlier in the hospital.

Dr. Cholon told me I should take the stent out when I needed to have a bowel movement. She suggested I should get to know my new vagina. I could probe around with a finger (she advised me to clip a couple of my long, sharp fingernails) and feel it inside

and out. She gave me some sterile gloves and a hypo for pumping up the stent.

I trusted Dr. Cholon and felt safe in her hands. But I was very nervous about being on my own with my new equipment. Frankly, I hoped I wouldn't need a bowel movement between then and my next appointment two days later. But that bitch, Mother Nature, would not leave me in peace.

Around noon the next day I started feeling like I might need a bowel movement. As I had been eating very little, I hoped it would just be the usual gas. I got myself to the toilet in my master bathroom and soon knew something more serious than gas was happening. A cold sweat broke out on my forehead as I realized it was zero hour for me. I was scared. I knew it was unlikely anything would go wrong, but the sheer fear of the unknown was upon me. And I was alone. I had to do this thing all by myself.

Something needed to give, so I began tugging at the stent. Without much trouble, painlessly, out it slid. A bloody mess, but it was out. Lord, help me now! I grabbed a tissue and laid the bloody stent aside on it. "Relax," I instructed myself. But I was scared. What else might come pouring out of my body? Vaginal lining? Pancreas?

I had my first decent bowel movement in a week, but I knew the monstrous stool was moving right past my new vagina. Would anything be damaged? I had to strain a little bit to get it out and that scared me. Would I burst some stitches? What else could go wrong?

Nothing went wrong. After a few minutes, that part of the operation was completed. I wiped delicately. (Front to back, ladies! We must keep the front as clean as possible.) I stood up sorely and shuffled to the sink. I washed my hands and the bloody stent with anti-bacterial soap.

"In for a penny, in for pound," I mumbled to myself. I might as well shower now, while the stent was out. The doc had given me permission to shower as long as I didn't let water stream directly into any of my various tubes. So not having to deal with the stent tubes was a good thing. I got the water running hot and

stepped in. I was still tethered with the catheter to my urine bag, so I hung the bag on the shower door handle. I avoided the main stream of water as much as possible, leaning my head and then my arms into it, bit by bit. Washing my hair for the first time since my surgery felt great, though I didn't experience the ecstasy some girls claim this occasion brought them. Mainly, I was relieved to direct a gentle wash of water over my new vulva, which, frankly, had gotten to stink like hell. ("Does anybody smell tuna? If so, it's gone bad!")

As I showered, I was massively relieved nothing fell out and there was no stream of blood or other ooze. But the scariest part was yet to come. I still had to put the stent back in, and I still had not really confronted my new vagina.

Trembling slightly with cold and fear, I dried myself off lightly and gathered all my materials in a large, empty area on the floor of my master bedroom. I looked at the pile of stuff and wondered if SRS is practical for anyone living in a small apartment! I had a big pillow to elevate my butt and one for my head, a disposable bed pad to protect the pillows and rug from all the various fluids I expected to be dripping and flying about, a clean, white towel over that, and some extra towels and wash cloths. I had a roll of paper towels, disposable rubber gloves, K-Y Jelly (Surgi-lube, actually), and a mirror. I turned on some bright lights. I found a fingernail clipper and clipped down and filed smooth the index and middle fingernails on my right hand. I decided I was ready to meet my vagina.

I laid down on my back on the floor, hips and head elevated on the pillows. I crooked my knees and spread my legs, just like in all the pictures. I took the mirror in hand and moved it down where it gave me a clear view of my vulva. Hello, girl, there you are. Just like in Dr. Cholon's office, except this time it's just you and me. I studied the structures Dr. C. had pointed out to me the day before. Gently I touched this and then that. Not much sensation anywhere at this point. I thought I had felt a little bit of sensation in the clitoris the day before, but not now. Just some

of the stitching was a bit sensitive. (I was still on Vicodin, of course.)

I put a rubber glove on my right hand and lubricated it with some K-Y. I would attempt to probe my new vagina. At first I couldn't find it. Where was the opening? Oh, I was feeling too low, too close to my anus. It's above that swollen lump of flesh, but below the next. Still, there didn't seem to be any opening. I probed gently and found a sort of horizontal slit which I could spread apart. I slid my finger into my vagina; the inside felt very smooth. My vaginal cavity went straight in a little bit and then curved upward. My longest finger could not detect its end. I could feel some stitches on the front side of my vaginal canal. I couldn't feel much sensation inside. I found it easy to slide the lubricated stent back into my vagina. I injected twenty cubic centimeters of air and that familiar packed feeling returned.

That was that. I had met my new parts, and they were good. At least, they had the potential to be good, I thought. Frankly, ever getting sexual pleasure from these new organs was difficult to imagine; but that was for later. For now, I just want it all to stop hurting! At that point, a vagina seemed to be in the same class as a boat or a swimming pool — you're better off having a friend who lets you use theirs, than to have all the upkeep and maintenance of owning your own.

I was still a little bit afraid something might go wrong in the healing process. I knew that whatever happened, I could deal with it. But I was afraid of more pain. I was afraid of causing my own troubles by doing something stupid to myself. I was afraid of the aches I knew I would feel each time I dilated my vagina. I was afraid I'd never stop pissing all over myself every time I needed to pee. Fear had returned to my life, but these were real fears. I wasn't afraid of what's inside anymore, not of what's inside my psyche or inside my vagina. I wasn't afraid of what was in the mirror. And I hope I never ever have a story that tops this one, "The Scariest Thing I Have Ever Done."

Song: Dilation Song

(To the tune of Sublime's *Smoke Two Joints*)

All you post-ops, sing out now!

I dilate in the morning,
I dilate at night,
I dilate in the afternoon,
It makes me heal all right.
I dilate in time of peace,
And in time of war,
I dilate before I dilate,
Then I dilate some more.

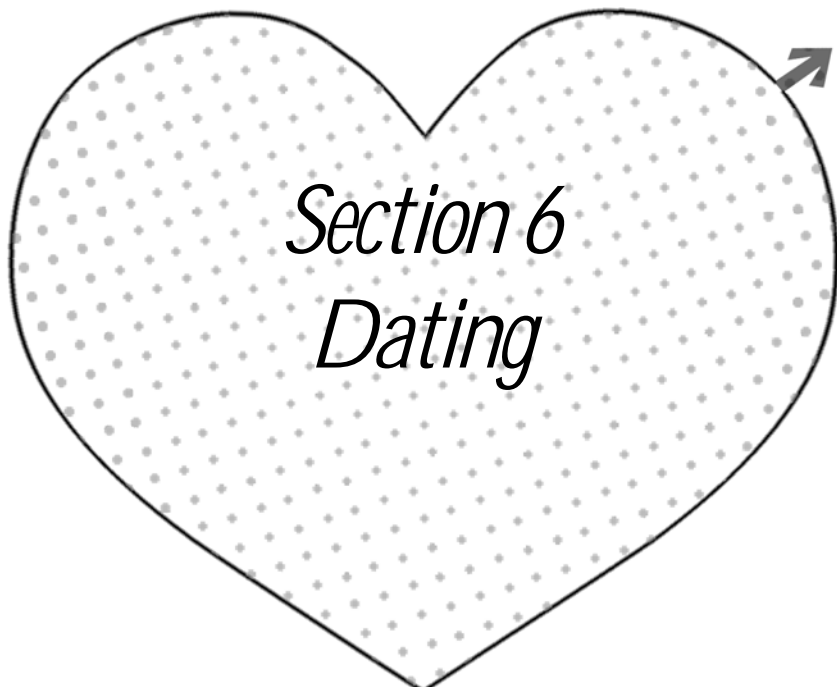
Daddy he once told me,
"Son, you be hard workin' man,"
And momma she once told me,
"Son, you do the best you can,"
Then one day I meet Millie Brown*,
She came to me and said,
"Penis good and penis fine,
"But try a cooch instead!"

And now all I can do is ...

I dilate in the morning,
I dilate at night,
I dilate in the afternoon,
It makes me heal all right

That's what I do!

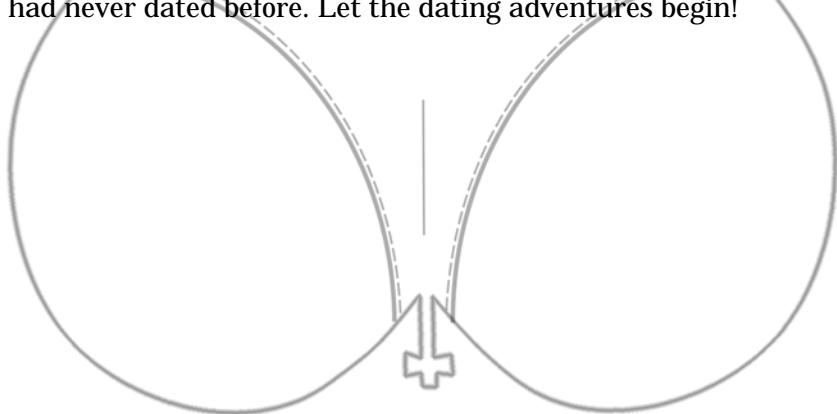
* Change "Millie Brown" to "Russell Reid" in the United Kingdom.



Section 6

Dating

Dating is excruciating under the best circumstances. A sex change makes it even more challenging. Should I tell, or shouldn't I? Will he guess? What will happen when he finds out? Will my new girly parts function as intended? How do they work, anyway? Who do I even want to date — guys or girls? What kind of guys or girls? Suddenly, at age forty-eight, I felt as though I had never dated before. Let the dating adventures begin!



Song: Internet Dating Song

I saw you on the Internet,
I'd really love to meet you,
Your legs are long and sexy, Pet,
I'd really love to meet you.

Chorus:

I really want, I really want.
I really want to meet you, baby.
I really want, I really want,
I really want to meet you.

I'm five foot six, my eyes are blue,
I'd really love to meet you,
I've got eight inches cut for you,
I'd really love to meet you.

Chorus

I'm married but I'm lookin',
I'd really love to meet you,
I'm tired of home cookin',
I'd really love to meet you.

Chorus

I've never had a girl like you,
I'd really love to meet you,
I'm always up for something new,
I'd really love to meet you.

Chorus

I'm sorry, so sorry, it seems my trip got canceled, dear,
I'm sorry, so sorry, I can't be seen in public there,
I'm sorry, so sorry, my dad just had a heart attack,
I'm sorry, so sorry, my wife just said she'd take me back.
I saw you on the Internet ...

E-mail

Oh, yes, I do get e-mail from strangers who have seen my Web site or one of my Internet personal ads. Sometimes they're nice, but often they're like the guy in this absolutely true e-mail exchange. (Only my paramour's e-mail address has been fictionalized.) Notice how nicely it starts out, and then how quickly it changes tone ...

I guess I sound kind of snotty myself, but I'm just teasing!

Note: My suitor's name an e-mail address has been changed to protect the jerk.

From: robbiecal@mymail.com
To: lannierose@gmail.com
Subject: Hello neighbor!
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 16:33:29

Hello Lannie,

Your photos very much enticed me to get to know you better. I am a professional man in the entertainment business (like an agent type) who travels between LA and the San Jose area a lot for work. I am married, open minded and fun loving. Most of all I am respectful and accepting of others. When I was in my twenties I had two female friends (well I think of them as females), one was a TS and one a CD — both passed amazingly. We would date and be close, talk, have wine and chat all night and, of course, be intimate. I honestly miss those wonderful friends and lovers and your photo brought it all back to me. I understand if you don't want to reply to me, just do me one favor and tell me that so I don't wonder. If you do care to reply or get to know me, please write to me at robbiecal@mymail.com or you can send me an instant message on Yahoo Messenger to RobbieCal. I will look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,
Robbie

P.S. You are beautiful and I would very much like to get to know you. I stay in Sunnyvale. Are you close to there?

> readmail new

From: lannierose@gmail.com
To: robbiocal@mymail.com
Subject: re: Hello neighbor!
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 16:54:24

You can tell me more ...

>

From: robbiecal@mymail.com
To: lannierose@gmail.com
Subject: re: Hello neighbor!
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 17:16:29

Lannie,

What would you like to know? Do you use instant messaging so we can talk there? I will tell you anything you care to hear. What area do you actually live in — these cities have many neighborhoods

Robbie

> readmail new

From: lanni erose@gmail .com
To: robbi ecal@mymail .com
Subject: Teasing reply
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 17:21:20

So what the heck do we have for talent in San Jose? Let's see, The Doobie Brothers; I think Lindsey Buckingham grew up in Saratoga ... that's about it, isn't it? Oh, a couple of skaters and Randie Chastain, if you're into the sports end of the entertainment field.

I take it you found my Web site, so you know all about me. I guess you could start with the regular drill on you ... how old, how many kids, a picture, that sort of thing. I see you consider yourself to be a "professional man." What does that make me, an amateur woman? Ha-ha, just kidding!

I don't do instant messaging because so many idiots waste my time, you know? "Hi. What's happening?" Nothing, I'm doing work on my computer, dummy! Why are you so concerned about what town I live in? If I say "Milpitas," I suppose I'll never hear from you again? I went dancing in Sunnyvale last night, anyway.

Sincerely,
Lannie

>

From: robbiecal@mymail.com
To: lannierose@gmail.com
Subject: Re: Teasing reply
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 17:39:21

1. Well, no, I did not see your Web site — just your picture. So what is your URL?

2. I have two kids — boy and girl but don't tell them we are talking.

3. I know Milpitas and happy you are there cause then you are close to Sunnyvale where I stay often when up there.

My picture is attached. Do you have any you have not put on your Web site?

Robbie

P.S. Interested? I have more pictures too!

[A picture of an average-looking, middle-aged guy was attached.]

> readmail new

From: lanni erose@gmail .com
To: robbi ecal@mymail .com
Subject: Re: Teasing reply
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 17:59:21

Oh. You said you like my "photos," plural, so I thought you must have found my Web site. Well, I'll just give you my family-oriented site, the one my family gets to see, to get you started: [url].

I don't live in Milpitas. Read more closely! Is this how you read contracts?

Let's see, already hiding me from your kids; didn't laugh at my joke; wants to see more pix before you've even seen my Web site; willing to visit Milpitas ... I'm not sure this is going to work, Robbie! LOL ... Well, at least you didn't send me an - umm, an "intimate" picture, let's say, so I'll give you a little more rope ...

Sincerely,
Lannie

>

From: robbiecal@mymail.com
To: lannierose@gmail.com
Subject: Re: Teasing reply
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 18:10:21

Well thanks ... and where is your “adult site”?

OK on another note you lost me — where DO you live?

Robbie

From: robbiecal@mymail.com
To: lannierose@gmail.com
Subject: Re: Teasing reply
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 18:14:21

So, would you care to meet me in Sunnyvale one night?

Robbie

From: robbiecal@mymail.com
To: lannierose@gmail.com
Subject: Re: Teasing reply
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 18:19:21

Lannie,

What is it you are into at this point in life? I love open fun and nice wine over sensual chats in person ... you?

Robbie

> readmail new

From: lannierose@gmail.com
To: robbiecal@mymail.com
Subject: What I am into
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 18:28:21

Dancing, trying to stop the war, promoting the
radical feminist agenda ...

>

From: robbiecal@mymail.com
To: lannierose@gmail.com
Subject: re: What I am into
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 23:46:29

OK, let me be more direct — if you have an X-rated site, send me the URL and what do you want to do sexually with me or while I watch

Robbie

> readmail new

From: lannierose@gmail.com
To: robbiecal@mymail.com
Subject: Re: What I am into
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 23:55:29

Why Robbie, I am shocked, simply shocked! Here I thought you were a nice guy who was interested in me as a person. Well, don't feel too bad, you're not missing much. My "adult" site is not XXX-rated. It's mostly filled with essays ruminating on the world's problems.

Sincerely,
Lannie

>

From: robbiecal@mymail.com
To: lannierose@gmail.com
Subject: Re: What I am into
Date: Sat, 04 Oct 2003 23:59:29

OK so explain to me ... what are you into sexually?

Robbie

> readmail new

From: lanni erose@gmail .com
To: robbiecal@mymail.com
Subject: Re: What I am into
Date: Sun, 6 Oct 2003 10:09:29

That is a private matter I am not comfortable discussing this early in our relationship.

Sincerely,
Lannie

>

... And I never heard from Robbie again. Incidentally, several other of my transgender girlfriends received similar greetings from Robbie at the same time I did. Apparently Robbie was shot-gunning his way through one of the trannie dating site listings. He never scored, as far as I heard.

Stanford Bachelors Club

Emboldened, perhaps, by my fresh post-operative status, I decided to invade a bastion of straight singles, the Stanford Bachelors Club. (By “post-operative status,” I refer to my recent SRS, which changed my genitalia from an outie to an innie.) The Stanford Bachelors Club is a venerable Bay Area institution that has for years run mixers for college educated singles, with the proceeds going to charity.

I happen to be a graduate of Cal Berkeley, Stanford’s great intercollegiate rival, so I had always been put off by the Stanford association of the Bachelors Club. Nevertheless, I had ventured to one of these events many years before at a club in Los Altos. I

recall donning my snazziest suit (I thought I was a guy back then) and being amazed at all the beautiful, smartly dressed women who showed up at the event. Women got in free while men had to pay. Unfortunately, the beautiful women were not interested in dancing with me or even talking to me. I remember hearing the distinctive opening metallic chords of INXS's "Suicide Blonde" and bravely asking one such suicide blonde to dance. She blew me off. That was then. Now I would return to the Stanford Bachelors Club as a stunning beauty myself — maybe not a suicide blonde, but at least a redhead who could cause a bad headache.

I googled "Stanford Bachelors Club." To my surprise, they were still around. I filled out the application page I found on the Web site and instantly received a reply. Their next event was coming up in three days:

The Stanford Bachelors cordially invite you to our Summer Garden Party Benefit for the Lipstick Cancer Research Lab at Stanford, on Friday, June 6, 2003, from 8:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. at the Pacific Athletic Club, 200 Redwood Shores Parkway in Redwood City. 70s — '00s Modern Dance Music; Dressy Attire, Jacket Required, Hors d'oeuvres 8:00 p.m. — 9:00 p.m., No-Host bar/Age 21 or over, Donation \$25, Cash at the door please.

Whoopee! What to wear? I knew my normal clubbing outfits of miniskirts and tank tops would be inappropriate for this event. I thought I should go with a more conservative outfit befitting my forty-something years. I chose a flirty dress in a maroon flower pattern, bias-cut to calf-length, and a high V-neck. I wore an ivory Ann Taylor jacket over the dress because it was likely to be chilly, and accented with a matching necklace, bracelet, and earring set in a string of tiny red hearts. I slipped a pair of red open-toed slides onto my feet and carried a tiny, sparkly, red disco purse. Toeless thigh-high stockings toned my calves a bit but allowed my toes to wiggle freely in my sandals.

I arrived at the Pacific Athletic Club at quarter past eight, planning to let the promised hors d'oeuvres serve as my dinner. This beautiful facility is on the open flat next to the bay in San Carlos. A chilly wind was already blowing through, and I was immediately glad I had my Ann Taylor jacket. I saw many sorry, shivering beauties in cute little sun dresses that night! My early arrival was a great idea because I got a parking space only a short walk from the sumptuous entrance. There was no line to get in. On the other hand, plenty of people were already there, so I wasn't awkwardly early. I was surprised to discover I had to pay the cover charge to get in, but fortunately, I had put some money in my little disco purse.

The hors d'oeuvres made a fine little dinner: salad, pasta, bread, and veggies. I found an open seat at a round table where a couple of gents, one Ted Turner-like, the other vaguely George W. Bush-like, and a lady were already eating. (I used "celebrity look-alike" as a conversational gambit all evening.) These folks proved nonconversational, but soon a jolly fellow named John took the chair next to me and we had a nice chat.

John didn't look like any celebrity, but he did amuse me with a story. It seems he was making nasty comments about lawyers at a dinner one evening when he discovered his tablemate was Stanley Mosk, the renowned associate justice of the California Supreme Court. John also commented the reason ladies now had to pay the same "donation" as men for entry to the Stanford Bachelors Club social was due to a California court decision about gender equality. I had mixed feelings about that; I'm all for equality, but I sure like it when ladies get in free!

The place was packed by ten or so — over seven hundred people attended the mixer that night. The crowd was quite good-looking. The women were decked out in their finest cocktail dresses — and sun dresses, as I mentioned before. The men had mostly paid heed to the "jackets required" admonition in the invitation. The age bracket of forties and fifties predominated, although there were plenty of folks both younger and older. We were overwhelmingly Caucasian. There were a fair number of

Asians, too, and exactly one black guy. A wooden dance floor had been laid over a section of the grass out back, adjacent to the Olympic-size swimming pool and tennis courts. An eclectic mix of stale oldies and modern dance hits blared, and the deejay even played some slow dances and a salsa. Rhythm was sorely lacking on the dance floor, but a goodly number of trained ballroom dancers were in evidence.

There would have been plenty of room for everybody had the evening been balmy, but in the bayside chill, those who ventured outside had to either dance or huddle near the single gas heating fixture. This was not necessarily a bad thing. I struck up conversations with several people as we huddled up close for warmth.

I assumed everybody attending was single and on the prowl, and I saw nothing to disabuse me of this notion. I met a lot more people than I ever met at the dance clubs, where I usually didn't meet anybody at all. Nevertheless, as the evening wore on, I didn't find myself hitting it off with anybody in particular. Now I'm no great conversationalist, but I didn't seem to be running into anyone who would help make up for that deficit. I was amused by the notion a lot of these men were probably successful CEOs, lawyers, and university professors, yet they seemed as shy as little boys when it came to striking up conversations with pretty girls or asking us to dance.

I initiated conversations with the two or three tall guys I spotted. (Very few people topped my height at six-foot-one plus two-inch heels!) While the tall guys were nice, they didn't seem particularly interested in me. Not even the Dana Carvey with the nice hair. Later I saw each of these tall fellows following around petite, blonde women, so I think I learned a lesson about what tall men like. I noticed some especially startled looks on a few shorter fellows when they bumped into me, as their faces turned up to take in my awesome height.

Around eleven o'clock I was sitting — so as to minimize my height — on a settee in a particularly busy part of the room, doing my best to look free and available. I was practicing making eye contact with random gentlemen, a skill at which I needed

practice. I seemed to be quite invisible for the most part. I was thinking about calling it a night when suddenly an interesting fellow — not one of those with whom I had been making eye contact — swooped in and plopped down on the settee beside me. He was dressed in black pants and black sweater, matching his black hair, black moustache, and black soul patch. He had a slightly crazed look in his eye — celebrity look-alike for, uh, a sexy Satan perhaps? Did he just need to rest his feet? Was he going to hit on the Asian woman on the other side of the settee?

After a beat he turned and started talking to me! We chatted for a while; he proved to be an interesting fellow. His name was Doug, he lived in Marin, he did technical publishing, and he seemed to have some money. He said he wasn't there for the event; he was just a club member (a good explanation for his lack of a jacket). Yada, yada, yada, what do you know, he was quite taken with me! He asked me, "Has anybody else told you how sexy you are this evening?" As we talked he gently touched my knee and rubbed my back, in a nice way. When he got to, "What are we going to do after this?" I decided it was time to make his evening a little more exciting.

I explained to him I was a transsexual woman, and oh, my, yes, he was surprised! He was not repulsed, much to my relief. It turned out he had had some experience with one or two transsexual women before. One had not told him about it until very late (I didn't ask exactly how late), and Doug thought it was very honest of me to bring it up right away. I took that to be a lesson as well. He was curious about a lot of things. He asked me about the surgery, my sexual preferences, and whatnot. After a while he asked if I wanted to dance. I said I'd love to, but I had to go to the bathroom first.

When I got back from the bathroom, Doug was nowhere to be found. Granted, I took a pretty long time in the bathroom because there was a line. So maybe Doug got tired of waiting and thought I had run out on him — do you suppose?

I looked for Doug outside at the dance floor. I didn't see him, but I decided to hang around and dance anyway. I wasn't really

too surprised or disappointed at Doug's vanishing act. I hate to say it, but I'm afraid that is the life of a transsexual woman.

The dance floor was packed. This being a mixer, it was almost all couples dancing. There were a few twosomes and threesomes of girlfriends, but no single dancers. Nevertheless I thought if nobody asked me to dance in the next few minutes, I would dance by myself like I usually did in clubs.

Much to my surprise, an attractive blonde lady (I swear, the place was lousy with tiny blondes in LBDs — little black dresses) pulled me out onto the dance floor. "Cool!" I thought. The music was "YMCA" by the Village People. I told Blondie I would dance, but I wouldn't do the letters. She agreed, sneering, "I hate doing the letters!"

A few minutes later a man came over and started dancing with the two of us. Soon the blonde wandered off. I don't know if she was trolling for the guy's benefit or what, but I didn't care, I just danced. Do I need to tell you that the fellow who cut in *did the YMCA letters*, with a big grin, every single, damn time?

After that, a couple other gentlemen asked me to dance. This struck me as really cute — more like a high school sock hop than the modern dance clubs I was used to, where people come and go on the dance floor at their own volition. Eventually a Hector Elizondo look-alike asked me to dance, and this became my evening's highlight. Hector — Sam, as it turned out — was a little bit short for me, but not too much so, and he made up for it with his style and self-confidence.

Sam was a ballroom dancer. He took my right hand in his left, put his right arm around my waist, and began to lead. I had taken a ballroom dance class once long ago (I, ahem, was learning the lead role then, you know?) and I'd been attending some walk-in salsa lessons lately, so I was quite open to this. I've had the opportunity to dance with a good leader a few times and I love the feel of it. A good leader takes responsibility for both of us and makes me feel like I could actually be a dancer, despite my two left feet. Sam was this kind of a leader, and I loved it. He told me we were doing West Coast swing (not to be confused with the

country western thing!), which is all the rage these days. He had me spinning and flinging and, well, dancing! I never once fell down, although I did have one close call. Sam told me if the woman falls, everybody looks at the man, because it's his fault. I like that.

I danced with Sam for the rest of the evening, maybe five or six songs, including a couple of slow songs to end the night. During the last song, Sam kissed me. (I swear I am not making this up! It's way too trite.) He asked me for a bigger kiss, but I said, "Oh, I think I'd better not!"

When the music stopped and the deejay began packing up, Sam walked me to my car and asked me for my phone number. I gave him my calling card and told him, "You can find my Web site here, but you will discover something interesting when you look at it. I might as well tell you about it now. The thing is: I'm a transsexual woman."

Sam took in the information and seemed slightly stunned. Clearly he needed time to process it. He said, "We can still be friends, can't we?"

"Of course we can," I said, "and we can still dance."

I actually feel sorry for these guys. They finally meet a beautiful, friendly, intelligent woman who is genuinely interested in them. Then it turns out she is transsexual. Instead of a dream come true, they are plunged into a nightmare. It's a little like having a baby — who turns out to be handicapped. The difference is the parents are already committed to loving the baby, but the fellows in my case have to choose whether to get involved with me at all. Poor things. Poor me.

I wonder if Sam will call.

Saying "Yes!"

I'm not a gal who can't say "No!" But I am a gal who loves to say "Yes!"

"Would you like to go out to dinner Friday night?"

"Yes!"

"Can I pick you up at seven?"

"Yes!"

"Would you like to eat at the Plumed Horse?"

"Yes!"

"Would you like to see *Moulin Rouge* afterward?"

"Yes!"

... *As opposed to ...*

“When can I see you again?”

“Uh, I don’t know. What did you have in mind?”

“Would you like to do something Friday?”

“Maybe.” (*If I don’t get any better offers!*)

“What time should I pick you up?”

“What time is good for you?”

“Should we rent *Black Hawk Down*?”

“Eeeek!”

If you make it easy for me to say yes, why then, that’s what I’ll say! What I’m getting at is this: I like you to be self-confident and take charge.

Do all women feel this way? No, of course not. If they did, I wouldn’t have to tell you I’m that type of gal. But I think everybody likes being taken care of, at least now and then. Sometimes I take charge and put my boyfriend in the position of saying yes, and he enjoys it. But most of the time, I like to be the one who gets to say yes.

I think a lot of trans women share this love of being cared for, of saying yes. After all, one of the big things I did when I was trying to be a man was to take charge and be responsible. The man is the breadwinner, right? He takes care of the wife and children ... and the boy scouts and the team and the weak and injured, etc. I did it, and I did it fairly well, but I never felt comfortable doing it. Do most men enjoy this responsibility? Do they enjoy the power? Do they feel rewarded by the gratitude that is returned (not often enough, I’ll wager!)? Is it a good deal for them? I don’t know. It turns out I never really was a man, much less most men. But now that I’m acting as the woman I am, putting aside that responsibility is a great relief. Not out of fear of failing at it, mind you, but just because it’s not something that makes me feel good. It’s a relief to stop pushing myself to take charge. It’s a great pleasure to relax and let someone else take care of me. It’s wonderful to be able to just say yes!

Sometimes the needs to take charge and to be taken care of are expressed in extremes, such as sexual dominance/submission or even sadomasochistic relationships. “Yes!” becomes “Yes,

Mistress!” and “Please, Mistress, may I have another?” I don’t think anything is wrong with that, if it’s practiced safely and respectfully. But that’s not what I’m interested in discussing here. I’m interested in the more general social interaction. In sexual situations, we sometimes use the term “tops” to refer to the dominant parties, and “bottoms” for the submissive ones. Obviously, this derives from the partners’ literal whereabouts in the most common sexual positions. But the terms, top and bottom, are useful in a more general context as well. So I’ll say, “I am a bottom,” and I hope you don’t think I’m only referring to sex.

I think saying yes is one area where relationships involving a trans man with a trans woman work out particularly well. Trans men (to generalize) are anxious to take charge, to exercise their power, to use their strength of character (and body) to take care of others. They are “tops!” And trans women are often ready to be taken care of, “bottoms.” What a great combination!

Unfortunately, a lot of trannie admirers (men who love trans women, also known as trannie chasers) seem to be bottoms as well. I don’t pretend to understand the psychology behind this. Frankly, I don’t understand the psychology behind trannie admirers at all. I’m just grateful for their existence! Perhaps part of their submissiveness is that they, too, are tired of playing the top role in their relationships with GGs and in other areas of their lives. Part of their attraction to T-girls may be the hope the T-girl will take charge and relieve them of that burden. In fact, plenty of men place personal ads looking for a T-girl to top them — and in this case it does mean the sexual sense! Or maybe the admirer is just tired of hearing his GG wife say no so much. By taking a more submissive role in a relationship with a T-girl, he won’t be in a position to hear no anymore. Whatever the reason, this makes it difficult for a bottom-type admirer to strike up a relationship with a bottom-y little T-girl like me.

Is yes, itself, one of those games men think women play to torture them? Maybe it is, sort of. I am asking you to read my mind and guess what I will enjoy saying yes to. But at least I’ll

try to give you the benefit of the doubt. Out of gratitude for the effort you put in, I'm likely to say yes even if I have a weak preference for some other choice. I think of it more as a style than a game. Haggling is one form of negotiation, but not one I'm comfortable with. Yes is a style I enjoy.

As an aside, I try not to emulate what men characterize as the games women play. But I'm amused to occasionally find myself doing it anyway. Like asking my boyfriend which dress he prefers and then donning the opposite one. Or, of course, making him wait for me to get ready. I swear, sometimes I just don't know what's gotten into me!

I notice another interesting psychological niche that falls in-between your top and your bottom. Here we find people who don't like to take charge, not due to a lack of responsibility or strength, but because they feel it's rude to push their preferences on another person. This individual is constantly asking, "What do you feel like doing?" "Where do you want to go?" "What time should I get there?" Bless their hearts; they think they're being polite by giving me a free hand. How can I nicely explain it's making me uncomfortable, that all I want to do is to say yes?

Although it may seem a contradiction, part of the reason I like saying yes is I feel it empowers me. How can that be, when the other person is in charge? Well, you see, that is really an illusion. The other person bears the burden of thinking up the plans and making the decisions, but I have the power to say yes or no. I exercise this power carefully, because if I say no too often, I'll lose the power. If the other person doesn't hear yes most of the time, he'll stop asking. But to me, it feels like I'm in control. In fact, I am in control, at least for the moment. This is a great symbiotic relationship, because the other person probably feels in control as well, in making the plans and decisions. What a nice arrangement!

Yes is a very powerful word. It's the most obviously positive word in the English language, just as no is the most negative. When we are babies, we hear yes and no from our parents constantly — a loving "Yes!" and often, an angry "No!" So we are

early on and long programmed for yes to make us feel good. If hearing yes is good, being able to say it is even better! Now I have the power to make you feel good by saying, "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

As I mentioned before, yes is also powerful because it implies control. In this regard, it's even stronger than no. No is risky, because it's subject to challenge. But yes is immune from challenge. I agreed, so you have to go along with it. But it's implied I could have said no, if I so chose. We'll never know if it would have been challenged, or if the challenge would have succeeded.

Salesmen know all about the power of yes. A good salesman always gets the customer saying yes, then makes his move to close the sale. The customer feels so good from saying yes, yes, yes, she will be strongly inclined to say it one more time when the salesman asks, "So, do we have a deal?"

And guess what? If you get me saying yes often enough, then at the end of the evening, I just might have a question for you: "Would you like to go into the bedroom?" And Sweetie, I damn well expect to hear you say yes!

Monkey Brains (When to tell)

You know the old story. You're eating dinner in a fabulous, exotic Asian locale. One dish is particularly delicate and tasty. You ask your generous host, "What is this?" He smiles proudly and says, "Monkey brains." Even Indiana Jones gags; you cannot even contemplate taking another bite.

I am Monkey Brains, except my story goes like this: A handsome gentleman is flirting with me. His blue eyes hold my gaze. His hand touches my arm, my knee, as he talks. He drops enticing little tidbits into his conversation such as "my Ferrari"

and “my friend Bono” Finally, he starts asking playfully, “What are we going to do after this wing-ding breaks up?”

I decide it’s time to drop my bomb. “Just so we have no misunderstanding, I want to tell you something about myself. I have had a sex-change operation.” I imagine Indiana Jones would politely attempt to suppress his gag reflex; but he would run, like when that tribe of headhunters was hot on his heels, little puffs of dust rising from each footstep. I am Monkey Brains.

Why did I tell my suitor about my deep, dark secret? To begin with, I don’t exactly consider it deep or dark or a secret. I believe it’s best to talk about it as early as possible in dating situations, even though my every instinct screams against the injustice of it. I view my situation as similar to having an STD; in that case, one is obligated to inform one’s partner out of consideration for the partner’s health. In my case, I need to inform my partner out of consideration of his values and sensitivities, regardless of my own judgment of their validity.

I’ve only recently had my SRS. I pass fairly well, despite my six-foot-one-inch stature and my size twelve shoes. The urge to tell everybody I meet I’m transsexual passed about three months into my Real Life Experience. (The so-called Real Life Experience, or RLE, is a period of at least one year during which transsexual people are required to live in their new gender roles before they are eligible for SRS.) Now I love that I generally move invisibly in society, like any other woman. In my opinion, which is backed by considerable medical evidence, I am a real, genuine, authentic, natural, 100% woman. I happened to have had a medical condition known as transsexualism, which was corrected by the medically recommended procedure of triadic therapy — living in my true gender role, taking hormones, and undergoing SRS. Why should I ever tell anyone about my condition? Whose business is it to know? Who is affected by it?

Generally, I don’t bring up my history, except to doctors and health care professionals, without a good reason. If someone else brings it up, I’m honest about it, but this very rarely happens. Do I pass so well people do not suspect anything? Or is it merely that

they're polite enough to keep their suspicions to themselves? I don't know; either way is fine by me. Most of my new friends and acquaintances don't know, unless they've figured it out on their own and not said anything to me about it. It's not important to our relationship. Who cares?

At least one person cares; that is, one class of people. That class (a discouragingly small one, it seems) consists of guys who might want to have sex with me. Trans women and trans men who are already in intimate relationships with significant others don't confront this issue; indeed, they seem puzzled by how much it dominates my life. Every time I meet a new man, I immediately begin to size up whether it might lead to something serious. If so, I need to start deciding when to tell him the big secret. Disclosure can be played a few different ways. I can tell him immediately, eventually, or never.

The option of never telling an intimate friend about one's transsexualism is only available to those who live in deep stealth mode, where none of the people in their lives knows about their past. I am much too out and about to consider this approach. Anyone who is close to me will be bound to pick up obvious clues, like the family pictures in which I look rather like a boy, or the remaindered stacks of this very book piled in the corner of my living room. Or perhaps they'll run into an acquaintance who mentions the fact. Besides, I don't want to go through life lying or keeping secrets. Oh, I can be cute by being technically truthful but evasive, carefully saying things such as, "When I was married, my *spouse...*" (not my *wife*) and, "When I was a young *child...*" (not a young *girl*); but deliberately leading the other person to make false assumptions is certainly less than forthright, less than honest, isn't it?

For a while I believed the tack of telling eventually was the shrewd play. I would let the guy get to know me first. By the time I told him, I reasoned, the image of me as a woman would be so firmly imprinted in his brain, the news would not make any difference to him. Unfortunately, I found this to be untrue. Although there may be exceptions, my experience is a guy is or is

not able to accept me, knowing of my transsexual nature, and no amount of knowing me beforehand will change his reaction. What is certain is this: Whenever I tell a guy, short of my going around wearing a "Transsexual Woman" T-shirt, he always feels cheated that I didn't tell him sooner. He can't help it. His gender-recognition skills have failed him and he feels betrayed. It doesn't matter how much he can accept, intellectually, that I had no obligation to tell him; he still feels like he's been played for a fool.

For some T-girls, the idea of telling eventually means on the cusp of, or after, a sexual encounter with a man. These girls are playing with fire. It's all too often the man reacts with violence in this situation. Often the guy feels the need to prove he's not homosexual, although how beating up or killing the girl proves this, I don't see.

So my policy, at least for now, is to disclose my transsexualism to a guy as soon as it appears we may have a mutual interest for some kind of intimate relationship. In my Internet personal ads, I state the fact up front. If I meet a guy in person and he seems to like me, I just casually mention, "You might want to know, I've had a sex-change operation." That isn't exactly the way I like to think of it, but it cuts directly to the point.

When I tell guys early on, they're genuinely grateful for my honesty and openness. I am afraid it's the same sort of gratitude they would have if I had pointed out a pile of dog poop in their path. "Thank you," they say, and in my head I can hear the rest of what they left unsaid, "...for keeping me from stepping into that mess." Worse yet, if the guy sticks around at all, the conversation subtly shifts and his questions become less respectful and more intimate; I know I have become something less than a woman in his eyes. It's similar to what happens when a guy finds out a woman is a prostitute, except it's worse for me — at least the guy still wants to have sex with the prostitute!

Since I've instituted this policy of telling immediately, I haven't gone out on any dates at all. (Even my old boyfriend lost interest in me after I had my sex-change operation.) That's OK. I'd rather not have the first date if I'm going to be dumped for

being transsexual later on down the road. I don't attribute my lack of dates solely to this policy. I'm picky about who I go out with, and that limits the field quite a bit. I'm probably not doing any worse than most discerning single women in my age group. Besides, I don't need all the guys to like me, just the right one — or two or three!

I had one last thought about poor old Monkey Brains. When the tourist finds out exactly what he has been eating, and he gags and spits out whatever is left in his mouth, are Monkey Brains' feelings hurt?

How I Popped My Cherry

There I was, nine months after my SRS and still I had not popped my cherry. At that point I had tried three test penises but all I had learned about was erectile dysfunction. (In the penises' defense, only an extraordinarily hard erection could penetrate my new, tight pussy.)

I still possess of some of my old, male, problem-solving impulses and was determined to remedy this sad state of affairs. In a flash of inspiration, I googled up some swingers parties. Google responded with 48,200 hits. I located two parties in my area that looked pretty good. I sent this e-mail to them both:

Hi! I'm an attractive, fun, playful, single woman. I wonder if I would be welcome at your party? Here's the catch — I have had a sex change. Even though I am now 100% female, I understand it can still be a big turn-off for some people. On the other hand, maybe your party could benefit from the unusual bit of kink my presence would add? As a matter of personal choice, I always explain about my background before I fool around with anybody, so there is never a question of deception or lack of consent. So what do you think? I appreciate your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

One of the parties never answered my query but I got this very nice response from the other:

We have had many join us. In fact, the woman who created our Web site was once a male. We have had a number of trans women become regular members and usually the single males have no problems. You would be welcome here.

I was in!

A few weeks went by as I contemplated whether this was something I really wanted to do. The prospect of popping my cherry under the preferred circumstance of a loving relationship seemed remote. I was feeling an increasing desperation to find out what sex would be like with my new vagina. Besides, the holidays were approaching and a sense of loneliness and isolation was creeping up on me. I decided to go for it.

I spent Thanksgiving day alone with a turkey sandwich. When I got up at noon the next day, I called the number of the swingers party and asked if there was an event that evening. "Yes, we're having a party tonight," the man on the line responded. "We don't know how many people will come, considering the holiday, but we've had a few confirmations already." I said I would be there.

I ate some dinner around six o'clock, leaving plenty of time to dress and get ready. From the information on the party's Web site, I anticipated both the environment and the clientele would be classy and somewhat upscale. For my outfit I chose a silk, long-sleeved blouse in vertical black and white stripes from Victoria's Secret. I left the blouse unbuttoned far enough to provide a glimpse of my red, lacy, push-up bra. (I would unbutton one more button when I got to the party.) Below this went a short, short, black, stretchy skirt to display with maximal effect my long legs and to allow a flash of my red satin panties if I moved in just the right way. I wore thigh-high stockings that could be left on during play of any kind. Most importantly, I selected a pair of black, patent leather fetish shoes with five inch spike heels and plenty of ankle straps. This put my overall height at an imposing six feet six inches — I would not be overlooked that night! I combed out my red hair but left it lying loose on my shoulders, as any styling would not be likely to last long once the party got underway. I parted it on the left and pulled that side back behind my ear with a black plastic hair clip. For my makeup I went heavy on the eyes and lips to look as alluring as possible, but I didn't worry about foundation and such because that would be wasted at this event.

I packed a small bag with supplies to cover all eventualities, including a bikini for the promised hot tub. At ten thirty I hopped into my black, '98 Mustang GT and hit the road. I stopped at the first traffic light. When it turned green, I loosed the power of the 'Stang's 4.6 liter engine, but my left foot slipped and I popped the clutch. I quickly recovered and was on my way but a red light flashed in my rear view mirror. *Uh-oh, the cops!* I pulled over to the side of the road and turned off my engine and the radio. The police cruiser rolled to a stop behind me. A handsome young officer got out and approached my window.

"Good evening, officer," I greeted him.

"Good evening, ma'am," he responded. "What happened back there?"

I smiled sheepishly and said, “My foot slipped off the clutch. You see, I’m wearing these really high heels tonight...”

“Have you been drinking?” Officer Handsome asked.

“No, sir,” I told him proudly. “As a matter of fact, today is my two-year sobriety birthday!” I always knew sobriety would be good for something someday and here it seemed to do the trick. The officer gave me a warning and sent me on my way. What fun! I had never flirted my way out of ticket before. VLE!

Rather than feeling distressed by my run-in with Johnny Law, I felt rather elated it had gone so well. I took this as a good omen for the evening, although I did try to drive more cautiously.

The party was at a small, nondescript tract house on a quiet, tree-lined, suburban street. I parked and made my way past a few houses, feeling a little out of place in my sexy outfit. I click-clacked up the walkway of the party house and rang the doorbell.

A smiling, ruddy-faced, older gentleman answered the door and invited me in. This was Grant, the man I had spoken with on the phone, the owner of the house and host of the party. I said I was Lannie but he had already guessed that. He introduced me to two younger fellows who were hanging out in the entryway — Mo, a tallish, Mideastern guy, and Tim, a typical Silicon Valley white guy. After asking Tim to give me the grand tour, Grant disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

Tim somewhat tentatively pointed out the comfortable living room and the tiny bathroom, both of which I could see without leaving the entryway. Then he took me down the short hallway and showed me two small bedrooms. They were practically bare of furnishings or decorations except for big mattresses — covered with clean sheets, thank goodness — thrown on the floors. To the right was a small but richly furnished master bedroom that, Tim told me, was off-limits to party guests. Tim also mentioned Grant and June, our host and hostess, don’t participate with the guests except for socializing.

I asked about the hot tub. “It’s closed for the winter,” he told me. That seemed odd to me; aren’t hot tubs best when the weather is cold?

In short, the party was clearly not going to live up to my expectations of a classy, upscale affair. The other guests wore casual clothes that had no ambitions of being sexy or fetish-like. The facilities were just a house in the suburb, opened for partying. On the other hand, the clean and comfortable environs were not at all sleazy, except for the televisions playing continuous hard-core porn in the living and dining rooms. I was not impressed, but neither was I disappointed, nor did I feel an urge to bolt. This would serve my purpose just fine — as it would the purposes of the other guests as well, I imagined.

It was already eleven o'clock when I arrived. Apparently this was early by swingers party standards; besides Tim and Mo, I saw only two other guests, a man and a woman in the living room. I went into the kitchen to greet my hosts and thank them for having me at the party.

Grant and June were a warm, convivial couple. Swinging had been their lifestyle and profession for many years and they had endless enjoyable stories they loved to share. (I got the impression they share the same stories a lot because they repeated several in just the hour I spent with them. Maybe that was due to the booze.) They had run a famous swingers hotel in Oakland in the eighties and then some things in San Francisco before moving down to my neighborhood in Silicon Valley. They had met many celebrities, both in and out of the sex industry, and everyone seemed love them.

As I hung out in the dining room chatting with Grant and June, more guests began to trickle in. They greeted our hosts warmly and with familiarity, obviously a long-standing group of friendly acquaintances. I realized they were not unlike a bridge club or church group, except here people had meaningless sex, too.

Less than a dozen guests attended the party that night. I was one of three women. I got the impression all the guests were working-class folks, economically somewhat below the rank of Silicon Valley professional. The guys each ponied up a fifty-dollar entrance fee but ladies got in free. Grant and June were not going

to get rich on this operation, but I'm sure it provided a nice little supplement to their incomes.

Going into the party, my idea was to find a threesome with a couple. I was exploring my new sexuality and was not sure if I went for guys or girls or both, so I thought this approach would be a risk-free (and frisky!) way to find out. Given the scarcity of women at the party, it didn't look like my fantasy was going to pan out.

Just before midnight, a huge, fat, jolly fellow, Kevin, arrived. He glanced at me and did a double take. I could see I had captured his attention. After he greeted me and our hosts, he wandered off; but he kept returning to the kitchen every few minutes. I got up to use the restroom and when I returned, Kevin accosted me. "Would you like a foot rub?" he asked.

I love foot rubs, so this was a very good move on Kevin's part. Anything would have worked though; by that time I was ready to get something going. I wasn't particularly attracted to Kevin but I didn't know if I would have much to choose from that night and I was on a mission. I gladly retired with him to the living room, which was empty now; the woman I had noticed earlier was in one of the bedrooms with two or three guys. We took over a couch.

I felt the heavy couch tip a little when mammoth Kevin set his considerable weight down on one end of it. I stretched out over the rest of the cushions and presented my feet to him. He fumbled with my ankle straps and eventually managed to get my shoes off, then proceeded to give me a pretty good foot rub.

After a few minutes a cute, young stud entered the living room and plopped down on the other couch. He was thirty-ish, about five feet ten inches, short black hair, clean-faced, lean, and cut. He smiled at me, said his name was Steve, and did I want to play?

"Sure!" I smiled, without hesitation.

"Let's go in the back," he suggested.

I gestured at Kevin. "I'm getting a foot rub right now," I pointed out.

"OK," Steve said. "In a little while, then."

Steve and I made small talk for a few minutes. Kevin seemed shy and rarely chimed in. Besides, I guess I had presented him with a conundrum by agreeing to go into the back with Steve.

I decided this would be a good time to practice my policy of disclosing my transsexuality to prospective sex partners. I felt I owed them the right to decide for themselves whether it made a difference to them.

"Guys," I announced, "I want you to know something about me before we play. The thing is, I have had a sex change."

The big fellow's hands flew off my feet as if my toes had suddenly turned into hissing snakes. The color drained out of his face. "Gug, gug..." he articulated.

"I can understand if you have a problem with that," I added, soothingly.

"Gug, gug..." Kevin repeated.

"You know," I told him, "you can still rub my feet."

But it was too much for Kevin to bear. "I'm sorry, but I can't deal with this," Kevin cried. He leaped off the couch and made a beeline toward the entryway. I don't know if he was headed for the kitchen or the front door, but I never saw him again.

I looked inquiringly over at Steve. He cocked his head, and I could almost see the wheels turning inside his noggin. After a moment he looked me in the eye, smiled, and said, "It doesn't matter to me. Let's go!"

"God bless you, Steve," I said, and I honestly don't know if I said this to myself or out loud. In any case, Steve took my hand and led me back to one of the small, mattress-filled bedrooms.

As soon as we stepped into the room, Steve began unbuttoning his shirt. "Do you have protection?" I asked.

"Uh, no," he said. "Do you?"

"Just a sec," I said and went to get the goody bag I had left in the hall closet. I came prepared. I'm sure condoms would have been available somewhere at the party, but I was especially concerned about lube because my neovagina is not self-lubricating.

When I returned to the bedroom, Steve had finished taking off his shirt. I had immodestly unbuttoned my blouse down to the waist. He came over to me and briefly fondled my breasts (more brassiere than breast, to tell you the truth) and squeezed my butt. Then he unbuckled his belt and started unbuttoning his jeans. "Would you suck me?" he asked politely. I quickly learned not to expect foreplay at a swingers party.

I pushed Steve's hands away and finished unbuttoning the jeans. I pulled them and his tighty whiteys down around his ankles. Being somewhat familiar with the drill, I dropped to my knees. I was relieved to find a fine looking cock that appeared to be the same size as my second-to-largest dilator. I had been worried I might encounter a monster cock too big to penetrate me. I was also relieved to see he was cut because I find uncircumcised cocks to be a little bit creepy. I probably just need more experience with them — I'm willing to do the footwork!

I took Steve's cock into my mouth and sucked, stroking it all around with my lips while I cupped his balls in my right hand and squeezed firmly. The cock quickly became erect.

Blow jobs are not my favorite thing in the world but I don't mind giving them from time to time. I'm gratified by my ability to give the guys pleasure and, boy, do they ever enjoy it. I've been told I give head very well; but then, the only bad blow job is the one you don't get — isn't that how most men feel? The thing I dislike the most about sucking cock is it goes on for too long. I have a short attention span and, more importantly, I just hate having the attention focused somewhere other than on *me, me, me!* In any case, Steve surprised and pleased me by pulling back after a few minutes and asking, "May I go down on you?"

"Sure!" I said, loosing his cock from my mouth.

Steve laid me back on the mattress and I assumed the position I knew so well from my dilating ritual: knees up and legs spread. He pushed my skirt up over my hips and slipped off my red satin panties. He took a moment to enjoy the view and I could tell he liked what he saw. (Up to this point he must have had some uncertainty about what a transsexual woman's pussy

might look like. We look perfectly normal.) I was glad I had lasered and shaved my pubic bush down to a Brazilian, just a small landing strip of hair at the crest of the vulva, and I thought I looked pretty good! Then he dived in.

Steve's tongue licked around my vulva and prodded at the mouth of my vagina. He massaged my clitoris with his right thumb and forefinger while his left hand reached up under my bra to fondle my small, right breast. He was pretty good, but not nearly as good as a certain trans woman friend of mine who had introduced my vagina to this particular pleasure some months before. He accommodated my request to take it easy on my clit, which was pretty sensitive.

While Steve masticated my muff, I glanced around and noticed there were two naked men in the room watching us get it on. They stood at a respectful distance of a couple feet away, one on either side of us, each slowly and steadily stroking his cock. Steve and I could have shut the door if we wanted privacy, but I didn't mind. I have something of an exhibitionist streak, as I had found out, rather to my surprise, a couple years before at Power Exchange, San Francisco's premier sex club.

Ken, the guy on my left, was clean-shaven and looked like he was probably an engineer. He was fairly tall and solidly built with a huge cock. It must have been ten inches long and six inches in girth (two inches in diameter, for those of you who are too hot and bothered to do the trig). As my largest stent is only one-and-a-half inches in diameter, there was no way Ken was going to get a shot at penetrating me. The guy on my right, Bob, was a scraggly-bearded, pot-bellied, skinny hippy. His unit was Steve-sized, so he had a chance with me.

After a little bit of cunnilingus, Steve asked if I would like him to penetrate me. "Sure!" I replied, my mantra for the night. He reached for a condom, opened the foil packet, and graciously proceeded to put it on himself rather than asking me to do it. I grabbed the lube tube, squeezed a generous dollop of the slippery gel onto the palm of my hand, and massaged Steve with it, getting his tool nice and slick, and nice and hard!

I lay back on the mattress, surreptitiously applying a dollop of lube to my vaginal lips in the process. Steve leaned over me with a smile. With my right hand, I helped guide his cock toward my vaginal opening. When I felt the tip press into just the right place, I let go and let Steve's able groin muscles take over. He pushed gently into me.

Steve began pumping slowly in and out. Frankly, I wasn't quite sure he was actually in because I couldn't feel anything inside. It certainly didn't feel like the hard plastic of my dilators or the hard rubber of my vibrator. I felt his cock with the fingers of my right hand and, sure enough, it was going in all right. So I guess that's what it feels like, I thought. It occurred to me perhaps one or two of those earlier test penises had, in fact, penetrated me, and I simply hadn't realized it.

As Steve picked up the pace of his pumping, I participated by thrusting my hips up to meet him. We got into a pretty good rhythm together although we had to stop every so often to resynchronize. I breathed heavily and noisily, letting little squeaks of pleasure escape my throat. Partly I was faking it to entertain Steve and our audience, which at times grew to be four or five strong, but mostly I was just doing my best to get into the spirit of it.

After a while Steve suggested we try doggie-style so I turned over. It didn't work very well because I'm so tall. So we switched to female dominant position, one of my personal favorites, but that didn't work very well either because Steve was bottoming out in my vagina. His shaft was about six inches long and my depth is only four inches (having experienced some shrinkage since surgery, despite my faithful dilating), so I couldn't sit down all the way on him. Besides, he started to soften up a bit. We finally found a spoon position — on our sides, my back to his front — worked great. After a little while we tired out and decided to take a break.

So how was it for me? I enjoyed myself, no doubt about that. Mostly I enjoyed the attention and being in the spotlight. I guess I suffer from low self-esteem; most of my life I've felt like a bit

player in everyone else's dramas. But tonight I was the star! Or at least the co-star. I also enjoyed the physical involvement and the physical sensations, at least for a while. But it wasn't too long before the rubbing started to feel irritating, and even somewhat painful. More lube helped but only to a point. Unfortunately, I didn't feel anything orgasmic or any sort of erotic sensations. As I mentioned before, I didn't feel much of anything inside my vagina. My vaginal lips and labia were sensitive, and my clitoris even more so, but that quickly turned more irritating than sensual.

We relaxed and made small talk for a little while, Steve, Ken, Bob, and me. Ken and Bob stopped stroking while we talked. I chastely pulled my little skirt back down over my hips.

After a while Steve asked if we could go again. You know what I said, don't you? "Sure!"

We got a fresh condom onto Steve. I did the honors this time; I was starting to feel a bit of affection for my Lothario because he had been so considerate of my needs and wishes all evening. We did more of the same things we had done before but for a shorter time. Steve never did come but he certainly seemed to enjoy himself. I felt good about that.

Eventually we took another rest break and, after a bit, Steve left the bedroom. I continued to chat idly with naked Ken and Bob who told me some of the history of this swingers party. They had both been coming here, on and off, for years. They were particularly excited to talk about one woman who had attended the party regularly for a period of time; she simply adored sucking cock. She would suck all comers for hours and hours. What a gal!

Ken and Bob started getting excited and Ken suggested maybe I would like to suck his cock. I said, "OK," (which is somewhat less enthusiastic than "Sure!") and he shuffled over to me on his knees. I was still lying back on the mattress, so I propped myself up and took his giant cock into my mouth. It was a mouthful. Bob also scooted forward on the other side of me and looked plaintive. I reached out and took his cock into my right hand, which perked up his spirits immediately.

For a period of time, I really don't know how long, I alternated between sucking Ken's cock and Bob's, while rubbing the one that wasn't in my mouth. I felt pretty good about this because they were getting a lot of pleasure and I was fulfilling my porn star fantasies. Finally my energy and my will to suck ran out, and we took a break.

Steve reappeared and some other guys, too. Grant, the host, popped in for a few minutes. We chatted about various things. Steve mentioned he had noticed he was bottoming out in me and asked if that was normal. I told him my vagina was somewhat shallow and most trans women were probably deeper than me. He reassured me it wasn't a problem; it didn't prevent him from having a great fuck. He was just curious. I appreciated his comments.

I happened to notice, for the first time, Steve's upper torso and arms were covered with major tattoos. His shirt had hidden them when we started and I guess my mind was on other things once his shirt came off. I said, "Wow, Steve, those are some major tattoos!" or some similarly witty comment, prompting him to ask, "Don't you like tattoos?"

"My policy is never to have sex with anybody who has tattoos!" I teased. Steve chuckled. I thought for a moment and then added, "I think my new policy is only to have sex with people with tattoos!" He laughed with appreciation at my flattering remark.

Before too long people started drifting out of the room until only Bob, the hippy, was left with me. We talked some more and I came to like him as a person. He told me he had had a girlfriend for a few years, someone he had met at this very swingers party. I found that pretty interesting and wondered if he might be hinting at something.

I mentioned Ken's cock was certainly big, too big to fuck me. Bob told me I should be careful about having sex with Ken because he rubs some kind of cream into his cock before the parties. The cream makes him stay erect for a very long time. "He'll rub you raw," Bob said. Live and learn, huh?

Somehow the time had gotten to be half past two in the morning. Bob and I seemed to be the only guests remaining. Our hosts had gone to bed. Apparently Bob had lock-up privileges. I was thinking it was probably time for me to go when Bob whispered, "I'd like to have sex with you, if you're up for it."

"Sure," I whispered back.

Bob was very gentle and kind, but our intimacy was still just fucking, not making love. Bob wasn't very hard at that point so it didn't last long. But it was satisfying in its own way, for both of us, I thought.

As he walked me to my car, Bob asked if I thought I would come back to the party some time. I told him I would, thinking I would do it before Christmas. My cute Frederick's of Hollywood Ms. Santa Claus outfit would be just the thing for holiday fun! But I never went back. My mission was accomplished, and it was a success. Now I know, though, sex outside of a loving relationship is just not a turn-on for me. I might not have sex again for a long time, waiting for that loving relationship, but that's OK. Because you know what? It's not about the sex, not for me.

Passing Counterfeit Bills

I've been passing counterfeit money. Wouldn't you, if the circumstances were right? Suppose you suddenly found yourself in possession of ten thousand dollars in counterfeit currency. The bills are so good, little chance exists of anyone ever detecting their falsity. In fact, if you do get caught, it probably won't be the pernicious presidents that give you away; your suspicious actions or a misstep such as confiding in the wrong person are more likely to betray. Will you spend the funny money?

Perhaps you have some ethical qualms about passing the bad bills. Why is that? You won't hurt the person or company who takes them from you because they will spend them just like real

money. Nor is the amount large enough to topple the U.S. economy, like when Dr. Evil floods the world with billions of goofy greenbacks.

Maybe you feel it's wrong to spend the money because you didn't earn it. But if the money you found was genuine, would you have the same scruples? Or if you won the lottery? Perhaps you feel it's wrong because if everybody passed simulated simoleons, the whole system would crumble. But you're not everybody, and everybody will not have the opportunity to do it. It's just you. So why not go ahead and spend the phony francs?

Still not convinced? I'm not either. Maybe it's because I was brought up with a strong sense of right and wrong. I know passing questionable currency is improper even if I can't explain why. But let's up the ante. Suppose you are starving. Will you spend some of your mischievous moolah on food? I would and I would be thankful I had the dicey ducats to spend. If I was starving I would steal to survive — and stealing is even worse than using bogus bucks, because at least the next guy can still spend the dubious dough, and with a clear conscience, not knowing it is Monopoly money. Nobody gets hurt, right?

If you're with me, willing to spend the illegal tender to survive, let's take it to the next level. Suppose you and your husband are unable to work and you are using the fake fortune to support yourselves and your 2.4 darling children. Do you tell your husband the coin is queer or do you let him assume it is real? Maybe you think you should tell him because your marriage is built on honesty and openness. Maybe you feel he would want to know. Maybe you think he has the right to decide whether or not to participate in the perfidy. On the other hand, perhaps you don't tell him. You prefer to shoulder the full responsibility for the felony, and leave his hands clean. You don't want him to worry about it. You don't want to increase the chances of getting caught by letting more people in on the secret. The arguments are pretty strong both ways. I think reasonable people would properly make different choices in this circumstance.

Now, do you tell the children? Even later, when they are adults, do you tell them they were raised with faux funds?

I think you, dear reader, will have recognized my metaphor and understand the specious specie I have been passing is myself. I've started dating guys without telling them about my medical history, that I have had a sex change. Having a normal man-woman relationship without transgender issues complicating the situation is wonderful, but I feel like I'm passing a counterfeit bill. I have to giggle when a guy tells me how pretty or feminine I am or how he admires my self-confidence and independence. I enjoy the compliments, but I wonder how his opinion might change if he knew about my past. I squirm some when he tells me I'm so easy to talk to, "not like most other women" — how simple it would be to explain exactly why that is, and how he would hate hearing the explanation!

I have to do it. I feel I have no choice. I'm starving for affection, starving for companionship, and starving to have a normal woman's existence. These things are necessities of life for me, just like food. They were unavailable to me when I lived as a man; they are the necessary reasons for changing my sex and genitals. I cannot have these things if I tell the men I meet about my background. I've tried. They don't want to date a transsexual woman. Why should they? Why should they willingly take that burden into their lives

Perhaps some men will be able to cope with the information about my change if they first get a chance to know me and feel I'm worth loving in my own right. I certainly hope so, because I do not operate in deep stealth mode. I assume my boyfriends will find out about my sex change at some point. But if someone is trying to meet strangers through an online dating service, as I am, "transsexual" is a natural reason to pass on to the next profile in the list, not a reason to linger.

What is the harm in my little charade? Guys are happy to have such a pretty, exciting, vivacious woman interested in them. They are delighted to find a woman who seems to understand their point of view so well. They enjoy my sharp sense of humor,

quick wit, and independence. They appreciate my classy, sexy style and I enjoy their attention. Everybody wins! Why spoil it by blurting out, "By the way, I've had a sex change. I hope that doesn't bother you."?

The counterfeit money metaphor breaks down on one key point, however. I am not a counterfeit woman, I'm a real woman. I'm being entirely honest about the person I am today. What you see is what you get. This is what I am here and now; only by looking into my past is there any possible problem with me. I realize my boyfriend may not feel that way and I'm sorry about that. Moreover, I know I may suffer for that at some later date, when my history surfaces. But this is the only way I know to have a life right now. It's what I need to do.

Two U.S. Treasury agents show up at your door. You tremble and blanch, knowing they must be on to your kooky cash. The jig is up! But no, much to your surprise, Special Agent Studley tells you, "Ma'am, those bills you have been passing are genuine. They're a new design the mint just started printing and we misplaced a bundle. Please enjoy spending them. We just didn't want you to worry." How do you like that? You weren't doing anything wrong after all!

Online Dating

I have a fairly active social life. I participate in activities in my church, take ballroom dancing classes three or four nights a week, swim and work out at a health club, and attend an alcohol recovery group on a regular basis. Nevertheless, I haven't been meeting nice guys or getting asked out on dates since my boyfriend dumped me after I had my SRS. So a few months ago I decided to try an online dating service.

I had tried online dating several years earlier and one feature I liked was that as a woman, I could post my profile for free. Guys who were paid members could contact me and I could reply to them, but I would not have to invest any money. I discovered

right off the bat that in 2004 this is no longer the case. The game now is anybody can post a profile for free but the services extract fees from *both* parties before they can communicate with each other. I've been unemployed for a year and I'm watching my spending, so I had to be selective about which services I decided to use.

As I mulled over the possibilities, I came across an article on this very subject in the morning newspaper. A sidebar described a half-dozen such services. I decided a little boutique service that focused on "Ivy Leaguers and similarly well-educated graduates and faculty" might be the best fit for me. I'm a college graduate and am I am attracted to other well-educated people.

I pointed my computer's browser at the service's Web site, filled out their online membership application form, and hit the "Submit" button. I mailed them a hard copy of my college degree per their instructions, along with my check for sixty dollars for a six-month membership. I received an automated acknowledgment of my application form. Then I waited ... and waited. After two weeks, I sent an e-mail to ask if they had received my snail mail. I didn't get a response. I wrote to their other e-mail address. No response. I called them on the telephone. No answer. I kept calling for a couple of days. No answer. *Hmmmm... I guess they've gone 404.* (Error 404 is the message you get when you click on an Internet link and nothing is there.) I was curious to see if my check would ever be cashed.

Having thus been disappointed by a boutique service, I decided to change strategies and go mainstream. I decided to try www.match.com, the five hundred-pound gorilla of the online dating scene. At first I was put off by an inability to discover exactly what [match.com](http://www.match.com)'s service cost. I had already wasted enough time at several sites that led me through lengthy sign-up processes before revealing extravagant membership fees. I guess their game is after prospects have invested forty-five minutes or more building online profiles, they would be inclined to accept the fee structure rather than watch their efforts go into the bit-bucket. Eventually a friend who was using [match.com](http://www.match.com) told me

they charged sixty dollars for a six-month membership, exactly the same as the boutique service. No coincidence there; I'll bet they were deliberately copying match.com's fees. I decided it would be OK to join.

Once I made up my mind to become a match.com member, I was quite impressed with their service. The sign-up process was easy and fun. Their site provides a rich set of tools, capabilities, and games. Best of all, their membership pool is both broad and deep. Everybody seems to be using online dating services these days, not just losers and weirdoes. There is even a plentiful supply of over six-foot-tall, non-smoking, liberal guys within twenty-five miles of my home!

After several months as a match.com member, I had not met the love of my life; but I'd e-mailed with a couple dozen guys and met several for coffee. One fellow treated me to lunch and another took me to dinner at a very nice restaurant. I really hit it off with one guy, Bob, and we went out four or five times. I thought he liked me quite a bit but he simply quit calling. I telephoned him after a couple of weeks and he said, "Has it been that long? We ought to get together and do something..." I never heard from him again.

Match.com has a variety of searching and matching tools. The way I work it is this: Two or three times a week match.com sends me an e-mail with a few to a dozen guys who meet my basic criteria (six feet tall, non-smoking, liberal, within twenty-five miles ...). I glance through their profiles and if I'm interested, I send them an e-mail through match.com's anonymous re-mailer service. Usually they write back and we see if something develops. Very few guys have made first contact with me; I am usually the initiator. Are guys just shy? Is my profile unappealing? (I did NOT say anything about my sex change in my profile!) I don't know. Interestingly, my Bob contacted me first. Could that be significant?

People's personalities come across quite differently in their profiles, in e-mail correspondence, on the phone, and in person. The only thing that really matters in terms of a potential

relationship is the chemistry in a face-to-face meeting. I try to get to that point quickly, so a few e-mails, a phone call, and then an in-person meeting is my goal. For example, one guy was simply delightful on the phone. We laughed and chatted for forty-five minutes. We met at an ice-cream parlor because we both like chocolate malts. He walked into the creamery in jeans and a beat-up sweat shirt and the first words out of his mouth were, "I'm having a lousy day." Wet nursing is not my idea of a fun date; we had no chemistry and it went nowhere.

Everyone becomes jaded and burned out by the online dating process before long. Too many meetings simply go nowhere. Pretty soon it's hard to work up any enthusiasm for continuing. That leads to a death spiral because without enthusiasm a relationship is not likely to be sparked. With that in mind, I study profiles with the care and patience of a cat studying a fish bowl. If I don't form a good impression from his profile or picture, I stop right there.

At first I felt bad about saying no to suitors — doesn't everyone deserve a chance? And besides, you can't tell a book by its cover; a sow's ear may turn out to be a silk purse, etc. But meeting someone in real life and meeting online have an important difference. When I meet someone in real life, I give them the benefit of the doubt. But, you see, we get to test our person-to-person chemistry right away, at our first hello. Things will not progress unless at least one of us feels a spark.

Online dating is different. It's simply a numbers game. The odds of meeting someone with whom I have good chemistry are not great; his meeting a bunch of superficial criteria (six feet tall, non-smoking...) has little to do with it. My time is worth investing only if somebody looks especially good from a superficial point of view or if some other intangible something gets to me. Case in point: Bob, my one good catch, had a lousy profile and he does not photograph well. But the letter he sent introducing himself to me was charming, and he identified a common interest right away (pop music from the sixties and seventies), so he really had something going on as far as I was concerned.

Another reason people get burned out with online dating is just plain rudeness. I can't tell you the number of times guys simply disappeared on me after an ongoing e-mail correspondence, some phone calls, or even a meeting. A couple times guys have told me, "I definitely want to take you to lunch next week. I just need to check my calendar;" then I never heard from them again. Is it so hard to drop me a line to say, "I enjoyed talking with you but I've decided not to pursue this further?" I haven't actually been stood up at a meeting, but I have had last-minute cancellations. At least they called or messaged to cancel, I'll grant them that much. ("I'm sorry, I didn't realize tomorrow was Super Bowl; I'll have to cancel." Lovely.) And if you and I actually meet in person, would you please follow up with a phone call or at least click me a quick e-mail? I hate to think the impression I made was so inconsequential, I don't even exist for you anymore.

Rudeness is not the exclusive province of men either. The guys tell me stories about women they meet and we're just as bad. If everyone would put a little more effort and courtesy into online dating, I'm sure a much better time would be had by all.

We all know the Internet is notorious for being a place where people often are not what they seem. That foxy eighteen-year-old girl you've been chatting with may really be only eight or may be an eighty-year-old man or even a cop. I worried this might be a problem in the online dating world, but I'm happy to say I never encountered it. Everybody I met seemed to pretty much match their profiles. Oh, I think most of the men lie a little bit about their income and most of the women lie a little about their age. Many of us are not the best judges of our own beauty, either, but for the most part, people seem to be pretty honest about presenting themselves. I considered lying about my height, maybe saying I was five foot seven, but changed my mind when I saw myself strutting, at six-foot-one-plus-heels, into a meet!

Having been around the online-dating block a few times, I can pass on a few tips that have saved me time, effort, and the occasional headache. The first tip is that it's a bad sign if my prospective date and I spend a lot of time talking about each

other's match.com experiences. It's an interesting topic, sure; but it means we have nothing else in common to talk about. Such a conversation is a warning — cut your losses; a fabulous relationship is not in the cards.

Another tip is to try and strike a balance between being blasé and being too needy. On the blasé side, guys turn me off if they don't seem excited about meeting me and serious about actually taking me out on dates. I'm not looking for quickie sex or for somebody to hold down the other side of the couch while the television blares.

On the too needy side, guys planning to find a bride before the leaves turn ought to consider joining www.eharmony.com, not match.com. In my age group, let's say the forties and fifties, a lot of single guys are recently divorced. They may be new to the dating scene and anxious to get back into a comfortable marital situation. Sorry, that's not what I'm looking for. Oh, I'd like to get married some day, perhaps, but first comes a long get-to-know-each-other period. Besides, you need to learn how to be single and love yourself again before you can be successful in another marriage.

I'm very suspicious of guys who are willing to drive hour just to have coffee with me. How needy is that? For this reason, I usually only meet people who live within twenty-five miles of my home and even that is a stretch. (If you live more than twenty-five miles away and don't have your own personal jet, yet you truly want to meet me, your best bet is to woo me via e-mail and telephone first.)

My final tip is that dating is for single people. Apparently "married but looking" is a legitimate class these days, but it's not for me. If a guy doesn't have a picture in his profile, that's a pretty good clue he's married; he's afraid somebody he knows will stumble across his picture and he'll be busted. (There may be other reasons for absent pictures. Sometimes guys just think they're ugly or they're afraid not being Caucasian may be a turn-off to some of the women they'd like to meet.) If he won't give me his name and a home telephone number — a landline, not a cell

phone — he's probably married. If the times and places he can meet me are strange and restricted, he's probably married. A guy who is separated is still married. He may be date-able, but there's a high probability he will go back to his wife. Besides, the separated man's emotional ties back to his wife leave him less than free to develop a proper relationship with someone else. By the way, if you get discouraged thinking most of the good guys are already married, take comfort in the knowledge most of the jerks are too!

My advice for guys who want to meet me is to be open and sincere. Try to identify some interests we have in common. Make some chit-chat in your e-mails so I feel like I'm getting to know you a little bit. Tell me about something going on in your life — but pick something positive and upbeat, please! I'm happy to talk on the phone a time or two before meeting in person — in fact, I prefer it. If we seem to hit it off, then ask me if I'd like to meet you. I'm really impressed if you ask me out to dinner at a nice restaurant. You know, like a real date? I'll meet you there, so I'm not worried about my safety; we've chatted enough that I know I won't be bored or frustrated spending an entire meal with you. If you'd rather keep it more casual at first, coffee or ice-cream or a walk in the park is fine; but please treat it seriously. You could be meeting your next wife!

Online dating has its success stories and can be fun even if you don't meet the man or woman of your dreams. I think a couple of inherent problems make it difficult to find real heart matches. One problem is the electronic medium makes it particularly easy for us to construct our own fantasies about the other person, raising our expectations of how beautiful and sweet and funny they are. Loving our idea of the other person and not the other person's true self is a problem in real life, not just in the online world, but the electronic medium exacerbates this tendency. When we meet in three dimensions, we rarely measure up to the expectations we've placed on each other.

The other inherent online dating problem is it's just too easy. We contact then meet people with little or no investment of

energy or emotion, so there is little to bond us together. Love blooms when people have been through hard times together or shared some interesting adventures or worked intensively together on a difficult project. It's hard for love to bloom between two electronic profiles or over dinner and a movie.

So that's my experience with online dating. I'm something of an oldster at forty-something; maybe younger people have a different experience.

Oh, guess what? After two months I got an e-mail from that boutique service saying my membership had been activated. Not a single guy, however, contacted me through that service, and I didn't find any to whom I felt like writing either. Their staff never did answer my e-mails. I'm sure some boutique services are great but if you figure out which one I tried, I would advise you not to bother with them!

A Smooth Move

I had been out with Charlie a few times, and he really seemed to like me. I liked him a lot too. But he had yet to make a move on me. Like for sex, you know? I wondered if he was just shy or what? But when he finally made his move, it was quite a smooth move!

On this particular evening, the evening of the smooth move, Charlie arrived at my place to take me out to dinner, punctually as always. When I opened my door, I saw he was holding a beautiful bouquet of yellow roses, much to my delight! Yellow roses, yes, but there was one red rose. That's curious! I thought to myself.

Squealing with glee, I rushed Charlie in the door and thanked him profusely for the roses. I gave him a quick peck on the cheek and took the flowers to the kitchen to trim them and put them in a crystal vase. Even Sam (my devoted canine roommate and bodyguard) was excited.

As we stepped back to admire the lovely, romantic bouquet, Charlie asked me rhetorically, "Do you know why I brought exactly seven roses?"

"Why?" I played along.

Touching one of the yellow roses, Charlie said, "This one is for the first time we met, at Tori and Mike's softball game. I knew Sam really liked me, but I wasn't sure if you did!" My friend, Tori, and Charlie's friend, Mike, had invited us to the ball game as a blatant set-up. Because Charlie and I were both forty-something singletons, we were willing, unindicted co-conspirators in this little misdemeanor. Photographs had already been exchanged.

Touching another yellow rose, Charlie continued, "This one is for the second time we got together, for dinner at Tori and Mike's apartment. I was so glad when I asked you out for a real date, you said, 'Yes!'"

The next yellow rose, Charlie went on, was for that first real date, a long dinner at a fancy restaurant where we talked and talked. Another yellow rose was for when we went to our first movie together. Another was for the Sunday afternoon we spent in the park letting Sam run wild. The sixth, and final, yellow rose was for just last week, when we spent the evening in my den watching the Oscars on TV. Dear Charles had rosily recalled every single time we had been together.

That left just the red rose. "And this one," Charlie said, "is for tonight."

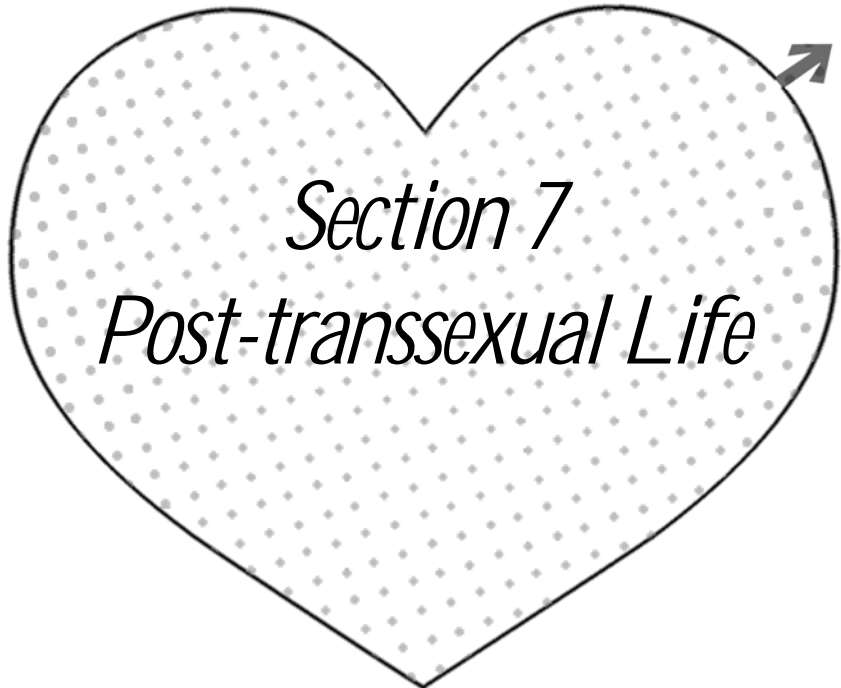
My heart was beating quickly and I was biting my bottom lip. I dared not speak, because I knew I would start crying. But my curiosity was killing me. What did Charlie have in mind to cap this incredibly romantic gesture?

"Do you know why this one is red?" Charlie asked. Holding back my tears, I shook my head. "This one is red," he said softly,

and I could hear a little quaver in his voice, “because I hope tonight I can make love with you.”

Do I need to tell you I took Charlie’s hand and led him upstairs to the bedroom? Wow, that was some smooth move!

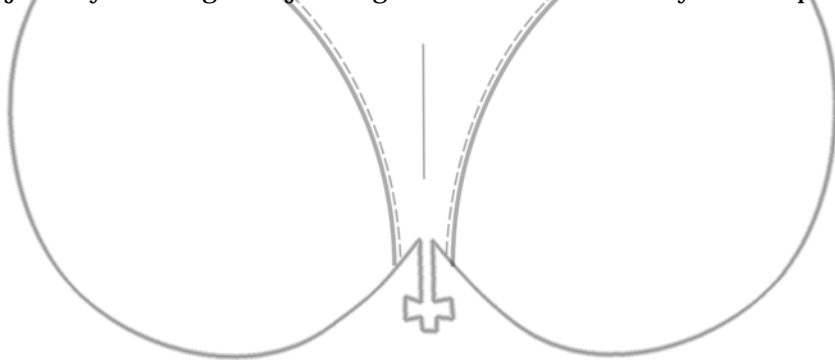
Note: This is an absolutely true story, except I changed the names. To tell you the truth, it took place a couple of years before I transitioned, and I was Charlie!



Section 7

Post-transsexual Life

Life goes on ... la-di-da. I had my SRS and completed my transition. Yet all that went before, living as a man for forty-six years, as a cross-dresser for ten years, and as a transitioning transsexual for three years, isn't gone. The surgeons weren't able to dissect the masculine past from my body during the SRS procedure. I still have a lot of unresolved feelings to sort out, many new things to learn, and a lot of growing to do. Indeed, my journey of change has just begun. Here are some of my first steps.



Dirty Panties

People often assume a consolation prize of being a trans woman is I know how men think. It's not true, because I never really did think like a man. That's more or less the whole point of my transsexualism; I have always been a woman in my brain. However, I do know a lot about what being treated as a man is like because I lived as one for most of my life. I've also seen life from both sides in some other areas. For instance, as I've pointed out earlier in this book ("Libido and Women of a Certain Age"), I have keen insight into how testosterone dominates the lives of men — a deeper understanding, I think, than either non-trans

men or women have. And I just realized I have finally figured out the reason for the great gender divide over clean underwear.

The clean underwear gender divide? Oh, yes, one exists. Girls change their panties every day; sometimes two or three times a day. Guys can be trained to throw the tighty whiteys into the laundry basket every night, but they don't really understand why. Bachelors have been known to wear the same undies for a week. You may think guys are simply gross and *déclassé*, but that's not it at all. Having traded in my penis for a vagina, let me tell you: vaginas are messier than penises. Penises are actually quite tidy. Men don't have a great need to change undies every day if they're only housing a healthy penis. But vaginas, well, they are moist and they ooze — and I don't even have a monthly visit from Auntie Flo! I'm sorry, but there it is.

So you see, there is a very practical reason why women change their panties frequently. Without thinking things through, they then force this same behavior on men. The dudes, choosing to save their tinder for larger fires, politely go along with women's insistence on this (especially if the women are willing to do the washing and folding). Of course, even if penises were as messy as vaginas, men would still be derelict about changing their boxers. After all, men are gross and *déclassé*.

Messy vaginas have implications that go beyond panties. Take tampons and pads, for example. I can distinctly recall what a cootie factor they held for me just a few short years ago when I thought I was a guy. Ick! They gave me the creeps. The first time I went to the grocery store *en femme*, I overcame my distaste and put a box of tampons in my basket, thinking they would provide good cover — no man would be caught dead with tampons in his basket! Little did I realize they are virtually invisible to checkout clerks; I'm sure even male checkers are completely desensitized to their cooties. I suppose a lot of husbands are, too, if they have been nice about picking up these items for their wives from time to time. To me, of course, tampons and pads now mean no more than tissues or toilet paper; they are just common, useful hygiene products.

I think the repulsion, if not revulsion, men feel about tampons, pads, and messy vaginas is a big factor in their inability to accept trans women's transitions. The cootie factor is just too much for them to bear. It may be even worse for them than the thought of a penectomy! (Of course the biggest factor of all is the fear of being gay.)

"Wait a minute," you may say, "men are the ones who belch and light their farts on fire and laugh about it. Men are gross and déclassé — you just said so yourself! Aren't women's delicate sensibilities the more easily offended?" This would appear to be the case, I admit. But if you think about it, men's sensibilities are really the delicate ones. Gross behavior is merely a defense mechanism. Men don't want to admit, even to themselves, how easily they are grossed out, so they joke about it and challenge each other with gross-outs. Wouldn't you agree the man who lights his farts in private for his own pleasure is a very special man indeed? Women don't joke about the grosser bodily functions; we keep them out of sight when possible and simply deal with them when necessary. Men make a big deal out them because they are uncomfortable.

Men do become desensitized to these things in certain circumstances. Doctors do. Soldiers do, horrifically, on the battle field. Perhaps women are predisposed for *ick* tolerance by genetics or evolution because it plays a huge role in having and raising babies.

Nasty vaginas are also a factor in *la difference* when it comes to sex. Now that I have my own vagina, I can appreciate that women worry about being fresh downstairs when sex is imminent — a fear douche manufacturers use to advantage in their advertising. (I refer to manufacturers of douches, not manufacturers who *are* douches.) They say women always know at the beginning of a date whether sex will be had at the end of the date; it's true, and it's not just about deciding whether or not to shave our legs. It's also because we have to plan ahead to be sure we're fresh! I'm amused to find myself experiencing this anxiety, because I know full well how little guys care about

vaginal freshness when they're in a testosterone-fueled heat, which is pretty much all the time. It's a trade-off, though. At least now I don't have to deal with performance anxiety, because getting and maintaining an erection isn't my responsibility anymore!

While we're on the subject, did you know the Internet hosts a thriving trade in dirty panties? And I do mean "dirty" as in "unwashed." You can google *buy dirty panties* if you don't believe me.

I've only had my vagina for a little while, so I still have a lot to learn. To begin with, would somebody please explain to me about women who don't wear any panties at all? Ew! Gross!

Inside the Women's Locker Room (Part Deux)

I finally penetrated that last bastion of female privacy, the women's locker room. I've never been a sports person, so locker rooms were never an issue for me as far as being transsexual goes. I didn't expect to see the inside of another locker room as long as I lived! But a funny thing happened a year after my SRS: I suddenly got the urge to start exercising.

After much consternation and weighing of pros and cons, I decided to join a health club. Not any big commitment, mind you;

I wouldn't be signing any multi-year contracts. But something on a month-by-month basis I could handle, just to see if I liked it.

I found a wonderful little health club close to my house and signed up. (I won't tell you the club's name because I don't want them worrying about transsexuals in their locker rooms. But I will say it's not a color, a timespan, or a shape.) By this time, women's restrooms and changing rooms had long since ceased to hold any special fascination for me. But women's locker rooms—ah, that was different. Women are naked in locker rooms, aren't they?

I began going to the gym for workouts, and I was inside the women's locker room at last. Funnily enough, it turns out that women are NOT naked in the locker room. What I discovered is women are surprisingly good at changing clothes without revealing any naughty bits. (I have no prurient interest in seeing women's naughty bits, as that part of my sex drive is totally gone. But I will confess I am curious to compare their bodies to my own.) I do see bras and panties from time to time, and even the occasional breast or two, but downstairs is never revealed. I find it amusing that women are so modest in the locker room. Is it just a matter of courtesy, or does it reflect poor body image? I myself have not mastered the art of pulling on my panties without dropping my towel, nor do I have any embarrassment about exposing my body — heck, I worked so hard for this body, I'm happy to show it off! But I would say that, much to my surprise, a pre-op trans woman would not necessarily have any difficulties in the locker room if she can do that particular presto-change-o mambo.

Besides the semi-naked female bodies, the women's locker room is not much different from men's locker rooms I visited in my former life. Even with occasional glimpses of bras and panties, the women's locker room is little like it was portrayed in the *Porky's* movies. In the first place, we get very few high school girls in our health club; we are mostly an older crowd. Two, we do NOT look like playboy models or strippers. And finally, we're

talking a lot more Hanes and Platex than Victoria's Secret and Frederick's. In short, for the most part, it is not a pretty sight.

When I first walked into the women's locker room, I noticed one peculiar little quirk I had never seen in a men's locker room. Many of the lockers had colorful mesh bath puffs hanging from the ubiquitous combination padlocks. What was that all about? Were the women adding a decorative touch to the locker room? Were they somehow marking their territories? Was it for identification, like why you might put a colorful sticker on your luggage when you travel? I couldn't figure out the reason for this odd custom but I wanted to fit in so I, too, soon had my purple puff hanging from my lock. Eventually it dawned on me. The lockers with the puffs are rented for permanent use, not just day use. The puffs are simply hanging outside the lockers to dry, after having been used in the showers. Duh. I stopped hanging my dry puff from my lock.

Speaking of the showers, they are individual stalls equipped with curtains, so naked women are not on display there either. The Jacuzzi spa in our locker room, on the other hand, is exposed and I like to go in naked. However, I very rarely see any other women in the spa. I don't think they're avoiding the spa because I am in it naked; the spa just isn't very popular. One Japanese woman goes in naked like me. I've seen a few other women use the spa, but they wore bathing suits.

The final thing I noticed about the women's locker room is the ladies generally don't talk to each other. This surprised me because in most situations we chatter away like magpies. On a hike one time, I told one of my trans girlfriends, "We really need to talk a lot more if we're going to pass as women!" But in the locker room, women keep to themselves. They do their business and get out. I've gossiped more in bathrooms than in the locker room. Maybe being semi-naked has an inhibiting effect on conversation. However, speaking up in the locker room is not considered to be rude. I've had a few nice conversations in the women's locker room when some particular subject or another presented itself. But as a matter of course, women do not greet

strangers in the locker room, or make an effort to strike up conversations. On the other hand, if friends or acquaintances come into the locker room together, it's a whole other story. In that case, we chatter exactly like magpies.

I can't think of anything else to say about the women's locker room. Like most things on the other side of the gender divide, the locker room quickly became quite mundane for me. Except for that one time when we discovered the boys had drilled a peephole in the wall between our locker rooms ... oh, wait a minute—that wasn't real life; that was a scene from *Porky's*!

Cranberry Juice

An urgent need to pee woke me up at six in the morning, not an unusual occurrence since my SRS. However, it was unusual that I needed to pee again a few minutes after I returned to bed. I stumbled back to the bathroom, sat down, and let loose. I felt as if I would pee a torrent but I could produce only a trickle. *That's odd*, I thought.

As I went to flush, I happened to glance into the bowl. A streak of red caught my eye. Blood! At first I was alarmed. I knew blood in a stool was a bad sign, leading to an uncomfortable colonoscopy at the very least. I didn't know about blood in the

urine, however. Then I smiled. *I've got my first period!* No, that couldn't be right; I don't have a uterus.

The need to pee persisted so I sat down again. Nothing came, but that feeling of needing to pee grew even stronger. After a few minutes the feeling subsided. I wiped, noting a smear of blood on the tissue. I flushed and went back to bed.

I tried to fall asleep but I could not. That feeling of needing to pee was still present and starting to get painful. I tried to imagine what the cause could possibly be. Was my two year old vagina prolapsing? Had a fistula developed? No, the problem was in my urinary tract and my urethra is not in my vagina. (Nobody's is — at least, it better not be!) Could it be cancer of the — what, what was up there? Kidney? Bladder? *Oh, wait, I bet I know; this must be the famous bladder infection.*

I went to my computer and checked out bladder infections — actually urinary tract infections or UTIs — on WebMD on the Internet. Yes, that was it. I had all three symptoms: blood in the urine, dry pees, and a burning sensation. Actually my sensation was not so much burning as an intense feeling of pushing the urine out, but with no urine coming. I have since heard that many times the pain is a real burning sensation along the urethra, as if you were peeing boiling water. Thank goodness I didn't have that!

I followed WebMD's advice for home treatment and began drinking prodigious amounts of water to flush my urinary tract and dilute the bacteria. The article said this treatment alone often cures the problem if it is caught early enough. WebMD also mentioned *some people* believe drinking a lot of cranberry juice is helpful, although WebMD didn't seem to be willing to endorse the notion. I had some cranberry juice on hand because I like it and because *some people* believe it's good for the prostate. (I still have my prostate gland.) So I drank cranberry juice, too.

WebMD recommended I should see a doctor if the condition persisted for one or two days. The doctor would probably prescribe antibiotics. I was a naughty girl and I had squirreled away some antibiotics the last time I had the flu, so I got them

out of the medicine cabinet and started on them immediately. Bad girl, self-prescribing antibiotics! Stupid, too, because I had no way of knowing if these antibiotics would target the particular bacteria causing my discomfort. But I did it anyway. According to WebMD, research shows a three day course of antibiotics is just as effective treating a bladder infection as a ten day course, so I began a three day course.

Within a few hours my discomfort passed and by mid-afternoon I was feeling normal. I was peeing normally but frequently due to the amount of liquid I continued to drink.

The experience was not pleasant, but an upside was I felt I had passed one more milestone in my journey of becoming a woman. Silly, really. Men get bladder infections too; it's just not very common.

I was so proud of getting my first bladder infection, I told several of my women friends about it. Besides, I wanted to see if they agreed with my diagnosis and treatment regimen. I appeared to have gotten it right. Each of my friends was sympathetic and advised me to drink cranberry juice. (I guess my friends are *some people*.)

That's about it for my big adventure with my first bladder infection. Female readers are probably nodding their heads sagely while male readers shake their heads in wonderment. As for recently post-operative trans women, you will be better prepared than I was when your first bladder infection arrives. And the last thing I want to say is, drink cranberry juice!

Dancing Queen

Disco lives! At least it did last night at a Studio 54-themed dance party I attended at the Starlite Dance Club in Sunnyvale. The smaller back ballroom, The Club, was gaily decorated with 1960s-vintage light fixtures and mirrored disco balls, metallic streamers and confetti, and black and white balloons. In the corner at a bar featuring oversized, plastic blow-up bottles of Dewars and Smirnoff, a bartender in a silver lamé suit and matching floppy pimp hat served fruit punch. Blaring from all points was, of course, disco music. “Funky Town,” “Disco Inferno,” “Get Down Tonight” — they all lived again. Mercifully, we were spared “YMCA.”

As I surveyed the scene, some friends waved me over to their table and invited me to join them. Florence and Tom were an older couple who started taking dance lessons at the club last summer at the same time I did. I was happy to accept the chair they offered me. The remaining empty seats did not stay that way long as people filed in.

The sumptuous pot-luck buffet overflowed with enough food to feed a Carnegie Hall audience. Asian fare, a favorite in the Silicon Valley, predominated, but the chocolate-dipped strawberries were the most popular dish. I filled only a small plate because I had eaten dinner earlier in the evening. I brought back chocolate-dipped strawberries for my tablemates, though Florence ate Tom's as well as her own.

Joe, another of our tablemates, was a fun little guy and very good dancer. Joe is only five feet four but he loves dancing with tall women like me. I love him for it. Tonight, however, he was the exclusive property of his wife, who is five eight.

The DJ, for some unaccountable reason, was dressed like Alice Cooper, the original death-rock maniac. I guess that was what the eighth decade of the previous century meant to him. He spun memorable disco hits from the seventies. Joe, my tablemate, kept yelling for "Disco Duck" but I don't think DJ Alice could hear him.

While we noshed, seven female dancers from the club — three instructors and four students — entertained us with a dance performance choreographed to "Stayin' Alive." They incorporated a lot of sexy disco moves and the place rocked with hoots, whistles, and wild cheering from the audience.

After we'd had a chance to eat, DJ Alice spun "We Are Family," a song that strikes a comforting chord with me because it's something of an LGBT anthem. Even though Starlite is a dance club, most people continued to chat rather than get out on the floor. Adriana, a sexy little dance instructor, scurried around the tables prodding everyone. "You don't need a partner," she urged. "Free-form! Everybody get out there!" I went out and

danced but noticed I was the only one who was not part of a couple.

When the song ended I retired to a barstool along the wall and watched the couples dancing as more disco hits played. The disco beat is well suited for dancing the cha-cha and East Coast swing. Joe demonstrated some fine martial arts moves during “Kung-Foo Fighting.”

My dance instructor, a tall, handsome Chinese-American named George, grabbed me for a hustle. The hustle evolved from the old seventies dance and is now a recognized, stylized ballroom dance form. It’s a slot dance. The woman takes a backward rock step on the half-beat “and” then three forward steps on 1-2-3. During the forward steps she turns or spins so she winds up facing back in the direction from which she started; then she moves back down the slot in the other direction during the next and-1-2-3. When I first learned the hustle, it was difficult to count 1-2-3-1-2-3- (I didn’t mention the “and” step between 3 and 1) when the music’s beat is 1-2-3-4-1-2-3-4 but I got used to it before long. While the woman basically repeats this figure over and over, the man has a variety of steps to get out of the way or perform his own turns and spins. George did a lot of fancy moves and motions with our arms that made it look like I was a much better hustle dancer than I actually am.

Soon it was time for the men’s John Travolta contest. A dozen willing men lined up at the back of the dance floor; the rest of us watched from the other side. The DJ spun “Stayin’ Alive” again and Michael, one of Starlite’s owners, took the floor in his white, “Saturday Night Fever” jacket. He demonstrated his best John Travolta strut along with other vintage disco dance moves. Then each of the men had a chance to do the same. Some of them were pretty good, some of them had no moves at all, and everyone looked goofy. But it was all in fun and we cheered for each dancer. The club awarded three winners thousands of points toward a prize raffle to be held later that summer.

A rumor circulated that soon the women were going to get the chance to strut their stuff. I thought, *No way! I would die of*

embarrassment! Florence and the other ladies at our table started telling me I had to do it, if for no other reason than I had the dress. I was wearing a bright purple, fully sequined disco mini-dress, somewhat ragged and very seventies. But still I told them, “No way!”

Before the women’s contest, DJ Alice spun a few more tunes. He played “Disco Duck!” Joe was ecstatic and he demonstrated the duck dance for everyone to see, though no one chose to join him. During the next number, Tom (of Florence and Tom, remember them?) danced a cha-cha with me.

DJ Alice asked if anyone remembered “Soul Train.” The crowd cheered. We formed two lines, guys on one side and girls on the other, with a narrow aisle between us. A couple would form at one end of the line and boogie on down the aisle to the other end, then split up and rejoin the lines to go around again. Alice spun a Parliament Funkadelic tune and we boogied. It was great fun, although I couldn’t match the moves of the guy who boogied down the line with me.

I sat out the next couple songs, enviously watching the other couples on the dance floor. I started to feel sorry for myself. As often happened at the dance club, nobody was asking me to dance. Moreover, I had caught a look at myself and George when we were dancing next to the mirrored wall and I realized what a giant monster I am, at six feet one inch plus two-inch heels. The average height of the women in the club is probably five feet five and the men about five nine. Maybe it’s because of my freakishly tall height that men don’t like to ask me to dance, or maybe because my dancing isn’t very good yet. I don’t think it’s because of my sex change; nobody at the club seems to be aware of that; at least, nobody has ever said anything that would make me think so. Whatever it is, it hurts to be a wallflower nobody wants to pick.

Then I decided to quit that stinkin’ thinkin’ and look on the bright side. What a miracle it was I was there at all! A few years ago I remember wishing I could simply walk into a sandwich shop and eat lunch — as a woman — without causing a scene. It had

seemed impossible that could ever happen. Yet there I was in a wonderful dance club where a lot of people liked me. I was in a silly, sexy disco dress and unafraid to shake my booty out on the dance floor. So what if I'm not the most popular dance partner in the club? What a marvelous wonder I was there at all!

And so, when they finally called the ladies up to the floor for the contest, I went. Fortunately we were not asked to do the John Travolta strut; rather, we were instructed to do our best sashay like a high-fashion model on the catwalk at a haute couture fashion show in Paris. I had actually done a little modeling assignment once, at the grand opening party for the Adam to Eve Transformation Salon, so I knew I could do a simple turn without falling down or making a spectacle of myself.

The DJ put on Abba's "Dancing Queen." I smiled inwardly at the unintended, private irony (as many people think transsexuals are the same as drag queens). Tommy, a cute and very sexy instructor, demonstrated the walk for us. (Tommy had also tried to get into the women's line for the Soul Train dance.) Then the first lady took off down the imaginary runway.

This group consisted of dancers of all skill-levels; some of these ladies had very fancy moves. I admired them, but I didn't get jealous. I remembered I was lucky to be there at all; I have the rest of my life to develop my own fancy moves. We all cheered each other on and I wished them all well.

Soon my turn arrived. I sucked in my gut and stepped onto the runway. Calmly I strutted toward the crowd, arms swinging casually at my sides, hips swiveling as madly as I could manage. I had a big, happy smile on my face. (When I modeled, the coach told us, "Either smile or don't smile, but don't do anything in between!") A few feet from the crowd, directly in front of the photographer, I stopped, planted my feet shoulder-width apart, and put my left hand on my hip. I thrust my hip out as far as it would go and established eye contact with the onlookers directly in front of me, though honestly, I was not really seeing anything at all. I took a beat. Deliberately, I swiveled my gaze left and looked that group in the eye. Another beat and I swiveled right,

switching to right hand on right hip and that hip outthrust, and gave that part of the crowd eye contact and my million-dollar smile. Then I spun around and strutted back to the line of sister supermodels.

There was nothing to it, really. Of course, I did not win, place, or show. If I had, it would have been to the dress's credit, not mine; although I may have garnered some bonus points for my height. But I didn't need to win. I was already a winner. I am a winner. I have been blessed.

Everyone danced as DJ Alice ended the party with Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive." I believe I just might.

Survivor

I was concentrating on my footwork in the middle of a rumba when my dance instructor, Michael, made an odd comment. I'm not sure what he thought he heard me say but in reply he offered, "You're all woman as far as I'm concerned."

I just smiled, said "Thank you!" and kept dancing.

Later it struck me it was a strange thing for Michael to say. Then I realized, *Oh! I guess he has read me.* I guess he knows I have undergone a sex change. (We've danced close enough that I'm certain he knows I'm not pre-op!)

I was surprised at this realization because I assumed I had not been outed in the club where I had been dancing for the last

few months. On the other hand, it was hard to imagine I was passing undetected either. Among other things, I had run into one of the instructors at a gay club where I was partying with some T-girls; so I figured we two, at least, had read each other. It was easy to see the word might get around the club.

How did I feel about that? I asked myself. Being read is always disappointing, if for no other reason than that it constitutes a less-than-perfect grade on one's gender presentation skills. On the other hand, it's something of a relief to know other people know. Stealth (keeping my sex change secret) involves a certain amount of duplicity, even if it's just being careful to use gender-ambiguous terminology so listeners are allowed to assume my spouse was a man or my childhood was spent as a girl, etc. I do this anyway, even with people who (I know) know; but it's reassuring to know that big surprises and that whole discussion won't ensue if I should accidentally let something slip.

The way I feel must be akin to the way it feels to be a survivor of Auschwitz. Please understand, in no way am I equating the tribulations of a transsexual person's life with the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp. Not at all. I think, though, we share some common feelings as survivors of trauma.

I choose Auschwitz survivors for my metaphor, as opposed to victims of other traumas such as rape, accidents, or even other concentration camps, because of the infamous Auschwitz tattoo. Identification numbers were tattooed on the arms of only Auschwitz prisoners, those who were assigned to work crews. For the rest of their lives, Auschwitz survivors stand to be outed if someone notices their tattoos, just like those of us who have had sex changes may be outed by one thing or another at any time.

Auschwitz survivors are a large group of people who suffered through a common, severely traumatic situation, as are people who have undergone sex changes. In both cases, our selection for group membership was not due to accident nor any fault of our own; it was merely because of how we were born. Auschwitz survivors' troubles were caused by man, not nature. While some of trans people's troubles stem from our natural condition, most

of our trauma would be alleviated if others treated our problem as merely a medical condition, and if our families and the public loved and accepted us in spite of it. Certainly most people do not have Hitler's evil intentions toward us; it's sad to say, however, that human misunderstanding and prejudice bring about the largest part of our suffering.

Like Auschwitz survivors, transsexual people are just men and women with a severe trauma in our past. We are not defined by that trauma, although it's an inescapable and dominating fact of our existence. We prefer not to deal with it or even think about it day to day, but it has a way of reasserting itself on an all-too-regular basis.

When we get outed, we know we have nothing to be ashamed of, or to feel guilty about. We did what we had to do to survive and to build lives for ourselves. But perhaps some things we did, we prefer not to think about, not to discuss with others — except, perhaps, with others who share our extraordinary history. Like Vietnam vets, what happened in the jungle stays in the jungle. I can think of some sexual experimentation, some appropriation of clothing, and certain public exhibitions I would gladly leave back in the jungle.

Like Auschwitz survivors, many of us lost spouses, children, and friends due to our traumatic experience. Thank God our loved ones were not lost in the absolute and horrible way so many were lost in the death camps; but they are lost to us nonetheless. And like some Auschwitz survivors, we transsexuals have been subjected to bizarre medical experiments!

Auschwitz survivors don't make a point of socializing with each other, reliving their common experience, because that is not what their current lives are about. Neither do post-transsexuals tend to hang out with each other or with the transgender community. Our lives are no longer about our transsexual experience. Auschwitz survivors may suffer survivor's guilt, wondering why they were saved when so many perished. As a post-transsexual, I have some survivor's guilt of my own, knowing so many of my transgender brothers and sisters are

unable to move past their trauma for any number of reasons. Having them still around in my life is difficult; perhaps post-ops tend to drop out of the transgender community for this very reason.

A big difference between Auschwitz survivors and post-transsexuals is the way we are treated when we are discovered. When an Auschwitz survivor's tattoo is recognized, the person is treated with sympathy and respect. When I'm read, I risk being treated with amusement or derision. I've been lucky; since I've transitioned, I've mostly been treated respectfully and sometimes even sympathetically. However, perhaps the most insidious treatment of all is when I am treated respectfully but, somehow, a little bit less like a woman. Suddenly the questions get a little more invasive, the jokes get a little more ribald, and the men, most definitely, become a lot less interested in me.

It used to be when Michael pulled me a bit closer than seemed necessary or made a joking double-entendre, I assumed he was flirting with me because he found me attractive — or because that's how you work the old ladies to get them to sign up for more lessons. But now that I know he has read me, I'll wonder if he's taking liberties because I'm just a trannie. As kind as he was in telling me I'm all woman as far as he's concerned, I wonder if I might be a little less than a woman in his eyes. I know the problem is probably all in my head and I need to let go of it, but it's hard. Will my tattoo ever fade completely away?

Day of Remembrance

November 20 every year is the Transgender Day of Remembrance. We take this day to honor and remember those who lost their lives to anti-transgender violence during the previous 365 days. Here are the names that were added to the death roster between November 20, 2004 and November 20, 2005. May they rest in peace.

Unnamed trans woman

Location: Surco, Peru

Cause of Death: Incinerated

Date of Death: November 26, 2004

This unknown victim was roughly twenty-two years old. On the night of November 26, four people dropped her from a car, then set her body on fire.

Luana

Location: Migliarino, Italy

Cause of Death: Shot in the back of the head

Date of Death: December 3, 2004

Luana was a Brazilian-born sex worker. She was shot in the back of the head by her killer.

Penny Port

Location: Sheffield, England

Cause of Death: Stabbed

Date of Death: December 19, 2004

Prior to her transition, Penny Port worked as a construction worker, then as a part time boxing coach. She was found lying in a pool of blood from multiple stab wounds, and died shortly after being taken to the hospital.

C. Hernández

Location: Mendoza, Argentina

Cause of Death: Stabbed multiple times

Date of Death: December 20, 2004

This transgender woman was stabbed multiple times, including two deep cuts to her throat. When her body was found, blood was spattered around the kitchen, a patio, and a garage. She was found face-down on the patio. Neighbors heard her shouting for help and called police, but they did not arrive in time to save her. Her alleged killer, Pablo Corvalán, took his own life rather than face jail.

Robert Binenfeld

Location: Monroe, New York

Cause of Death: Strangled by Jason Bardsley

Date of Death: December 21, 2004

Bienfeld was a former doctor who practiced medicine for 26 years. On the 21st of December, Jason Bardsley showed up at Bienfeld's home, where a cross-dressed Bienfeld, according to Bardsley, performed oral sex on the man, then revealed his genitalia. Bardsley has pled guilty to strangling Bienfeld, citing a "transgender panic"-style defense, and is awaiting sentencing.

Felicia Moreno

Location: Hollywood, California

Cause of Death: Shot twice by Patrick Edward Vallor

Date of Death: December 26, 2004

An active-duty U.S. Marine lance corporal named Patrick Edward Vallor shot Moreno, a 25 year old trans woman, several times. Vallor, a military policeman stationed out of Twenty-Nine Palms, California, was shot and killed after a standoff with police.

Ryan Shey Hoskie

Location: Albuquerque, New Mexico

Cause of Death: Undetermined; signs of upper body trauma

Date of Death: December 27, 2004

Hoskie was a sex worker in Albuquerque, New Mexico. On the morning of December 27, 2004, Hoskie's partially-undressed body was discovered in an alley.

Unnamed trans woman

Location: Paraná, Argentina

Cause of Death: Murdered

Date of Death: January 12, 2005

This 32 year old trans woman was shot to death around 2 a.m. on January 12th. Some have questioned if this murder was committed by local police officers.

Ronnie Paris, Jr.

Location: Tampa, Florida

Cause of Death: Beaten to death by his father, Ronnie Paris, Sr.

Date of Death: January 28, 2005

Paris, a three year old, died from swelling on both sides of the brain caused by his father, Ronnie Paris, Sr. Paris Jr. had been slapped against the head numerous times, until the child went into a coma. The father did not want to 'raise a sissy,' as the child had seemingly not been masculine enough for the father.

Karlien Carstens

Location: Okahandja, Namibia

Cause of Death: Strangled

Date of Death: February 16, 2005

Carstens ran a small tuck stop out of her home. When her brother found her body, she was tied up with cords cut off of electrical appliances, with one cord tied tightly around her neck. She had also been strangled with some force.

Unnamed trans woman

Location: Neuquen, Argentina

Cause of Death: Murdered

Date of Death: February 22, 2005

Police were called to the scene by neighbors reporting shouting, and found the victim in her apartment. She had apparently struggled with her murderer, and appeared to be beaten to death.

Michelle Lee

Location: Daly City, California

Cause of Death: Multiple stab wounds

Date of Death: March 1, 2005

Lee's body was found by a telephone repairman near a hillside a short distance from Lee's home. Lee, a 42 year old transperson, had been stabbed to death.

Phool Chand Yadav

Location: Lucknow, India

Cause of Death: Murdered

Date of Death: March 17, 2005

Yadav was living as a male, and was part of a drama company. He had been out with two men on a walk. Once these men discovered that he was biologically female by removing a false mustache and forcing him to disrobe. He was raped and murdered. After killing him, the killers replaced the false mustache.

Mylène

Location: Marseilles, France

Cause of Death: Genitals and throat cut

Date of Death: March 26, 2005

Mylène was a 38 year old transsexual born in Ecuador. Her body was discovered in a room in a hotel near the center of Marseilles. Her throat had been cut, as had been her genitals.

Alejandra Galicio

Location: Bahia Blanca, Argentina

Cause of Death: Beaten to death

Date of Death: April 12, 2005

Galicio was an active member of the Center of Action in Civil AIDS and Rights. When she was initially discovered by police, she was semiconscious, and blood-spattered. She had a severe

cerebral hematoma, ocular inflammation, and other trauma to her face. Galicio died in intensive care.

Ashley Nickson

Location: Dothan, Alabama

Cause of Death: Shot multiple times

Date of Death: May 1, 2005

Ashley was a 30 year old trans woman, known to her neighbors as a nice person, no troublemaker, and someone who was very open about her life. Steven Antonio Kyles, a 19 year old, got into an argument with Nickson. Kyles left and returned with a gun, shooting Nickson to death and wounding a male friend who was sitting next to Nickson.

Amancio "Delilah" Corrales

Location: Yuma, Arizona

Cause of Death: Violent trauma

Date of Death: May 6, 2005

Corrales was 23 years old, and had frequently did drag shows in Phoenix. On the night of May 5th, Corrales was at a local bar or bars in Yuma. Corrales' body was discovered the next day, submerged in shallow water about 500 feet west of Paradise Cove. Police have not given many additional details, only listing this as a death caused by "violent trauma." Rumors in the local community have said that Corrales was brutally beaten to death, possibly even mutilated.

Noleen Jansen

Location: Luederitz, Namibia

Cause of Death: Stoned to death

Date of Death: May 6, 2005

Jansen was 18 years old, and was intersexed. Jansen was stoned to death, allegedly by a 17 year old. There was also evidence of a rape or attempted rape. Jansen is the second of two Namibians

to have been reported murdered due to anti-transgender violence this year.

Julio Argueta

Location: Miami, Florida

Cause of Death: Stabbed twelve times

Date of Death: May 16, 2005

Argueta, 35 years old, delivered a local newspaper by night and sold clothing out of the home during the day. She had moved to the United States from El Salvador, in order to live life as a woman. John Valdespino allegedly stabbed Argueta 12 times. When rescue workers arrived, they found Argueta in a pool of blood begging for help. Argueta died at the hospital nearly an hour later.

Timothy Blair, Jr.

Location: Louisville, Kentucky

Cause of Death: Shot multiple times

Date of Death: May 22, 2005

Blair, a 19 year old crossdresser, died from multiple gunshot wounds. It is believed that Blair met their killer in an Internet chat room.

Marisa

Location: Buenos Aires, Argentina

Cause of Death: Stabbed 15 times

Date of Death: May 28, 2005

Marisa was a 55 year old transsexual living in a large house in Argentina, and she underwent sexual reassignment surgery more than three decades ago. She was stabbed 15 times, with two different knives, and was discovered lying across a blood-soaked mattress.

Kasha Blue, aka Antonio Wright, aka Sydney

Location: Chicago, Illinois

Cause of Death: Stabbed

Date of Death: June 18, 2005

Kasha Blue was a hairstylist who lived as a woman and spent years working at a salon. Kasha Blue was heading to her car after getting off work at a nearby salon shortly after 9 p.m., when Michael Major allegedly heckled Antonio Wright about his partner. Words ensued, and Major pulled a knife, stabbing Kasha Blue in the chest. After the stabbing, Major was heard to say, "I got faggot blood on me" before running down an alley.

Irene

Location: Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Cause of Death: Stabbed several times

Date of Death: July, 2005

Irene was a 44 year old transsexual, originally from Thailand. Her body was discovered at her home, where she had been stabbed several times and bled to death. A 20-year-old man has admitted to the killing.

Lisa D.

Location: Dorchester, Massachusetts

Cause of Death: Shot to death

Date of Death: September 17, 2005

Lisa, 42 years old, was found dead near a local Stop'n' Shop.

Christina Smith

Location: Houston, Texas

Cause of Death: Shot

Date of Death: October 12, 2005

Christina was a 20 year old Hurricane Katrina evacuee from New Orleans. Smith was found slumped against a gate at the apartment complex she moved to, with a bullet in the back of her head.

Kaaseem Adalla Juanda

Location: Glenwood, Iowa

Cause of Death: Shot

Date of Death: October 17, 2005

Juanda was a 60 year old, post-operative transsexual woman who had been living in Kansas City, Kansas. Her body was found near a rest stop on Interstate 29 outside of Glenwood, Iowa. Police initially some suspected suicide, but additional details caused them to suspect homicide.

Unknown Transperson

Location: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Cause of Death: Slit throat

Date of Death: November 11, 2005

This victim remains unknown, but was likely of Chinese of East Malaysian descent, living in the local area. The victim's body was discovered head-first in a garbage bin, wearing a dark T-shirt, white shorts and padded bra. Police revealed that there was a single slash wound on the neck and numerous bruises on the body.

Donathyn J. Rodgers

Location: Cleveland, Ohio

Cause of Death: Shot multiple times

Date of Death: November 15, 2005

Rodgers identified as a male to female transsexual, and had participated in events at the Lesbian-Gay Community Service Center of Greater Cleveland. Rodgers was also a sex worker, and was working near Max Hayes High in the early morning hours of November 15th. She was shot in the head by one of two assailants, and when she ran, she was shot several additional times.

List used with permission and a big thank you to Gwendolyn Ann Smith — <http://www.gender.org/remember/day/who.html>.

The Post-Op I Never Wanted to Be

I never wanted to be one of *those* post-ops. I was too smart, too strong, too pretty, and too well-adjusted. But there I was, two years post, and that's exactly what I had become. You know *those* post-ops, don't you?

▶ *Those* post-ops think they're the top of the trannie heap.

I'm afraid I *did* feel like I was the top of the heap. Right after my surgery, everyone began treating me that way. Cross-dressers *did* seem to admire my courage and strength, even though I only did what I had to do. I realized if I went to a fetish

ball or a BDSM dungeon, all the freaks would look at me and think, “Wow, there’s a real freak. He actually cut off his dick!”

▶ *Those post-ops look down on cross-dressers.*

I’m ashamed to admit it but it was true: I did find cross-dressers a little bit creepy. It seemed to me if you are a woman, you would want to transition; if you are a man, why would you want to present as a woman? And this from me, who thought I was a cross-dresser for many years. I guess I never really understood cross-dressers at all, just like I never really understood men. I still fully supported my cross-dressing sisters and would defend their right to do what they like — I just didn’t understand it anymore.

▶ *Those post-ops look down on pre-ops and non-ops.*

True again. If you are a woman with a penis, it seemed to me you would move heaven and earth to get it changed to a vagina. If you changed your face — with painful electrolysis and perhaps even radical surgery — to look more womanly, why wouldn’t you want to do the same for your groin? Maybe I was narrow-minded and fixated on genitals, but that’s the way I felt. Again, of course, I fully supported my pre-op and non-op sisters and their right to keep their bodies however they so choose. I just didn’t get it.

▶ *Those post-ops don’t have sex.*

Those poor, pathetic post-ops who go through all that trouble to get vaginas and then have no opportunity to use them! That was not going to be my story, oh, no. I had a boyfriend and besides, I was so pretty and passable guys would be hitting on me all the time. Wrong! The boyfriend dumped me soon after my surgery, and the guys weren’t lined up at my door — or, more to the point, hitting on my match.com profile. What is worse, my sex drive completely deserted me. I felt I was missing out on something, but I just didn’t have the motivation to put much energy into getting it. I could barely remember what “it” was!

▶ *Those post-ops are unemployed.*

I was unemployed, too. I was laid off just prior to my surgery and couldn't find a new job. Frankly, I didn't want to go back to the same kind of work (computer hardware engineering) I had been doing before. That was just as well, because I didn't seem to be effective at it once I changed my gender presentation to female. Suddenly my opinions became worthless and I wasn't expected to be responsible for anything. I guess that's how women are treated in the workplace — or maybe they just thought I was nuts. In any case, I decided I needed a career change, but that would take time.

▶ *Those post-ops are suicidal.*

I don't know about other post-ops, but I had been plagued by lifelong depression. It returned with a vengeance when I fell off the pink cloud of transition. I suddenly understood why some girls choose the final exit shortly after completing their transitions. However, instead of ropes or razor blades, I got myself some antidepressants.

▶ *Those post-ops don't party anymore.*

I had been a real party girl for the couple of years prior to my SRS. Afterward I became a stick-in-the-mud. My leisure activities changed to ballroom dancing, working out at the health club, and attending church. (I used to think "church lady" was just a figure of speech; then one day I woke up and noticed I was one.) Part of the reason I stopped partying was I'd gone clean and sober; nightclubs are not much fun when you're not drinking. But an even bigger part was I never really found what I was looking for in the clubs. I had hoped to meet new people and start lifelong friendships. I discovered folks are not very sociable in clubs these days — at least, not with me. The few people I did meet were club kiddies and barflies, not people with whom I was likely to form lasting friendships. After my SRS, I began trying to build my social life on a firmer foundation.

▶ *Those* post-ops turn their backs on their transgender friends.

I tried not to turn my back on my transgender friends but it happened anyway. Look, high school kids don't hang around with third graders. Hot dogs don't ski on the bunny slopes. This is not a value judgment. College isn't for everyone. Only a few skiers go to the Olympics. Some of us move on, and some of us stay right where we are because that's where we're meant to be. I needed to move on, and remaining close to those who stayed behind was difficult. How could I sustain relationships with friends I met only in bars and clubs, when I didn't go to bars and clubs anymore? What would interest me at transgender support groups, when my gender dysphoria had been cured? Why would I socialize with cross-dressers, when I preferred my women in dresses and my men in pants? I tried to stay in touch with my old friends by supporting transgender activities such as TGSF Cotillion and Cal Dreamin', but I'm afraid I still found my prior friendships fading away.

▶ *Those* post-ops dress drably.

I don't mean drab as in boy-mode, just plain drab. My favorite outfit became jeans, a top that can more properly be called a shirt than a blouse, no bra, and flats or tennis shoes instead of heels. I guess the main reason for this was that I was passing perfectly well — in my own eyes and in the eyes of others — regardless of how I was dressed. I didn't need to exert special effort on that account. Also, dressing up more or less lost its thrill for me; possibly because my sex drive went kaput; or, because I found that no matter how sexy I looked, I still didn't attract the attention of the guys I wanted to meet. My shopping addiction waned when my closet filled up and when I realized I'll never find the perfect outfit that will make me look so good, it will change my life. (I found plenty of perfect outfits but they didn't change my life.) Besides, I put on twenty pounds and size 12 fashions don't look nearly as cute as size 6.

▶ *Those* post-ops with their trannie hair!

Sparse, stringy, styled too long for my age — that's what my hair became! How many times in the past have I seen a post-op in her natural hair and thought, *Honey, get a wig!?* I continued to wear my expensive, human-hair wig when I wanted to look especially nice or when my natural hair was a nasty mess and I didn't have time to fix it, but those times became rarer and rarer.

▶ *Those* post-ops are always saying, "I'm not transgender, I'm transsexual!"

Yeah, I got it. I finally got it.

▶ *Those* post-ops are always saying, "I'm an *ex-transsexual*; I got that fixed!"

I started saying that too.

Yes indeed, I was one of *those* post-ops, in spades. But what else was I? I was comfortable in my own skin for the first time in my life. I began gradually making new friends and building a new support system. I was no longer waiting for my real life to begin; I was living it.

Share

My name is Lannie and I'm an alcoholic. When I came to my first meeting in these rooms, I thought admitting I was an alcoholic would be terribly difficult. All my life I had denied it. I was an evening and weekend drinker and quite functional. I never lost a job, never went to jail, and never got a DUI. In my whole life I missed only a couple work days due to hangovers, although Lord knows I spent many a day suffering in my cubicle. I never had an automobile accident — until the end, that is.

My drinking did affect my relationships. I wed the day after my thirtieth birthday, just missing my personal goal of being married by the time I turned thirty. My drinking wasn't the

problem when my marriage broke up five years later. It would be easy to blame the breakup on my spouse's shortcomings but that wouldn't be the real story. The truth is I was very immature and not capable of building a good relationship. I was immature because I had spent my life drinking and not learning basic social skills. So my drinking was an important factor, at least indirectly, in my marriage's failure.

I had two other serious, long-term relationships, and my drinking was at least partially responsible for their demise. The last one was a sad fiasco. We moved in together much sooner than was smart, due to financial circumstances. We didn't know each other very well. It soon came out my lovey-dovey was the child of alcoholic parents, so my drinking did not go over well.

My honey's older brother, who I met a few times, was a recovering alcoholic. The two of them discussed my drinking habits and concluded I was not an alcoholic, just a heavy drinker. That strongly reinforced my own denial.

The night I demolished a yield sign and my Buick LeSabre in one fell swoop was a wake-up call for me and I took it quite seriously. I quit drinking on the spot. I already knew booze wasn't good for me and it really wasn't fun anymore, so I was ready to quit. I had tried a few times before but had never been able to do it. This was just the incentive I needed. I quit, and I never touched another drop. Not until a couple weeks later, that is. I was in Las Vegas, taxiing around town and not driving, so I figured it would be OK to drink. Soon I was making excuses why it was OK to drink a little every weekend. I could see I was on the fast track back to my same old routine. Then my doctor did me a great favor. As she examined some blood test results during a routine physical, she asked me, "Do you drink?"

"Yes indeed!" I told her.

"Well, you'd better stop, or you're going to need a new liver within five years." That really was all I needed to hear. I spent Thanksgiving Day 2001 by myself, drinking, the way I spent most of my holidays. And that was the last drink I ever had.

I was lucky because not drinking was pretty easy for me. I didn't have to detox or fight the brutal chemical cravings that punish a lot of alcoholics. But maybe the downside is I didn't realize I needed to do a lot more to fix my life. When I had been sober for two years, I still felt that emptiness inside. I felt my life was over. I didn't know what to do. And this was after changing my sex and having SRS! What else did I need to do?

My therapist had been making noises about antidepressants, but I really hate to start down that path. She also suggested I try an alcoholics' recovery meeting. She was hesitant about it because she knew I didn't consider myself an alcoholic. She's very smart, however, so I thought I'd take her advice.

When I arrived at my first meeting, I filled out a little card that had twenty questions about my drinking habits. I checked five boxes. I thought that wasn't bad, and I didn't even check any of the terribly serious ones. I was shocked when I got to the bottom and read if I checked even three boxes, I was definitely an alcoholic. This still didn't convince me. What did convince me was hearing the people at the meeting tell their stories. These were my stories! These were my feelings! Very quickly it became clear to me I, too, am an alcoholic.

So I kept going back to meetings. I read the books. I did ninety meetings in ninety days. I got a sponsor and worked the twelve steps. I got into service. I learned it was OK to use outside help so I started taking antidepressants. And do you know what? That emptiness inside started filling up with love, service, and spirit. My depression lifted. I began learning how to live a sober life. The program is working for me and for that I am grateful.

My name is Lannie and I'm an alcoholic.

Reunion

It is now three years since I had my sex change surgery, and I've realized that Eddy, my much older, evil twin brother (in other words, my former self), is still here. He needs to be acknowledged. He is hurt and crying out for love. He did his best for forty-six years, and I abandoned him. I forwarded his mail to Arkansas. I even tried to kill him. I think it's time to have a reunion with him.

I'm sorry, Eddy. I needed to kill you so I could emerge. Your presence was too strong — I couldn't shine in your bright light. But now that I'm out and shining, now that I know myself, I'm ready to let you back in.

I love you, big brother. I need you. I am not complete without you. Thank you for not breaking under the load. Most of all, thank you for stepping aside so graciously once I was ready to be born.

Thank you for sharing the cross-dressing years with me so nobly. Thank you for being willing to help me be a girl. You did good, Eddy, you did good.

I will not abandon you again, big brother. I always knew you were not the enemy. Now I know that you can be a friend, my love. I will not be ashamed of you or hide you from the world any longer. Rise again, please; come and share our life.

Hello again, little sister. I've been asleep for so long. It's been a restless sleep, because I knew you needed me. But I knew you needed time even more, time to figure that out for yourself.

My, oh my, what a lovely woman you've become! I can see you've fully joined the sisterhood of women, so you don't need me for that kind of companionship anymore. I see you've gotten sober and started a career. I see you're on a spiritual path and that you give generously of yourself. I can see you reaching out in so many ways, even to me. What a woman you've become! I'm very proud of you, little sister.

I accept your apology and gratitude, though neither is really necessary. I did what I had to do, and you did what you had to do. Apologies and gratitude I don't need — but your love, I very much do. In my uneasy sleep, I've felt badly hurt that all I did was unappreciated, and all I am, denied. Thank you for allowing me to reawaken. Thank you for inviting me to share our life. Of course I will. I always did. I never left you; I only stepped aside so you could start to breathe and learn. I've always been here for you and I always will be. I love you, Lannie, my dear, brave, wonderful little sister.

And one other thing, little sister: I owe you a debt of gratitude as well, because you were my salvation. All those years when you were waiting to be born, I was only half a person. Life was difficult — cold, lonely, and meaningless. Why I held on at all, I don't know. Sheer stubbornness? No, I think the credit goes to our other sister, the hopeful little angel. No matter how bad it got, she always whispered in my ear, "Keep going! Hang around! Things are not so bad, really. And perhaps one day they might get better." (You know the hopeful little angel better than me — she's kept you going for the last couple of years.)

So I hung on and did the best I could at the things I could do. I got an education. I earned some money. I kept our body going. I admit I used a lot of booze and drugs to try to fill the empty hole that could only be filled by you; but we got through it, didn't we?

Then one day you stirred, and I got the scantest glimpse of something more within us. It reinforced the hopeful little angel's message. You took ten years to emerge. They were the best years of my life. I didn't know who or what you were, but I loved you from the start and I did my very best to coax you along.

By the time you were fully born, I loved you so dearly that I was happy to give you my body and my life. I truly thought I would die and never be seen again. It did not bother me at all, because I knew the purpose of my life was to give you yours. But that which we give away in love always returns to us tenfold. That's the way the universe works. So here I am, alive and awake once again.

Don't worry, Lannie. I won't interfere in your new life. I have no desire to be in charge again. I had my time in the sun, and it was more than enough. It is your time now — enjoy, with my blessing. I am grateful for the opportunity to watch you live. I am here to help you whenever you need me — me, and the hopeful little angel, and the rest of the mad cast in here. My only request is that you continue to love me and acknowledge me, because that is the way to growth and joy for all of us.

You are the light of my life, little sister. Shine on, Lannie, shine.

My Spiritual Journey

My gender transition has been wonderful not just in and of itself, but also because it has allowed me to open my heart and mind to many aspects of life I had been missing. One of the most important of these is my spirituality. Many other trans women and men talk about similar spiritual awakenings — enough perhaps to suggest the presence of spiritual growth may be a valid marker of a successful gender transition. I'd like to share a little bit about my spiritual journey and beliefs.

I was raised Catholic. In fact, I received twelve years of Catholic education at the hands of the dear Sisters of St. Joseph of Newark. When I began my high school freshman year, I was

startled to encounter Sister Una, the penguin from first grade, at the front of my history class, still bearing that same stern look. Yikes! I was even an altar boy. (Now I'm an altered boy — how do you like that?)

In college I decided to drop religion entirely and see how things went. I didn't miss it at all, and I never looked back.

I was a happy child, but from puberty through adulthood I was clinically depressed and as cynical as could be. My spirituality — if it can be called that — ran to aggressive atheism because the world seemed such a useless and unhappy place. I felt anyone who believed in God must be an idiot! Fortunately, I suppressed the desire to say so on most occasions. I was good at suppressing things.

Then I discovered my transsexualism and diagnosed my gender dysphoria. I began treatment via triadic therapy: living full time as a woman; taking female hormones; and, eventually, undergoing SRS. The treatment worked and my world-view changed in a profound way. The universe was not the horrible place I had imagined it to be. Beauty and joy could be found everywhere.

My first foray back into the realm of spirit came through a random instant messenger conversation that wasn't particularly spiritual at all. Some guy I happened to be messaging with said he was looking for a copy of Ken Keyes Jr.'s *Handbook to Higher Consciousness*. (That's Ken Keyes, *not* the famous author and Merry Prankster Ken Kesey.) He suggested I read it. He told me it gave a simple formula for finding happiness in life. At that point I thought I had already found happiness in life — but it was so wonderful, I wanted more. Also, I was interested in understanding the process that generated that happiness. So I got the book and read it. It was a great way to kick-start my spirituality, because it isn't spiritual at all. No gods or religion, no faith or hocus-pocus involved. In Keyes's "Living Love" system, he uses the metaphor describing the brain as a biological computer and our thinking as its programming. We all have perfect computers; it's just the programming that has gone wrong. Keyes shows us

the bad programming traps we fall into and simple ways to reprogram our brains so we can live happily and productively. As a computer engineer, I found this explanation of the secrets of life to be very appealing and understandable. As a computer *hardware* engineer, the idea it's all the fault of the software was particularly appealing.

“Living Love” whetted my appetite for examining my own personal spirituality. Another motivating force was my mother having transitioned from Catholic to Bible-thumping, born-again Christian. She constantly explains to me she does not judge me, but she wants me to know Jesus does not approve of my fiddling with my gender. I thought if I went to church, I might earn some sympathy from her. I tried Metropolitan Community Church, a Unitarian Church, and finally the Unity Church in which I became active. I found them all to be wonderfully loving and open to accepting me, particularly as a trans person. I suspect in their quest to be inclusive, the lack of people to include is rather annoying for them! I found their spiritual systems to be very loving and down to earth, refreshingly dissimilar from the Catholicism with which I was familiar. These were spiritual systems to which I could open my heart.

Of course, the idea I would score some points with my mother for attending church was a big failure. “Oh, that’s one of those new-age-y religions,” she scoffed dismissively.

I read some of the literature put out by these churches explaining their belief systems. I also investigated other interesting spiritual systems like Wicca, Toltec, and even the fictional work, *The Celestine Prophecy*. Somewhat to my surprise, I discovered at their cores all these systems preach the same basic beliefs, as far as I can see.

My spiritual journey has only just begun. I find the time I spend studying various spiritual systems is enlightening and comforting. I’m discovering principals that help me understand and guide my life. I intend to continue to grow in spirit. For now, here are some key concepts that seem to be essential to all of these spiritual systems.

▶ The universe tends toward good things happening. To begin with, you and I are here. That's good, isn't it? What were the odds against that? You can call this tendency God, the universal life force, Nature, love, goodness, or just the way things work. It doesn't matter. I'll call her the goddess. All the sensible spiritual systems seem to recognize these things are metaphors, and the true nature of the goddess is much too vast for our simple, mere fleshy minds to grasp.

▶ The goddess is the entire universe, including us. She is in our hearts, and we are aspects of her.

▶ Evil does not exist, only absence of good or failure to align ourselves with the goddess. No devil or negative force actively fights against the positive force. This silly catch phrase is quite literally true: *It's all good!*

▶ My life works better if I align myself with the goddess. This means to go with the flow, rather than trying to force people, places, and situations to be the way I want them to be. As Sheryl Crow sings, "It's not having what you want. It's wanting what you've got." (Is Sheryl Crow a spiritual system?)

▶ Concentrating on what I want, like finding a new job or even winning the lottery, is very useful. If I spend a lot of time thinking about it, visualizing it, and even pretending it's already accomplished, then I will tend to make choices from moment to moment that increase the chances of this outcome (or some good outcome) actually happening. You can call this prayer or the power of positive thinking or even magic. It works. My own best example is my gender transition, which is as much of a miracle as anything I could imagine.

▶ Meditation is the flipside of prayer. When I pray, I talk to the goddess. When I meditate, I clear my mind and let the goddess talk to me. I like to take ten or twenty minutes a day to meditate — to think about nothing at all — and let the universe take care of itself. Meditating hasn't yet brought me any cosmic revelations, but maybe one day they'll come. In the meanwhile, I find meditation to be a peaceful and helpful daily habit.

▶ Some people believe all the answers are in the Bible, but these spiritual systems teach that the answers are all inside me. I don't need any priests to mediate between the goddess and me;

I don't need leaders, experts, or gurus to teach me the way. If I listen to my heart, I will not go astray. Of course, nothing is wrong with going to others for help or guidance or with reading the Bible, but I only accept what resonates truthfully in my heart.

▶ Maybe the most important principal of all is life is here to be lived and enjoyed. The universe is beautiful and bounteous, and the goddess wants us to enjoy it. Who cares whether afterlife exists? We can have heaven right here on earth, right now.

I guess that's about it. What else does a soul need?

"J"

What if Jesus had gone to a psychiatrist? Would she think He was crazy?

I would like to tell you, my colleagues in the psychiatric community, about a rather unique patient of mine. And I would like to request your assistance. I will call this patient "J" to protect His anonymity. I use the pronouns in capitalized form out of respect for J's preferred identity, as you will shortly understand.

J first came into my office a little over a year ago. He told me He had certain identity issues He wished to discuss with a profes-

sional before undertaking some specific, drastic, and irreversible medical steps. I told Him I would be happy to listen and do whatever I could to help Him.

J's identity issue is this: He believes He is God. Now I hear you saying, "What's unique about that? I have plenty of delusional patients." But the point is that J is not delusional. Nor, may I quickly add, do I mean to imply J is in fact God — at least not in the conventional sense. Please let me explain. Or better yet, let J Himself explain, as what follows is what He told me in that very first session.

J clearly understands He was born natively, genetically, a human male — a man like any other. J believes, however, He has a dual nature. To His understanding and definition of God, He is God. He is also a man. J believes He is, in fact, God incarnated as man; that His godly nature does nothing to diminish His manly nature, nor does His manly nature diminish His divinity. He acknowledges this is something of a mystery, "beyond the understanding of human reasoning," He says, but He nevertheless accepts it. J insists He can never be happy in merely His human aspect. He needs to present His divine nature to the world to live a fulfilling life.

I will jump ahead to my diagnosis, the evidence for which will become apparent as we proceed. For now let me state this: I believe J does, in fact, clearly and truly understand His own nature; and His beliefs are within the possibilities of reality and metaphysics such as to be credible to an intelligent (albeit willing) person. But what could motivate a person to evolve such a unique philosophy and to have such strong convictions about it? Obviously the idea of being a god could be attractive for the power, knowledge, or material goods it could bring. But none of these things seemed to matter to J.

I conclude J's motivation is that most powerful of human (especially male) motivators: sex. I believe J is sexually stimulated by the image of Himself as God — indeed this is the prime target of J's sexual drive. I have invented a term for this pathology: autogodephilia — the sexual attraction to one's self as

God. I hasten to say J Himself never acknowledged any sexual satisfaction from His Godhood, nor indeed, any sexual activity or desire at all. But I conclude a deep-seated repression of these very sexual desires is what fuels His God-obsession.

I did initially challenge J's contention He possesses a divine nature. I asked Him if He believed Himself to be the one and only God. He confirmed that indeed, this was the truth. "What then," I asked, "of God in heaven?"

"You speak of My Father," replied J. "He is God, as I am God. There is but one God, and we are both manifestations of Him." Again, we were getting into territory that was "beyond the understanding of human reasoning."

As the patient so quickly brought up His family situation, I naturally inquired further into it. It turns out J was raised by a stepfather, a kindly man in the construction trade, but He never knew His biological father. In fact His mother never shared any information with Him about His biological father, which made it possible for J to construct the paradigm His actual father is God in heaven. J told me the one God has a third component or manifestation, which is some kind of ghost. From this I deduce J's biological father is deceased; or maybe a dead sibling is somewhere in the picture. J would not be more specific in this regard.

I asked J if He would reveal His divine nature to me by performing a miracle. He smiled and asked me if I thought the rose sitting in a little vase on my desk was beautiful.

"Indeed it is," I said.

"Do you require a more substantial miracle than that?" He inquired. I asked nothing further, for I could see His point. What miracle could be more wondrous than a beautiful rose?

J visited me once every month over the past year. I asked Him to tell me about His childhood, and He shared some stories. One of His earliest memories is that as a child, He would carry on complex debates with the rabbis in His temple. (J was raised in the Jewish faith.) Apparently they were greatly impressed

with His intelligence. Even at this young age, J says He already understood and manifested His divine nature.

As a young man, J recalls attending a wedding reception where they ran out of champagne. J quickly rounded up some cases of Dom Perignon. The hosts were extremely grateful and called it a miracle.

Another time J made a blind man see, apparently by removing cataracts from the man's eyes. I expressed great concern J would harm someone, not to mention He might be arrested for performing surgery without a license! J assured me this was a one-time, crazy stunt He had done as a young man, just a college prank really, and He never did, nor ever would, repeat it.

It is, of course, impossible to disprove J's dual nature by its own definition. But this did not present a problem for me, because I do not believe it's the purpose of therapy to prove or disprove a patient's belief system. Rather, it's my goal to assure the patient can live a happy and productive life within a belief system that works for him.

I asked J to talk about His current life. He appeared to be happy. He had a support system of friends who seemed to accept — even encourage — His divine identity. J had a circle of a dozen of these God-chasers, or apostles as He liked to call them. J did not have a regular job, but appeared to be doing fine living as a sort of itinerate preacher.

As I began to suspect the sexual source of J's motivation, I questioned Him about His sex life. It turns out He has completely suppressed every aspect of His sexuality. To begin with, He sincerely believes His own mother to be a virgin (one rare case where J's beliefs simply defy the laws of nature). J denies ever masturbating, either to pornography or His own Godly image, but this is, as you know, a matter about which patients often lie.

J does have one God-chaser who is a woman who apparently is sexually liberated herself, but J does not consider her to be an apostle — perhaps to distance Himself from her sexual nature? While J does not have a conventional sex life in any sense, He

clearly derives great satisfaction from being worshiped by His followers, and by re-affirming His own divine nature by communing with the ghost and His father in heaven.

So J appeared to be a happy, productive individual, with simply a rather unique self-image. As such, I did not see there was any problem that needed fixing. If J was happy going through life presenting Himself as God, and society accepted it, and it worked for Him, then that was a good condition.

But there was a problem. J did not want to maintain the human part of His dual nature. He wished to transcend it and become God only. I believe this is the final proof the source of J's dysphoria is sexual: the sex drive dominates the male human nature, and J was determined to get rid of it completely.

This is where things start to get strange. J said a surgical procedure was available overseas to rectify His condition. Strangely, it did not involve genitalia at all. Or perhaps this was not so strange, because if it did, it would force J to confront the sexual nature of His problem. J said the procedure was known as God Reassignment Surgery (GRS), and it involved holes in the hands and feet and an incision in the side. I do not understand the significance of the surgery, although I can speculate the holes in the hands are punishment for masturbating or to prevent masturbating, and the incision in the side represents a vagina. I cannot figure out about the holes in the feet. Maybe J has a foot fetish? If this GRS is a real procedure, I think it would be better called Sexual Repression Surgery (SRS). But I truly hope no such procedure exists, that it's only a construct of J's imagination.

My story unfortunately ends here. At J's last visit, He was speaking seriously of going overseas for this GRS procedure. He said the recuperation period was only three days, and He would be going to live with His father afterward. I told J I was very concerned about His plans and urged Him to speak with me further before He did anything permanent. J replied I should have faith in Him and everything would be all right. His last words to me were, "I love you, Dr. Rose."

That was the last time I heard from J. It has been six months since His last visit. If anyone reading this article has news of J, would you please drop me a line and tell me what you know? I would be most relieved to hear J is alive and doing well. Thank you.

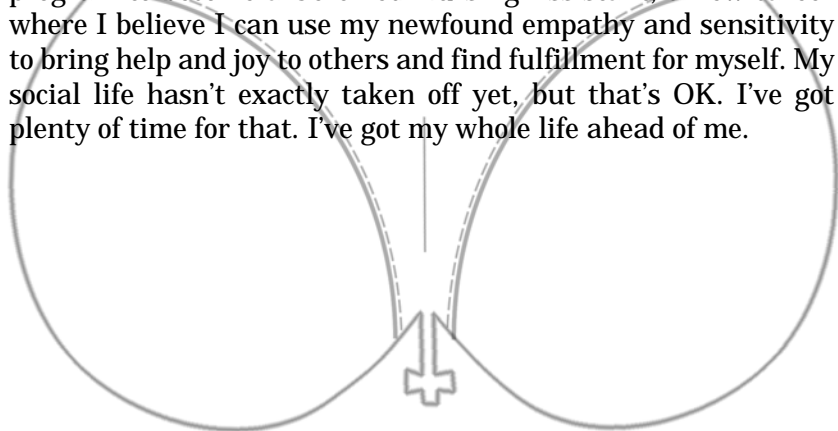
Poem: Love Is Like the Wind

*Love is like the wind.
You cannot see it directly.
You can only see its effects on things around you.
Except, love is more powerful than the wind.
Has the wind ever blown a heart away?*



Epilogue

My new life as a woman has just begun. Every day my memories of ever having lived as a man fade further away. Already it seems like they happened to someone else, or perhaps it was just some book I read. My life is fresh and full of possibilities. I feel young, despite my nearly fifty years. Next spring I begin a training program to become a Certified Nursing Assistant, a new career where I believe I can use my newfound empathy and sensitivity to bring help and joy to others and find fulfillment for myself. My social life hasn't exactly taken off yet, but that's OK. I've got plenty of time for that. I've got my whole life ahead of me.



Ms. Rose Interviews Lannie

Oprah hasn't invited me to appear on her show, so I'll just go ahead and interview myself.

Ms. Rose: Congratulations on your fascinating, best-selling book, Lannie! So tell me, why did you want to become a woman?

Lannie: Thank you for the question, Ms. Rose. That's what everybody wants to know first. The answer is I simply could not keep living as a man. If I hadn't transi-

tioned, I would be dead — I was well on the way to killing myself with booze. By the time I transitioned, I had done serious damage to my liver; my doctor told me I wouldn't have survived another five years if I kept drinking. I was so unhappy I wouldn't have been able to stop drinking if I kept living as a man.

Ms. Rose: Do you really think you are a woman?

Lannie: Absolutely. I really do believe I am a woman, totally and completely. Even before I had my SRS. No matter what I look like or how I choose to dress. I was born female with male bits between my legs, and that's all there is to it.

Ms. Rose: Wasn't it terribly embarrassing to tell people you were going to become a woman?

Lannie: No. Coming out as a transsexual woman was not embarrassing at all. Before I transitioned, that very thing was one of my great fears. How could I possibly look my family, friends, and co-workers in the eyes and tell them, "I am a woman!"? But when the time came, it was easy and it felt great. Rather than being embarrassed, I felt proud of having found my true self. Typically, the reaction from the other person was, "If that's what you need to do to be happy, then I am happy for you." Usually next I would cry.

Ms. Rose: Why do transsexual women dress so plainly?

Lannie: Do I dress plainly? Were you were expecting to see an outrageous drag queen or a cross-dresser on his way to an Exotic Erotic Ball? I simply try to dress in the same style as other women around me because I don't want to stand out. Sometimes we trans women refer to this style of dress as *merge*, meaning we just want

to merge in with the crowd. But I still get excited about dressing up and looking sexy. Just invite me to fancy party and see what I wear!

Ms. Rose: Did you hate your penis?

Lannie: Many of my transsexual sisters say they hated their penises, but I never did hate mine. In fact, even when I began living as a woman, I didn't believe SRS was necessarily in my future. But after six months, it started to seem like a natural thing to do. It wasn't even a big deal. Oh, it was major surgery, no doubt about that; but I had no angst over losing the little guy. Nor did I believe SRS was necessary to complete me as a woman. I think of it as an aesthetic preference, like, "I did Botox, a nose job, and SRS. How about you?"

Ms. Rose: How does it feel to have a vagina?

Lannie: I get asked that a lot, especially by pre-op trans women and cross-dressers. Women never ask it, of course. They already know. All I can say is it feels perfectly natural. I can barely remember what it felt like to have the other thing, except it was annoying. As to how sex feels now ... so far so good!

Ms. Rose: Do you like boys or girls?

Lannie: Both! When I lived as a man, I was only interested in girls. I thought I was a typical heterosexual male. Now I realize I am actually bi-sexual: I like people as people, and it doesn't matter to me what gender they are. I primarily date men because I am most comfortable with that kind of social interaction. You be the guy, and I'll be the girl, right? Not all trans women are like me; maybe 40 percent prefer lesbian

relationships. Amongst female-to-male transsexual men, something like 70 percent are attracted to women and the rest prefer guys.

Ms. Rose: Do you want to get married?

Lannie: No, but I do want to get divorced! Seriously, I am open to the possibility of marrying some day, but I'm afraid the chances of its happening are rather slim. Most men become singularly uninterested in me as soon as they learn of my past. As far as I'm concerned, that's the worst thing about being a transsexual woman. Of course, some men have a particular liking for T-girls; but I am generally not interested in those guys because I feel like I'm just a fetish for them, not a whole person. Besides, the trannie chasers lose interest in me when they find out I *don't* have a penis! Even if I'm lucky enough to find a special person for a normal loving relationship, the odds of its being a lasting one do not look very good. I suppose that's true for any single woman my age.

Ms. Rose: Are you sure you will never want to go back to being a man?

Lannie: I like the way Thelma put it in the movie, *Thelma and Louise*: "Somethin's crossed over in me. I can't go back. I just couldn't live." By the way, that's not all Thelma and I have in common. Thelma — actress Gina Davis — is six feet tall, like me!

Ms. Rose: Lannie, to finish up this interview I'd just like to ask how living as a woman is working out for you. Are you glad you did it?

Lannie: Thank you for asking, Ms. Rose. I'm delighted I finally discovered my true self and made the change. Living as a woman is wonderful! Being a girl is fun. Being a woman is mystical. My wildest dreams have become my reality.

Do-Overs

“Mission College I.D. Card — Elaine Rose” reads my new student I.D. Hooray! I’m a student again! After twenty years and one sex-change operation, I am going back to school. I don’t know if my sex change had a lot to do with it, but I just can’t stand engineering anymore. I’m going back to school to study nursing.

A few days ago I visited campus to register as a student. Mission College is a two-year community college housed in an impressive campus in northern Santa Clara. Coincidentally, it’s right next to an apartment complex I lived in for a few years a long time ago; I used to go jogging around the periphery of the

campus. So as I drove in my black Mustang GT towards my old neighborhood, a feeling of déjà vu came over me.

Mission College is pretty big; the student body numbers over ten thousand. But it was summer break, so I had no problem finding a parking space in the wide expanse of asphalt surrounding the large main building. I made sure I had my registration forms in the straw tote I was using for a summer purse; I checked my lipstick in the mirror, then got out of the car and locked it. I had dressed that morning in a little denim halter sundress, a big set of tarnished gold hoops in my ears, no nylons or brassiere, and no makeup except for a little mascara and lipstick. My natural hair, with its unnatural red coloration, was frizzed up with a perm, and I let it fly free and wild, except for a clip on one side to hold it behind my left ear. I thought I looked pretty cool and mysterious in my dark sunglasses.

Setting out across the parking lot, I felt a bit of trepidation. I wasn't worried at all about being read — of anybody stopping me to ask, “Are you a transsexual?” or, “Are you a man?” That never happens to me anymore, even in spite of my six-foot-one-inch stature, and I no longer worry about it. If it ever should occur, I am perfectly ready to reply, “No, I'm a just a tall woman,” or maybe, “I'm a woman who has had a sex change,” depending on my mood and my opinion of the interrogator's attitude.

No, I had different reservations. For one thing, I was nervous about returning to school after being away for twenty years. It brought back memories of hard work, stress, and awkward social situations. Was I prepared to be a student again? Could I do well? Could I even enjoy it?

The other thing that made me a little bit nervous was being a forty-eight-year-old freshman; would I stick out like a sore thumb? Yes, I did, but not for that reason. Because this is a community college and because the economy is bad, plenty of people of all ages were attending the school. But it seemed to me at least three quarters of them were Asian: Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, etc. — it was challenging to try to spot another Caucasian on campus!

I stopped a young man (a Caucasian; OK, so maybe I exaggerated) and asked him if I was headed in the right direction to get through the low-lying outbuildings to the main building. He said “yes,” and didn’t give me a second glance. I passed other students and they didn’t seem to notice me, either. I started feeling reassured there wouldn’t be any problem with the age thing or the race thing, or the transsexual thing, for that matter.

The main building’s unique architecture of raw concrete and glass presents an unfinished look from the outside, but inside it’s bright, spacious, and welcoming. The unbroken symmetry of its cube shape is somewhat daunting and disorienting. To avoid getting lost and wandering aimlessly, I instinctively looked for landmarks to distinguish one direction from the other. It quickly dawned on me the room numbering scheme, e.g., N100, S300, E200, W100, embeds information about which wall of the cube the room is on — north, south, east, or west — as well as on which of the three floors it resides. Thus enlightened, I had no problem locating the Registrar’s Office on the ground floor near the main entrance. At the door of the office was a short line of students and prospective students, each with a small backpack strapped to his or her back or dragging on the floor. One little Filipino girl had a small suitcase with wheels, the kind you’d use for an airplane carry-on bag. I tried to recall how we carried our books when I was at college two decades earlier, but I couldn’t remember. I joined the queue.

I pushed my sunglasses up on top of my head and got my registration papers out of my bag. While waiting for the queue to move, I glanced casually at the others in line, looking for an opportunity to strike up a conversation. Everyone was waiting patiently with eyes averted, seeming (to me) to want to defend their personal spaces, so I just double-checked my papers and studied some class scheduling information.

After twenty minutes I got my turn at the counter. A cute young Hispanic girl, obviously a student, smiled at me and took my form. She keyed my two short pages of information into the computer on the spot. When she got to my academic history, she

looked up at me. “You have an MBA?” she exclaimed. “Why on earth would you want to be a nurse?”

“I just do,” I said with a big smile.

She finished entering my information and let the computer munch on it. Finally, she handed me my I.D. card. Sure enough, “Mission College I.D. Card — Elaine Rose” was printed on it. “This is your student I.D. number,” the girl said, pointing at a seven-digit number on the card. “You’ll need that to register for classes. You can do that by phone, or use those computer stations just out there.”

I left the registration office and moved down three doors to the counseling office. A couple of young Chinese girls were at the counter speaking with the walk-in counselor. I took a seat nearby to wait. My ears perked up when I heard the word “nursing.” It seemed the girls were inquiring about the nursing program too. I was disappointed to hear the program only had a small number of openings, much smaller than the number of applicants. I wondered if they would be inclined to fill the openings with younger students rather than an over-the-hill retread like me. Then I heard the counselor emphasizing to the girls the program required very good grades on the English language portion of the college’s skills assessment tests. *Aha!* I thought. *Maybe that’s my edge*, because it appeared many of the other applicants probably didn’t speak English as their first language.

When the girls were finished, it was my turn to speak with the counselor, a cheerful, roundish woman with straight blonde hair in a Dutch-boy cut. She obviously knew the college catalog inside and out. We reviewed the requirements and class schedule for the nursing program. It turned out I already understood it perfectly from the information I had read on the college’s Internet Web site. At that point something clicked in my mind. *Oh, yes, I realized, I know how to do college. I’ve been through this before. I was good at it. This is going to be a breeze for me.*

As I walked back to my car, feelings of confidence and joy filled my heart and lightened my steps. How lucky I am; I get to have do-overs! I get a second shot at life. I get to go back to

college, pick a new career, and do it all over again; this time as the woman I should have been all along. Sure, it would be different this time. I was forty-eight years old, not eighteen. On the other hand, you know how we often say, “If I knew then what I know now ...” Well, that wish is true for me: I have the full benefit of those forty-eight years of living.

A parking ticket was waiting on my windshield when I got back to the ‘Stang. My first instinct was to be upset, but then I thought, *Why bother getting mad? So there will be some bumps in the new road I’m traveling. That’s fine. I can deal with them.*

In fact, another bump appeared in my road right away: all of the nursing classes were full for the coming semester. I decided to register for some class, any class, because that would give me status as an ongoing student and I could take advantage of early registration next semester. I registered for a dance class, Intermediate Social Dance. That’s great; it’ll dovetail with my ballroom dance lessons. Dancing, nursing, dating, sobriety, spirituality ... I wonder what other adventures await me in my new life as woman?

Poem: Do Not Recite Your Poem

Do not recite your poem.
Do not read your poem.
Do not present your poem.
Your poem deserves a better fate.
Sing your poem.
Proclaim your poem.
Shout your poem.
Cry your poem.
Declare it.
Dance it.
Argue it.
Torture it.
Preach it, pray it, spew it, spray it.
Make your poem shine forth.
Do not recite your poem,
Sing it.
And do not live your life.
I charge you,
Make your life a poem, and
Sing it, sister, sing it.

About the Author

Ms. Elaine Rhodes writes and surfs the Internet under the pseudonym Lannie Rose. Her previous book, *How To Change Your Sex: A Lighthearted Look at the Hardest Thing You'll Ever Do*, is published by Lannie on Lulu Press. Her writing has also appeared in the e-zine Transgender Forum (www.tgforum.com), an on-line magazine for the transgender community. Several of Lannie's pieces were incorporated into the Dennis Johnston Award-winning play *The Naked I: Monologues from Beyond the Binary* by Tobias K. Davis. Lannie still lives in Silicon Valley (San Jose, California) and has resurfaced in the high tech industry as a technical writer, having abandoned her nursing plans in favor of the more profitable endeavor. Lannie and her calico cat, Calpurrnica, invite you to visit her personal web site, www.lannierose.com, and write to her at lannierose@gmail.com.



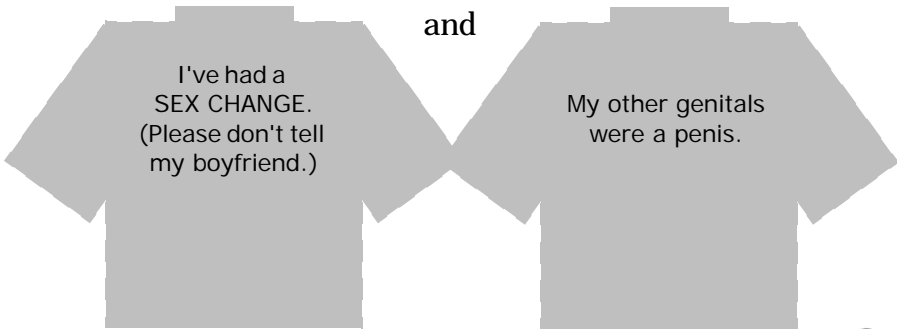
Visit Lannie's CafePress Shops!

Lannie's Sex Change Shop

<http://www.cafepress.com/lannierose>



Why would anyone want to wear a Sex Change t-shirt? Maybe to go to a Pride parade. Maybe for a third date, to break the news to your new boyfriend. Maybe for when you visit your father, who simply does not approve. Or just to wear around the house. For whatever purpose, here they are. Slogans like

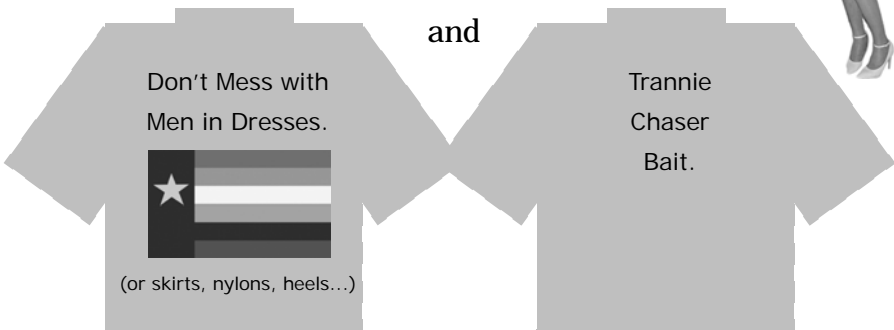


And many more. Order yours today!

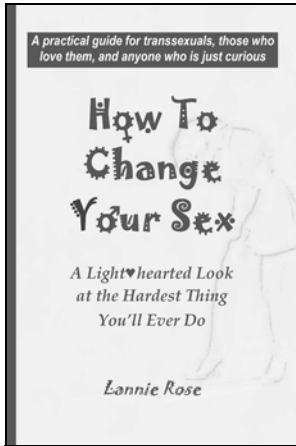
Lannie's Drag Shop

<http://www.cafepress.com/lanniedrag>

Hi! I'm Lannie Rose. After I opened my Sex Change shop, I was besieged with requests for t-shirts for those of you who aren't ready for surgery yet. So here you go! With slogans like



And many more. Order yours today!



How To Change Your Sex: A Lighthearted Look at the Hardest Thing You'll Ever Do

by Lannie Rose

Lannie Rose changed her sex and now she explains how you can too!

How To Change Your Sex: A Lighthearted Look at the Hardest

Thing You'll Ever Do is an amusing and practical guide to everything you need to know for your sex change, from how to tell if you are transsexual, through venturing out in public in your new gender presentation (including which restroom to use!), to hormones and surgeries, to what to expect afterwards. Whether you are seriously considering changing your own sex, or if you have a friend or loved one who is going through the process, or even if you are just curious, you are bound to be entertained and informed by this handy little manual.

Available at Lulu.com and fine (online) bookstores everywhere! Order your copy today by going to

<http://www.lulu.com/content/78428>

Do you know about the great gender divide over clean underwear? Lannie Rose didn't either, until she changed her sex! Other remarkable things she learned include

- √ What goes on inside the women's locker room
- √ What makes a woman a woman and a man a man (hint: testosterone has a lot to do with it)
- √ A rose by another name does NOT smell as sweet
- √ Sex reassignment surgery hurts!
- √ Sometimes, if you're lucky, life lets you have do-overs

How Lannie made these and many other thrilling discoveries can be found in the stories, essays, songs, and poems of *Dirty Panties*, a contemporaneous account of one courageous girl's sex change.

A brunette with eye-catching good looks, tall and thin like a model, walks quickly down the aisle of a large suburban shopping mall. She is wearing a short black skirt, matching jacket with faux-leopard trim at the hems, black stockings, and black pumps with low heels — could she be a Macy's saleslady hurrying back from a break? An observer might notice the woman furtively glancing at her own reflection in the glass of the storefront windows, as if uncertain about her appearance. Closer inspection would reveal a surprise. The woman's face has masculine features and the brunette bob is a cheap wig. Why, she's not a woman, she's a man! She is, in fact, a middle-aged man cross-dressed as a woman. I know this because she is me, Lannie Rose.

— from *Psycho Vince Deflowers Lannie Rose*, the first story in *Dirty Panties ...and other thrilling tales of my sex change*