

YOUR SOFFA VOICE

Volume 2, Issue 1

February 1, 1998

Editor's Note

The first issue of Your SOFFA VOICE has come and gone and I must admit, I'm pleased with the response so far. I sent several samples out and several SOFFAs have expressed a desire to subscribe. This issue includes some excellent articles from Mary Boenke and Loree Cook-Daniels as well as some SOs who want to share their experiences. If you are reading this newsletter and know of a parent or SO who are struggling and feel alone, please share it's existence with them. It's so important for people to know there is support and resources available. Send any requests for sample copies or any personal stories, articles, poems, essays, letters, comments, etc. to either of the following addresses: Email: SOFFAUSA@aol.com or postal mail:

Jodi Burchell, Editor

P.O. Box 1916

Smyrna, TN. 37167

~jodi

P.S. Visit the new Websight:

www.angelfire.com/tn/yoursoffavoiced/index.html

A Stunted Conversation: When Language Obstructs

By Hope

"And as you struggle to identify yourself with words, you offer every one of us here the gift of new language -- of fresh concepts."
~Leslie Feinburg

My mother certainly caught me off guard the other day. "Why on earth," she insisted upon knowing, "are you attracted to such masculine females if you are not at all interested in men?" I sat there quietly, with the painful awareness of my inability to provide my mother with a sufficient answer. In this period of awkward silence, I came to the conclusion that my mother and I simply do not speak the same language when it comes to sexuality and gender. With this in mind, I knew that finding a suitable answer for both of us would be no easy feat.

My mother's question was based upon the relationship that I have with my partner, Tracey, who identifies as both a transgender Butch and as a transman. In my experience, I have found that these concepts are extremely difficult for parents, as well as for most of society to grasp. The former term is used to explain very masculine, female-born persons who tend to partner with very feminine, queer females like myself. The latter concept refers to people who have adopted "man" as part of their identity, yet put a slight twist on it. For the most part, transmen are viewed and treated by the general public as men.

My mother is fully aware that I have not dated nor been interested in biological males for many years. Nonetheless, my partner looks, smells, walks, sits,

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 A Stunted Conversation: When Language Obstructs
- 2 Choosing a Bow For The Box
- 2 NEW TRANS-PARENTS' WONDERINGS
- 3 Amboyz SOFFA Contacts
- 5 Growing Old Transgendered
- 6 Domestic Bliss-a poem by Sonya Lorenzo

continued page 3

Choosing a Bow for the Box
By S. Lee Smith

All my life, I've been attracted to men. I dated biological males in high school, married a bioguy and stayed put for over sixteen years, telling myself I was reasonably content and that intensity of passion in a relationship, that soulmate connection we all dream about, was a fairy tale, the stuff bad novels are made of and not part of "real life." Then an activist friend of mine introduced me to the ftm community, and I found my heart.

Since then, I've been asked to explain myself constantly; explain myself to friends, co-workers, other people in the trans community, many of whom have questions regarding my sexual identity, or who wonder if I now question it. It's a question we all face as significant others of transmen, a question of whether our partner's status as ftm changes who we are or how we perceive ourselves. Just as the SOs with roots in the lesbian community struggle with other people's misconception that they have "gone straight" because of their partners' transition, we who identify as heterosexual are continuously asked if loving an ftm has suddenly transformed us into lesbians.

I admit that at first I felt a jab of resentment at the question, not because it bothers me personally to be seen as gay, but because being perceived as such tells me someone is not quite "getting it" where my partner is concerned, not fully recognizing or accepting him as male the way I do. And that hurts.

For me, the leap of faith was an easy one; it was simply a matter of realizing gender is determined between the ears, not between the thighs. I've dated transmen in various stages of the process from pre-T to 20 years post-transition, and have found that it all boils down to a simple equation: my partner is male, this is my partner's body, therefore this is a male body. Plumbing doesn't make the man, things like personal integrity, compassion, chivalry, warmth, and caring do. During the two years I've spent in this community, I've encountered a number of strong souls who are more intensely male, more man than any bioguy could ever hope to be. It's simply a matter of helping the other people in my life see them as I do, or rather learn, as I did, to see with their hearts instead of their eyes.

I suppose I'm luckier than most. A writer myself, I socialize primarily with creative folk, writers and artists who ask questions and truly listen to the answers, whose vision slices through the outer shell to see the core personality beneath. It

NEW TRANS-PARENTS' WONDERINGS
By Mary Boenke

There are, of course, as many different reactions to learning your child is transgendered as there are parents. Much has been written, already, about the typical grief reactions as they apply to parents of gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgendered (GLBT) offspring, so we don't need to elaborate here. It is true and wise to keep in mind, however, that these feelings of shock, denial, guilt, anger, shame, bargaining, and acceptance will probably color much of parents' early responses, even how they ask the inevitable questions. What follows is mostly about transsexual children, but could apply also to parents of crossdressers, intersexed children (with mixed genitalia) and transfolks who chose not to use hormones or surgery.

Once parents recover from the initial shock they often have many questions. "What did I do wrong?" The answer is -- probably nothing! No one knows for sure what causes children to become gay, straight or trans. It is currently thought to be largely effected in utero by the timing of certain hormones plus some genetic connection. While there have not yet been many studies on trans formation, we know from gay studies that gayness tends to run in some extended families, that if one identical twin is gay, the other is at least 3 times more likely to be gay also. We know also that children often identify as gay or trans at ages too young to fully understand orientation or gender differences, and that GLBT persons, virtually unanimously, say this was not a choice but a discovery. We now know that male and female brains differ in at least twelve places and that trans folks tend to have the brain shape of their chosen gender. We also know that most mammalian species have gay members, some species change sex, and that GLBT persons have been known and recorded in many cultures, almost since history began. While none of these proves orientation and gender identity are genetic, they certainly point to that conclusion. So -- Mom and Dad, relax, you didn't do anything wrong. In spite of Freud's attempt to make children's personalities almost totally dependent on their parents, "it ain't necessarily so."

The other reason parents sometimes feel guilty is "Why didn't you tell me/us sooner? We could have BEEN there for you. We should have known." Probably all parents want to smooth the bumpy road for their children and feel badly when they can't. Children learn ever so young that they are somehow different and do their very best to conform, to be what they think we all want - a "normal" healthy child. They also want ever so much to "fit in" with their peers. Transgender adults tell us how hard they tried EVERY day to conform. Risking parents' love and acceptance, in their perception, is beyond their ken. In retrospect parents often put the earlier clues together and say "aha", now I understand why you wouldn't wear skirts, or wanted to wear my dresses and make-up, or played such and such. Maybe in the future, when "transgender" is a mainstream term, then

AMBOYZ SOFFA CONTACTS

National SOFFA Coordinator:

Loree Cook-Daniels: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

Local SOFFA Coordinators:

-New York City: Natalie: Email: [REDACTED]

-Tennessee: Tracy: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

-Minnesota: Beth: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

-Arizona: Debra: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]

-Toronto: Kaia [REDACTED] FAX: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

-San Antonio, TX: Debra: [REDACTED]
(leave msg on answering machine);

Email: [REDACTED]
-Richard Brown in Delaware; (gay man, to ally): Delaware: Richard Brown: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

We also have SOFFAs serving in regular positions:

-Lee Smith, Midsouth Coordinator, is a SOFFA and also the Online Outreach Coordinator:

PO Box 118, New Haven, KY, 40051

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

-Arlene Sandoval-Guerra is the Southeast Region Spanish-speaking Liason (ally): Latino/a Issues: (Se Habla Español)

Email: [REDACTED]

The following special contacts are also SOFFAs:

-Legal Issues: Phyllis Randolph Frye, Esq: [REDACTED] (lawyer and transwoman)

-Medical Issues: Dr Kathryn Thomas, PhD, RN: [REDACTED] Email: [REDACTED]
(gender therapist)

-Continued page 11

stands, and dresses like a man. Tracey is the man I have always dreamed of, yet he was born female. From the moment that he and I first found one another, I knew that he was exactly what I needed and wanted. Despite the extreme certainty I feel towards my partner and my relationship, I was presented with quite a challenge in answering my mother's query.

After days of contemplation, I finally began to find the words that were necessary to convey the nature of my being, my attraction, and my identity. I realized that I ought to explain to my mother that we do not share the same conceptualization of gender. She views the system of gender with binary lenses; one is either "man" or "woman." I, on the other hand, feel you can be both of these options, or neither. In fact, I envision a multitude of ways in which genders can be expressed and experienced.

Consequently, I am not attracted to biological males who grow up to be men but rather to men who were born female. Since Tracey was born female and raised as a "girl," he was able to evade the type of socialization that I am often repelled by. He is a definitively a guy, minus the sense of privilege and supremacy that plagues many (but not all) biological males. He is clearly not a societal woman, nor is he a traditional man, but rather a transgressor of the conventional gender system.

The life of a gender transgressor is undoubtedly no easy journey. However, I happen to be an avid devotee of such individuals. Like the majority of Femme dykes, I am drawn like a magnet to polar opposites. Nothing makes my eyes shine quite as brightly as when I am able to juxtapose my high femininity against my partner's masculine qualities. I appreciate his extreme masculinity in a culture that vilifies such an appearance on a female. Similarly, Tracey values my hyper-femininity in a queer culture that continues to hold androgyny as the only legitimate way to express disapproval with the patriarchy.

While differences are essential in my attraction to transguys, it also is imperative that we have certain commonalities. Due to the fact that we were both raised as "girls," we share a number of similarities both intellectually and emotionally. We thus have a common base from which we can both understand how and why we turned out in a manner that was antithetical to both our parents' expectations. My parents, for instance, expected to have their feminine daughter enter a heterosexual union and basically, become another husband's wife. Likewise, Tracey's parents expected their "daughter" grow into a woman and not such a

-Continued page 4

A Stunted.....cont. from page 3

(deliciously) masculine being. Although we both have deviated from our parents' prospects, I view it as a bond that serves to strengthen the Femme/Transgender Butch connection. Countless significant others endure this specific struggle. They know without a moment's hesitation the precise type of individual that they are most attracted to yet they are not always able to defend their choices as clearly as they would like to. I encourage anyone in this place, in my place, to continue to struggle with language. I strongly believe that a certain amount of deconstruction is needed to bring about a common understanding among our family, friends, and allies. And isn't it high time that people cease judging and start listening? ♦

Choosing... cont. from page 2

still hurts when friends or family fall by the wayside, digging in their heels and wallowing in their own willful ignorance, refusing to accept my partner or me for who we are. But I'm learning to cope and move on, concentrating my efforts on those who are more open. All we can do is educate whenever the opportunity arises, provide the people who care enough to ask questions with information and literature and the assurance that we're always willing to talk. And most of all, cut them a little slack when they struggle or lag behind. With a little help, they usually catch up.

Transgenderism isn't an easy concept, and it takes time and patience both to explain and to grasp it. Most people see gender and sexuality in black and white terms and become uncomfortable when shades of gray start seeping in. It's human nature to assign labels, to try to put everyone in a neat little box tied with a ribbon that clearly states "male" or "female," "gay" or "straight." Rather than fighting it, I've found it more productive to simply maintain and project a strong sense of self, to present myself and my ftm partner as the heterosexual couple that we are without apologies or disclaimers. That, and when someone starts to wrap me up and put me in that infamous little box, to state loudly and clearly which color bow I expect them to put on top. ♦

ANNOUNCEMENTS

~NEWSLETTER ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS

FTM Int'l Newsletter is a 12-year-old quarterly out of San Francisco. We have an ongoing interest in submissions of work from SOs, family, and friends of FTMs. Poetry, artwork, or writing are all forms that we could use: 600-1000 words is a good length to shoot for, though longer pieces will certainly be considered too. Topics are pretty unlimited: personal stories, political work, kvetching, what's going on in your area; you name it.

The easiest forms for us to use are email or floppy disks, but typed or even hand-written work is fine too if you don't have access to computers. Our contact info is: Jed Bell, FTM, [REDACTED] San Francisco, CA 94103; phone [REDACTED] email: [REDACTED] (newsletter submissions only).

~NEW SUPPORT GROUP-Florida

Trans/Mission

Open support & discussion group for all transgendered people and significant others meets the third Saturday of each month at 3:00pm.

FTM/SO of all orientations transgender support & discussion group meets the first & third Saturdays of each month at 1:30pm. S&M/Kink-Friendly.

All meetings are held at the Center of Tampa Bay, 4265 Henderson Ave, Ste. B.

Contact Bo at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] or write PO Box 17522, Tampa, FL 33682.

~NEW SOFFA WEBSITE

Resources for SOFFA's of any type of transgendered person:
<http://members.aol.com/SOFFAUSA/index.html>

If you know of any informational SOFFA-related resources for the websight, please EMAIL them to: SOFFAUSA@aol.com

ANNOUNCEMENTS cont. page 8

Growing Old Transgendered by Loree Cook-Daniels

Are FTMs who have been on testosterone for 30 years more likely to develop blood problems? Are there heart medications they should steer clear of? Is 65 too late to have a phalloplasty?

How comfortable will the partner of 55-year-old, "new FTM" feel in the local support group? What have been others' experiences telling grandchildren that grandma's going to become grandpa? How does one go about using a parent's power of attorney when the name on the paper is "Judy Smith" and you're now "James Smith"?

When it's time to enter a nursing home, who is available to help educate the nurses' aides about how to handle a man with "female" genitals? If the nursing home refuses to accept the new resident, does he have any recourse? Does he have any rights if the nursing home refuses to let him have private time alone with his male spouse?

If most of these questions stump you, you're in good company. Although transgendered persons have always existed, we will be the first generations to reach old age in sufficient numbers to be able to start forging the answers to these — and hundreds of other — aging-related questions.

This past year American Boyz became the first U.S. transgender organization to begin an organized effort to start answering these questions, by founding the Transgender Aging Network (TAN) and ElderTG. TAN networks and supports the "professionals" — researchers, health care professionals, service providers, advocates, educators, and others — who are interested in transgender aging issues. ElderTG is an e-mail list that networks and supports transsexual, transgender, and intersex persons aged 50 and older, and the SOFFAs involved with such persons.

The range of issues and persons that are of interest to both TAN and ElderTG is huge. There are at least three generations encompassed within the targeted agespan, for instance. One generation, roughly 50 to 65, is still dealing with workforce issues while simultaneously planning retirement, providing eldercare to older relatives, and finishing raising and launching children. The middle generation, approximately 65 to 85, is coping with the challenges of retirement; the loss of loved ones, income, and routines; the threat of isolation; and, possibly, increasing health concerns. The oldest generation, those 85 and older, is concerned about its legacies, arranging for long term care, and making end of life decisions.

Another way of dividing this population is by stage of transition. An FTM transitioning at age 63 has questions quite different from those facing his age peer who transitioned 25 years before, for instance. Yet all those who are aging or who are working with older transgendered persons and SOFFAs share concerns and, more importantly, knowledge and experience that others can use and build upon. Indeed, American Boyz decided that because the issues of transgender aging are so pressing and have been so poorly addressed, TAN and ElderTG would be the first AmBoyz services specifically designed to address MTFs and their issues as well as F2Ms and SOFFAs.

Although both TAN and ElderTG are too new as of this writing to have plans of action, there is no shortage of topics and projects that we could take on. Some of the areas that need work include:

- ✓ Models of transgendered aging. (It's always helpful to know that others have forged the path in front of you.)
- ✓ Healthy transgender aging. (What are the implications of long-term hormone use? How does testosterone react when mixed with three or four or six other medications for chronic conditions? Should hormone dosages be reduced once one becomes 60, 70, or 80?)
- ✓ Healthy transgender aging interactions. (Are the issues and support needs of older transgendered persons and SOFFAs different from those of their younger peers?)
- ✓ System advocacy. (How do we educate the hundreds of thousands of aging services providers first that transgender elders exist and, then, how to appropriately serve them? Who can help transgendered elders get Medicare to pay for surgery?)
- ✓ Integration into the transgender community. (Do older transgender persons and SOFFAs feel welcome in existing transgender organizations? Are these organizations meeting their needs?)

TAN, launched during the summer of 1998, has managed to undertake a number of advocacy efforts. In its first few months of existence, TAN:

- ♦ Answered a request from SAGE (Senior Action in a Gay Environment — the oldest Lesbian and Gay aging services organization in the country) to assist them in understanding what they'd need to do to incorporate transgender aging issues into their programs. (It's not clear what they've done as a result of this, but we've certainly been circulating copies of that letter!)
- ♦ Lobbied the sponsors of a Washington, DC conference on Lesbian and Gay aging to include at least a mention of transgendered elders and TAN. (This letter and packet of materials was also sent to Congressman Barney Frank, who was keynoting the conference.)
- ♦ Worked with LGAIN, the Lesbian and Gay Aging Interests Network, of the American Society on Aging — the largest professional group in the country concerned with Lesbian and Gay aging — to include transgendered issues on its website and in its newsletter. This work has resulted in a decision to devote a whole edition of their newsletter to transgender aging issues during 1999! TAN will help plan, write, and distribute this newsletter.
- ♦ Advocated that the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) expand its public policy paper on "LGBT" aging issues to actually include information on transgender aging public policy issues.

Although organizations concerned with Lesbian and Gay aging issues may be the most likely to also begin looking at transgender aging issues, they are certainly not the only ones TAN members are working with. For instance, one TAN member has been including transgender aging issues in workshops she gives nationally to adult protective services and aging services professionals. Another has begun including "out" transgendered elders in a traveling photography and essays exhibit she has created. Future plans include developing a website with resources relevant to transgender aging topics, and sponsoring a regular newsletter.

Growing....cont. page 6

If you are interested in transgendered aging issues, we encourage you to join either (or both) TAN or ElderTG. To join ElderTG, e-mail moderator Loree Cook-Daniels [REDACTED] a short message explaining who you are and why you are interested in ElderTG. TAN's sole membership requirement is that every member answer the following short questionnaire to facilitate networking among members. Answers can be e-mailed, faxed or snail- mailed per instructions at the end of the questions. Those requesting additional information about either TAN or ElderTG should also direct their questions or requests to Loree Cook-Daniels via any of the means below.

Transgender Aging Network Member Questionnaire:

1. What is your involvement with transgendered elders/aging? (Are you serving elders; researching elders; or involved in transgender groups?) If so, please describe fully. (Add more pages and/or attachments if desired.)
2. To what organization(s) related to transgender, aging, health, and related topics do you belong?
Organizations: _____ Topics: _____
3. What are you seeking concerning transgender aging topics, resources, assistance, etc.? I.e., What might other network participants provide you or help you with? (Please be as specific as possible)
4. What publications/resources can you provide to others interested in transgender aging topics?
5. Aside from sharing the results of this questionnaire, what would you like to see this network do?
6. What else should we have asked/would you like to share?

Your contact info: (Please print clearly!)

Name: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

Phone(s): _____

Fax: _____

Email/URL: _____

Please return this questionnaire to:

Loree Cook-Daniels

[REDACTED]
Vallejo, CA 94591

Voice: [REDACTED]

Fax: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

POETRY

Domestic Bliss

Washing dishes
on a cold and bright gray day.
I peer through salt sea spray
clouding the window.

A sudden intake of breath
sounds an "oh" of delight,
for I've caught sight of your
crew cut cruising by
on the way to my front door.

Rubber gloves hang limp
on the wet sink rim
as I dash to the door,
not wanting to wait a moment more
to throw my arms about you.

"Honey, I'm home," you call,
with a laugh in your throat as you knock,
but the door is swung free of your knuckles,
before you can land the final rap.

I stand before you in my Donna Reed best,
white apron over full skirted dress...
Not planned this way, but so fitting, yes?

It makes me grin in my heart,
because, although I look the part,
you are no grayed-out Ward Cleaver.

And I am certain June never kissed her guy
so full and passionate as I do you,
stripping your thick leather jacket
from your solid back
before the door is closed behind you.

Your parcels fall to the floor.
Your hands slip under the thin
fabric of my skirt. And while I am fast
releasing buttons on your blue-collar shirt,
your fingers are already on my skin.

Then I am open palmed against your
thin white undershirt,
and I see the mysterious shift
of your breasts beneath the cloth.

You gloat,
"Now, this is how a butch
likes to be greeted by his femme
after a long day at work."

Without waiting for niceties,
you nudge me to the bed.
I feel the touch of the edge
against the back of my knee.

Your hand on my ass, you push,
and with a sudden graceless fall
your full weight presses me below.

Your thigh is hard between my legs,
my knees hook 'round your hips.
Our lips seek to somehow melt together,
locked as they are, insistent,

almost violent
in the passion of the moment.

This
is how a femme
likes to be greeted
by her butch.
Ravenous.
How well you know me.

But hungry as I am for you,
I slip from your embrace.
I know you'll satisfy me well tonight.
You'll love me hours before you remember
your fatigue or aching muscles,
before you remember
to eat or rest or breathe.

I make my way back to the kitchen,
singing, "Darling, let me get you dinner?"

You shoulders slump; you sigh.
And in our respective states of disarray,
we go about the rituals of the end of day.

You kiss my cheek.
We speak about our trials.
We sit and eat.
And talking, gazing deep
into each other's eyes,
we unwind.

Later, dishes washed and table cleared,
well rested and well fed,
we go to bed
long before it is time to sleep.

And oh! how you lay your body on mine
and push deep into me...
This is the way it was meant to be.

This is the way it was meant to be.

-Sonya Lorenzo, copyright 1998

BY THE WAY....

This newsletter is available on a one time basis as a sample copy via postal mail. To receive a print version of the latest issue, send SASE to Jodi Burchell, Editor at: PO Box 1916, Smyrna, TN 37167. Or Email: SOFFAUSA@aol.com or visit Websight: www.angelfire.com/tn/yoursoffavoiced/index.html

All donations are greatly appreciated to help provide materials and postage.

To receive future issues, complete the subscription form on page 11.

Announcements

~NEW HARVEY MILK COURSE

Transitioning In Relationship

Loree Cook-Daniels

5 Thursdays, April 22 - May 20; 7-9 pm

Location: HARVEY MILK CIVIL RIGHTS ACADEMY, 4235

19th St @ Collingwood Course #: 99A-054

\$60

Nothing is as personal and individual as one's gender identity, but changing from one gender identity to another when you're intimately involved with someone is definitely not a solitary pursuit! This course will provide a safe place for those who are or are considering gender-transitioning and their loved ones to explore jointly the issues involved. Through group discussions, pair/triad work, worksheets, journaling, and readings, we will help each pair/group: identify their hopes, fears, griefs, and uncertainties; and identify and solve the issues/decisions they face; and approach those issues/decisions as a problem-solving team.

Although participants' specific needs will set the ultimate agenda, issues likely to be discussed include: sexual orientation identity; timing of transition steps; emotional support needs; coming-out; money; body image; employment; community/friends; sexuality; legal issues; children; and sex roles.

This class will not substitute for individual or couples therapy, nor will we cover basic medical or legal transition information. Instead, the focus is on managing relationship issues before and during transition.

Both/all members of a partnership/relationship are strongly urged to register and attend classes together. However, those whose significant other(s) are unable or refuse to attend are also welcome.

Loree Cook-Daniels and her partner Marcelle have been together 15 years, 3 of them post-transition. Loree is the national SOFFA (significant others, friends, family, and allies) coordinator for American Boyz, an F2M and SOFFA organization, and is the author of "Trans-Positioned", an article about the lesbian-identified partners of female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals. She holds an MS in conflict management and has written, taught, and consulted on conflict analysis and

resolution issues for twelve years.

To register, call Harvey Milk Institute at 415/552-7200 or register online at <www.gayglobalsf.com/harveymilk>.

~NEW SUPPORT GROUP-Indianapolis

We are happy to announce the arrival of a social/support group for FtMs in the Indianapolis area.

The group welcomes gender variant people on the FTM spectrum and those who support them; including but not limited to tomboys, butches, F2Ms, transmen, drag kings, intersexuals, and our SOs, friends, family, and allies.

The group meets once a month and the next meeting is scheduled for Saturday, January 16th at 6:00 PM at the Diversity Center.

E-mail [redacted] com for more information or call the Diversity Center for directions.

~NEW SUPPORT GROUP-Michigan

FAMILY MATTERS is a discussion and peer support group for parents, siblings, children, spouses, partners, significant others, friends, allies, and loved ones of transgender people. The group meets every first and third Monday at Northside Presbyterian Church, 1679 Broadway, Ann Arbor. For the month of February, the meetings will be on Mon., Feb. 1, and Mon., Feb 15, from 7-9 pm. The group is open to anyone from the Southeast Michigan/northern Ohio/Windsor, Canada area.

For directions, to check on the meeting dates, or further information, contact:

Debbie Accetta - [redacted] or Email:

Univ. of Mich. Office of LGBT Affairs
(734) 763-4186 or Email: lgbta@umich.edu

***NOTE: Please send any SOFFA-related announcements for future newsletters to:
Jodi Burchell, Editor
PO Box 1916
Smyrna, TN 37167

Or email:
SOFFAUSA@aol.com

Announcements...cont. page 10

parents and children alike will figure it all out sooner. But in our day, how could we POSSIBLY have known!

Parents' next most popular questions are, "Are you sure?" and "Why can't you just pretend?" While there seems to be some variation in the intensity of pain and anguish transsexuals experience, and the age at which they self-identify, most will tell you it is extremely, extremely compelling to make one's body match one's internal identity. One friend has written that, "No transgendered person can fully describe the anguish... and no non-transgendered person can adequately understand it..." Another person said she explained her need to transition to her child by saying it was like coming home from a Halloween costume party, but never being able to take off your costume and always being seen only as that character. Someone else who gave up a \$50,000 job to transition and is now cleaning houses while training for a new career, when asked if life isn't terribly hard now, said, "I tell them I get up every morning happy and relieved, because now I'm a woman and I no longer have to strive daily to pretend and act like a man." Transgendered people have been pretending and keeping the unmentionable secret all their lives. They know the great risks of coming out; they wouldn't do it if they were not pretty darn sure!

Parents often go through a period of shame. "Who can I tell? They feel isolated, like this never happens to "real" people, only those few bizarre cases played up in tabloids years ago. It's true that parents need to pick their confidants carefully. Relatively few clergy and even psychotherapists are familiar with transgender issues. We do suggest getting professional support, but only with a knowledgeable and sympathetic counselor. It pays to shop. It IS OK to ask prospective counselors a few questions; it is good to ask one's trans kid if he or she knows of anyone or can help find someone appropriate to talk with. Many national trans organizations and PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, which is officially trans inclusive) may help find appropriate local support groups or professionals.

"What will the family and close friends think?" We encourage openness, but we also suggest that parents consult with their trans (or gay) offspring to decide on a strategy, i.e. which family members are likely to be more accepting, whether to talk to each one individually. We suggest that any coming out process should not happen at a major holiday or family celebration --or in a moving vehicle ;-). Letters are often a good way to explain a complex situation; one can write and re-write until it sounds just right. The recipient can then ponder the matter and give a considered response. We certainly encourage parents to find SOME support.

Parents also have a hard time with the name change. We are often middle age (or older) when confronted with this issue, and even when we TRY to remember, we find our memory has not improved with age. Many of us even confuse our children and grandchild's names at times. So -

we suggest that all parents TRY very hard to use the new name, and we ask our trans kids to be a little patient with us. Using the new name is a concrete way of showing our trans children that we honor and accept them for who they really are.

The new pronouns are even more difficult; they are more gender specific; the dye is cast! We mothers have changed this child's diapers a thousand times; we know that body and the genitals very well. When we are asked to speak the "wrong" pronoun there is a disconnect; it wreaks havoc in our heads. There is no easy way; nor a quick way to make this change. It needs commitment, persistence, time, and lots of love. A sense of humor helps, too. One young FTM transsexual took his elderly grandmother out to lunch and referred to her new son as "her" in speaking to the waiter, who was momentarily, speechless. Later the son told his grandmother the waiter probably thought she was a little senile. He says she hasn't made that mistake again! Another FTM and his grandmother report laughing hysterically after leaving the butcher shop where grandma had flubbed the dub and left the butcher gaping. A long-time still-married couple with inter-racial adopted children still smile when talking about the time their Afro-American daughter came running up to her "new" Caucasian mother, shouting in public, "Hey, Dad!" We also know that children can apparently accept a parental change of sex quite well -- if the adults in their lives are handling it amicably and assure the child she is still loved as always.

Several trans persons and parents have written about the emotional turmoil that the hormones may cause for a while. Some trans folks become moody, depressed, euphoric, want and need extra support, act like teenagers again, or even distance themselves from their family for a time. We family members must remember that, as difficult as this is for us, it must seem like jumping off the edge of the world for them. We can stand by, repeatedly offer our support, respond as best we can and in whatever way our transie seems to want that. And wait -- until things even out and settle down again. And they probably will I often tell transies and parents alike, that if you had a good relationship before this issue came up, you will probably get back to that -- or better-- again..

And surgery! Parents who know and love that perfect body cannot be expected to take easily to cutting and changing it. But then, people undergo all kinds of surgery all the time, sometimes even when it's not a matter of life or death. Sexual Reassignment Surgery is becoming routine for certain doctors and the results are quite satisfactory. There are many resources for this. The MTF genital surgery has become so good that one surgeon bragged that one of his patients was married to a gynecologist "who didn't know." FTM's often pass better, but often stop after breast reduction and hysterectomy, sometimes done together, with only 1-2 nights in the hospital. Insurance coverage is rare. We have noted that transsexuals

feel SO VERY much better after surgery, more complete, greater consistency between mind and body. Gone is the fear of an auto accident and shocking the EMT's! If THEY feel it's necessary, and are willing to bear the discomfort and expense, why would we object?

I remember the first time we were planning to see our "new" son; he lives cross-country from us and did not want to see us during the early stages of transition. It was, frankly, scary; I couldn't imagine what to expect. An email friend told me to expect to meet someone who looks and acts a lot like our former daughter's twin brother. That was very comforting to me; something to "hang on to." It also turned out to be quite true.

Do parents and family ever REALLY get used to a child's transition? In PFLAG, we say that many parents get to a place beyond acceptance, to a feeling of celebration. That can certainly happen. We are immensely proud of our new son, his honesty with himself and with us, and the grace with which he handled this process. While we sometimes miss our former daughter, and get a little misty-eyed looking at old pictures, we wouldn't want him any different now. We honor and love him just the way he is. We hope with all our hearts that every trans-parent will come to feel the same way. ♦

Mary Boenke, Chair
PFLAG'S Trans Network

PERSONAL ADS

'Your SOFFA VOICE' is now accepting personal ads for future issues. All ads should be no longer than 30 words. All correspondence should be sent c/o 'Your SOFFA VOICE' and will be forwarded unless otherwise specified. Personal ads are free for a limited time and will only be posted in one issue.

ANNOUNCEMENT

~Knox Boyz Support Group

First meeting of the Knox Boyz Group will be held on Feb. 05, 1999.

All FTM identified persons and SOFFA's of FTMs are invited to attend.

When: Friday, Feb. 05, at 7:30pm

Where: Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church
2931 Kingston Pike, in the 7th and 8th grade classroom

Meetings will be held at the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church, on Monday and Friday of each week at 7:30pm. Meeting times may change as agreed upon by the group. Though this support group is not religiously focused, the church has offered us this space for meetings. A voluntary donation of \$2 per person, per meeting you attended, would be appreciated for space rental and coffee, but don't feel like you must "no show" because you are broke. As more persons show interest, carpooling may be made available for those unable to drive.

Please email me at KnoxBoyz@aol.com if you are interested in this support group.

As the group develops more information will be posted.

Knoxville Boyz
PO Box 27746, Knoxville, TN 37926 (423) 932-7389

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OR EMAIL:
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American Boyz

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

To learn more about The American Boyz, send email to majordomo@netgsi.com with the message 'info amboyz' in the body of the email, and it will automatically return the 'Welcome and Info' article with more detailed information about our online resources.

Or send email to listwangler@netgsi.com

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

Contacts... (cont. from page 3)

-Family Issues: Mary Boenke; Email: MaryBoenke@aol.com (parent of tg)
-Official Jewish Mother: Leslie Ann Alpert; Email: [REDACTED] (ally)

If you think you'd like to be an AmBoyz local, regional, or SOFFA contact, see the American Boyz website, <http://www.netgsi.com/~listwangler> for a "job description" and then contact national SOFFA coordinator, Loree Cook-Daniels, at:

[REDACTED]
or American Boyz's Coordinator-in-Chief, Gary Bowen, at:
[REDACTED]

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