

En femme®

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INTO THE 90's!



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ON THE COVER: The Ladies of *En Femme* are poised to take you into the new decade! **Clockwise from top left:** Roberta Angela Dee, Robyn Ann, Wendi Seabreeze, & Joanne Wilson

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Roberta Angela Dee

The Transsexual Trail

Remember that time, not terribly long ago, before acid rain or outspoken feminists? Remember that time, before Watergate, the urgency of civil rights, the assassinations of American political and social leaders, and machines that flew faster than the speed of sound?

I refer to that time, shortly after World War II (1939-1945) when America was recovering from the horrors of global conflict, economic uncertainties and threats from foreign powers. A time when Americans felt new hopes and aspired to create a new reality, a better reality from the dreams that had been suppressed for too long.

A time when everyone spoke of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the hope that there would never be another world war.

It was a time when a man married a woman, they remained faithful to each other, and raised a family. A time when the husband could earn enough, at whatever trade he chose, to provide for his family. And his wife stayed at home to care for their children and their possessions. Men wore pants, women wore dresses, and the roles and distinctions between the two genders were strictly defined and strictly adhered to by nearly everyone.

Of course there was always the homosexual population, or the 'gay' population, which consisted of effeminate males and masculine females or, men and women who preferred sexual intimacy with members of their own sex. People who, for whatever reason, were 'perverts' and outcasts from the social norm. People psychologists had deemed to be 'abnormal' or 'deviate' at a time when normalcy meant everything. Because, if you were not normal, you were nothing. Everyone and everything needed to fit into a small, structured definition of terms. Anything that was categorized outside of the 'norm' was evil, bad, corrupt, or a sin against God, Mankind and Nature.

African-Americans were stereotyped as being shiftless, lazy and both sexually and morally unrestrained. Those of Irish descent were honest and, therefore, made good policemen or civil servants. Asian-Americans were best suited to do laundry. Women, with their natural maternal instincts and submissive personalities, were suited to be the domestic

guardians of the culture. Femininity was a sale item! Women, even white women, were paid less than white males.

Why? Because women are, physically not as strong as men and because we are known to cry. Of course, African-American men were 'known' to be genetically and culturally 'inferior' which justified their being paid less for the same tasks performed by white males. So, strength is sometimes an issue or sometimes not an issue. As is true with most stereotypes and prejudices, they are intended to fit preconceived, notions of what is normal.

Imagine being born at a time when normalcy is everything and not having a name or word to describe your abnormality! It can only be described as an intensely mortifying and alienating experience.

I realized at four years of age that, although I was born a normal genetic male, to a normal suburban middle class family, with normal parents and sisters, I wanted to be a girl! I approached adolescence desperately

wanting to fit into the definition of a homosexual, simply because that 'abnormality' had a name! There was no name for a boy who wanted to be a girl, other than 'sissy' and that word failed to accurately describe my situation or psyche. It was not that I was, or wanted to be, effeminate. It was not a matter of liking boys (at that time male celebrities), or wanting to wear dresses. I wanted to be a girl, and felt that I was, somehow, already female.

Perhaps, the culture (society) 'sensed' my frustration and desperation. It allowed the word transvestite to slip into my vocabulary. But even that definition failed me. The word 'transvestite' focused on a person of one gender who derived sexual gratification through wearing the apparel, and possibly adopting the mannerisms, generally ascribed to the opposite gender.

Most typically, a transvestite was a male who got his rocks off by wearing lady's silk bikini panties or a dress. He was heterosexual and maintained a hairy chest and legs. To a fashion conscious individual, he was more akin

to a half-back in a mini-skirt, than to the kind of lady most men would care to know.

Traditionally, the gay transvestite had always been regarded as the flamboyant faggot or drag queen before queens became the subject of Broadway plays and were attributed the degree of credibility they enjoy today.

However defined, the term 'transvestite' failed to describe me as a human being or as a person. Besides, I grew up at time when a ten year old barely knew the meaning of sex. Few, if any, sought sex wantonly.

It was not until the emergence of Christine Jorgensen that I was able to find the word that defined my condition: transsexual. Ms. Jorgensen and I had more in common than any other human being I had ever know. She had been a man, served in the military, and had become a woman through what was called a "sex-change operation."

I remember racing home from school, Andrew Jackson High, in Queens, New York, every day with hopes of

catching Ms. Jorgensen on the six o'clock news, or hearing her speak, or seeing her.

Esthetically, she wasn't bad looking. She appeared as fashionably proper as any other middle class, middle aged woman. But it was not her appearance that attracted me to her so passionately. It was the fact she represented the realization of a dream; the realization that becoming a woman was a real possibility. If she could become a woman, so could I. My secret was still my secret, but it was no longer a fantasy.

I was too young to understand, however, that in spite of her sex change, Christine was still not considered a 'normal' woman. She was a 'sex-change,' an "it," neither male nor female. Society could still not accept, or refused to accept, transsexualism as anything more than a deviation from the norm. American culture continued to cling to its rationalization that God did not make men who were better suited to be women. God, after all, is perfect. I assume, that logic refers to the condition that perfection breeds perfect men

and women, although it doesn't quite explain the present deficit of perfect people.

At the bottom line is the tautology that no man has the right to take it upon himself to change his gender. It is unholy and unnatural. Men are men. Women are women. And that's that!

Unfortunately, society also continues to cling to most of the other prejudices and stereotypes it nurtured so well. Even today, we live in a country which considers homosexuals to be deviants, blacks to be genetically more prone to criminal acts and promiscuous than whites, women more inclined to be emotional and flighty, and so on, and so on, and so on.

Technological and medical advancement fails to change people. Most of the sciences move on, but not the people they serve. The people remain as primitive as their ancestors during the Dark Ages or the Elizabethan era.

Psychology is especially backwards when it comes to the subject of transsexualism. A significant number of

psychologists believe that a transsexual is simply a homosexual preoccupied with the notion that becoming a member of the opposite sex he or she can remove the enormous guilt derived from their deviant behavior. In other words, if a man loves other men but feels guilty about being gay, then he may subconsciously believe having his penis removed can also remove his guilt.

Aside from that absurdity, the main problem with this hypothesis is that gay men are quite happy being men and their genitals are an important part of that happiness. A gay man would no sooner have his penis removed, than he would have his partner's penis removed.

When reviewing this particular school of thought, we must remember many of these learned men were educated from the same textbooks that inform us women love their fathers because they have a subconscious desire to have a penis. This phenomenon is referred to as 'penis envy.'

Furthermore, these same psychologists tend to believe

that given an opportunity to talk to a transsexual for a long enough period of time, they can 'talk' them out of their condition.

They call this pagan practice psychotherapy. It makes about as much sense as talking someone out of having AIDS, tuberculosis, breast cancer or mental retardation. Can you imagine a psychologist spending years trying to talk someone out of being mentally retarded? I do not mean to suggest this biological condition should not be treated, but that the proper treatment be applied to the proper condition.

This is why it is so difficult for me to accept psychology as a science. The logic psychologists employ is only slightly more sophisticated than that of the logic endorsed by the general public.

Lay-persons believe that individuals choose to be gay or transsexual. They believe that if these 'sinners' find themselves, or God, or religion, they will correct themselves and be healed of their deviant and perverted behavior. Or, they believe their condition is the result of some

hormonal imbalance correctable through modern chemistry, a proper prescription of hormones.

Those who believe that homosexuality or transsexuality are conscious choices can 'justify' their prejudice and persecution against gays and transsexuals. After all, it is fairly easy to rationalize that belligerent actions against gays is not a bad attitude for good, normal people, and because homosexuals are *bad*, punishment is a proven way of having bad people turn into good people. It is an idea which leads some psychotherapists to believe electric shock treatment is a 'cure' for transsexualism.

If you accept the notion that a transsexual is an individual suffering from a gender dysfunction, then you can comfortably argue they are confused as to whether they should be boys or girls. And there are those who believe this indecisiveness can be reversed with electricity, much the same as Dr. Frankenstein believed that death could be reversed.

To make matters worse, one prerequisite for a sex

change operation is to spend a year in therapy! Talk about being between a rock and a hard place!

My hero, Ms. Jorgensen, had succeeded in changing her sex and at convincing untold numbers to follow her pursuit of self. But she had failed to change the heart and mind of American society, or that of most of the world. As stated earlier, we have the technology but we lack the vision to use it in a manner which best can serve those who suffer most profoundly.

By the time I was prepared to enter a university, I was keenly aware of the detrimental psychological effects and consequences my pursuit of a surgical solution could have on my immediate family and other people I had grown to love, respect, and admire.

For many years it seemed my desire to become a socially and legally accepted woman was in direct conflict with my responsibilities to my family. It left me unhappy, depressed, and bitter most of the time. My only emotional release was, from time to time, to be able to go out dressed as the woman I be-

lieved I was destined to become.

Sexually, I remained a 'heterosexual,' in the sense that I had no sexual encounters with men. This was due, mostly, to the shame and embarrassment I felt with having a masculine anatomy and genitals.

My female persona remained a virgin, until I reached twenty-five years of age. This in itself was considered quite a remarkable feat for a woman of my day. Inevitably, I was unhappy with my overall condition and station in life and society. Occasional sexual intimacy provided some psychological relief, but it was not enough.

At thirty years of age, I started taking female hormones, primarily Premarin (estrogen) and Provera (progesterone). I also started to construct a history as a female by applying for credit under my feminine name, and began creating a resume and other documents that could be traced to that name.

Within the first six months of taking female hormones, I began to realize they were

doing a great deal more than expanding my breast size! I was taking the medication in the cyclic dosages of a genetic woman and, for this reason as well as the nature of the hormones, I soon found myself on an emotional roller coaster. I became moody, bitchy, and even tearful over events and circumstances, which under previous conditions, could barely have affected me. This helped me to recognize that my 'logical' approach to life did not always work. As a result I became more intuitive, and relied more on my 'feelings' about particular issues to determine my reactions.

The most startling change, however, had nothing at all to do with the hormones. It was the manner in which other people reacted to me, both men and women. Men mostly assumed I would not be knowledgeable or interested in many areas of life and experience where I had been quite expert. Women assumed me to have an interest and knowledge of subjects of which I was totally ignorant.

It had been far easier to live as a woman among men than

it was to live as a woman among other women. Women were far more attentive, critical and observant. And, I had to learn all the unwritten, undocumented laws and rules that apply to being an adult woman. These were the codes of conduct that little girls were instructed in while playing in the kitchen at their mother's knee. I was, so to speak, quite a late bloomer. But I leaned and I matured.

Today I am (although still pre-operative) a successful free-lance and technical writer, living and working as a woman on a full-time basis. I maintain a very nice household with a loving male companion.

In addition to this column, I would be happy to share any experiences or to answer any questions directed to me personally. Simply address your letters to the magazine, or to:

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My motivations for writing this column is to have a forum through which I can, hopefully, enlighten women and men, regardless of their lifestyles or sexual preferences, as to the psyche of most transsexuals. And although transsexuals tend to be quite varied, as to their degree of commitment towards becoming, legally and socially, accepted as women, my emphasis will be on those with only the most serious commitment.

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