

A practical guide for transsexuals, those who love them, and anyone who is just curious

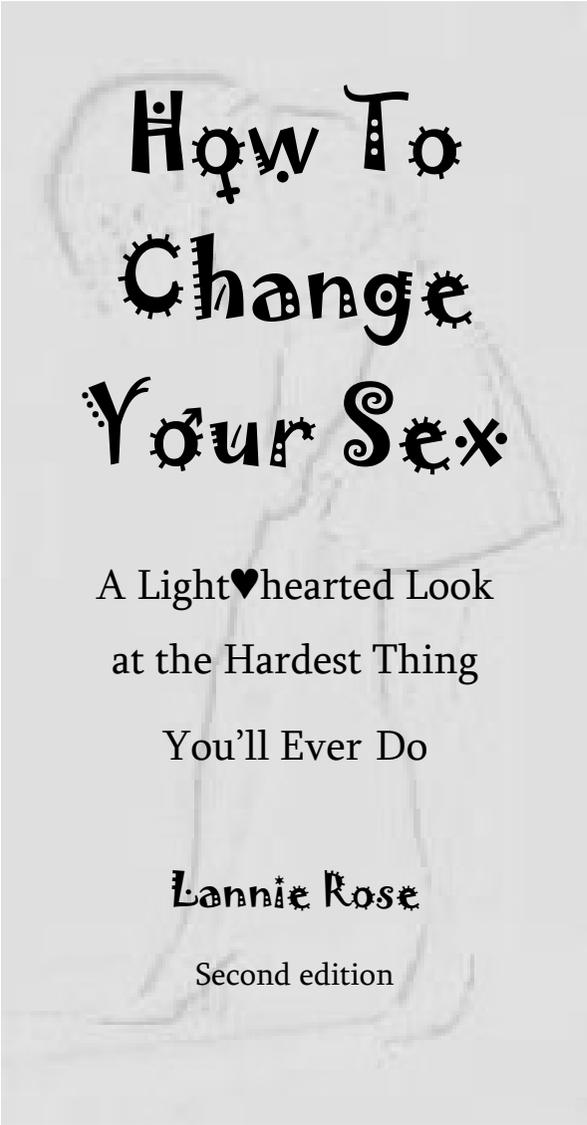
How To Change Your Sex



*A Light♥hearted Look
at the Hardest Thing
You'll Ever Do*

Lannie Rose

Second edition



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A Light♥hearted Look
at the Hardest Thing
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— LuLu Press —

To Jamie Faye Fenton,

The best friend a little t-girl ever had!

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Thanks and love to all those who supported me in my transition, especially my great friend, über gender nerd Jamie Faye Fenton; the irrepressible Dish, who embodies the concept of unconditional love; Annemarie, who plowed the furrow just ahead of me; Jennifer, who showed me what a trans woman can be; and Renee Satin, who brought me out in so many ways; also to my professional team: Dr. Robert Brink, Dr. Annette Cholon, Charle Dewitt, Denaë Doyle, Adrienne Gowen, Dr. Joy Shaffer, and, most of all, Cynthia Young. Special thanks for the encouragement and many valuable suggestions from the trans women who reviewed this manuscript: Jamie Faye, Melinda, and Crissie; and especially Tori, who made invaluable contributions to the section on spouses and children. Thanks also to all the girls in the transgender discussion forums, groups, and clubs whose stories and advice I've shamelessly cadged. Finally, much love to my family—may they one day come to appreciate the wonderful gift God sent them when I was born transsexual.

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Preface to the second edition

Much to my surprise, it's been a year and a half since **HOW TO CHANGE YOUR SEX** was first published, and there haven't been howls of protest about the hurtful jokes, ill-considered advice, and downright incorrect information in my little manual. To the contrary, readers consistently tell me they find my humor charming and the information helpful. This second edition comes about primarily because I wanted to correct my misunderstanding about the availability of a certain type of SRS I mention at the end of page 163. Besides, I have since become a professional technical writer and it was killing me to see some of the formatting gaffes I committed in the first edition. I also added a few more references I overlooked

before, like the sections on corsetry and podcasts.

In the first year and a half of HOW TO CHANGE YOUR SEX, over a hundred copies of have flown off the virtual shelves of Lulu, Amazon, and fine online bookstores everywhere. It's a smallish number, but worthwhile if the books are finding themselves in the hands of those who need them. I consider this my little way of giving back to a community that did so much to save and enrich my life. I hope HOW TO CHANGE YOUR SEX enriches yours.

With love,
Lannie Rose
February 2006

Introduction



So you want to change your sex? It's a good idea—if you happen to have been born transsexual; that is, if the sex between your legs doesn't match the gender in your heart. I was born transsexual but I didn't realize it until I was 46 years old. That was just a few years ago. Then, after living my whole life up until that time as a man, I changed my sex; now I live as a woman. You can, too!

Changing your sex is not just a surgical procedure; in fact, the surgery is completely optional. What changing your sex does entail is simply changing your entire perception of your own self; and, changing your gender presentation—how you dress, how you walk and talk, how you relate to all the other people in your life, how you engage in sexual

activity, your name, and all of your identification documents. You may even change what you are doing with your life.

You will probably change your body, at least in terms of your hairstyle, grooming habits (facial hair and the length of your fingernails), and ornamentation (piercings and tattoos). You will probably use hormones to make even more fundamental changes to your body. You may opt for various plastic surgeries like rhinoplasty and liposuction to further modify the appearance of your face and body. Ultimately, you may choose to change your genitals with *The Operation* (as in, “Have you had *The Operation*?”): sex reassignment surgery or SRS. Or, you may decide that your genitals are fine just the way they are.

There are plenty of books and other resources that discuss all aspects of transgenderism, transsexualism, and sex changes in great detail. Many of them are very good, and they contain all sorts of important information that you will probably want to know eventually. These resources tend to be long, detailed, and serious. This book, HOW TO CHANGE YOUR SEX, is a quick, practical, and entertaining overview of the subject. It is guide to the things you will want to learn more about. I skip over the details that you will quickly uncover as you research any of these topics further. I concentrate on the most important points and on practical advice based on my own experience and that of many other transsexual women and men I have spoken with. While I’ve tried to write in a lighthearted style, all of the information in this book is as accurate as I can make it and as serious as can be. Changing your sex is no joke! This

book is a great starting point for someone who is just beginning to realize they have gender issues and wondering if they might eventually lead to a sex change. It's also a good overview to help family, friends, and coworkers of transsexual individuals understand the process that their loved ones may undergo.

You can change your sex from male to female (MTF) or from female to male (FTM), depending on your starting point. You can even change back again—but if you follow the advice in this book, you should never have to! Most of the information in this book applies generally to both directions. If the MTF point of view dominates, that's because that is the direction I went. In a few places where it became too cluttered syntactically to cover both cases, for example when discussing spouses, I've simply resorted to writing from the MTF perspective. I'll let you FTM guys figure out how it applies in your case. I know you'd want it that way, you are such a gallant bunch.

Please note that I do not have any professional training in this area. I am not a doctor, psychologist, or lawyer. (I do hold college degrees in computer engineering and business, but that is neither here nor there.) My expertise comes from having changed sex myself, from talking with a lot of other people who have changed their sex, and from reading the same books that you can read yourself. Please consult with appropriate professionals rather than relying on any advice I give in this book. As a matter of fact, there is woefully little hard data on many of the issues facing transsexual people, so we are forced to make many of our decisions based on rumor, anecdotal evidence, tradition, and folklore. I

probably should preface almost everything I say in this book with, “In my humble opinion...”; but that would get rather cumbersome.

Whether you are on the long, exciting road to a sex change, or a short hop to a cross-dressing hobby, or just curious, I hope you enjoy learning about HOW TO CHANGE YOUR SEX. I imagine that most of you will never change your sex; but perhaps you will be inspired to make other changes to your body or your life—maybe something that has long been a dream of yours. Three things that every transsexual person knows well are these: Change is possible; miracles do happen; and life is short, so you’d better start making your dreams come true today!



1 Are you transsexual?



So you think you are transsexual? Or maybe you don't know about that, but there's something appealing to you about passing as the other gender? The good news is that you don't need to figure out if you are transsexual right now. It's not important until you get to Chapter 7 or 8. Just relax and have fun for now. But you will want to be looking for the signs as you go along, so we'd better discuss the issue up front.

The odds are that you are not transsexual. The fact that you are reading this book indicates that you have at least a little bit of confusion or curiosity about your gender. That is *not* unusual; something like half of all people do. But only about one in 250 people is transsexual, and only a small

number of them actually go about changing their sex. So rest assured that you are probably perfectly normal, and try to have some fun exploring your gender. If you are a guy, go ahead and try on your wife's sexy lingerie. (Ask her permission first!) If you're a gal, be a guy-type lumberjack or biker for a day. There's no harm in it, and you'll probably enjoy it.

On the other hand, suppose you won the lottery and you actually are transsexual. How do you know for sure? What does it even mean, to be transsexual?

The latter question, at least, is simple to answer. Being transsexual just means that you have the genitals appropriate for a particular sex, but your brain tells you that you are the other gender. In other words, you have a penis but you feel that you are a woman, or you have a vagina but you feel that you are a man. This is known in the psych books as Gender Identity Disorder, or GID. It causes anxiety, confusion, shame and guilt in the afflicted individual. These uncomfortable feelings, called gender dysphoria or GD, may be strong enough to prevent the transsexual person from forming successful social and intimate relationships or coping with life in a healthy manner.

Some people, who may be described as intersex or hermaphrodite, are born with ambiguous genitalia or various chromosomal anomalies which may also cause them to suffer feelings of gender dysphoria. A sex change may be appropriate treatment for some of these individuals. However, intersex is less common than transsexualism and the challenges and issues which confront these people are

different than those faced by transsexuals; I do not attempt to address them in this book.

The best science to date indicates that transsexualism comes about because when you were just a little fetus developing in your mother's womb, your genitals started down the path towards one gender but a few weeks later the hormones took an unusual turn and your brain started down the path to the other gender. It is perfectly natural, if somewhat rare. It is nobody's fault and nothing to be ashamed of.

The tricky part is that you may not know what gender you really feel like. If you were born with a penis, like I was, chances are that you were raised as a boy, like I was. We got very strong messages from our parents and from society that we were boys, and you may think that is what you are, even if your brain is really female. How do you figure out where your true self lies? I'll show you how, seriously, in a moment. But first, here are some lighthearted clues to look for:

- ♥ If you are a guy and you like wearing women's clothing, you just might be transsexual. (If you are a gal and you like wearing men's clothing, don't worry, you're perfectly normal.)
- ♥ When you were a little boy, did you tell your mother, "I'm a girl!"? Maybe you are transsexual, and you were right after all! (About 80 per cent of transsexuals seem to have been aware of their gender issues from a very early age. Others, like me, may not realize it until they are 46

years old.)

- ♥ Does your sexual preference run strongly to loving women? You just might be transsexual! ... or lesbian; or both. Many male to female transsexuals start out liking women, and a large number of them never change, even if they do change their sex.
- ♥ Do your genitalia seem wrong to you? Maybe it's because they don't match the gender your brain feels, and you are transsexual.
- ♥ When you make love, do you fantasize that you are the other gender? Maybe it's because you are transsexual.
- ♥ If you've always felt more comfortable in groups of the other gender, maybe it's because your true gender is not what you thought it was.
- ♥ If you develop computer games for a living, you just may be transsexual. (The trans population boasts an unusually high number of software engineers. Might this indicate a relationship between transsexualism and creativity and intelligence? Some people think so.)
- ♥ Did your wife's first husband leave her and become a woman? Maybe that is your path too. Many ex-wives of transsexuals seem to wind up with another transsexual person or cross-dresser as their next mate, often to their own surprise.

♥ Is your brother a woman? You may be too! I know two sets of brothers who both had sex changes. Now they are sisters! (The link between genetics and transsexualism is being studied.)

Seriously, I don't believe that you can determine whether you are transsexual by taking a test or checking any list of symptoms. I, for example, never experienced any of the symptoms listed above, except for the wearing-women's-clothing thing—a symptom which is shared by many non-transsexual cross-dressers, and *not* experienced by a large number of true transsexuals. Oh, I also had the liking-women thing. (Now I prefer men.)

Becoming a firefighter

I believe that the only effective way to figure out if you are transsexual is a process of trying on different roles and seeing which ones feel like they fit you the best. It's the same for finding out anything about your true self. For example, suppose you think you would make a good firefighter. Start by studying up on firefighting. Read some books, watch some movies. Does it still appeal to you? Study it in more depth, so you really understand what it's all about. Does it still seem like what you would like to do with your life? Can you take the bad parts along with the good? Try it out. Do some firefighter-type activities in your spare time. (Be careful not to burn down your house when you do this!) Hang out at a fire station and buddy up with some real

firefighters. If you are of age, find a bar where firefighters go for a drink after work and try to get to know them. Are they your kind of people? Can you see yourself doing what they do? If you still think firefighting is your calling, enroll in firefighter school, and get serious about it. Become a firefighter. After you've fought a few real fires, you will finally know for sure whether you were right, that firefighting is the life for you. You will be a firefighter.

You may not want to be a firefighter; but you do want to figure out if you are transsexual. How can you apply a similar process? Here are the steps. Keep in mind that your goals are to understand your true self, to have fun, and to enjoy your life. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, stop! You don't need to go any further.

1. Study up on transsexualism and transgenderism. You are reading this book; that's a good start. Try *The Lazy Crossdresser* by Charles Anders for another fun, helpful read. Watch these movies, if you can find them: *TransAmerica*, *Normal*, an HBO movie; *Just Like A Woman*; and *Different For Girls*. (*Tootsie* and *Mrs. Doubtfire* are fun, but they won't help you very much I'm afraid. They are not very realistic. *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*, *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, and *The Birdcage* are fun, too, but they're primarily about drag queens, not transsexuals.)
2. Now that you know a bit about it, does cross-dressing seem fun and exciting to you? Or, if not cross-dressing, maybe just leaving your gender markers behind and

becoming androgynous? Then why not try it out? Go to Chapter 2 in this book—*Getting started: Dressing and going out*. It will help get you going with cross-dressing or dressing androgynously; and give you some leads on how to get connected with support groups on the Internet and where to meet transgender folks (transsexuals, cross-dressers, and other gender border-crossers) in the real world.

3. Do you still think there's a chance that you are transsexual? Study it in more depth, so you really understand what it's all about. Read some more serious books, like *True Selves: Understanding Transsexualism - For Families, Friends, Coworkers, and Helping Professionals* by Mildred Brown and Chloe Rounsley. Try to meet some transsexual folks who are in the process of changing their sexes, or have already done so. Start seeing a therapist who specializes in gender issues—more on this in Chapter 6.
4. Are you starting to think that you really might be transsexual? (Or, if you knew it all along, do you still know it?) Can you take the bad parts along with the good? Good. Okay, now start part time cross-living. Spend more and more of your time in your new gender role doing regular activities like shopping and going to church, not just going on “adventures.” Try to really think of yourself as a woman rather than a cross-dressed man when you are in your femme persona. Does it feel right to you? Does your old gender role feel wrong to

you? If so, it may be time to start taking some serious steps down the path to changing your sex.

5. If cross-living feels right to you and you are ready to abandon your old gender role completely, it's pretty likely that you are transsexual and ready to transition. ("Transition" is the word we use to describe the entire, gradual process of changing your sex.) Move on to Chapter 7: *Hormones*, and Chapter 8: *Transition*.

6. If you've allowed time for the hormones to change your chemical balances and you have become comfortable living and working full-time in your new gender, then you are ready for the final step: Become a firefighter. No, wait, that's not right. I mean, have sex reassignment surgery. Or don't. It's totally optional. Whatever feels right to you. Whether you do or whether you don't, it doesn't really matter. In either case, you are now living happily and successfully in your new, true gender. Congratulations, you have changed your sex! And now, at last, you know the answer: Yes, you were transsexual. However, you are not transsexual anymore. Now you're just a woman or a man, whichever the case may be, and you have no more gender confusion.

To recap, I recommend that you do not worry about whether or not you are truly transsexual as you start out. Keep it in the back of your mind as a possibility, but put your main energy into getting in touch with how you feel about the different identities you try on and the various

activities you engage in. It may be months or even years before you need to seriously answer the “transsexual?” question—before you start taking any irrevocable actions. Even if the answer comes up, “No, I’m not transsexual,” you will have discovered a great deal about your true self and opened your life up to a new honesty and some exciting new interests and directions.

Remember, there are no time limits on this. You are living your life, not trying to complete a project. You can always change your mind and decide, “Yes, I am transsexual” at any time in the future. But once you decide “Yes” and take certain extremely serious steps, like sex reassignment surgery or coming out at work, going back to “No” can be problematic, to say the least!



2 Getting started: Dressing and going out



Haven't you always wondered how the other half live? Why not find out? Go ahead! If you're a guy, try on a dress or some sexy lingerie. If you're a gal, chances are that you've already worn "male" clothes, but have you actually pretended to be a guy? Go ahead and do it. It's completely legal in all 50 of the United States in the 21st century, and it's perfectly moral in 72% of the world's major religions. Okay, I made up the figure about religions. You'll have to work out the morality issue in your own head. Take this, if it helps: I say it's not a moral issue, and I give you permission to do it!

It was easy for me to type the preceding paragraph today. But there was a time, not so very long ago, that it would have been the furthest thing from my mind. Nothing I learned growing up, even through the sexually-permissive '60s, so much as hinted at that sort of freedom of gender presentation. It was so far off the map that it was unspoken, although a thousand clues in daily life constantly enforced the idea that men are men and women are women, and that boundary must not be crossed. One day a little light went on in my head, and I said, "Why not cross the gender boundary?" And I never looked back.

Cross-dressing is fun—for a lot of people; not just transsexuals (and not for all transsexuals—more on that in a moment), but also for many others in the transgender community: cross-dressers, drag queens, female impersonators, and the simply curious. ("Transgender" is an umbrella term that includes all of these categories of gender-enhanced people.) If it holds absolutely no appeal for you whatsoever, then forget about it. But if it holds even a little appeal, why not give it try?

You probably want to do your initial cross-dressing experiments in private, unless you are lucky enough to have a very understanding spouse or friend; or, best of all, if you happen to have a friend who cross-dresses. You may actually dress in a closet, but if you do it in your bedroom with the curtains closed when nobody is at home, we still refer to this as being "in the closet."

Getting some clothes

When you start experimenting with cross-dressing, please do not “borrow” clothes that don’t belong to you. Oh, many of us borrowed something from our mothers’ or sisters’ wardrobes or the laundry hamper when we were small, but adults should not do that. Spouses, in particular, get justifiably annoyed if they find their clothes or cosmetics mussed up, stretched out of shape, or soiled. The good news is that it is easy to get your own stuff. You can buy inexpensive clothes at mass market stores like Ross or Wal-Mart, or, better yet, thrift stores and Goodwill. I guarantee you that the people at the check-out counter will not give you any grief about buying clothes of the “wrong” gender. I used to prepare elaborate stories for inquisitive sales people; my most cunning one was about a wife who was too sick to do her own shopping, poor thing. I never had occasion to use my stories, thank goodness. At worst, sales clerks may make an assumption and say something like, “Your wife will like that!” Some cross-buyers take wicked pleasure in replying, “No, it’s for me!”

If you are very intimidated about buying cross-gender clothes in person, then try shopping by mail-order catalog or the Internet. These outlets also are great sources for larger-sized items, if you are too big for the things that are usually on the racks in the women’s stores. Of course, you need a discrete shipping address if you don’t want your wife and kids to ask curious questions about your purchases. Be careful about having things shipped to your work address—your gregarious secretary is apt to ask your wife how she

enjoyed her present from Victoria's Secret! (Maybe you shouldn't be hiding things from your wife in the first place? More on that coming up soon...)

The thrill of dressing / the androgynous way

Some transsexual people get a big thrill out of cross-dressing during the period prior to changing their sex. I cross-dressed thoroughly and enthusiastically for many years myself. Others cross-dress, but only because it feels comfortable and natural. That's the way I feel about dressing as a woman now; but, of course, it is not cross-dressing for me anymore. Cross-dressing would be if I tried to pass as a man. Yuck!

On the other hand, many transsexual people have no interest in the clothes aspect of it at all, or in strongly typing as either gender. They like to affect an androgynous look—neither identifiably male or female. These folks are often delighted when people seem confused about whether to call them “Sir” or “Ma’am.” Over time they find that more and more people seem to call them by a new set of pronouns, and they say, “Hmmm, I guess I’m a woman [or a man] now.” These two different approaches to migrating one’s gender presentation usually end up at about the same place eventually, a more-or-less average, very passable appearance. Androgynous types of transsexuals very gradually change from presenting as one gender, to

androgynous, to the other gender. We cross-dressing types change abruptly from one gender presentation to the other, and we often overshoot the mark. Initially our new gender presentation is likely to be overly femme (or overly butch), and gradually we learn to scale it back until we achieve a natural presentation in our new gender.

The androgyne path is often preferred by those who have the good fortune to transition at an early age, say the late teens or early twenties. Perhaps this is because young people's desires to fit in with their peers and not stand out as unusual are so strong. An androgynous presentation is something of a blank canvas upon which the beholder can paint whatever picture he or she chooses. If it works out well, family and friends can be swept along by your gradual feminization, and the shock will not be so great when one day you announce that you plan to change your sex. Transitioning in middle age, like I did, has a distinctly different flavor. As adults our need for external approval is not so strong, so we can tolerate the inevitable odd looks and jibes we receive when we go out cross-dressed. Besides, the middle-aged, closeted, transsexual person often has no peer group or close friends to worry about anyway, because our life-long gender dysphoria has prevented us from forming healthy social relationships. Another factor is that we feel we have let too much of our lives slip by us already; we are anxious to get going in our fully femme presentation as quickly as possible, so the cross-dressing route appeals to us. It may also be that our identities, even if they are primarily masks behind which we hide our true selves, are so solidly formed that the abrupt, extreme shock of cross-

dressing is needed to crack them open and allow change to begin; whereas a younger person's more malleable self identity adapts more readily to the gradual molding process of an androgynous transition.

Androgyny is not always a stepping stone to transition. Some people who may identify as androgynes choose to eschew male/female gender typing completely and permanently, living their entire lives in an androgynous gender presentation. They may consider themselves to be both male and female genders at once; or neither; or something completely different. Sometimes their sexuality is celibate; or, even more than celibacy, a total disinterest in sex. In some cases their androgyny may be a response to having been born physically intersex—having ambiguous genitalia and/or rare chromosomal syndromes. Whatever the cause, androgyny is a valid and respectable life choice. It presents a different set of challenges and issues than transsexuality, and I don't try to cover it in this book. If you think you may be this type of person, you may want to look into support groups such as The Intersex Society of North America (www.isna.org).

Going out

If you enjoyed the experience of trying on a new gender presentation in the privacy of your own closet, your next step is to try out your new image on some other people. This will probably be the scariest thing you've ever done in your life! (Unless you are a battle-tried war veteran; I'm told that

being shot at is much more scary.) I know it was terrifying for me; but it was also thrilling and rewarding.

There's no hurry about going out. As long as you are enjoying your activities in private, and you're not miserable in the rest of your life because of your gender confusion, then just stay in the closet. But there may come a point at which you feel "all dressed up and no place to go." Take heart; there are plenty of places to go.

There are a several good ways to take your new gender presentation out the front door (or, perhaps, the back door?). You can go to transgender support groups, transgender-friendly businesses, transgender-friendly nightclubs, or you can be a do-it-yourself-er. Traveling by car or plane can get you even further out, with even greater thrills and fun.

Transgender support groups

Most major cities have groups where transgender people meet for fun and support. Some, like Transgender San Francisco (TGSF), are mainly organized around social activities. TGSF has monthly dinners and the annual Cotillion where Miss TGSF and Mr. TGSF are crowned. Others, like Santa Cruz Trans and SCOUT (Santa Cruz Organization Uniting Trans men), both in Santa Cruz, California, are more oriented towards support and discussing personal issues. All of these organizations welcome new members, and you should feel free drop in wearing your regular clothes if you are not comfortable going out "dressed." Every group has its own personality and its own

set of interesting characters, so don't be dismayed if you don't feel at home in the first group you visit. You might want to find another group in the next city over and give them a try. Transgender support groups are a great way to start meeting all different types of transgender people, and to try out your new gender presentation when you are brave enough.

Transgender-friendly businesses

You may be lucky enough to have a transgender-friendly business which does “transformations” or “makeovers” in your community. These are places where you can walk in as a man and walk out as a woman; or, just hang around the shop for while as a woman, if you prefer. (I don't know of any female to male makeover services. I guess FTMs are too smart to need 'em!) Carla's in San Jose, California is one of the most famous of these establishments. The Hidden Woman in Reno, Nevada is another. The Hidden Woman even has package deals for Las Vegas—a nice little vacation idea.

These “transformation” services tend to be a bit pricey. If you can afford it, they're a nice way to get started. They are also great places to pick up tips on doing your makeup, wigs, and fashions. Even if you have been able to put yourself together reasonably well on your own, these shops are still fun destinations for you. You can visit them just to try out your new look while shopping and socializing. They are very open-minded and accepting no matter how

undeveloped your look may be, and they are great places to meet other transgender people.

One day I discovered how very understanding and accommodating of special needs such shops can be. I was in Carla's one afternoon doing a little shoe-shopping and I met a gorgeous Chinese girl—who was actually a guy, of course. She was tall, thin, absolutely lovely, and fun to chat with. I was surprised to find out that she had never dressed as a woman until Carla had transformed her that afternoon. I was even more astonished to realize, after I had been chatting and waling around the shop with her for about a half hour, that she was completely blind!

Transgender-friendly nightclubs

Another way to take your new gender presentation out into the world is to be a vampire! Vampires are cross-dressers who come out only after dark. There are many t-girls (transgender girls) whose feminine selves never see the light of day. Clubbing is their life.

Very few bars and nightclubs cater exclusively to transgenders. Even in San Francisco, that mecca of sexual deviance, only two of the over 100 clubs in the city have transgender themes: Diva's, a bar and dance club, and AsiaSF, a bar and restaurant featuring beautiful transsexual waitresses. So mostly transgender club kiddies make do with gay bars.

You are not likely to find transgender folks in every gay bar. In fact, gays and lesbians are usually no more familiar

with transgenders (other than drag queens) than the general population. Nevertheless gay bars are—usually—friendly and accepting of transgenders. If you feel uneasy about going into a gay bar, I've got news for you. Whenever I go into gay bars I see women there, and heterosexual couples too. In lesbian bars, I see some men and some couples. Heck, the gay bars have the best dance music, and all the serious club kiddies know it! So don't be afraid to drop into a few of your local gay drinking establishments and ask the bartenders whether t-girls hang out there. Ask which night—sometimes we gather at particular pubs on specific nights of the week or month. For example, San Francisco's most wonderful transgender party is Trannie Shack, which is held every Tuesday night at The Stud bar south of Market. ("Trannie" is slang for "transgender person." Sometimes it is spelled "tranny", but I prefer "trannie" because, well, my nickname is "Lannie the Trannie"!)

If a bar doesn't have a trans clientèle, just ask the bartender if he knows where else we go in town. He'll know.

When you are out clubbing after dark, please be careful! Danger lurks everywhere these days, and you are especially vulnerable in your new gender presentation. Be aware of what is going on around you, and don't trust strangers. Don't provoke or challenge people; if you are provoked or teased, just walk away. Don't assume that the police will help you; if you are obviously a cross-dresser or transsexual person, the police, sadly, may look the other way when you are in trouble. Be especially careful if you are drinking or otherwise "partying," and don't drink too much. Don't drink and drive! If the police stop you when you are obviously

cross-dressed or transsexual, it could go either of two ways. One school of thought is that you are likely to be sent on your way because no cop wants the rest of the guys at the station house to see him filling out paper work on a trannie all night; another school of thought is that they are more likely to run you in just for the fun of it. Why take a chance?

Be a do-it-yourself-er

You don't need support groups, or trans-friendly businesses, or trannie bars to go out. You can just be a normal person and go the mall. As a bonus, you can shop for more clothes and shoes while you're there. I did just that for many years. You will be surprised at how little attention you receive. Be sure to dress "merge", that is, so that you merge in with rest of the crowd. Don't go to the mall dressed like a five dollar hooker if you don't want to attract attention. (Five dollar hookers dress that way specifically to attract attention.)

Look for trans-friendly public events in your area. Most communities host an LGBT (lesbian gay bisexual transsexual) Pride celebration in June each summer. This is an ideal environment in which to try out your new gender presentation. If you get clocked, just be proud! Similarly friendly events include San Francisco's Folsom Street Fair, which is held on the last Sunday in September and features a heavy dosage of leather and bondage arts and crafts; and the Transgender San Francisco (TGSF) Cotillion, where Miss and Mr. Transgender San Francisco are selected each

January. (Granted, San Francisco may have more LGBT-themed events than most communities.)

If you begin your going-out activities in transgender-friendly environments or as a vampire, be sure to get some real-world experience too, if you think you really might be transsexual. If you change your sex, you won't be able to spend your life in bars and support groups. Going to the movies is a great initial adventure in the real world—a few moments of panic while you buy your ticket, two hours enjoying yourself out but alone in the dark, and then a few more moments of panic as you exit the theater and walk to your car. Parks and museums are great places to be a do-it-yourself-er. Some churches like Unity, Unitarian, and Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) emphasize diversity and welcome transgender worshipers at their services and events. Flea markets, summer arts and crafts festivals, and free outdoor concerts are fun places to mingle with the regular folk.

Travel and conventions

Traveling en femme can be enjoyable and exciting adventures. Driving around town without even leaving your car provides a safe environment for your initial steps out of the closet. I still remember the thrill of my first drive over the hill to visit a friend at Santa Cruz beach, with absolutely no boy clothes in my possession, not even for emergencies! As you grow more confident in your new gender presentation, you may want to try longer road trips and even

plane trips. If you go somewhere you are unlikely to run into anyone you know, you may find more courage to flaunt your new image. So what if you get clocked (recognized as a cross-dresser)? You'll never see those people again.

Transgender conventions are especially good destinations for out of town trips. Transgender people from all over the world gather annually in late September at a fine hotel in Atlanta, Georgia for Southern Comfort Conference (SCC), the largest and most famous such convention. Meetings and activities are scheduled throughout the week, though many people attend Thursday through Sunday or just for the weekend. SCC is a great opportunity to spend several days or a whole week entirely in your new gender identity. During the day you can attend sessions on diverse topics of interest to the transgender community, such as transgender activism, feminine style and deportment, sex reassignment surgery, dealing with families, and many other subjects. Lunch and dinner provide great opportunities to make new friends as everybody socializes together in a large banquet room. In the evenings and occasionally during the day buses arrive to take groups to pre-arranged entertainments such as shopping, nightclubs, and shows. A Big Brother/Sister program teams experienced people with newbies to help with those first scary, tentative steps out the hotel room door.

Other popular transgender conventions are California Dreamin in San Francisco (San Jose) in April; Esprit, held near Seattle in May; Colorado Gold Rush in Denver in March; and the less formal but more fun Diva Las Vegas in May in Sin City itself.

A lot of people worry about traveling in a gender presentation which does not match the gender on their identification documents, especially with the stepped-up airport security since the 9/11 tragedy. I don't think this is really a problem. The first time I flew presenting as female but with male id was when I traveled to Southern Comfort just a couple of weeks after 9/11/2001. My best friend, Jamie Faye Fenton, remembers that I seemed extremely nervous as we headed for the airport! A guard at a security checkpoint studied my driver's license carefully, then looked me up and down. Finally, he smiled and said, "You've lost a lot of weight, haven't you?" "Yes!" I agreed, and scurried through the metal detector.

A lot of people travel with mismatched gender on their id all the time and they rarely encounter difficulties. Just be sure to be totally honest if anyone questions you or asks for your id. I've found that saying, "I'm transsexual" is a magic password—security people have been trained to understand this and let you through. *Never try to use a fake id!* As insurance, you may want to carry a letter from your therapist explaining your condition; we jokingly call this a "Get Out Of Jail Free" card and it may help in some sticky situations. If you want to be really careful, you may want to be prepared to quick-change back to "guy mode" if airport authorities insist on it.

That said, I should mention the story of Sarah West, a delightful English girl who traveled to the United States for Southern Comfort Conference in 2000. On her way home she boarded a United Airlines connecting flight in Omaha, Nebraska. UA personnel pulled her off the plane, which she

had already boarded, and forced her to change into male clothes to match her British passport. She even had a “Get Out Of Jail Free” card, a letter from eminent British psychiatrist Dr. Russell Reid, but it was no help in this situation. Sarah was humiliated and sued the airline, but her timing was unfortunate; the lawsuit got derailed in United’s bankruptcy mess following the 9/11 disaster a year later. Sarah has traveled extensively in the United States and Europe without any other trouble, but you should be aware that incidents like this may occur from time to time.

Getting connected

If you follow the do-it-yourself approach to going out exclusively, you are unlikely to meet other transgender people. That’s too bad, because you do want to meet other transgender folks so you can compare stories, get ideas about your gender identity and presentation, and know that there are others who share your feelings. Fortunately, there are other ways to get connected in the transgender community.

Sometimes it seems that there are more transgender and transsexual people around today than ever before. I don’t think the incidence of gender confusion is any greater today than it used to be. What is different is the Internet. Thanks to the World Wide Web, we have been able to connect with each other and find out that we are not alone. We have been able to share information about our condition and to encourage each other to explore our diversity and enjoy our gender-enhanced lives. You can too. Just google

“transgender support groups,” “transgender-friendly businesses, ” and “transgender friendly nightclubs” for plenty of links to the types of places I discussed in this chapter. (You do know that to “google” means to use the Internet search engine at www.google.com, don’t you?) Google “transgender” and “transsexual” for plenty of other useful information. Look for transgender-related groups under the “group” features of the Yahoo, Google, and MSN portals. Check out some online e-zines like Transgender Forum (www.tgforum.com), which publishes articles by your humble author (that’s me!) every month. Sample a lot of different transgender communities, groups, and resources to get a feel for the wonderful diversity within our community; sometimes it may seem that all trannies are impoverished, or rich, or hookers, or pathetic, or stunning; but keep looking, and eventually you will find somewhere where you feel like you belong.

The Internet is great for finding a lot of other things you will want as well. Makeup and fashion tips are easily located. Advice on special trannie needs, like breast forms and prosthetic penises, beard cover, and tucking (concealing the penis by tucking it between the legs) are available. Online shopping provides an easy way to assemble your new wardrobe, assuming you have a place to discretely receive packages. Try www.payless.com (Payless ShoeSource—I love it because sizes up to 13 are available mail-order from their Web site) for shoes and www.onehanesplace.com for nylons and brassieres, for example; try www.carabella.com for sexy dresses. For more exotic attire, Frederick’s of Hollywood and Victoria’s Secret probably jump into your

mind; but you can visit plenty of other fine boutiques like www.threewisheslingerie.com and www.ladybwear.com as well.

In this age of the iPod, you'll want to subscribe to some transgender podcasts (or listen to Internet radio shows) like www.gendertalk.com, www.transfm.org, and Susan Moses' wonderful www.talkingtranny.com.

If and when you get serious about actually changing your sex, you'll want to visit these two well-respected sites: Andrea James's *TS Roadmap* www.tsroadmap.com and Dr. Anne Lawrence's *Transsexual Women's Resources* www.annelawrence.com/twr. You might also want to look in at *FemImage* www.femimage.com/ where the lovely and amazing Denaë Doyle provides a unique service coaching trans women on feminine poise and deportment.

Feel free to post to the group discussion boards and to e-mail people you meet online. You will find some nice people, a few mean ones, and a lot who will just ignore you. So what? You are anonymous online, and it's worth the effort to find the nice ones. If you arrange to meet anyone in 3-D (that is, in person in the three dimensional world), take the usual precautions you would in meeting any stranger, no matter how well you may feel you have gotten to know them online. It's best to meet in a public place; trans social events and support groups are great meeting places. As a rule of thumb, psycho killers like to remain anonymous so they are unwilling to meet you in a group situation. (But don't stake your life on that assumption.)

A very pleasant aspect of being transgender is that it is very easy to make friends within the transgender

community. You instantly share a deep and intimate bond with your trans sisters and brothers, so there is always something to talk about to break the ice. It is easy to get close very quickly. However, don't be surprised if your new friends also fade from your life very quickly. This happens because, once you get past the superficial similarities of the both of you being cross-dressers or transsexual, you find that you don't have much else in common. Also, a lot of people in the trans community are changing very rapidly—and you most quickly of all, as you go through with actually changing your sex. So it is not unusual to find that you have grown out of relationships that you thought would last forever. This can be very difficult on you, especially as you will be on an emotional roller-coaster from the hormones and other changes in your life. But you have to accept it and more on, without taking it as a personal failure or insult. It is likely that some of the people you meet will remain your friends and allies for life, but it may only be at the level of the occasional e-mail or Christmas card.

You will meet some people in the transgender community who seem to be walking disaster areas. They have money problems, they can't find a job, their marriage is breaking up, they have health problems, and they have a million things they "need" to do for their transition. (Some of the ones with the most things to do for their transition wind up never actually changing their sex at all.) And they'll talk about nothing else. Then you'll meet others who seem to have it all—a good grasp on their identities, lives that are working well, and they look great. But don't be fooled. If you get a chance to know them well, you'll find out that all

of us have our demons. The point is that you should not waste your energy being envious of anyone you meet, or excessively sorry for those who seem to be having rougher times. Just try to be a good, supportive friend, and we can all help each other through this. You might want to be particularly cautious about inviting down-and-out t-girls to share your residence. It is often much easier to get them to move in than it is to get them to move out again. On the other hand, sometimes t-girls make fine roommates, sharing expenses as well as joys and sorrows. Just be careful!

One final hint. Don't expect anybody to become all giddy at the prospect of helping *you* learn how to dress up. That's what transformation services are for.

Getting clocked

When you go out in public sporting your new gender presentation, you will be amazed to find that almost everyone will completely ignore you. I've run around in some of the most outrageous outfits, trying my best to get some attention, to no avail. Nevertheless, from time to time, you are going to be "clocked." Getting "clocked" or "read" means that somebody recognizes that you are not quite what you seem to be. Most of the time this comes in the form of overhearing somebody exclaim to their companion, "That's a man!" Less often someone will confront you with a question like, "Are you a man?"; or they'll try to be cute with a comment like, "Dude, nice dress!" Very rarely, at least in my experience, will somebody be actually hostile.

A transsexual person's desire to pass—not to be clocked—is completely understandable. A cross-dresser or a drag queen may not mind being clocked because they inwardly identify as men; it does not bother them to be recognized as such. In fact, most drag queens, those who dress in an outrageously exaggerated manner, expect and demand to be clocked. (But you had better treat them as ladies, or they will let you have it!) I, on the other hand, as a transsexual person, inwardly identify as a woman; it challenges my identity and hurts my feelings if somebody treats me like a man. If you have a strong feeling about passing, it may be an indication that you tend toward the transsexual side of things.

Who is most likely to clock you? Teenage girls are absolutely the best at clocking t-girls. They are self-conscious and are constantly evaluating other women as they strive to develop their own feminine images and personalities. (As trans women we go through much the same process, though we need to move rapidly from our psychologically teenage years to something more befitting our real ages.) Fortunately, teenagers are so wrapped up in their own little worlds that they rarely notice us if we are older. Men are terrible at clocking t-girls because their attention is always focused on our bosoms and legs, which are usually our best features. The funniest clocking incidents are when a small child looks up at her mother and says, "Mommy, why is that man wearing a dress?" Little kids' eyes see directly into our souls.

One big factor that causes t-girls to get clocked is their tendency to dress inappropriately or to overdress.

Ridiculously short skirts, sexy heels, large breast forms, and long, flowing wigs are alluring, but they will attract attention in the mall—especially if you are 55 years old, six feet four inches tall, and 280 pounds. The urge to dress this way is often part of the Cinderella complex, or “feminine overshoot”: having finally granted yourself permission to wear feminine clothes, permission you have denied yourself for so long, you want to go all out and wear the most sexy, outrageous outfits you can find. There is nothing wrong with this; just expect to get clocked a lot if you wear these outfits out in the conventional world. Maybe you’d be better off enjoying them in the privacy of your own home, or at tranny-friendly nightclubs? (You can wear absolutely anything at Trannie Shack!)

Incidentally, Halloween is a great opportunity to shop for femme clothes with confidence, and to have some of your first “going out dressed” adventures. But Halloween is also the worst day of the year for getting clocked, because people are looking for disguises and costumes on that day.

If you are worried about being clocked, you should be aware of the “Two Trannie Rule.” The Two Trannie Rule says that the chances of being clocked go up exponentially with the number of t-girls in a group. Two t-girls together are four times as likely to be clocked as a single t-girl by herself; three t-girls are nine times as likely, etc. So expect to be clocked if you go out with a group of other transsexual women or cross-dressers. The situation in which you are least likely to be clocked is if you are out with a man, preferably one whom you do not tower over, because his presence validates you as a woman. If you are with a non-

trans woman or a group of women, it can work in your favor because they accept you as one of their own, or it can work against you if the contrast between their femininity and yours is too great. If you go out with your spouse, there is an extra danger that you may fall into your accustomed male patterns and make it obvious that you are the husband.

My advice about getting clocked is simply this: Get used to it. It doesn't matter how good your gender presentation skills become, or how hot you are—even a hottie like me gets clocked now and then. It's not important to me. I'm not trying to fool anybody about anything. If they know what I really am, so what? The whole point of the exercise is to understand my true self, and to live as exactly that. Oh, don't get me wrong. It still hurts my feelings if someone thinks of me as a *man*; but it doesn't bother me if they know I'm a trans woman as long as they accept me as a woman.

I learned a good lesson about getting clocked when I was still just a cross-dresser (or so I thought). I was out at a “straight” dance club in San Francisco with two trans woman friends. We were leaving the club in the wee hours when a young fellow passed us on his way in. He gave us a classic double-take, his head swiveling around to give us a careful second look. Sounding incredulous, he asked, “Are you men?” My friends just laughed and replied in unison, “No, we're trannies!” and we blew on by. This taught me that I didn't need to hide in shame from my transgender nature; rather, I could and should be proud of it—or rather, proud of myself, in spite of it. It wasn't our problem—the guy was a goof for not realizing what was going on!

Ironically, once you don't care about getting clocked anymore, that's when it stops happening. The number one key to passing is self-confidence. The number two key is a big smile. These are the only tools that will ever get you a pass from a small child. Until you develop the confidence to present comfortably in your new gender identity, here is a prescription for faking it: walk slowly; breathe deeply; and look people in the eyes.

When nature calls

When you venture out in public in your new gender presentation, there will come a time when you feel a call of nature. Which restroom should you use? The general guideline is to use the restroom appropriate for the gender in which you are presenting yourself. So if you are a guy going out dressed as a woman, use the ladies' room. If you're a gal passing as a guy, use the men's room. Your primary concern should be your personal safety. A cross-dressed person (guy or gal) could get beat up if they get clocked in a men's room. If you sense that risk, don't go in. It is less likely that you will be assaulted in a women's room, but don't kid yourself, women can get rough, too; especially, say, in a dyke leather bar.

If you're not completely comfortable using the restroom, or if your gender presentation isn't highly passable, then do your business and get out as quickly as possible. Don't dawdle at the mirror checking your makeup, or start

conversations, etc. The restroom is is not the best place to make new friends.

If you go into a women's room and find that all the stalls are full and there is a line, don't panic. Just get in line and wait your turn. In general, if there is a problem using a restroom, the objections don't come from the women. The problem is that men don't want to think of a cross-dresser in the restroom with their wives—although what they imagine goes on in there, I can't fathom.

I'm not a legal expert, but I believe that in most states and municipalities, using a public restroom appropriate for your gender presentation but not your biological sex is perfectly legal. Nevertheless, you wouldn't want to have to prove it in court. Be discreet.



End of preview!

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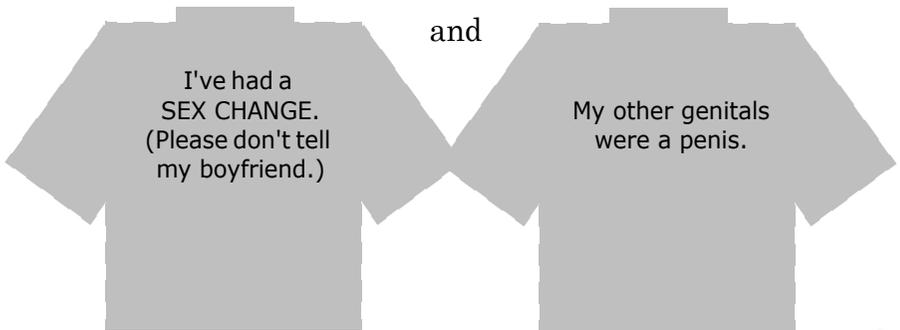
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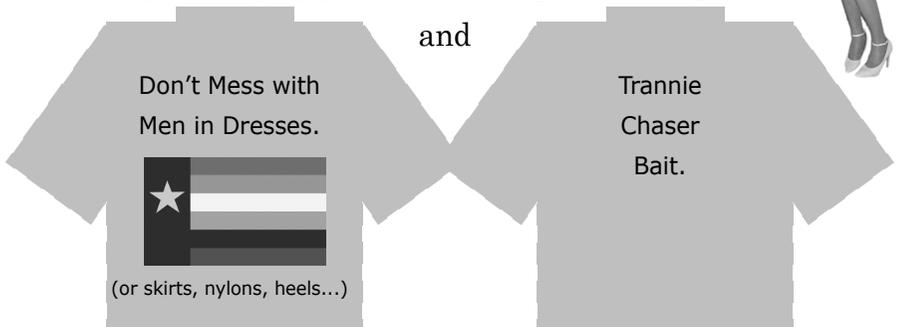
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