# From Man To Woman

By Delisa Newton

(Ed. note: In the first part of Delisa Neuton's story the young singer called herself a "complete migit." "I had the mind and soul of a girl and the body of a boy." She explained her life from birth in New Orleans 32 years ago into a large family. Her mother was a beautiful woman from Halti. She never knew her father well because of the separation of her parents. Doctors told her that the absence of a father figure patterned her life. She identified herself with her mother. As her body awakened sexually she indulged in a homosexual affair while serving in the army. After discharge the man known as Lionel Neuton went to San Francisco and began wearing women's clothes. This was the step that lead him finally to seek help through a sex change which is told in this second installment.)

## Because I am a Negro it took twice as long to get the operation

#### Part II

Because I am a Negro it took me twice as long to get my sex change operation as it would have a white person. Because I am a Negro many doctors showed me little sympathy and understanding. "You people are too emotional for such an ordeal," one doctor told me.

But finding medical attention wasn't the only problem complicated by the color of my skin. Even with my college and nursing education, I couldn't get a good, steady job to raise money for the operation. For a three-year period I worked as a crop picker in the California fields by day, a nurse at night, and as a night club singer on weekends.

The exhausting schedule reduced me to skin and bones. My height is five feet, 10 inches but I weighed only 105 pounds. But I was saving money and each dollar bought me closer to the expensive sex change opera-





A happy woman sings the blues. Photo on opposite page shows Delisa Newton as she is now-a happy woman. Photo above shows her as a man-Lionel Newton before she underwent the amazing operation.

tion, the only thing that could save me from my lonely life.

In last month's article I told you about the kind plastic surgeon who took an interest in me and who finally found a California doctor willing to take my case. When arrangements were at last completed I was too happy to be nervous when I went to the hospital for the first of the five hideously painful operations necessary to change me into what I am today — the first and only Negro sex change in the world.

#### **Violent Pain**

The first series of operations were to amputate the male organs and start building the female organs; and finally there would be plastic surgery and skin grafts to cover the scars left by the operations.

Through it all I would suffer pain so violent that even morphine could not dull it. And no nurse's words could ease the agony by telling me that the pains were only temporary. To me, each minute was an eternity.

But on that March morning in 1963 as I waited for the first operation to begin, no words of warning could dissuade me from what I knew I would be going through. Though this was the first sex change operation my physician had ever attempted, I had complete faith in him. True, it was a research operation but he was in constant touch with Denmark for medical advice.

I remember being rolled into the operating room, and I could only think that when I came out again I would have taken the first step toward womanhood. But six hours later, when I awoke, I had no such thoughts. All I knew was terrible pain. The lower half of my body was throbbing and burning unbearably.

Of course they kept me heavily sedated during the first days after surgery but it was



Delisa Newton's album, "Delisa Sings Dinah Washington," is a big hit across the country.

one of those times when nothing helped. The minutes of endless pain dragged into hours, then into days. It was more than two weeks before I was able to get out of bed and walk, but only for a few minutes at a time. The pain was still too intense. But the nurses were always there, trying to cheer me up.

"You'll be a perfect fashion model," they'd say, looking at my bony frame.

A month passed before I was well enough to go home and wait for the next operation, and all that kept me going was my intense desire to be a real woman. I became eager for a continuance of the surgery, but it was three more months before I returned to the hospital.

Once again I suffered agony greater than any I have ever known, and this time there was an added complication. A bad infection set in and I had to stay in the hospital longer then I expected. So it was five months before I could have another operation.

It wasn't easy, this long period of waiting. It wasn't all smiles and happy anticipation. A profound change was taking place within my body and it bore down on my emotions.

But, fortunately, the psychiatrist assigned to my case was there whenever I needed him. When I wanted a word of encouragement or comfort, he was there. There were times when his understanding was the only thing that kept me going.

Then, finally, the surgeon's knife cut me for the last time. It had been almost two years of continual physical pain and emotional torment. But now it was over.

I had to heal for seven months after that last operation. After that I was free to take up my new life as a 100 per cent American Negro woman!

And how did I celebrate?

I could get married, I thought. I could make love. Or I could just jump up and down and make great happy sounds.

I decided that I should treat myself to

a luxury I couldn't afford during the last two years, so I went out and bought a new

And as I browsed around the dealer's showroom, I met a handsome young man who was obviously more interested in my shape than the latest style automobile.

It was a perfect way to meet. We simply started discussing the pros and cons of the various autos on the showroom floor. And laughing, we decided to buy identical models in identical colors.

And it was just as natural that we should have lunch together and congratulate each other on such excellent taste in autos.

After lunch we went to a film, and he took me home to my apartment.

Then I acted like the woman I had always been inside!

Of course, I didn't tell him about the operation. I simply let nature take its course.

As a new-born woman, I was looking forward to what was coming with all the

ar





anticipation of a virgin; for, in a sense, that is exactly what I was.

As a nurse, I was thinking on a more clinical level. This night together was an experiment, and I would chart the effects carefully in my mind.

But in a few moments, I forgot about being clinical. I forgot about being a nurse. All I could think of was being a woman.

I thought of only the beautiful feelings my body was experiencing.

And then I knew that my operation had been a success.

Today I am a happy woman at last. I have gained weight, and at 135 pounds, I look much better than I did in my harvesting days. In fact some of my dates tell me I look absolutely perfect — a compliment which is honey to my ears.

Still, when I think back on all the anguish I had to undergo before I got permission to have my sex changed, I want to do something for the other people in this world who should have the surgery.

They are a sad bunch of people — the homosexuals and Lesbians, the people who are the wrong sex. The law fights them, the medical profession fights them, so they become social outcasts.

There are clinics for the alcoholic, the drug addict, the mentally disturbed. But for the man or woman who was born sexually maladjusted, there is nothing. They aren't allowed to join your society, because no one will help them. There should be a

fund and clinic where sexual "misfits" can be physically and psychiatrically examined.

Those who can be helped by psychiatrists to adjust to their problems without surgery – and these are the majority – should receive the treatment at reduced cost.

For the very few who need surgery, the sex change operation should be performed at a fair price, not for the terribly expensive fees the doctors get today. The only reason the surgery is so costly is because it is not generally accepted by society.

#### Society Is Wrong

Thus the doctor risks his reputation when he agrees to perform the operation. The sky-high fees have little to do with the difficulty of the operation. But society is very wrong in not accepting this kind of surgery as reputable.

And to those who feel we should not "tamper" with the human body because it is made according to God's plan I say this: God also gave us the knowledge to perform such an operation. He wouldn't have done this if He didn't intend us to use this knowledge for man's happiness.

As the daughter of a minister, I have great reverence for God's work. And because of the happiness I feel now, because of the sense of belonging I have in the human race, I say the operation is a good thing and those who really need it should have the right to it and the happiness it will bring.

How do I know it brings happiness?

I can only use my own life as an example. For me it has meant a rebirth. Since my operations I feel like the guest of honor at a royal reception.

After each of the five agonizingly painful operations I went through to change my sex, I gave myself a great big treat — a shopping spree.

The wardrobe I gathered up would make any woman, natural-born or surgically constructed, green with envy! I change furs and clothes to suit my mood.

Sometimes I go out with — well, let's call him John. He is handsome, rich and very jealous.

"Delisa, that dress is too tight and low cut," he'll scold me.

But then, he doesn't know how great it is to be able to show off my curvy female figure.

I don't mind his jealous possessiveness, though. He makes me feel very desirable and feminine, and this is just the feeling I need.

Just the opposite of John is Larry, a musician I see now and again. For Larry, nothing I wear is low cut enough.

"Lisa, with a figure like yours, you shouldn't bother with clothes," he kids me.

My steadiest boy friend is a doctor, a man who already knows about my operations, and thoroughly understands. As a medical man, he is not in the least shocked

### I am not only playing the role of a woman - I am a woman in every way

by the surgery that altered my body to fit my mind and spirit.

This relationship could turn into something serious, but I don't know, I want to be free for a long while.

I was confined in the wrong kind of body for too long, and now I feel that I'm truly breathing for the first time in my life.

Before, when I only dressed as a woman, I always had to sneak around, hoping that someone who knew me as Lionel Newton wouldn't recognize me. Now I can dress up, go anywhere, and not worry about public opinion. Nor must I worry about the police and the laws against being a transvestite.

Now when I love, there is no secretiveness. For the first time, my mind and body are in unity. I am not only playing the role of a woman, I am a woman in every way.

The problems I have now roll right off my back. Sure I stew when "he" doesn't call on time. Sure I get upset when a man gets too fresh and forward with me. But these are problems for every woman, and I'm glad to have them!

I can honestly say that I have never regretted changing my sex, not for one instant. I have read the stories of some sex changes who regret the day they went under the knife. I think these girls may have acted on the spur of the moment, and didn't really search their souls carefully before making their decision.

I know I went through six years of psychiatry, trying to adjust, trying every possible way to be happy as I was born — a

It was only when the doctors and I agreed I was meant to be a woman that I decided upon the operation.

Had I had any doubts, had there been any question that I was trying a sex change operation just to see how I'd come out, I would never have gone through with it.

This is an irreversible change and you have to be positive that you are making the right decision.

I was positive then and I am positive today.

I've given up my nursing career to try and make it in the career I've always wanted, show business.

I got the courage to leave my position in the hospital shortly after my sex change operations were declared a total success. It seemed a perfect time to make a completely new start.

And now, to light up the last bit of dark on the stage, I've told my story in Sepia Magazine.

Everyone will read about me, think about me for awhile, and eventually forget that I wasn't born a woman.

And if they meet me somewhere, I think people will realize that I'm as much a female, and maybe more so, than many natural ones!

End



All dressed up and ready to go. Delisa poses for quick photo before leaving for theater date.