BRANDON TEENA WAS A WOMAN WHO LIVED AND LOVED AS A MAN.

LOVE HURTS

SHE WAS KILLED FOR CARRYING IT OFF.

BY DONNA MINKOWITZ

They say Brandon was the best boyfriend they ever dated. Clockwi from left: Reanna Allen, Daphne Gugat, Lindsay Classen, and Gina Bartu, who was engaged to Brando for three months.

FALLS CITY, NEBRASKA—"We are on loan in this world," Father Paul Witt tells 200 mourners at St. Mary's Church, the toniest Catholic congregation in Lincoln. "Our goal is to get to heaven," the priest continues, as teen mourners alternately fidget and cry. But every eulogy, even for a youngster, must offer a word or two about the specific human being who has left this world. "She was a very confused young lady," Father Witt says, gesturing toward the coffin in which lies a 21-year-old on whose face bruises from a gun blast are still visible.

The *Lincoln Journal* reported that the deceased was "buried in men's clothing, wearing her favorite cowboy shirt and black cowboy hat." But a day later, a Brandon relative will prod the paper to print a correction stating that the corpse had, in fact, sported "a black-and-white striped shirt purchased in the women's section of a local store." The woman christened Teena Brandon caused even greater consternation when she reversed her own first and last names three years ago. "Keep the faith," Witt encourages her survivors, "even though you have encountered something that doesn't seem to make any sense." It is unclear whether he's referring to Brandon's murder or her penchant for adopting a male persona and dating women.

Last November, Brandon Teena blitzed into Falls City, a dusty farming community in the southern tip of the state, asking to be introduced to the most attractive women in town—even leafing through a new friend's phone book and requesting that she point out the best-looking girls so Brandon could invite them to "his" birthday party.

Two days after Brandon arrived in Falls City, every teenage and young adult woman in town was after this pool player with the jawline of a Kennedy, who could often be seen in a White Sox jacket and slicked-back hair. To the girls he fancied, Brandon brought perfume, roses, and teddy bears, as well as the cards and love poems other boyfriends were too crude—or repressed—to send. Sometimes he'd call a limousine to take a girl to work, or, with Elvis-esque extravagance, give a woman his entire paycheck. When it came to making out, Brandon was rated heavenly, and unlike most boys, he never pressured women for sex. (One of his favorite songs was "Shoop," in which women rappers Salt-n-Pepa instruct men to "get your lips wet.")

Every former girlfriend the *Voice* talked to says Brandon was the best boyfriend they had ever dated: the most alluring suitor and certainly the best lover. No wonder that, both in Falls City and back home in Lincoln, where Brandon had also passed as male, girls were always hanging on his arm. "But when she saw Lana Tisdel," swooned the *Chicago Tribune*, "Brandon focused exclusively on her."

After they spotted each other at the Kwik Shop, Brandon asked Lana, the most glamorous 19-year-old in this economically depressed town of 5000, out on dates to Hardee's and the movies (where they saw *Addams Family Values*), and they fell in love in about two weeks. "Brandon was nicer and looked better than any boy I'd ever been with," says Lana, a cool, shy, and soigné blond who met him one evening when she was singing karaoke country-western songs at the Oasis, Falls City's only nightclub. "With a lot of guys around here, it don't matter what the woman wants, but Brandon wouldn't tell a woman to do anything—he asked. He knew how a girl liked to be treated."

Even after Brandon's true gender became known—when she'd been jailed on check-forging charges in late December—I stood by her, not an easy thing to do town where gossip is the major form recreation. Later, Lana would dare to the press that Brandon had been "a g kisser" and that "he was my sweetheart still is." Even after people had begun to Lana a lesbian, Brandon's favorite wer far as to use a blank check her father given her for a perm to secure the $ needed to bail Brandon out of jail.

Two of Lana's male friends were less giving. She recounts how John Lotter, a year-old ex-boyfriend of Lana's, and buddy Tom Nissen, 21, pulled Brand pants down in public at a Christmas party and told Lana they would hold lover down until she looked at the fe genitals Brandon had tried to conceal f them all. "I covered my eyes. I didn't w to look." But in the end, Lana did; e

PHOTOGRAPHS BY C.T. WEMPLE

COPY PHOTOGRAPH BY C. T. WEMPLE

Brandon Teena (right), teaching Lana Tisdel to play pool: "He knew how a girl liked to be treated."

seeing Brandon's femaleness was better than beholding her boyfriend in such pain and fright.

Later that night, Nissen and Lotter used an elaborate ruse to separate the two women and drove Brandon outside the city limits, where, police say, they each raped her twice and beat her till there were boot-shaped bruises on her back and her face was dripping blood. Then, Brandon told police, the men took her back to Nissen's house, locked her in the bathroom, and told her to take a shower. She escaped out the bathroom window and reported the rape immediately. The two men were taken in for questioning and then released, even though a policeman who interviewed Brandon at the time noted that her mouth and face were badly injured, and a hospital test determined she had recently experienced vaginal penetration. "When Brandon showed up at our front door, he was wearing no shoes and a T-shirt, holding his ribs and bleeding," Lana's mother says.

Still, no arrests were made because, as Sheriff Charles Laux puts it, "What kind of person was she? The first few times we arrested her she was putting herself off as a guy. We were trying to figure out when she was telling the truth and when she wasn't." (Police have also argued that speedier arrests might have compromised the case. Said Laux's deputy, "You just can't go running out and arrest someone.")

One week later, on New Year's Eve, Nissen and Lotter allegedly shot and stabbed the young gender offender to death, along with two other people who were sleeping in the same house. Finally, the police were convinced they meant to do her harm. Both men have been charged with first-degree murder, sexual assault, and kidnapping. Nissen told police that he drove Lotter to the house and saw his friend put on a pair of gloves, break down the door, and kill the occupants. "I feel like killing someone," Lotter had told Lana a few hours earlier. "He was wearing gloves, and I'd never seen him do that, not even in the dead of winter," she says. According to police, casings and bullets found at the murder scene match a gun Lotter allegedly stole from an acquaintance on the night of the murder. The gun and a folding knife were found on the ice of the frozen Nemaha River, inside a pair of gloves.

All three victims were shot "execution-style," at close range. Lisa Lambert had opened her home to Brandon; Phillip DeVine, a young black man, had been staying with Lisa because he'd had a fight with his girlfriend, Lana's sister Leslie. All three victims were shot in the head, but Brandon was also stabbed.

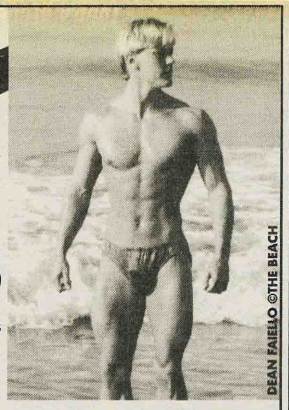
Neither Nissen nor Lotter has yet offered a plea in the case; both, through their lawyers, decline to comment on the charges. But although they won't go on trial for the slayings till next month, Brandon's murder has already provoked controversy. Richardson County Attorney Douglas Merz, antsy over accusations that his office put Brandon in danger by refusing to prosecute the rape while she was still alive, maintains that neither that incident, the murder, nor his office's response to them had anything to do with Brandon's sexual identity. "I don't know what a hate crime is," says Merz. "I don't know if we have laws against hate crimes in Nebraska. You should ask your New York attorneys about that."

Brandon's mother JoAnn is considering a civil suit against Merz and Sheriff Laux for their slowness to act. According to Lana's mother, Linda Gutierres, Laux—pronounced "Lox"—told her, after Brandon had been raped but before she'd been mur-

dered: "You can call *it* 'it,' as far as I' concerned." Brandon's sister, Tammy, say that immediately after the murder, Lau made insinuating remarks to her abo Brandon's sexual identity: "What kind sister did you have?" (Laux declines comment on these accusations.)

Brandon, who splashed on Preferre Stock aftershave every morning—a produ "from the House of Stetson" whose lab says it is "what preferred men prefer"—to many different stories about her own phys cal sex, sexual orientation, and gender ide tity. She told Daphne Gugat and Linds Classen, Lincoln girls she briefly dated, th her breasts were a "deformation fro birth." Gina Bartu, a secretary who live with Brandon for five months and even g engaged to her, was told, "I was born wi both parts, but I'm nothing but a man no I had the operation done in eighth grade, there's nothing to worry about." As tin went on, Gina recalls, "he'd always s there was some part of the operation th

The Beach
LE ON SUNTANNING ENDS MAY 9TH
Four Tanning Sessions
Plus Free Haircut Now $30
Restrictions Apply: NY-NJ Clients Only / 1st Time Clients Only
ean & Low Pressure Beds, Facial Tanning & 5-minute Columns
w! Vitasun High-Pressure Sun Beds
Call About Special Sale Prices
uropean Facials for $50
ard Certified Cosmetologists
Electrolysis, Waxing
Salon Services for Men & Women
112 CHRISTOPHER STREET
(212) 924-8551
10am-10pm Mon-Sat • 12pm-8pm Sun
ALL MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED



DEAN FAIELLO ©THE BEACH

ELECTROLYSIS
ERMANENT HAIR REMOVAL
OR MEN & WOMEN
SPECIAL OFFERS
1ST TIME ONLY
ELECTROLYSIS — $60 1 Hour
BODY BUFFING — $60
SEAWEED WRAP — $60
FACIAL — $40
MANICURE / PEDICURE — $20
MASSAGE — $45
EAR PIERCING — $20
BODY WAXING
BACK — $25
CHEST — $25
LEGS & BIKINI — $35
WHOLE BODY WAX
10AM-10PM Mon-Sat • Closed on Sunday
MALE & FEMALE STAFF
TRANSFORMATION
212-420-1402
6th Ave. 2nd Fl. (Bet. 8th & 9th St.)

The NEW
CHELSEA GYM
7 West 17th Street, cor. 8th Ave., NYC 10011
Tired of working out in one of those "dungeon" basement gyms?
ur NEW workout floors, newly equipped, e above ground with windows to the sky!
Our March Sale gives you an affordable portunity to get ready for the beach, NOW.
Regular Annual Membership: $350 EACH (reg. $499 each)
Off Peak Annual Membership: $250 EACH (reg. $299 each)
Sales on Monthly Memberships!
ll (212) 255-1150 for details. Offer expires 4/30/94
Day Workouts $10

COPY PHOTOGRAPH BY C. T. WEMPLE

Brandon impressing friends at his engagement party: He was worried about being thought of as a weakling.

remains to be done. Later, both of us knew that there was no operation—that he hadn't done anything."

As for Lana, Brandon told her at one point that she was "a hermaphrodite," but later confessed this was untrue: "I was born a girl, I am a girl, but I have all the feelings and intentions of a man." As a teenager, Brandon had attempted suicide and been confined in a psychiatric institution because, she told friends and family at the time, she thought she might be gay.

Brandon's survivors choose their own image of her according to their memories, gender norms, and sexual shame. Relations between the mourners from Lincoln and those from Falls City have become downright vitriolic since the murder. At Nissen and Lotter's March 17 arraignment in Falls City, pandemonium breaks out outside the courtroom: JoAnn and Tammy Brandon heckle Lana's sister Leslie in the middle of her interview with a television reporter. They interrupt just at the point when Leslie, an outspoken 21-year-old in the Job Corps, is defending Brandon's right to use male pronouns, a man's name, and any other masculine accoutrements: "When Brandon died, she was dressed as she wanted to be dressed. She was dressed as a male."

"No, she was not!" JoAnn screams as the cameras frantically turn to include her. "And her name is Teena, not Brandon!"

Leslie isn't fazed: "Well, I got introduced to Brandon as Brandon!"

"That was *her* mistake!" JoAnn sputters. The Lincoln and Falls City camps—led by the Brandons and the Tisdels respectively—symbolize their fight over Brandon by debating the appropriate way to refer to the murder victim: as "Brandon" and "he" or "Teena" and "she." What appears to be under contention is judgment and blame: homophobia is alive and well in both families, and so is guilt over Brandon's fate. After the funeral, two of Brandon's friends followed Lana to a diner and harangued her with cries of "murderer."

These unlikely Capulets and Montagues are wrangling over the words each camp believes will do the most to draw off opprobrium from the dead woman—and by extension, from themselves. But they are also fighting about who knew Brandon best, who cared the most about her, and which side it was that abandoned her to her death.

"Where was her family all the time she was in Falls City?" Leslie challenges the Brandons.

Tammy erupts: "You knew her for three weeks and you act like you've known someone her whole life!"

For Lana, and Brandon's other girlfriends, Brandon's gender is a question that cuts closer to home. "For your information, I am not a lesbian!" Gina recently snapped at a girl she heard gossiping about her at a party. A close friend has told the *Voice* that Gina is in therapy to deal with lingering questions about the relationship. Gina had told the friend, a cousin of Brandon's named Maury Adair, that sex with Brandon was "the best sex she ever had." (Gina, 20, offers "no comment" on Maury's report, but she seems at once embarrassed and stirred when talking about how Brandon made her feel. "He was a good lover," she murmurs. "I'd say so. Yeah.")

Lana seems less uncomfortable with the paradox, possibly because she is less conscious than Gina that she may have been in a lesbian relationship without knowing it. Lincoln is a hard town to grow up homosexual in, but it does have a smattering of gay visibility: two bars, a male cruising area, a few organizations. Gina figured out about Brandon's gender a month into their relationship, and decided to continue dating Brandon, she says, "because of the way he treated me. I'd never had that in a relationship with a man—he made feel so good. And he kept saying he was going to get the operation." Yet when Brandon took her to a gay bar in Omaha last October—with Maury and some other gay male friends—Gina became hysterical. "It was horrible, and I hated it! I wasn't used to seeing so many gay people in one place! And the fact

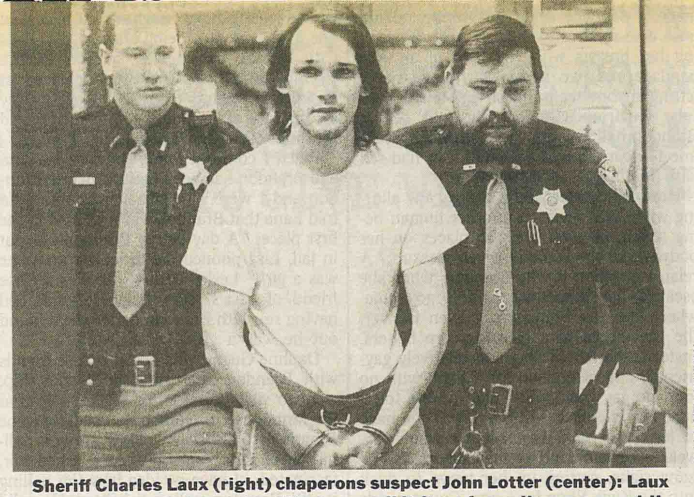
"I CAN'T BE WITH A WOMAN THAT WAY. THAT'S GROSS," BRANDON TOLD HER BEST FRIEND, SARA LYON.

that some people would look at Brandon there and think Brandon was a lesbian, that might mean I was a lesbian too."

It was probably easier for Brandon to throw Lana off the scent because, as Lana unselfconsciously affirms, "we don't have that kind of people here in Falls City." When *A Current Affair* called Brandon's case "a female *Crying Game*," Lana had no idea what they were talking about. "There was a movie called *The Crying Game*?" she asks, bewildered.

Lana unabashedly informs us that she still thinks about Brandon "morning, noon, and night, when I wake up in the morning and when I go to sleep." She carries the huge black teddy bear that Brandon gave her—which she has also christened *Brandon*—wherever she goes, and she'll buy only Brandon's favorite candy bar (Whatchamacallit) and brand of soda pop (Sprite): "I didn't like the Sprite at first, but it's growing on me."

A large scrapbook about Brandon is proudly displayed on Lana's living-room table, the first page of which is a collage centered on a photograph in which Brandon looks like JFK, at once serious and mischievously conscious of his good looks. For Brandon's name, Lana says, "I cut the letters out of Red Baron pizza boxes, and I colored with a red Magic Marker."



FALLS CITY JOURNAL

Sheriff Charles Laux (right) chaperons suspect John Lotter (center): Laux reportedly said of Brandon, "You can call it *it*, as far as I'm concerned."

Lana repeats two phrases as though they were mantras: (1) "When I kissed Brandon, I wasn't kissing a woman, I was kissing a man," (2) "Brandon didn't love me the way a woman loves a woman, he loved me the way a man loves a woman." What's the difference, I ask, between the way a man loves women and the way a woman does? Lana can't come up with one. Though she's adamant that both she and the dead woman ought to be considered heterosexual, Lana goes back and forth about whether Brandon's gender would have proved a barrier to the relationship if Brandon had survived.

"Everything I felt had to disappear because of the fact that he was a woman," she asserts at first. Later, she admits that it was Brandon, not she, who broke off the romance when Brandon's gender was made public; Lana would have been willing to continue the relationship despite the strong opposition of her parents and community, "because Brandon was a man on the inside, where it counts." Later, she adds meditatively: "Brandon knew how women wanted to be treated because, in fact, he was a woman. That's probably why he was so nice."

GIRLFRIENDS REPEATEDLY TOLD OTHERS BRANDON HAD A PENIS. ONE TOLD A FRIEND, "I'VE SEEN HIM PEE!"

She has dozens of pictures of her dead boyfriend displayed around her living room, but the portrait she likes best is one I gave her, a photograph of Brandon at 11 or 12 years old, wearing a flowered blouse and shoulder length hair, with her hand on her hip. "She looks so beautiful!" Lana says, touching Brandon's hair and cheeks. She looks like a girl on the verge of puberty, and Lana loves it.

However they classify Brandon, everybody wants her. From photos of the wonder-boychik playing pool, kissing babes, and lifting a straight male neighbor high up in the air to impress party goers at her and Gina's engagement party, Brandon looks to be the handsomest butch item in history—not just good-looking, but arrogant, audacious, cocky—everything they, and I, look for in lovers.

Her bereaved girlfriends are leery of describing sexual details, but it's glaringly clear Brandon was the precise opposite of a "do me" feminist. "He wouldn't let anyone touch him *here*, *here*, or *here*," Lana says, pointing to her breasts, crotch, and thighs. Other lovers report, with varying degrees of explicitness, that Brandon never got touched by them. She was the only one who touched, stroked, stimulated, or shtupped. You could call Brandon a top, but I'm not sure that word fully captures her enormous desire to give other people pleasure.

"He always gave," Lindsay Classen had put it in the *Tribune*. Later, Brandon's Lincoln girlfriends will blissfully recount how he did all the chores while they were dating. "A regular Betty Crocker!" Daphne tells me. "Oh, that guy could cook!" When Brandon and Gina moved in together, Brandon strode over to the loo and informed her girlfriend that she'd never have to pick up so much as a scouring pad to keep it clean. "This is your bathroom, Gina," Brandon breathed, devotion in his voice. "I'm going to clean it every day!" Gina marvels, remembering the laundry situation in the halcyon days they were together: "You only had to take off your dirty clothes and, within the twinkling of an eye, they'd turn up clean." Brandon did laundry, scrubbing, and vacuuming morning, noon, and night. "Everything you need will come from me," he told Gina, brushing her hair so she wouldn't have to brush it herself.

It's hard to say whether giving exquisite pleasure and never getting it makes a lover more like a man or like a woman. But to her partners, Brandon was "the perfect woman's man—every woman's dream," Daphne pronounces, licking her lips. Since the murder, many of Brandon's former flames have gotten together to compare notes about his technique: "We all get pretty [illegible] and go around the room [illegible] 'Good kisser!' He knew how to do *everything* right."

About Brandon's "equipment," Maury raves: "Whatever Brandon was using, it looked really real. I once saw him change outside the car, strip down to his underwear, and I could not believe how real it looked." Maury bitched at his cousin for exposing himself, but Brandon postured back: "I don't care. If they don't like what they see, they can make the arrest." Brandon's housemates once found a strap-on in the dirty clothes bag, where "Brandon had hidden it because he was the only one who ever did laundry." Ever quick-witted, Brandon tried to blame the lump of latex on his cousin, the only gay man in the house, but Maury wouldn't stand for it: "I was like, 'If I want dick, I can get it any time I want.'" The housemates quickly figured out that the simulacrum was Brandon's manhood. "Brandon probably did wear it a lot of the time," Gina concedes, abashed. "I don't want to go into the sexual aspects about it, people can probably figure it out."

On Christmas Eve, after Lotter and Nissen tore her pants down, Brandon cried on Lana's shoulder: "I didn't want to hurt you! I'm not gay!"—echoing a statement he'd often made to Gina ("We're not in a gay relationship!") during their many arguments about the subject. After weeping, he told Lana "to never tell anyone he cried on my shoulder, because men don't cry."

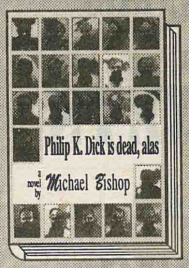
A short, small-bodied woman—five foot five and only 120 pounds, except for the one year she was pumping iron—Brandon

TOWER RECORDS | VIDEO | BOOKS

IMAGINE

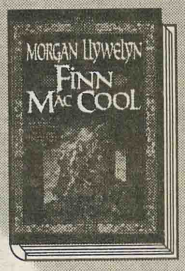
Explore new worlds...all the latest in science fiction, fantasy, cyberpunk and speculative fiction is on sale now!

30% OFF ALL SCI-FI BOOKS



An eccentric novelist named Philip K. Dick just died in California. Or has he? So begins a sequence of events all leading up to a fateful confrontation between Dick, Nixon and other haracters on the moon.

SALE 9.07
reg. 12.95

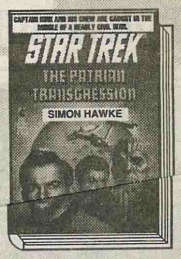


The story of Finn MacCool, mightiest of the Irish heroes, leader of the invincible army of the Fianna, he was a man of many faces: warrior, poet, lover, creator, destroyer.

SALE 16.77
reg. 23.95

Nearly a generation has passed since the first pioneers landed, but the transformation of Mars to an Earth-like planet has just begun.

SALE 9.07
reg. 12.95

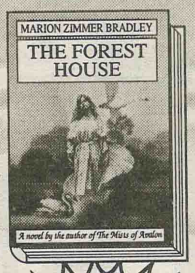


The U.S.S. Enterprise is sent to Patria 1 to discuss that world's application for Federation membership.

SALE 3.85
reg. 5.50

For the first time, Larry Niven brings together all the Beowulf Shaeffer stories - including a brand-new one- in one long tale of exploration and adventure

SALE 3.49
reg. 4.99



Inside the walls of the Forest House, a secret circle of Druidic priestesses guards the ancient rites of learning, healing and magic against the Roman Empire .

SALE 15.37
reg. 21.95

DISCLOSURE
Michael Crichton
BLOW OUT 14.40
reg. 24.00

MY LIVES
Roseanne Arnold
BLOW OUT 13.80
reg. 23.00

SOUL MATES
Thomas Moore
BLOW OUT 15.00
reg. 25.00

OPEN 9AM TO MIDNIGHT EVERYDAY!

SALE ENDS 4/19/

TOWER RECORDS | VIDEO | BOOKS

IN THE VILLAGE

TICKETMASTER

TOWER CLEARANCE OUTLET
20 E. 4TH ST
(212) 228-7317

BOOKS.....383 Lafayette Street
Lafayette at E. 4th .....(212) 228-5100
VIDEO .....(212) 505-1166
RECORDS .....Broadway at E. 4th....(212) 505-1500

BESTSELLERS ALWAYS 30% OFF

JAZZ MEETS HIP-HOP
AT
SPIKE'S JOINT
I SOUTH ELLIOTT PLACE
BROOKLYN, NY

GRAMMY AWARD WINNERS

DIGABLE PLANETS
AND
RAMSEY LEWIS

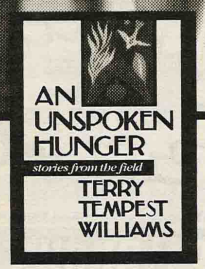
SATURDAY, APRIL 16, 1994

2:00-4:00PM

FOR MORE INFO CALL 718-802-1000

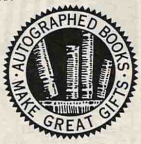
MEET TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

THURSDAY
APRIL 14TH
7:00-8:30 PM
396 AVENUE OF THE
AMERICAS AT 8TH STREET



Meet naturalist Terry Tempest Williams when she reads from and signs copies of her new book, *An Unspoken Hunger.* Covering such timely topics as the environmental crisis and women's issues, these eloquent and contemplative essays are a testament to nature's restorative powers.

B. Dalton
BOOKSELLER®



396 Avenue of the Americas at 8th Street
In the Heart of the Village

made a scrawny and very young-looking man. She went on posing anyway, concealing her breasts with the help of an Ace bandage and two baggy shirts, and never letting anyone see her flesh-and-blood genitals. Girlfriends repeatedly told others Brandon had a penis. "I've seen him pee!" one 17-year-old told a friend. "I've had sex with him!"

How could someone be so sexy and alluring when she never let another human being touch, or even see, the places on her body where she could be given pleasure? A related question is why Brandon, when she escaped her hometown, didn't go somewhere like San Francisco or even Denver, the gay mecca of choice for corn belters. Instead, she left the big and relatively gay-friendly city of Lincoln for a town with no jobs, no gay community, and far less tolerance for difference. "In this town, you have to look a certain way, act a certain way, wear a certain kind of makeup to fit in," Lana sighs, getting up her nerve to duck into the Kwik Shop for a pop. Counter girls there who flirted with Brandon outrageously when she was alive refuse to touch Lana's money now.

The experience is nothing new for the Tisdels. Her older sister Leslie has endured the town's disapproval for years because of her penchant for dating black men. Lana remembers: "When Leslie and her boyfriend Duane went to Hardee's, they wouldn't serve him." Yet in such an environment, the Tisdels have raised a young child of Leslie's who is black. Long before Brandon, the Tisdels were despised by their fellow citizens, not only "because we associate with black people," as Lana puts it, but also because they live on welfare. "In Falls City," Lana explains, "you have the high class, the middle class, and the scums, and we're the scums."

Talking with a number of Falls City dwellers—bartenders, store clerks, gossipy public servants—I ascertain that Lana is not imagining this disapproval. "They're not our kind of people," sniffs a retailer. "They aren't in the mainstream," a local professional hints hugely. Already, several local women have called Brandon's family and Lincoln friends to inform them that the murder victim's last girlfriend "sleeps with everyone and has no friends." The Tisdels are the most forward-thinking family in Falls City, but even they are hopelessly misinformed about homosexuals. "When I found out Brandon was a girl, I told them not to bring him back here when he got out of the hospital [after the rape]," says Lana's mother, Linda Gutierres. "'Brandon, [illegible] nothing against you,' I said, 'but you can't stay [illegible] house you're a lesbian. Because I heard all these [illegible] about AIDS, and you know, I have little ones here.'"

Brandon died in a farmhouse in Humboldt, an even smaller town just outside Falls City, where an acquaintance of hers named Lisa Lambert let her stay when Brandon moved here from the metropolis with no money, no car, and no job last fall. In all the newspaper accounts, Lisa is described as "a generous person" who often put herself out for strangers. She and Phillip DeVine were also killed by the wrathful intruders. None of the news accounts about the case—local or not—has mentioned that Phillip was a black man visiting in an all-white town. I only find out his race when Karen Garrett, the garrulous owner of a Humboldt dive called Big Mike's Tavern, refers to DeVine as "that black fellow."

Gossiping over rum and Cokes, Garrett informs me that Brandon and Lisa were both found lying on Lisa's waterbed. Police say that's where the two were killed in the wee hours of December 31. (DeVine was sleeping on the couch.) Except for a suggestion by the *Chicago Tribune* writer that Lisa was "attracted" to Brandon, newspaper accounts have avoided discussing the possibility that Lisa and Brandon were lovers. Perhaps they don't want to besmirch a dead local. Brandon, a cross-dresser from Lincoln, was a double alien, someone who might easily be called a lesbian—but a young Humboldt girl who "is remembered as being nice to everyone," as the *Pawnee Republican* puts it, a nursing-home worker with a young baby, oughtn't to be called one. Lisa is already being celebrated in Falls City as the "innocent" victim of the slayings, and boxes have been placed at businesses around town to collect money for the care of her infant son, who survived the attack on the farmhouse.

When I confront Lana, she tells me Lisa and Brandon had been dating "before Brandon and I were." In fact, it was Lisa who told Lana that Brandon was a woman in the first place. "A day before Brandon got put in jail, Lisa phoned me to let me know he was a girl." Leslie Tisdel, who was a close friend of Lisa's, says Lambert continued having sex with Brandon "after she'd found out he was a girl."

Daphne Gugat, who became close friends with Brandon after their brief courtship, went to visit Brandon for several weeks at the farmhouse in Humboldt, claiming to be Brandon's older sister. "How are you pulling all of this crap off?" she'd asked her, fascinated. "I have no idea how I'm pulling it off!" Brandon replied, delighted. How did Daphne suppose she was doing it? "I think she was using a fake plastic penis," the 18-year-old cackles. Both Lisa and Brandon told her they were having sex. In fact, Lisa told Daphne she *had* to keep seeing Brandon even after she found out that Brandon was a girl, "because the sex was so good."

But frequently, Brandon would take Lisa's car and drive down to Falls City. "He didn't want nobody to go with him when he went there." On the occasions when Lisa, Brandon, and Lana were all together, "Lisa would just stand there and you could see the steam rolling out of her ears."

It's startling to enter the Gay and Lesbian Resource Center at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln after three days in the land of Teena Brandon. Two women in a life-size poster on a wall eat each other out in a tangled embrace protected by dental dams: both the poster and its legend, "Safe Sex Is Hot Sex," would have made Brandon run from the room. It is bizarre, but perhaps fitting, how little interest gay and lesbian activists here evince in Brandon and her death.

"When we heard about the murder, we thought about doing something, but David, our director, said he didn't think it was appropriate for us to do anything because the victim adamantly didn't consider herself a lesbian," says Melanie Aswell, a graduate student in English. She's taking several queer theory classes, but none of her classmates or teachers have found it worthwhile to discuss Brandon under the rubric of gender identity, sexuality, or essentialism versus construction.

David Bolkovac, the 22-year-old undergraduate [illegible] serves as the center's director, knew Brandon wh[illegible] both attended Pius X High School. Accordin[illegible] David, Brandon was despised at Pius as much for her trailer-trash caste as for the fact that she wore a crew cut and men's clothes to school every day—often with a tie. When I visit, every girl is wearing makeup and a skirt, getting ready for afternoon tennis. There are several plaques up in memory of students who recently passed away, but not for Brandon. The principal, Greg Logsdon, won't say a word about her, unwilling even to mouth platitudes about the tragic loss of a student. "It would violate the family's confidentiality to discuss her," he says finally.

"They all thought of her as the little dyke in the school," David remembers. He, too, assumed Brandon was a lesbian until they finally had a conversation about it last year."We ran into each other and talked for about two hours. She said she was disgusted by lesbians, that she didn't think it was right." He remembers her saying,"David, it's not okay for me to love women as a woman. I have to be a man if I'm going to love women." Then she told him she was going to get her first sex-change operation in two weeks.

Bolkovac isn't the only one who remembers Brandon expressing repugnance for lesbians. "I can't be with a woman that way. That's gross," she told her best friend, Sara Lyon. But somehow the way she was involved with women, as a man with a plas-

tic penis, wasn't gross. Nor did Brandon's repugnance extend to gay men.

"When I first started running into Teena as a man, she was hanging out with her cousin Maury at the Loop [the gay male cruising area]," David informs me. It turns out to have been Brandon who introduced Maury to the Loop when he arrived in Lincoln last year. "I came to stay at my Aunt Doris's house, where Brandon was also staying, and Aunt Doris—Brandon's grandma—got really mad. She was like, 'That's just great. Now I've got two faggots living here!' "

Brandon, however, "was totally cool with my being gay. He showed me where to go to meet guys," namely the gracious, shadowy streets behind Lincoln's famous 400-foot-tall Capitol Building. Brandon even gave Maury the money with which to purchase his first pair of Freedom Rings, which Maury proudly displays in his cousin's memory on the rear-view mirror of his Lincoln Town Car, a present from his current boyfriend. It takes a lot, however, for a lover to remain in Maury's good graces: when a recent beau "lost his job, he lost me, because he couldn't fulfill all the promises he'd made," he winks. Brandon was furious with the man for being unable to keep her cousin in the style to which he'd become accustomed, "so we started chasing him down, telling him we'd beat his ass."

Brandon, Maury, their gay male friends and a group of straight women mostly made up of Brandon's former girlfriends became an impromptu social group, haunting male cruising areas and clubs and conducting raucous, all-night drinking sessions in whatever trailer Brandon had managed to co-opt from some lady friend with a source of income. The one thing everyone in Brandon's life can agree on is that she never, ever hung around with lesbians. "That time we went to The Run [a gay bar in Omaha], all of us nearly lost our cookies, because we saw these two overweight lesbians in these skimpy little skintight things," Maury winces, remembering. "It was really gross, we all thought so." The sight was especially hard for Brandon because several drag queens had just made rude and pointed remarks about her own femaleness: "Girl, you're a girl! You ought to dress like a girl!"

Were gay men ever attracted to Brandon? Daphne remembers it happening once, when "gay guys pinched his butt" at the gay bar in Omaha. Maury, however, says Brandon never got cruised by men. "Most of the gay guys here are out, and they know what a lesbian looks like." So why did Brandon hang around with so many of them? Daphne hazards a guess: "Probably because he felt safe with them. He knew they weren't going to touch him, they weren't going to hurt him." She pauses, meditatively. Looks at her nails, then continues. "He was really afraid of getting touched by men."

Tammy Brandon lives in a trailer park not far from the Cornhusker Highway, the strip of dive bars, working-class grills, and auto wreck shops where Teena Brandon grew up. Most of her family and friends live in trailer parks off the Cornhusker; except for her stay in Falls City, she hardly ever lived anyplace but a trailer. Tammy, three years older than her sister, is a waitress whose first child, an interracial infant, was adopted by a lesbian couple in San Francisco in 1991. The adoptive mothers, the first lesbians Tammy had ever talked with at length, "helped me a lot to understand my sister." It was Tammy, not her mother, who Brandon called when she was raped. "I could tell she hurt. But Teena was the type of person who tried to bear it. She tried never to show any anguish, or pain, or fear."

With her sister, Brandon "would at one minute admit she was gay, and another minute say she wasn't. She didn't know how to go about what she was feeling." At the age of 17, Brandon became anguished about the conjunction of her sexual feelings for women with the fact that she herself had a female body. Did her sexual feelings scare her? "Yes. She said that she never ever wanted to have sex," Tammy replies. (Lana happily recalls Brandon promising "we wouldn't have to have sex for months and months, if I didn't want to.") Brandon's anguish about her body and its longings was so great that even her mother finally suggested that Brandon "just try living as a woman and being gay."

Why was Brandon so unhappy about being a woman? Tammy looks me in the eye: "We were both molested by a male relative when we were little." It started happening when Tammy was two and a half. "I kept quiet when it happened to me, but when I caught him with Teena the first time, I went to somebody right away. I told my grandmother, but she wouldn't believe it." Thereafter, whenever the girls visited this relative, "he'd be at Teena and I'd go outside and play until the baby-sitter got there." The girls never told anyone else until Tammy told her mom about her own abuse a few years ago. Brandon apparently never told anyone.

She spent her childhood and teens cultivating a patina of invulnerability. "Whenever she'd fall and bruise herself or something, she'd jump up right away and say, 'Don't worry! I'll heal, I'll heal!' " Tammy's friend Alan remembers. She seems to have had an obsession with feats of strength: Gina remembers Brandon putting her neck between Gina's legs and lifting her with just his neck muscles, an act of bravado—or masochism—Brandon would cap with attempts to lift 200-pound men into the air. Says Gina, "He was worried of being thought of as a weakling."

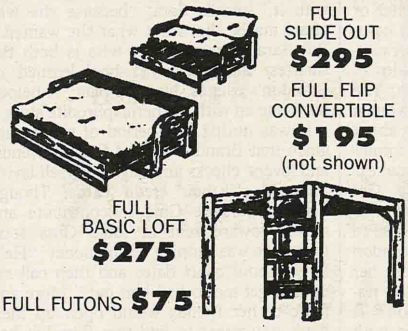
When, in high school, Brandon's friend Sara Lyon got pregnant and became apprehensive about the prospect of being a single mother, Brandon offered to coparent the child. "She said, if it was legal, I'd adopt him with you, so he could have two mothers." For as long as they'd known each other, Brandon had told Sara that she "wanted to remain a virgin till the day she died."

In high school, Brandon was raped once again, by an acquaintance. Her sister says she "filed a rape charge, and then dropped it." For reasons that are not entirely clear, she started living away from home around this time—staying with acquaintances and relatives, even disapproving ones. The suicide attempt came in her junior year, with a bottle of antibiotics. ("He said he tried to kill himself because he thought he was a lesbian, but then it was proven that he just had a sexual identity crisis, he wasn't a lesbian," Lana had related rather cheerily.) Four months later, Teena started showing a side of herself that none of her friends or relatives had ever seen. It wasn't the male persona; that had appeared months before. No, the new, surprising side of Teena was a vulnerable one.

"Teena wasn't one to cry, and she did. And Teena had always been a very laid-back person, and suddenly she was very scared," says Sara Lyon. Sara and JoAnn dealt with this problem by putting Teena in a car "sandwiched in between all of us, so that she couldn't get out. We told her we were all hungry and we were gonna take her to Hardee's for something to eat, but instead we drove her to Lincoln General" for psychiatric testing. Before they got in the car, Sara and Brandon talked for a while. "That was the first time she told me that she might be gay." Brandon, who made a point of never acknowledging adversity, added, "It's really hard." She also burst into tears. Then Brandon asked her best friend whether she'd still love her if she was gay. In a journal entry from around this time, Brandon had written: "Changes I'm going through in my life will change me forever."

"The thought of being gay was much more disturbing to her than getting a sex change," recalls Sara. The crisis around gender and sexual orientation might have been precipitated as much by the recent behavior of her family and friends as by the memory of incest: Sara, JoAnn, and others in her life had begun informing the women Brandon was dating that she was a woman. "I had talked to JoAnn about it, and we both thought it was very unfair to this girl that she didn't know," Sara says, describing the first of many disclosure missions. "I mean, this could screw her up for the rest of her life." The disclosure ended a relationship that mattered greatly to Brandon. "All I want is for her to love me," Brandon wrote about the woman in her journal. "I know that I hurt her, and I finally realized what I did. . . . But I want her to hold me, or let me hold her."

LOFTBEDS & FUTON CO.



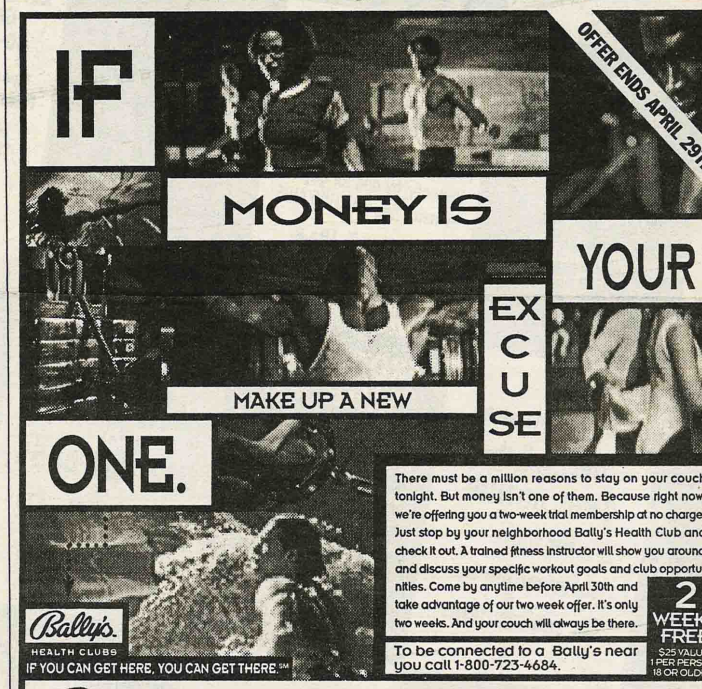
FULL SLIDE OUT $295
FULL FLIP CONVERTIBLE $195 (not shown)
FULL BASIC LOFT $275
FULL FUTONS $75
Superior 100% cotton • Fire Retardant • Stain Resistant
65 BLEECKER ST.
MON-SAT 11-7:30 BTWN. BDWAY AND LAFAYETTE SUN 12-5:00
777-4932

GOTHIC ARTS
Gargoyles & Grotesques
Unique Gifts ❖ Horror Art ❖ Jewelry
Send for free catalog: (914) 332-7697
P.O. Box 335 Tarrytown, N.Y. 10591

ZAPP RECORDS
258 BLEECKER
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10014
(212) 366-4958
FAX (212) 366-4962
SPECIALIZING IN IMPORT CD'S
RARITIES & COLLECTIBLES
OUT OF PRINT 12"
MAIL ORDER AVAILABLE

FUTON CENTER
28 East 17th St.
(bet Broadway & 5th Ave)
212-229-2578
Hours:
Mon-Sat 11-7:30
Sunday 12-6
Twin $49
Full $59
Queen $69
We Deliver Same Day
SPECIAL PRICE Futon Mattresses
2 Free Pillows w/purchase of frame & futon
BOLLA Frame & Futon $89

DOWNTOWN FUTON
484 BROADWAY
(cor. of Broome)
212-343-9151
Mon-Sat 11-7:30
Sun 12-
METAL PACKAG
ON SPECIAL
this week only



Bally's JACK LALANNE - FITNESS CENTERS

JOIN OUR NEW STATEN ISLAND CLUB AT SPECIAL PRE-GRAND OPENING RATES! CALL FOR DETAILS!

NASSAU & SUFFOLK: Bay Shore, Copiague (Price Club Plaza), Huntington, Lake Grove (Loehmann's Plaza), Levittown, Rockville Centre, Westbury
QUEENS: Elmhurst, Kew Gardens, Little Neck/Bayside
MANHATTAN: Broadway, Madison Ave. & 55th St., Wall Street Area, 5th Ave. at 53rd St., 86th & Lex. Ave.
BROOKLYN: Bensonhurst, Coney Is. & Kings Hwy., Flatbush, Sheepshead Bay
BRONX: Riverdale/Bronx
WESTCHESTER: Port Chester, Yonkers
ROCKLAND COUNTY: Nanuet
NEW JERSEY: Brick, Clifton, East Brunswick, Englewood Cliffs, Fairfield, Livingston, Ocean (Seaview Sq. Mall), Paramus, Somerville, Springfield, Wayne, Woodbridge

OFFER NOT AVAILABLE AT OUR VERTICAL CLUB® LOCATIONS:
A & S PLAZA: 139 W. 32nd Street
WESTSIDE: Worldwide Plaza, 350 West 50th St.
EASTSIDE: 330 East 61st St.
MIDTOWN: 43rd St., between Madison and Vanderbilt
To Be Instantly Connected To The Nearest Vertical Club® Location, Call 1-800-846-0270

Trial Membership is non-renewable. Club tour and consultation provided. Signing of guest register required prior to using the club. Membership plans are available. Services, facilities, hours and memberships may vary. Some restrictions apply. Offer ends April 29, 1994. ©1994 Bally's Health & Tennis Corporation. Bally is a registered trademark of Bally Manufacturing Corporation. An Equal Opportunity Club.

JoAnn refused to call her daughter by male names. "I wouldn't play the game. If someone would call here asking for Billy, I would say, 'There's no Billy here.' I wouldn't refer to her as something she wasn't." Like Sara's, JoAnn's attitudes about Brandon's love for women are contradictory. In one breath, she says, "I wish Teena could have spoken to someone who was a lesbian." In the next, she clucks, "I don't feel you walk up and tell someone what your sexual preference is." Sara explains the way she and JoAnn felt about the matter: "You don't want your daughter or friend dating another girl. That's only natural." She attributes Brandon's homosexuality to a "lack of attention from males."

So the cycle of disclosures began. The process was similar with each of the women Brandon dated: Get told "the truth" about Brandon by a zealous "friend" or former girlfriend—or find out through personal exploration. Continue the relationship. Get told again and again until the pressure to end the relationship becomes too intense to bear. Gina recounts that the ex Brandon had written about in her journal told her first. "Then Lindsay told me. 'Do you notice anything *different* about Brandon?' is how she put it. I thought they were both just jealous." That evening, Gina confronted Brandon. "I know I'm, like, way out of line," she began timorously. "It took me 15 minutes to even get it out, because I knew that it would hurt him. He got really mad, and we had a big fight."

Gina received her first report of Brandon's femaleness in April 1993, one month after they had started dating. But, in time, entire legions of neighborhood girls and boys would converge on their trailer to "convince" Gina that Brandon was female. "About 15 people came by one day and said, 'We're gonna find out the bottom of this, it's our right to know.'" Some threatened: "We'll just strip him down and find out for ourselves!" For many nights thereafter, "we had to go park in the airport parking lot just to be alone." Friends kept coming to the trailer, "asking where we were going, what we were doing," and ordering Brandon to "tell" her girlfriend. Later, in a similar spirit, Daphne told Lisa Lambert about Brandon's gender, and Lisa told Lana.

Meanwhile, Brandon was informing girlfriends that she either had already begun the long process of sex-change surgeries, or was about to begin it. But much as she hated her own women's genitals, the prospect of having them cut into was apparently a difficult one for Brandon to reconcile. "She told me she didn't want to go through with it," recalls Sara, "because she was afraid maybe that's not what she wanted." But Sara, a nurse's aide who is both the smartest and the most book-learned of Brandon's friends, hit on a plan: "I helped her come up with the hermaphrodite story."

It was during this period of gender anguish that Brandon started forging friends' and lovers' checks and buying herself lavish presents off their credit cards. Though Brandon forbade Gina to contribute any money toward rent or food, Gina soon found she was running out of money. "He'd forget about court dates and then call me up and get me to bail him out." More and more of her friends would open up their bank statements to find that Brandon had forged hundreds of dollars' worth of checks for clothes, girlfriend-gifts, and fancy meals.

Even Sara felt the sting of Brandon's vengeance. "I was giving her free rent, free food, and then it turned out she used my phone to call one of the girls she was dating, and I had a $600 phone bill!" The grandmother who had called Brandon a "faggot," and had not believed she was being abused, was also targeted: Brandon forged $100 of her checks. The grandmother, true to form, pressed charges.

All told, Brandon was charged with 18 crimes from March 1991 until her death, ranging from auto theft to forgery—almost all perpetrated on friends, lovers, or relatives. Perhaps the most spectacular scam was one she pulled on Gina at a time when Gina was considering breaking off their engagement. "I received a credit card from Montgomery Ward. I was like, this is crazy, I never applied for a credit card." Brandon pounded on the door at 3 a.m. that night: "Let me in, I need to see you, I need to be with you!" Gina wouldn't talk, but let him in; while she slept, Brandon pocketed the card, which he had ordered in her name. The next night, he showed up "in nice shoes, pants, a new jacket, a belt," which he claimed he had gotten off his mother's credit card. "And she's even gotten stuff for you!" For Gina, there was a balloon and a box with a diamond ring in it.

After Gina got the credit card bill for $452, Brandon finally confessed that she had perpetrated the scam to punish her. It was a way of making her lover pay for all the affection Brandon had lavished on her, but was unwilling to spend on herself. Lana nearly got scammed in a similar way. Before she hit upon the idea of using her father's hairdo check to pay for Brandon's bail, Brandon asked her to hand over the $200 cash she was holding to pay her family's rent. The Tisdels, three adult women and two children, live on only $346 a month.

Nor were swindles the only way in which Brandon tried to nurture herself. In Lincoln, she invented a story that she had cancer; had only a month to live: "I was so sad all the time because Brandon was dying of lung cancer," Daphne remembers. When Gina attempted to spend a weekend by herself in the country, Brandon couldn't bear it. "He called and said his grandfather had died, so I came home. Well, it turned out his grandfather didn't die." The next time Gina went away, Brandon called and said he'd been rushed to the hospital with a lung injury. "This time, I didn't fall for it. I called the hospital."

Far from the liberating lover women initially took him for, Brandon was hectoring, hounding, possessive. "If I called people on the phone, he'd want to know who I was talking to," says Gina. "He never wanted me out of his sight." At their engagement party, for which Brandon rented a suite at the four-star Harvester Hotel—"it had the hot tub, it had everything"—Brandon noticed one of his friends looking at Gina "little more than he should." He threw wine cooler at the friend's head from acro the room.

After the first month they were datin Brandon's jealousy had gotten so inten that Gina had few friends of her own le "He was an obnoxious little creep!" Dap ne laughs. "He could be a real octop sometimes." She remembers him packi Lisa Lambert's bags and ordering Lambe to leave her own house. "He did that to m in my own house, too," she grins. Whe women tried to break up with him, the ve worst part of Brandon would emerge: would call, write letters, and appear in pe son constantly, begging, wheedling, terro izing. "I know I cannot call you as much possible," read one abject letter to Gina. know you have given me more chances tha I can count." Finally, the police asked Gi whether she wanted an order of protecti from her boyfriend.

"I wanted you to find out how good could treat you before you found out Brandon wrote to Gina before she left f Humboldt. Maybe if Brandon had let hers discover how good *she* could be treated, s wouldn't have had to push the women s loved so far away from her. "Every now a then," Daphne remembers, "Brand would slip into Teena and say, 'I wond what sex would be like.'"

Daphne would reply: "What?!"

"Nothing."

"Did you just say, 'I wonder what s would be like'?"

"No. I didn't say that.'"

Brandon had to go to Humboldt becau everyone who'd loved her in Lincoln w finally too infuriated with her, whether she stolen their love or taken the money that th needed to live. The frustration she had felt f so long had finally frustrated others, and t fury she could not express was ultimate expressed on her. By men.

The author wishes to thank Susan Musi for her insights, and Winnie Hough for h research.

FIGHT PCP!
If you are HIV-positive, you need to protect yourself from PCP.
Call the HOTLINE for a FREE brochure that tells how.

LIVING AND LOVING WITH HIV/AIDS
A workshop on sex, dating, and intimacy, by and for gay and bi men living with HIV/AIDS.
Sat., May 7, 10 A.M.
Call the HOTLINE to register and for location.

LIVING WITH AIDS
GMHC-produced 30-minute TV show
Queens Public Access TV
Fridays, 9 P.M., Channel 56
Manhattan Cable TV
Thursdays, 10:30 P.M.
Channel 35
Paragon Cable TV
Mondays, 7:30 P.M.
Channel 34

All events are free. Call the GMHC HOTLINE for more information or for registration.

EROTICIZING SAFER SEX
Who says safer sex has to be boring? With other gay and bi men learn how to make it erotic, creative, satisfying and fun! 2½ hours.
Wed., April 20, 8 P.M.
Wed., May 18, 8 P.M.
The Center, 208 W. 13th

GMHC HOTLINE
212/807-6655
TDD: 212/645-7470
For the deaf and hard-of-hearing

WHAT'S IN IT 4 ME?
A SAFER SEX THANG
An evening exploring safer sex created for and by Black Gay men. Limited space. Registration a must
Wed., April 27, 7:15 P.M.
The Center, 208 W. 13th.

FIRST IN THE FIGHT AGAINST AIDS
GMHC
©1994 Gay Men's Health Crisis, Inc.
Ad Design: Timothy Jones

MEN MEETING MEN
Join other gay and bi men and learn how to negotiate safer sex and set your boundaries. 2½ hours.
Wed., April 13, 8 P.M.
Wed., May 11, 8 P.M.
The Center, 208 W. 13th

INSURANCE FORUM
What you need to know about insurance.
Tues., May 10, 7 P.M.
GMHC, 129 W. 20th
3rd Floor

SEX, DATING & INTIMACY
Spend the day in a safe, sex-positive environment, exploring the ways men are loving men in the age of AIDS.
Sat., May 21, 10 A.M. sharp
Call the HOTLINE to register and for location.

COMMUNITY FORUM: AIDS-RELATED DISEASES
A forum discussion of Lymphoma, Toxoplasmosis, and PML.
Tues., April 26, 7 P.M.
Sound Factory Bar
12 West 21st Street
Manhattan

WOMEN'S SAFER SEX FORUM
Join other women who partner with women to explore ways of making safer sex fun!
Thurs., May 5, 7 P.M.
GMHC, 129 W. 20th
Call 212/337-3614 for more information.