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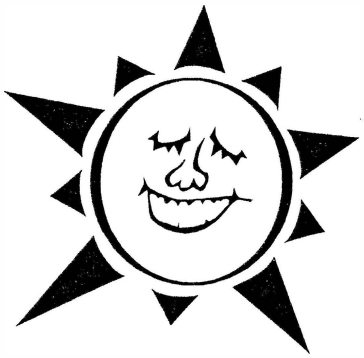
YOUR SOFFA VOICE

Volume 4, Issue 2 June 1st, 2001

Have a great summer!!



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FROM THE EDITOR

Greetings!!

I am very happy to bring you this issue of the newsletter! We have some great stories in this issue.

3 are from Femmes who tell their stories of transition and growth.

As promised, C brings us part 1 of her journey with her guy while they prepare for and achieve lower surgery.

I had also intended to have an interview from Minnie Bruce Pratt, activist and author, in this issue, but it wasn't quite finished, so we'll have to wait for the next issue.

This newsletter not only relies on the support of subscribers, but it absolutely relies on contributors for its very existence. So, a special thanks goes out to Teresa, who has continuously supported this newsletter and shared her writings with us several times!! Yay Teresa!!

Thanks everyone!!

~~Jodi

FEATURED ARTICLE

FEMMES TRANSITION TOO
3 SO's Stories

1. A FEMME'S TRANSITIONS

~~By Elizabeth (Bethie) Bays

While I don't want to make myself sound *too* ancient, I will say that I was born over on the river at "The Baptist" in the early fifties. (For our out of town visitors, "The Baptist" is the Baptist Regional Health Center where my son is now employed as a Critical care nurse.) I was the first born child of a couple, both of whom were firstborn children...and as a result, I was a very outspoken female from the very start, I suppose. From the day I was born, then, I guess I've always spoken my mind...sometimes that works well for me...sometimes it doesn't, but at least I've always had a certain inner peace because of it. Get ready, I'm about to do it again. <smile>

When I came out at the ripe old age of 26 years, I found myself in the Pacific Northwest in what some have called the "liberal mecca of Montana", a moderate sized town in Western Montana - Missoula. The site of the University of Montana, it had much more to offer than the population of 30,000 would imply. It was the service hub for five valleys, and as a result, there were lots of things there that one might not expect in such a small place. There were good restaurants, decent shopping, live music from the West Coast...and...several gay and lesbian organizations including some specifically for lesbians including a majority with a radical feminist bent. Now, remember...this is the late 70s.

Having come from a background that included being the daughter of a battering victim fatally injured in the final episode of what I still consider a 13year hate crime, the feminist path was one I adopted easily. I absolutely inhaled the writings of the day from Susan Brownmiller to Sheri Hite to Mary Daly. I had truly come home in the sense that I was able to garner a lot of strength from these women and their view of a world that had been none too kind to a little girl from East Tennessee. I grew stronger in body and spirit as a result of my interactions with them, both in print and in real time. There was bustling activity within the women's movement, and I very much wanted to be a part of that in any way I could...and I was.

But...and this is a big "but"...having emerged from a heterosexual marriage, I found that I was suspect from day one. While it is somewhat understandable seeing things as I do now from a totally different perspective, it was very difficult to "prove myself" as a lesbian in the beginning. Having never been much of an athlete, more inclined to music and the textile arts, I found myself the object of doubt by both friends and lovers. They were just sure I was going back to the "straight life" at anytime...and so...with great determination, I set out to prove them wrong.

I took a good look in the mirror and asked myself what I saw. I did indeed see a traditionally feminine biologically female person. Apparently, this was *not* the sort of person who in their opinion was a lesbian...so...I looked at those I had met in the community...and it didn't take me long to see the differences...and there were many. Gradually, my wardrobe became the androgynous attire that was the order of the day...jeans, flannel shirts, down jackets, hiking boots. All makeup was discarded, and my long, curly hair was shorn to a fashionable politically-correct length of about 1". Dyke Beth was born! There was an immediate reaction to the change in my appearance...suddenly I was visible! Suddenly, I didn't have to make long explanations about who my last lover was or where I came out...I was simply accepted as a dyke! I was in heaven!

Of course, they *still* liked my skills in the kitchen... that was one traditional activity I was encouraged to continue. <smile> Yes, I'll never forget it...I snagged my first lover with homemade egg rolls!

Then, after two years of settling into a new lifestyle, disaster struck. My ex-husband abducted my two young children and ran to Florida from Montana leaving me distraught and terrified. But, after many frantic phone calls, he was finally convinced to meet here in Knoxville to live at opposite ends of the same apartment complex sot hat we could co-parent the kids...and so...I packed up all my things in a U-Haul, towed by a Subaru Brat occupied by two lesbians and two dogs...and we made our way to the Tennessee Valley, my homeland.

We arrived on December 15, 1980. Not too long after that, we went to a party in West Knoxville. It was certainly different from the politically charged climate in the Missoula community. But, I was in for a real surprise the first time we went to the bar...one of two in town at the time - The Carousel. (By the way, I forgot to mention, that in Missoula the nearest gay bar was six HOURS away over a terrible mountain pass in Spokane, Washington.) So, I was hardly prepared for the scenario that greeted me the first New Year's Eve I spent in Knoxville at the Carousel..what with only having seen a couple of drag queens in my entire life and *never* having seen the penultimate sight for sore eyes...their counterparts...the drag kings!

Well, after swooning a while, I began to notice that these drag kings went 'round with girls...girls in dresses, girls in high heels...girls like the girl I had been all my life until

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Cont. from pg. 2

the PC police of the Missoula community had gotten hold of me. I was enthralled...I was relieved...I was looking at women who *looked like ME*!!!! I was simply amazed...and slowly as the full realization of what I was seeing dawned on me...something happened...something for which I am now very grateful...from that first night when I saw the Volunteer Kings, four good-lookin' butches on stage in their tuxedos...I was determined that from that day forward I was going to be true to myself...in every way possible. The closet door was flung wide open for this femme girl!

And I'll tell you what...I never looked back. My lover was absolutely appalled, of course. I swear, I think she thought there was something sacred and holy about flannel shirts and sandals. Not that there's anything wrong with flannel shirts...my sweetheart wears them all the time...OR sandals...why, honey, I must have fifteen pairs! But, in all seriousness, it was a fork in the road for me. Thank goodness Knoxville was twenty years behind Missoula...let's see...that put us right at circa 1960 When all this happened in December of '80.

Well, a few years passed, and I was really tired of waiting for the next lesbian event. People were still talking about the Meg Christian concert that had happened five years before! Never being one to wait for something to be handed to me, I got to work at something that the feminists in Missoula had taught me quite a bit about – community organizing. First, we had to have something to draw the women...I was a student at the time at UT and used to spend part of my day hanging out at the Women's Center on the second floor of the Carolyn P. Brown Student Center. I was loudly complaining about the lack of lesbian cultural events in this area one day, when the director politely handed me a flier announcing the availability of a comic...a lesbian comic named Kate Clinton! Well, to make along story short, we produced Kate Clinton in the Turnkey Centeron Summitt Dr. not too awfully long after that. We had a great turnout with about 300 women packed into that building. It was wonderful!

So, with that in my back pocket, I waited just a little while...then with the mailing list from the defunct East Tennessee Alliance of Lesbian Activists (ETALA - a splinter group from NOW in the late 70s), I began a telephone campaign. I was on the phone for a week, calling every queer woman I could find. Every spare moment was spent asking one simple question: if there were a lesbian organization here locally would you be interested in participating? I got a powerful YES from nearly everyone I spoke with. Shortly after, we had the first meeting of the Mountain Womyn's Coalition in the Phyliss Wheatley YWCA in East Knoxville. 100 women showed up for the first meeting! That Organization was in existence for seven years and served it's members well while it lasted.

Fast forward through the years...past the sad story of the Europa closed by the World's Fair and a criminal tragedy...past the Factory with its' elevated dance floor and uncomfortable high stools...on to the Point, that bastion of local lesbian her story, the only all women's bar in Knoxville other than it's illustrious predecessor, the Huddle, which was before my time, I'm afraid. It was here that I really experienced the butch-femme bar culture so vividly described in the classic "Stonebutch Blues" by Leslie Feinberg and in "Restricted Country" by Joan Nestle. It was here that I truly came home.

While the particulars will remain somewhat under wraps due to the fact that many of my cohorts are still alive and well here in River City, and not everyone is "out" due to legitimate job, housing, and child custody considerations. Let's just say that when my first relationship ended after nearly nine years, I was at last free to pursue and be pursued by someone who appreciated a "girlie-girl". Believe me, they weren't hard to find. While I'll spare you the details, it was fun to be young, know who you are and where you're going while having the time of your life getting there.

In the meantime, (I really don't want to leave the impression that my life was spent in the bars, because it most decidedly wasn't) I was busy raising two children, completing my degree in nursing at the University of Tennessee, then launching a new career in that field. It was an exciting busy time in my life. As the years crept by, I found myself withdrawing more and more from the community, first for reasons that had to do with work and family, then later because I fell ill with an auto-immune disease that most people have never heard of: Wegener's Granulomatosis. The most difficult part of the disease progression involved a radical loss of vision necessitating 14 eye surgeries, numerous hospitalizations, and treatment with immuno suppressant drugs normally used in organ transplant or cancer treatment. From the depths of severe illness, I made my way back aided by the right combination of medications, medical support, and the kind, gentle person who has now been a part of my life for ten years - LB (or Sam as he is now known.)

But, after years in near total isolation, my social skills were a bit rusty, my courage and self-confidence almost nonexistent, and what with my vision and hearing impairments, I just could not bring myself to venture out into the community. Then I got my first Personal Computer. Then...I learned to use it to get on the Internet. Then...I found the wide world of cyberspace, and I found out that there were queers like me out there! Waddaya know!! I didn't have to leave the house after all to start participating in that world again. I could do it from the privacy and comfort of my own home!

So in the fall of '99, I went online and found a community that is not local, but in my case was regional...a community of folks more nearly like me than even my lesbian sisters were. I discovered the

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online butch-femme community. Boy, talk about feelin' like you just went home! After a couple of false starts having a LOT to do with regional prejudices...I finally found some folks that were butch and femme SOUTHERNERS!!! Imagine that! Some of my closest and best friends came from that source, but once again...the Goddess of Community Organizing beckoned me...with the help of Her Daughter, Hope McCubbin, I've been at it again. This time with older womyn in my age group...and hopefully in the near future there will be a local butch-femme group for those of us who live that dynamic. We have already begun a mailing list that will hopefully soon translate into a real time community.

There are other communities I better understand after Some online study...the transgender community in particular. Even as this community is becoming in some ways my own even more than the butch-femme community is, I am learning and growing in ways that I never thought possible. As the partner to a transitioning FTM, I am now moving forward and becoming an integral part of a community that I barely knew existed just a few years ago. It is an exciting time of change and challenges, but on the arm of my loving partner of ten years, I feel hopeful and encouraged that next year will be even better than those that I have lived before. The knowledge that I am honored to be a part of such a wonderful person's life never ceases to amaze me. I am grateful in many ways for the beautiful unconditional love that I receive every day from Sam, the love of my life.

23 years after that first introduction to the lesbian community, I think I can legitimately say that I feel a case of culture shock coming on whenver I think that I may no longer be seen by others as "lesbian". I was told by my one and only female-id'd lover that I wasn't a lesbian...that really, really hurt at the time because I was trying desperately to hone out an identity for myself...and at the time, I thought my only choices were lesbian, straight, or bisexual. So of those three, I chose lesbian because I was not and am still not open to relationships with bio-males.

While the significant others in my life have been decidedly masculine for the last 19 years, the reality of dealing with transgendered issues only really emerged in my current relationship. I had been warned about LB (Sam) by others for many years. I was told he was "crazy"...why...they said he believed he was a man!!! (Said in horror-stricken hushed tones by some...with sly grins by others.) For some reason, I just didn't *think* about what they meant when they said that. I just shrugged it off because I was involved with someone else at the time...a woman-id'd drag king stonebutch who was really nothing more than a butch gigolo. But the very *real* nature of what they said did come back to me many years later...when Sam handed me literature from the Southern Comfort Conference in atlanta...although we had no money to go, he was saying that this is something he was interested in attending.

And although I was so very sick at the time that I couldn't even walk across the room without assistance...blind and gasping for air...I remembered him telling me about the conference...and the implication was crystal clear to me. So clear that it gave me shivers even as I said, "Honey, I'm sorry, but I'm just too sick to deal with this right now." And he accepted that, poor patient guy that he is. He accepted that for several years.

So, now it is his turn...and even as we emerge from the intense research we have been doing on the Internet since '99 when we first went online, we are stronger as a couple for it. He was able to put his needs second for several years as he helped me gradually struggle back to a level of health that could support the dramatic changes that transition will create in our life together. I am now and will always be grateful to him for being so patient, for not giving up on me, for knowing that when I was *able*, I would give to him...or at least try to give to him a fraction of what he gave to me - support, love, and guidance in making life altering choices. He is the great love of my life, and I am so very fortunate to get to spend my life with him.

I don't know exactly where my journey will lead...no One truly knows that, but as I go into the future with only a dim view of what may lie ahead, I am reassured that I have a rich heritage here in Knoxville...richer than I realized for a very long time.

2. **Laura's Story--So Far**

~~ by Laura J. Maune

I am a femme identified woman. I do not label myself as lesbian or straight, because I have found I am attracted to anyone with a good personality and reasonably good looks. I guess technically that would label me bi-sexual. However, I don't feel comfortable with that label. I guess the best label for me would be all loving.

I wanted to add my voice to "Our SOFFA Voice" mainly due to the fact that in the articles that I have read, I didn't see much focus on the femme dealing with the pre-T, pre-op FTM. I am in this situation and find it has many challenges that I would like for others to know about so that they might find some comfort in the long journey of their lives with an FTM.

Alex and I became a couple in August of 2000. I knew right up front that he was FTM. Due to the fact that I already had a couple of FTM friends, I did not feel totally "freaked out" by this knowledge. Yes, I had my questions as to how this girl, who had been IDing as a lesbian,

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would deal with it all, but I knew I felt a love for Alex I had never felt before and wanted to give the relationship a try.

Since then I have discovered the wonderful person that Alex truly is. I have dealt with many ups and downs in his mood, and I have found true happiness. I have gained so much respect for the individuals who struggle with their gender identity. I feel that these people have been given so much more to deal with in their lives than most of us ever think about.

There have been many a night when I hold Alex while he (and I) cry over the turmoil of dealing with transition. He is afraid of his mother's reaction when he tells her, he is afraid of his job status at the churches he plays for, he is afraid of losing me, he is frustrated because we struggle to meet our monthly bills, nevermind be able to save for top surgery and T. We have long talks of options we have for saving money. We have talks of how much I love him and respect what he is going through. I have to frequently remind him of why I love who he is. We talk of how frustrating it is to live in the town where he grew up, where nearly everyone knows him by his female he grew up with. He is frustrated by the fact that when he accomplishes something with his music, such as writing music for his church choir, that girl he once was gets all the credit. He has stated, "I hate accomplishing things at this stage cause that 'bitch' gets all the credit for it and not me". I think this is one of the statements that gets to me the most, because, as I have told him, I know who the real person is that is writing this music. I tell him to remember that we know who is really doing the work, Alex, not that girl everyone knows him as.

Alex and I talk of being able to move from this town after he has transitioned. With that are many joyful thoughts. Mainly, the thought of being able to totally live as Laura and Alex. But with that are the haunts of the girl that once he was. As he has stated, "I accomplished a lot as 'that girl'. When I went to college, I studied with some big names among organists. What happens when I am at a new location, living as Alex and people ask who I studied with? If they talk to that person, they may say, 'I never taught someone by the name of Alex'." I think this boils down to him being afraid of never being able to leave the 'girl' behind.

Luckily, most of our life can be lived as Alex and Laura, in our own home, with our close friends, with his dad (although he hasn't totally come to grips with his daughter now being a son), with his sister and brother-in-law. I so enjoy the times when Alex gets called he in public. I always share those times with him. I love when Alex and I get to do things together as a guy and a girl. It so warms my heart to know that we are able at these times to live as we both want to be living. It is strange to me, how even though I had been living my past 6 years as a lesbian, I dislike the times when people refer to us/see us as lesbian. I find myself thinking, "can't you see this isn't a girl?!?!".

I have to admit that all of this is VERY trying. However, in the big scheme of things, I think it is all worth it. I love Alex. I love living as a femme with the guy that he is. Yes, he may have "chesticles" (his name for those breast like "things" on his chest). He may physically sort of look like a girl. However, Alex is definitely not a girl. I keep telling him that. I look forward to the day when he believes it, and others in our world see it as well.

3. EVER CHANGING

~~by J.

My experience comes from being out for several years, but always feeling like I was on the outside looking in. As a teen I dated males, but went to my first gay bar when I was 16. Something about seeing the same sex couples together felt right to me. The only problem was...I wasn't attracted to women. The curves and softness didn't turn me on. On the other hand, men didn't turn me on either. Explain that to your mother! Anyway, I just shrugged it all off and assumed that I must be bisexual.

A few years later I met a butch. The butchest butch that *I* had ever met. I ended up marrying her. She was an amateur drag king, wore men's clothes and cologne, and couldn't stand it if she even thought I was looking at her breasts much less touching them. She told me she had talked to a doctor years before about taking testosterone.

I settled into my queer life assuming that I was a lesbian. But why was it that it didn't feel right? Like I wasn't 'really' a member of the club? I was a femme. I liked wearing makeup and dresses. The other lesbians just didn't seem to understand.

After we broke up 7 years later, I found the internet and online support/discussion groups. I discovered that I was attracted to masculinity, just not the kind usually found in biological males. I discovered that I was a 'Femme' in the old school sense of the word. And I became quite proud of that fact. I embraced it. I discovered that I liked dating tg butches, stone butches, and eventually FTM's.

I went through a long process evaluating my ideas about many things. Like what it means to me to be a femme, who I can love, and what gender means to me in terms of myself and the people I love. I discovered that I had many prejudices, unfair ones, against men and against people who didn't fit into my definitions of certain terms. The whole process, for me, has been an evolution of sorts. And it still continues. I learn new things all the time and I find that often I realize once again that I have to open my mind up a little bit more and challenge yet another prejudice or generalization that I hadn't even realized I had before.♥

ANNOUNCEMENTS

~~ENDA T-Shirts

T-shirts are now available in three styles and are 100% cotton:

-- white t-shirt ($16)
-- ash grey (heather) t-shirt ($17)
-- white baby doll tee ($19)

Design #1. "NOT ALL QUEERS ARE TREATED EQUAL BY HRC. Ask them why."
http://www.cafepress.com/tjg_hrc1

Design #2. ""HRC ONLY PROMOTES HUMAN RIGHTS FOR THE PRIVILEGED QUEERS. Ask them why."
http://www.cafepress.com/tjg_hrc2

Design #3. "HRC TELLS PEASANT GENDERQUEERS: ENDA? LET THEM EAT CAKE! Ask them why."
http://www.cafepress.com/tjg_hrc3

Design #4. "HRC SAYS I'M NOT STRAIGHT-LOOKING ENOUGH FOR ENDA. Ask them why."
http://www.cafepress.com/tjg_hrc4

Design #5. "HRC CLAIMS TWENTY POLITICIANS HATE MY GUTS. Ask them why."
http://www.cafepress.com/tjg_hrc5

Design #6. "HRC DEVOURS BREAD LOAF, TELLS TRANNIES TO PICK THE CRUMBS. Ask them why."
http://www.cafepress.com/tjg_hrc6

All styles are available in assorted sizes and each of the six themes found in the "inHRC Pride 2001 campaign posters" PDF file are available. All forms of payment are accepted, including all major credit cards, checks and money orders.

We don't know how many will sell, but if any proceeds are made from the sale of these t-shirts, we would like to donate that profit to an organization committed to working for gender equality in the workplace and elsewhere. If you have ideas of any organizations that could be interested, let us know. We understand that some groups may take to task the HRC policy on this issue, but at the same time must work with them on panels and the like, so if this could cause conflict of interest, that is completely understandable.

Thank you, and thanks to The Juxtaposed Group for hosting our t-shirt idea.

Unity in Identity

Announcements....continued on pg. 7

The scars on my lover's chest

~~by Teresa M.

The scars on my lover's chest tell a story. It's not a pretty story, just as the scars are not pretty. It's a story of pain, of bravery, of exploration, of discovering who you are and what you have to do to be that person.

The scars on my lover's chest remind me of how our relationship has evolved, for his chest wasn't always this way. Once it held appendages he could not relate to, had to dissociate from until he could have them removed. He didn't let me touch his chest back then. Many times prior to surgery, I looked at my lover in the moonlight while he slept and tried hard to understand why he hated his body so.

The scars on my lover's chest remind me of our eight days in a Portland hotel while his bruised and sutured body healed in preparation for our journey home. I fed him painkillers, changed his dressings, and prayed nothing went wrong. And I wondered how many times this scene would be repeated throughout our relationship.

The scars on my lover's chest tell me how brave he is. Could I do what he's done? Could I risk so much to be who I am inside, when the world says XX and XY tell the whole story? He is the bravest, most courageous person I know. No one chooses to be this way, but the strong do what they must to build a life that is true to themselves, as he has.

The scars on my lover's chest are beginning to fade. They tell me that life is like that, that time does indeed heal. I try to remember this when I'm overwhelmed, that this too shall pass, just as scars fade with time.

The scars on my lover's chest say it's okay to be different, to be yourself. I'm a feminine lesbian. I look straight, but I'm not. I can wear flannel and boots, but I don't look like the handsome dykes in our community and never will. And that's okay. I'm true to who I am, just as my lover's scars show he is true to himself.

The scars on my lover's chest speak of joy, the joy he feels each time he catches his silhouette in a mirror. He is learning to love his body and it's beautiful to watch. It teaches me the importance of being who we are, of feeling joy and pain and learning from it, and not being afraid to risk and to grow.

Scars aren't new to the queer community. Many of us carry physical or emotional scars; many of us are survivors. But the scars on my lover's body are happy scars, rites of passage that we celebrate as a couple and ask our friends to celebrate with us. If scars tell a story, for once, it's a happy story. ♥

Announcements....cont from pg.6

Below taken from the media kit available at: http://www.tgcrossroads.org/pdf/inHRC_signs_for_pride_2001.pdf

Why you need to ask HRC, "Why?"

In time for Pride season 2001 for the U.S., this freely-distributable PDF file is perfectly suited for printing onto flyers, posters, t-shirts and signs - all of which are highly encouraged!

The six different concepts in this document address the ongoing conflict between the whole of the queer community and the "lesbian and gay-friendly" Human Rights Campaign (HRC).

The Employment Non-Discrimination Act, or ENDA, is a legislative bill that, as its central lobbying effort in Washington, D.C., is sponsored by HRC and has been introduced on the floor of the U.S. Congress in every session since 1995.

Unfortunately, while it might seem that the HRC is batting for everyone under the rainbow, ENDA is engineered to eliminate workplace discrimination and harassment against a very narrow and limited definition of sexual orientation, which has consistently excluded any mention of presentation, self-identification or actual or perceived expression of gender.

So, what does this mean to you? Well, should we have ENDA in its current incarnation pass the Legislature and be signed by a president (we're not saying it'll be Bush!), it will probably not help you. Why?

If an employer fires you, regardless of whether you're out in the workplace or not, they can legally do so under the premise that you were not following certain "expectations of gender presentation" in their workplace. While Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act covers sex and gender, like ENDA, it does not cover "gender presentation."

And because Title VII and ENDA don't care if you're a slightly butch lesbian, a somewhat fey gay man or even a straight-acting queer, any HR department in 49 states - except in Minnesota - can legally fire you. Sounds crazy? Like Ginsu, there more: they can even fire you if you're straight, but if you aren't perceived that way by co-workers, your HR department's action is also legal! Imagine that.

HRC actively refuses to alter the language of ENDA for fears that including any words regarding gender will let in all the gender-different, transgendered and transsexual Americans under the ENDA umbrella. It argues that including any mention of gender in ENDA will cost them twenty congressional votes, fearing that people like RuPaul will "kill the bill." Please.

Until the HRC understands how important workplace protection is for everyone in America - queer or straight - they need to know from the community exactly how you really feel.

Surprised? Upset? Angry? Good. Now you know.

Ask your HRC pride booth why.

Announcements....continued on pg. 8

THE JOURNEY...Part 1

~~by C

This is about a journey to Portland, Oregon where my boyfriend had lower surgery, including a complete hysterectomy, vaginectomy and metoidioplasty. Like most journeys, there have been many details to attend to, and a geographical beginning and end. Unlike most journeys, this one continues to be an adventure long after the destination was reached and the purpose realized. This is the story of our physical, emotional and spiritual journey through one phase of this long, strange trip.

This also is not the format for this story I intended to write in. My original thought was to keep a journal throughout this adventure, so that every moment of this event and our personal growth would be recorded. The truth is, I became too protective of myself and of J to share my journal with you. As I reviewed my journal in preparation for this article, I realized that I had edited and distanced myself from the intensity of my feelings because I knew that they would be shared with people I did not know. As a result, parts of my journal are just plain boring. That is not to say that there weren't aspects of this event that weren't boring. Mundane is not a word I would have associated with this experience until I went through the hours and days of waiting. Waiting for planes to take off...waiting for the surgery to happen...waiting for someone from the operating room to tell me what was going on for 8 hours in here...waiting for J to wake up...waiting for J to be coherent...waiting for J to heal...waiting for our lives to resume...waiting for the changes to be evident in our lives...the waiting continues even now.

In retrospect, I can see a parallel between my feelings of being intruded upon and the invasiveness of the surgery itself. Boundaries and walls of intimacy were surmounted and redefined. Roles of caretaker and patient were blurred by our own previous experiences with relationships. Issues of control and surrender were explored. The responsibility that comes with trusting someone else was offered and reciprocated. In order for me to write my account of this experience, I had to realize that this is only my experience; that I am not the voice for everyone who may go through this in the future. Many have written much more eloquently about it , and you will have your own perspective if the future holds this journey for you.

J and I don't live together. We live about 100 miles apart, and even if we lived in the same town, we both agree that we would still not live together. We like it that way, but it is unfamiliar for both of us to have a relationship without physically joining with another under the same roof. This experience presented new challenges for us in how to stay connected emotionally while so far apart geographicaly.

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The trip to Portland presented an opportunity to spend 9 days together and go through something that is transformative. For J this signified the end of too many years of traveling with excess luggage that didn't belong to him. For me, it was a chance to witness the lightening of his load, and getting acquainted with the pieces that have been locked in storage his whole life.

We took great care to express our own fears, expectations and excitement about how the surgery would impact us as individuals as well as our relationship. J was extremely mindful of his health and for months before the surgery committed himself to acupuncture, chiropractic care, herbal supplements, visualization and meditation, and exercise. He felt very strongly that no matter how competent the surgeon, his responsibility as the patient was to be in the best physical and spiritual condition possible. This not only laid to rest some of my worries, but inspired me to adopt an attitude of self care. I knew that I would need greater emotional and spiritual strength to be fully present during the surgery and his recovery. I got massage therapy and cranial sacral therapy once a week to maximize my energy flow. I made sure I took my own dietary supplements and stayed in good physical condition. I talked to people I trusted...I didn't rely just on J to be my main emotional support and confidant. We made art together and talked about it. We made every effort to stay connected on every level....and then about a week before the surgery, we began to distract ourselves from the whole experience.

This was not part of the plan, but it just sort of happened. I threw a party the weekend before we left... a work party that had been postponed because of weather from the previous month. We both had a hectic week at work and preparations for being away from home and our jobs took precedence over the purpose of being out of town. Because we don't live together, we had the luxury of this solitude that seemed so precious at the time. I knew our lives would soon be intertwined in a way that neither of us had ever imagined when we met 6 years ago, and hanging on to "normalcy" was vital for me. After we arrived in Portland, we spent time with an old friend J had who lived out there. We spent time sightseeing in Portland, seeing movies and shopping. There were times when this felt like a regular vacation, and we forgot why we were actually there. I think we were able to do this because we felt as prepared as we would ever be, and were just ready for the actual surgery to happen, so that we could move on to the next phase.

I'll talk about that next phase, the aftermath of the surgery and how we are continuing to take care of ourselves and each other in the next issue....this journey is far from over. ♥

Look for Part 2 in the next issue!

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~~TRANNY FEST

Tranny Fest: Transgender & Transgenre Cinema, in San Francisco, is calling for entries for films and videos. There is no entry fee and our deadline is August 1, 01.

Tranny Fest will be held Mid-November, TBA
Entries must be submitted with our official entry form. 2001 Guidelines and entry form can be downloaded from our website: http://members.aol.com/trannyfest

We are also looking for donations and volunteers. Our volunteer form is also on our website.

Tranny Fest is a weeklong celebration of the sweet complexities of the Transgender experience. Our festival theme this year will be Tranny Fest 2001 "Gender Armageddon!" Trans and fan will participate in our Multi-galaxy of performance, panels and parties ending in a glamorous marathon of "Finger-Snappin, groin-bumpin, tear-jerkin, heartwarming, gut-bustin mix of experimental, documentary, drama & pornographic films!" Our event proudly boasts diversity and an array of cultures. We have as many genres and we do genders. Please come join us.

~~WHEELCHAIR FUND

For additional information, contact:

Bet Power
East Coast Female-to-Male Group (ECFTMG)
P.O. Box 60585
Florence, MA 01062
betpower@yahoo.com

Jean Marie Stine
The LGBT Political Alliance of Western MA
P.O. Box 1244
Northampton, MA 01061
JMStine@aol.com

Trans Community Seeks Donations to Wheelchair Fund Proceeds to Benefit Retiring Leader of American Boyz, Inc.

Northampton, Massachusetts (June 2, 2001) -- The East Coast Female-to-Male Group (ECFTMG) today announced the establishment of The Wheelchair Fund, a financial vehicle developed by members of the transgender community to benefit retiring American Boyz, Inc. (AmBoyz) founder and former coordinator-in-chief Gary Bowen. Bowen, also the founder and former chair of the True Spirit Conference (TSC), lives with disabilities as he continues to serve with AmBoyz and

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TSC on the boards of both organizations. Bowen has also served on the board of directors of other trans organizations including GenderPac (GPAC) and It's Time America (ITA) and is an award-winning author and editor.

"The idea to establish The Wheelchair Fund came in the reply of Jean Marie Stine (of the board of directors of The LBGT Political Alliance of Western Massachusetts) to Gary's email notifying the American Boyz organization of his intent to retire due to difficulties with his health," said Bet Power, founder and director of the East Coast Female-to-Male Group (ECFTMG), who is Administering the Fund. "The Fund is an opportunity for the Transgendered/transsexual, intersexed, genderqueer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, disability rights, and racial rights communities to honor and care for one of our foremost leaders now
--
Gary Bowen -- as he has touched us all and cared for us for so many years through his generous, devoted, and trail-blazing work in fostering a national, multiracial FTM transgender organization."

The cost of the wheelchair and equipment needed is in the three-thousand-dollar range, and the Fund hopes to gather donations quickly through outreach conducted primarily over the Internet and through group email lists. Funds are needed immediately and those wishing to contribute should send their check by postal mail endorsed to The Wheelchair Fund at: ECFTMG, P.O. Box 60585, Florence, MA 01062. Please include a SASE if an acknowledgement of the donation is requested.

About the East Coast Female-to-Male Group (ECFTMG)

ECFTMG is a free peer support group since 1992 for all female-to-male (FTM) transgenders, transsexuals, crossdressers, stone butches, genderqueer, and questioning individuals of all sexual orientations, races, classes, and Spiritualities, and our> significant others. The group is all-inclusive, safe, and nonjudgmental and meets the second Sunday of every month at 3:00 p.m. in Northampton, Massachusetts. ECFTMG believes that our diverse situations can be joined together in united trans community. It is this community that ECFTMG builds and for this community that ECFTMG exists. ECFTMG, P.O. Box 60585, Florence, MA 01062.

About American Boyz, Inc.

The American Boyz (AmBoyz) is an organization which aims to support people who were labeled female at birth but who feel that is not an accurate or complete description of who they are (FTMs) and their significant others, friends, families, and allies (SOFFAs). American Boyz, Inc., 212A S. Bridge St., #131, Elkton, MD 21921.

About The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Political Alliance of Western Massachusetts

The LGBT Political Alliance of Western Massachusetts is a PAC working in support of the region's and the state's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender population. The LBGT Political Alliance of Western MA, P.O. Box 1244, Northampton, MA 01061.

~~NEW HEALTH ZINE

May 15, 2001 - Trans-Health.com (http://www.trans-health.com) is looking for Submissions for its premiere issue (release date to be announced) of a quarterly online magazine of health and fitness for transsexual and transgendered people. The kinds of material we're looking for are:

* Profiles or interviews (with photos) of transsexual and transgendered people who are amateur or professional athletes, or who have dedicated themselves to becoming fit and healthy, or who are active in a sport or physical activity
* Scholarly or layperson-oriented articles on some aspect of general health or physical fitness in trans people
* Scholarly articles on some specific aspect of the health of trans people
* Layperson-oriented articles for trans people on a subject related to general health or physical fitness
* Brief news articles on trans-inclusive sporting or fitness events or regular activities
* Scholarly articles (preferably accessible to laypeople) on the subjects of: transpeople and aging, transpeople and the medical community, hormone (legal or illegal) use by transpeople
* Layperson-oriented how-tos on exercise programs for transpeople
* Literature reviews of works related to transpeople, health, and fitness
* Exercise, sports, and fitness articles on mainstream topics which include information aimed at transsexual and transgendered participants
* Scholarly articles on the intersections of bodybuilding, body modification, gender performance and identity, women's sports, the image of the sports figure, the sexualizing or de-eroticizing of transgendered and transsexual bodies, or related subjects
* Photograph and visual artwork portraying transsexual and transgender subjects in physical activities, and accompanying profiles or interviews

We're also looking for regular contributors for quarterly columns on topics such as:
* Fitness and health safety and tips for trans people
* Advice on dealing with locker room issues and gym

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culture
* Transsexuality and the aging process, elderly transgendered and transsexual people's issues

We are looking for individuals in as many geographical locations as possible to report to us any local items of interest on a regular basis for inclusion in Trans-Health.

The primary target audience of this magazine is transgendered and transsexual-identified people. Secondary audiences include medical and mental health professionals, the GLB community, and SOFFAs.

Trans-Health encourages submissions by queer people, genderqueer people, people of color, people of all ages, abilites, and negative statuses, people of all cultures, faiths, countries of origin, classes, and ethnicities. Due to editorial limitations, at this time Trans-Health can only consider English-language submissions.

For consideration of inclusion in the first or subsequent issues of Trans-Health, please email your completed article, outline, summary, or developed idea to submissions@trans-health.com by June 5, 2001. If you are interested in being a local reporter, please let us know your geographical location and submit a sample news brief (approximately 20-50 words). Please note that Trans-Health is unable at this time to pay for submissions. We request only the rights to publish the article on the website, where it will be accessible through archives. All other rights remain with the artist or writer.

Trans-Health.com
http://www.trans-health.com

~~ GenderBenderRevue IV

You're invited to join Gender MOSAIC Q&A for

GenderBenderRevue IV:
GENERATIONS OF GENDER

Saturday, October 6, 2001 at 7 pm
University of Michigan
Piedmont Commons
(North Campus)
Ann Arbor, Michigan
FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

GenderBenderRevue, an evening of performances celebrating gender diversity, is the premiere event sponsored by Gender MOSAIC Q&A, a UM student organization for transgender,

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SOFFA RESOURCES

~~EMAIL LISTS

➢ Support

FTMSOS – for any type of SO of FTMs, regardless of background, gender, or sexual orientation. For more information, go to: www.egroups.com/FTMSOS

Nytecafe – a list for straight-identified wives/lovers/girlfriends of FTMs. Send email to: Nyteflyer1@aol.com or go to: www.egroups.com/Nytecafe

Trannyfags – a list for gay-identified FTM/SOs. To join, go to www.queernet.org and search for trannyfags.

Transgenderedcouples is a list for TG people in relationships where all partners are transgendered and dealing with gender issues.
www.egroups.com/transgenderdcouples

Transensualfem is an email list for femmes who are primarily attracted to tgbutches and/or FTMS. To join, go to www.queernet.org and search for transensualfem.

➢ Dating/social

FTM_Dating is a list designed as a place where FTMs both gay, straight and bisexual can meet people (TG and non-TG) who are attracted to or open to the idea of dating or being a partner to an FTM.
www.egroups.com/ftm_dating

TG_leather is a list focused on FTMs and their SOFFA's who are active in the leather/BDSM/fetish community.
www.egroups.com/tg_leather

FTM_n_WWLT is an email list for FTMs and the women, who prefer their company ---and who are interested/concerned with today's FTM issues.
www.egroups.com/FTM_n_WWLT

~~SOFFA WEBSIGHTS

SOFFAUSA is a resource websight for SOFFAs of any type of TG person. Go to:
www.aol.com/SOFFAUSA/index.html

FTMSOFAQ is a dedicated to answering all those questions about being a SOFFA of a transman. Go to:
http://members.xoom.com/ftmsofaq/
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FTM_Personals

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transsexual, and genderqueer people, other members of the gender community, our friends and allies.

GenderBenderRevue IV: GENERATIONS OF GENDER is the kickoff event for theUM campus's National Coming Out Week, and is specially themed to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the University of Michigan Office of Lesbian Gay Bisexual & Transgender Affairs. The show will be presented in cabaret style, and will feature performers from the UM community as well as throughout the Southeast Michigan region. A special presentation of trans/gender/queer art will also be on display in the Piedmont Commons throughout the weeks of October 1-14, 2001, to coincide with the Revue.

If you are interested in attending, or perhaps in performing, or simply want more information, please contact genderbenderproductions@usa.com or call the UM Office of Lesbian Gay Bisexual & Transgender Affairs at (734)763-4186.

~~SEEKING SUBMISSIONS

FTM International is seeking SOFFA's to submit columns for publication in our regular SOFFA column. Please send submissions and inquires to: PO Box 34500, Phila. PA 19101 or write: FTMImalebox@aol.com.

~~SUBMISSIONS FOR "Your SOFFA VOICE"

If you have a SOFFA-related announcement, please send it via email to SOFFAUSA@yahoo.com.

~~Personal ads

FTM_Personals - FTMs (at any stage of transition) and those who would like to date them (of any gender/orientation) can post a personal ad of any length. SOFFA / future significant others are especially welcome! Discussion focuses on FTMs meeting people, dating, and sex. Photo and ad required to join. Explicit is OK!
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FTM_Personals

~~SUPPORT GROUPS

Support Group for Significant Others, Family, Friends, and Allies [SOFFA's] of Transsexual and Transgender People.

Group focuses on issues that spouses, partners, parents and loved ones cope with when a family member struggles with gender identity issues. Group meets once per month for two hours. For information about fees, times and meeting place, please contact Choices Counseling & Consulting.

arlene istar lev csw-r, casac
choices counseling and consulting
321 washington ave.
albany ny 12206
518.463.9152
<info@choicescounseling.com>
http://www.choicesconsulting.com

American Boyz

American Boyz is a support and social group for people who were born female but who feel that is not a complete or accurate assessment of who they are and our significant others, friends, family, and allies (SOFFAs). Our membership includes Butches, FTMs, Transmen, FTV's, Gender Outlaws, Transexals, Drag Kings, Boychicks, She-Bears, Shapeshifters, Tomboys, Passing Women, Amazons, Intersexuals, Female Guys, Boss Girls, Transgenderists, Sirs, and our SOFFAs. We provide education, support, social events, newsletters, online forums, local meetings, political action, and a national conference.

To learn more about The American Boyz, send email to *amboyz@iximd.com* or check out the websight at http://office.iximd.com/mailman

Or send SASE to: The American Boyz, 212A S. Bridge St., Suite 131, Elkton, MD, 21922 FAX: 410-620-2024

On Gender....

Remember, If they only give you 2 choices, they are lying to you!!