

# 'I had the wrong soul in the wrong body'



■ JUDY COUSINS in former years as a sculptor. "I was like an actor acting his part."

■ JUDY COUSINS, sculptress, today. "I am a very, very happy woman."

## WOMEN OF THE TIMES

Edited by Nicola Gannon

**A**T 67 Judy Cousins is an attractive bright-eyed woman with a shock of silver-grey curls that simply bounce as she throws back her head with infectious laughter.

It is easy to imagine that 45 years ago this pretty woman would have been the apple of many a war-weary soldier's eye, a lassie every homesick lieutenant would have loved to come home to.

Forty-five years ago however Judy Cousins was far from being a pin-up girl of the forces. Trained at RMA Sandhurst she was a major in the army. What is more she was a man.

Hard as it is to imagine this elegant rather gentle natured woman was a member of the Indian Army and later the Royal Artillery, it is true.

Judy Cousins was one of the brave men who risked life and limb to fight for the peace of a war torn country. As tough as they made them she fought in India and later after the 1939-1945 war she fought in Korea.

Until just 14 years ago Judy Cousins was in her own words, a fully fledged heterosexual male. She was a married man with children. She enjoyed family life at home. She enjoyed jokes and drinks with the lads at the pub.

The only difference between her and the men with whom she served during her army days was that

she always wanted to be a woman.

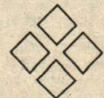
"I was not unhappy as a man," she said, "but I needed to be a woman. I was like an actor acting his part, but wishing he had been cast in a different role."

It was not until 1971 that Judy, now a sculptress changed roles.

Although she cannot remember a time when she did not want to be a woman she was 35 before she realised there was anything she could do about it.

"The first 35 years of my life were difficult enough knowing that I wanted to be a woman but couldn't be," said Judy.

"Then when I learned that medically there was a way of changing sexes the torment became in some ways worse. Knowing there is a road to happiness but not being able to take it easily can be worse than thinking there is no solution to your problem."



Being a married man and a father of three, the decision to change from a man to a woman was not one to be taken lightly.

Consequently it was 1971 before she felt the time was as right as it could ever be to say goodbye to the man she was and start a new life as Judy Cousins.

After months of hormone treatment and electrolysis to remove her beard, she went into a Coventry hospital for an operation that changed her life.

Secretly, without telling anyone, she took a step that required a courage and strength that would rival that of any army.

She went in a torn man, a man who felt he was living a double life, a man who knew he could never be the person he felt he was.

# 'I always knew I wanted to be a woman'

**H**OURS later she emerged from the operation a woman — one woman, lonely maybe, on her own, yes, but happy and content within herself, satisfied that after 53 years of searching she had at last found herself, Judy Cousins, the person nature had almost hidden from her.

"I felt a tremendous sense of relief," she recalled, "it was like a new breath of life sweeping over me. Suddenly I could thoroughly believe in myself. I could accept myself, I was no longer split — I can hardly explain the relief I experienced."

With the relief however came regret. Not regret that she had undergone the "reassignment operation". That had been a decision taken only at the end of years of self-searching and psycho-analysis, but regret at the suffering her family had gone through.

Although now divorced, Judy was married for 28 years. For 28 years she fulfilled the role expected of every husband and family man. With two daughters and one son she could not escape the identity of "daddy". As far as she can remember she was a father in every way to her children.

But her identity as daddy made her sex change all the more difficult to break to her family.

"I never confided in my wife that I wanted to be a woman. I couldn't have done. It is too strange a concept for anyone but the person concerned to understand," she continued.

"During my married years I used to dress as a woman whenever possible but my family never found out."

"Because I was in the army for 22 years I was away a lot due to work. Consequently I was able to slip away to London for occasional weekends without them knowing and live for a while as a woman."

"I would book into a hotel as a man and then change into female clothes and live for the weekend as a woman — it was my way of letting off steam, it was my only outlet."

"When I eventually went to have the operation I just disappeared literally overnight. I walked out of my business, North of Inverness, one Saturday and was never seen again as a man."

"I moved down to Coventry to start a new life as a new person. I had to have some time on my own before I could face my family with the truth."

of their father, they readily came to terms with Judy Cousins who now neither mother nor father is their parent.

"My wife has now remarried," explained Judy. "It was more difficult for her. Only in very exceptional circumstances do couples ever stay together and start a new life more or less as sisters."

"My two daughters lapped the whole thing up though. To them and to my son I am

just me, a parent and a person."

Looking back Judy can offer no firm explanation why, though physically she was born a man, in every other way she needed to be a woman.

"My own theory being a believer in reincarnation is that I had the wrong soul in the wrong body," she continued.

"A more popular theory is that when the egg is fertilised and the foetus begins to grow it always starts off as female."

"Then something happens to determine its sex. If it is going to be a male it first takes on a male identity in a



JUDY in Army days

physical way and then some time afterwards the brain also becomes male.

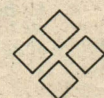
"The theory is that in trans-sexuals the brain does not change."

**W**HATEVER the reason Judy knows that the outcome can make life hell.

From the moment a person knows he or she is a trans-sexual to the day they undergo the sex reassignment operation can often be a long lonely time.

Before even joining a waiting list for the operation the person has to see GPs, and attend gender identity clinics. In the case of a man wanting to become a woman he must spend almost two years having his beard removed through electrolysis before he begins the role changing process with hormone treatment.

He must also live as a woman for at least a year before being recommended for surgery and then there can still be a three year waiting list for an operation.



"It is sheer hell," said Judy, "sheer hell that is except for the fact that now at least we have SHAFT."

SHAFT is the Self Help Association for Trans-sexuals founded by Judy some five years ago.

Its aims are information, friendship and contact for trans-sexuals.

"Many trans-sexuals are very shy people," said Judy "It helps a lot of them to be able to talk to someone who has experienced the same problems that they are going through and who understands."

When Judy first decided she wanted to help other trans-sexuals she joined the Samaritans. That was three or four years after her own sex reassignment operation.

She quickly realised that there was a need in society for a group aimed solely at trans-sexuals.

"Everybody was bone ignorant about trans-sexuals. There was a lot of educating which needed to be done and there was an obvious need for an association for trans-sexuals to belong to and to be able to turn to."

SHAFT started off as a body of 60 people. Five years later its latest recruit nationally is its 690th.

With many trans-sexuals only keeping up their membership while ever they need SHAFT the association has a fluctuating membership of around 300.

As well as offering help, support and advice to trans-sexuals, SHAFT is a campaigning body.

**J**UDY explained that one of the things SHAFT was trying to do at the moment was to help change the legal position of trans-sexuals in this country.

"A trans-sexual is accepted as his or her new identity in every way apart from on the birth certificate. And because a birth certificate has to be produced before a person can marry trans-sexuals cannot marry."

"A lot of countries are changing the law over this and at the moment the matter is going before the European courts which should bring things to a head."

For herself Judy does not see marriage as a possibility in the near future.

"I am quite happy with my women friends and anyway I don't know of anyone who is planning to marry me," she laughed.

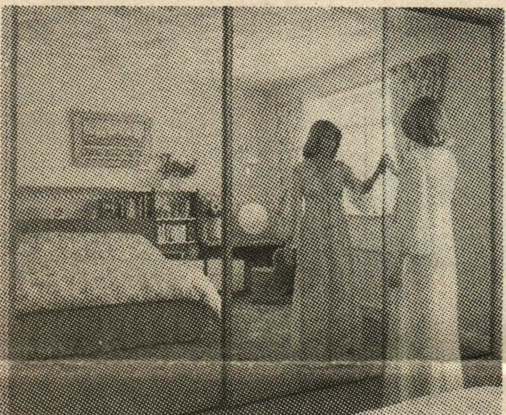
But she would like to think that marriage will be an option open to trans-sexuals in the future.

"I really regret that I was not able to have the reassignment operation when I was younger," she said. "I do envy young trans-sexuals today when I see them undergoing the operation and it is for these people that we must try and build a future."

"I am very very happy as a woman and I hope that anything that can be achieved to complete the happiness of tomorrow's trans-sexuals will be done."

Anyone who would like more information about SHAFT should telephone 01-228 5750.

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