

*I
Never
Asked
To
Be
Born*

The Carol Durrell Story

Introduction

This is a story of courage and faith, of searching and despair. No one who has ever lived has asked to be born but when they have been and they were found to be "different", their lives could very well be a living hell, ultimately cruel and unforgiving. Under such circumstances the testing of the human spirit comes into full play with most of the world as its' adversary.

Some of us are wise enough today to at least begin to view our sexuality with some degree of open-mindedness and intelligence. We know, for example, that the malfunctioning of a single gland may very well change an individual's entire personality and certainly not because he or she willed it so.

At the same time, most of us are locked in the past by so-called ethical or religious "truths" which we are not free enough or brave enough to throw off or even examine. As a result we look upon anyone who is considered "different" with much distaste or even disdain, and by doing so we betray our own self-expressed high-mindedness.

Abnormal means not conformed or conforming to rule, yet normal might possibly be the most unexciting thing one might say about someone else. Freud was not normal. Michelangelo was not normal. Jesus was certainly not normal. In fact, the highlights of human history have been created by those who in their times would not have been considered to be normal. WHAT MANY WOULD LABEL

I bring this to your attention because this is very clearly a story about abnormality, yet I would wish that you would read it with an open mind, in the knowledge that abnormality is by no means a dirty word.

But before you begin to read this story take a good look at your body. Is it tall or short, thin or fat? Is it malformed in any way? Is it muscular and athletic or soft and delicate? Would it be considered beautiful or ordinary or ugly? Is it something that you are proud of or unhappy with? If you had your way would you change it if you could?

"I never asked to be born", is a statement we all must share inasmuch as it is, the first truth of all of our lives. No one living knows why he or she lives. We only know that we do and because we do we must relate somehow to those around us. And at the very core of our relationships lies our sexuality.

Most of our art forms cater to our sexuality. Hollywood is filled with beautiful, sensuous people chosen for their sexual appeal. Television reaches out to our sexuality through its advertising as

well as its' regular programming. Our theater, music and dance purposely aim themselves at our sexuality. Yet at this stage of human development it still seems to be something which frightens us for whatever the reason or reasons.

Understanding ourselves and our sexuality does not mean opening the doors to promiscuity. This has been the theologians dilemma over the years thus their insistence upon shrouding sex in mystery. In fact the Holy-man has most often opted for celibacy so it has been more than likely that the celibate has been the one to instruct the world as to its' sexuality without really having to deal with it on a personal level. We might reason therefore that if all men were Holy-men, human-kind might simply cease to exist. So just maybe, God would prefer us all to be a little less "holy" and a little more "human".

When I first met Carol, I was attracted to her obvious physical beauty. Her skin was light brown and her face delicately cut. Her eyes are wide, sensitive and beautiful, by any standard...the kind you might see in a cosmetic ad. She had perfectly manicured hands which moved with the grace of a Hawaiian dancer. I had the feeling that if I gave her a paintbrush she might have put the finishing touches on some fine masterpiece...so delicate were her movements. Her figure appeared to be one which any woman would barter her soul for and in all, she was simply a beautiful female to behold.

Her voice was soft and throaty and I felt that if I could tie all of her words together I would have a song. I mentioned that to her and she laughed and said that she was indeed a singer and she seemed very pleased at my perception. Weeks later I heard her sing in a club on New York's West Side and she did indeed sing and as well as just about anyone I had ever heard.

The thing which impressed me most about Carol, besides her obvious good looks, was her laugh. There was some indescribable quality about it which both delighted me and puzzled me. What was it, I wondered. I knew that I was guessing but it seemed to me that her laughter had been stored up for a very long time, perhaps waiting for just the right moment to find release.

When I detected this or thought I detected it I reached out to her with what I have been told is a pretty fair sense of humor. Much to my delight she responded and we laughed together. She called me insane and assorted other funny names and we laughed and laughed.....and I left.

I met her several times after that and we would have a few drinks together and chat and especially laugh. She mentioned that she would wake up at night and find herself laughing at our remembered funny conversations.

Then one day she said, "Thank you." And I asked, "For what?" And she replied, "For making me laugh." Then she turned away and when she looked back at me there were tears streaming down her face...and she looked at me for the longest while.

I was totally unprepared for the abrupt change in attitude and I was rather at a loss for words. But suddenly I realized that Carol had a story to tell and her tears were the preface. I could not have guessed what it was but there was a humanity staring me straight in the eyes unlike I had ever experienced. Indeed, there was a Soul talking to me without saying a word.

I knew then and there that I wanted to write Carol's story, whatever it was. Something in her tear-filled eyes told me that I must do so.



Ron Marshall

I Never Asked To Be Born

I never asked to be born but I'm living
And loving the life that I live.
I never asked to be born but I'm living
And giving much more that I thought I could give
Once in a dream
A lifetime ago
I heard a song that I knew I must sing
Though the whole world said no.
And there in that dream
As clear as could be...
A lady all satin and lace
With a face
Exactly like me.

Life is a game
Nobody wins
Yet everyone has to play
One day you're born
The next day it ends.
Just be friends with yourself along the way.

I never asked to be born but I'm living
And though I've known sorrow and strife
I never asked to be born but I'm giving
The best that I have
For the rest of my life
And maybe... One day I'll say
Just before I go...
God, I never asked to be born
But I loved my life so!

Carols' Song

Preface

The year was 1964. The place, New York City. It was a warm Spring evening and my boyfriend, Fred and I were walking along Columbus Avenue just to the rear of the Museum of Natural History. We had just enjoyed a hamburger and Coke on 72nd Street and were now strolling towards Fred's apartment, drinking in the lovely Spring air.

Suddenly from nowhere a police car appeared and drove right up on the sidewalk in front of us. Two officers jumped out and one said to me, "OK you, get in the car!" "What's the trouble officer?" Fred inquired. "Mind your business or we'll take you somewhere and take care of you too. You.....get in the car!" Fred stood there bewildered as we drove off the sidewalk and headed toward the precinct on 68th Street.

Upon arrival I was roughly issued into the receiving room. "Well, what have we here?" asked the Captain. One of these goddamn faggots!"

Then I was being beaten by the arresting officer while the rest of the men watched and laughed. I tried to protect myself but his punches seemed to come from everywhere. Finally I crouched down on the floor and tried to cover my head and face. This angered him. "I'm gonna kill one of you goddamn faggots one day...you dirty cocksuckin' motherfucker!" Then, I was being kicked. There was no escape...no chance to avoid the punishment. "Oh God", I thought, "Oh my dear God." He kicked me all over. I was all his hatred there on the floor and he was having a heyday...while the other officers laughed and urged him on.

After an eternity of his ugly sport he apparently had had his fill and stopped. I looked up at their sneering faces with tears in my eyes. My body hurt so badly and I thought that maybe I had broken ribs. This thought alone saved me and with whatever courage I had left, I asked to be taken to the hospital because I thought my ribs were broken.

This seemed to sober this wonderful group of 'New York's Finest', and after some mumbled discussion they agreed to take me down to Roosevelt Hospital. Under this pretense they walked me to the front door. Then...they kicked me down the stairs.

As I picked myself up off the sidewalk I heard one of them say laughingly, "That takes care of that nigger faggot!" They all laughed and then the Irish one with the fat face told me to get the fuck outta there.

Their jeers and vulgarities followed me to the corner and became lost in the traffic sounds of the avenue. As soon as I was out of their sight I started to run with the tears streaming down my face and I never stopped until I had covered the more than twenty blocks to my room.

I spent the next week in bed. Every inch of my body ached and it hurt just to breathe...all that pain just to breathe. I was covered with bruises from head to toe and as my body ached so did my heart and mind. I did more thinking that week than I could remember in all my life, but nothing seemed to make any sense. I poured out every imaginable question into the silence of my dingy little room and then I begged for answers. None came.

I walked back through every remembrance searching for some kind of truth. I imagined that somewhere there was a door which one might open and there just for the taking was truth. Of course it was a foolish thought but I was reaching out for anything I could get hold of. I prayed...oh how I prayed! Somewhere back in my mind I remembered that God was Truth, or at least that was something someone had told me once. So I prayed and prayed some more...but nothing came.

I wanted to live, I knew that, but not this way. Not in pain and hatred. I had never hurt anyone in my life and at seventeen I was sure that I was not all of the vulgar things I had been called by those tiny-minded policemen. At the same time, I realized that I had been brutalized for simply walking down the street and by the very ones who had been hired to protect the rights of society. Nothing made any sense.

Was I who I had been made, and was that after all so ugly? Did just my existence so offend society that its keepers of the peace felt that they must rearrange my face with their fists? Was that awful experience a promise of things to come? Would my life be a hell on earth because of the way I had been born? Was there any hope, any way, that I could find happiness?

I prayed in bed and on my knees by the bed. I prayed sitting up and lying down. I prayed silently and out loud. But no answers came...no nothing!

I cried a great deal that week and I must confess I hated those policemen. I had never been taught to hate anything but I guess that hate is its own best teacher. Today I realize that it is also the lowest of emotions and worthy of being hated in and of itself.

I knew that eventually my body would stop hurting but I never guessed how very long it would take for the ache inside to go away. It's been over thirty years and I can still feel it.

An Irish-Indian, With a Dash of Soul

I was born, Roosevelt Carroll, on June 3, 1945 in Norfolk, Virginia. I was delivered crying and kicking by a mid-wife and placed in the arms of my mother whose name was Tiny. She was so named because at birth she had been just that...tiny.

I was named Roosevelt, I suspect, because Franklin Delano Roosevelt had just passed away and my parents thought to honor his memory by naming me thus.

I guess that I wasn't exactly a love-child because while I was still in the crib my folks separated and I was taken to live with my maternal grandparents in Lamberts Point, a suburb of Norfolk. There I would live for the next seven years of my life in the severity of a Pentecostal home.

The strains from which I came were so varied that they almost boggle the mind. On the paternal side there was Irish and Black. My grandmother was a high-yellow and my grandfather was white. On the maternal side my grandmother was black while my grandfather had Indian blood. Put it all together and suddenly into the world comes an Irish-Indian with a dash of Soul...me.

There was a storm in my mother's marriage and being unable to cope with it she decided to leave me with my grandparents who she knew to be good, wholesome, hard working people. I'm sure she felt that she was doing the right thing and that they could give me a better life than she could. She had no particular training or education and suddenly being on her own I'm certain that she was both unsure of the future and somewhat disoriented. (They say that divorce and death are the two most traumatic experiences in life) At any rate there I was in this stern household, minus a mother and minus the warmth that only a loving mother can give.

I mention the above simply because in the molding of me I am certain that those early months were crucial and as current investigations seem to prove the tactile (touch) implication is paramount in creating stability of personality. As a matter of fact I recently read where the actual brain cells can be altered by the presence or absence of touch. My mother could have known none of this and I sincerely believe she simply did what she thought was best for me.

I don't pretend to know much about psychology but I am convinced that when my mother went away and took her touch with her she left a void in me that has never and will never be filled. I suspect that at the very foundation of who I am or am not today there lies a lonely baby begging but a little warmth.

The house to which I was brought was comfortable and pleasant. It stood on a corner on a tidy lot, replete with flowers, porch, porch swing etc. It was my grandfather's castle and pride lived there in ample portion. No one would ever say that wealth had built it but just a passing glance was sufficient enough to show that whoever lived inside had some sort of covenant with cleanliness, order and care.

My grandfather was a shipyard worker and a very religious man. He was a deacon at the Pentecostal Church and took to his religion with great vigor. He was stanch, resolute and very aloof. He was all the properness that Pentecostals are told they should be. Whatever The Bible said was so was so and then only in the very narrow Pentecostal interpretation. Heaven and Hell, Jesus and The Devil, sin and salvation...they all lived in that little house on the corner.

My grandmother was part woman and part saint, if indeed saints ever live in little houses on tidy corner lots. She was strong, humble and prayerful. She worked as a domestic to help make ends meet and was the kind of woman who never if ever complained. She walked with that same Pentecostal God-fearing in her heart and was ready at the drop of a hat to get into a good "God-talk" with anyone.

There was church-going several times a week and constant Bible-reading at home. I don't think there were many dreams dreamed there because "the truth" had already been lived and written about and those two-or-three-or-four-thousand-year-old Bible stories were all that mattered. You simply worked to subsist and with your Bible in hand you lived out the days convinced that just a step or two behind you was the Devil, while up ahead somewhere around the bend was Heaven, Salvation, Jesus and of course, Jehovah.

In her absence I worshipped my mother. She had moved to New York and would visit only from time to time, but just enough to keep the vision of her always in my mind. When I would hear that she was coming I would reach a point of near delirium. My whole being would sing and every nerve-end in my body would tingle with anticipation. And then she

would be there.

How beautiful she was! How very deeply, in my child's way, I loved her. I could not get close enough to her. I could not look at her long enough. I could not hear the music of her voice enough. I could not feel her warmth enough, or hold her hand enough, or breathe her scent enough.

But then she would be gone again and always with some pretense. She would be, "just going to the store". and I would not see her again for perhaps a year. So it was, that I would go back into my dream world. I would lie in bed at night and see her face and try to remember just exactly what her voice sounded like. I would try to relive the moments when she had held me and kissed me or just been near to me. I would lie in the darkness and talk to her in hopes that maybe she could hear me wherever she was. Somehow it was clear to me that she could not be there in Norfolk but no one had ever made it seem hopeless that one day I might not be able to go to where she was.

Looking back, I think that I can now understand that my mother simply wasn't wise enough to know that you don't make babies and then just leave them somewhere. She was young and pretty and caught up in herself. Life was moving fast and she was racing along with it without any deep thoughts as to what she was doing or who she might be hurting. There is also a female passivity spawned of the Pentecostals and in taking a new husband I don't imagine she had the fortitude to ask that he be understanding enough to accept children of a former marriage into his household. She was off to making more babies and a new home and she was willing to shed the old. I don't know if it was guilt which brought the occasional visits to me or what, but I can say with a certain degree of assuredness that parents can really screw up children when they put their minds to it.

I do not for one moment wish to diminish the importance of my grandparents during those first seven years of my life. Had they not been there with their love or sense of responsibility, I really don't know what would have happened to me. I'm sure that there was some degree of resentment on their behalf, perhaps toward both my mother and myself, but somehow duty called and they took it all in stride. For that I must say, "thank you".

On the other hand, grandparents should be in addition to, not in place of parents. There is just too much space in between. I don't believe that anyone can suitably substitute for

the real parents unless of course the parents are totally unsuitable, in which case it's just a matter of the lesser of two evils. Please don't get me wrong... To this day I love my grandparents, rest their souls, and I most certainly appreciate what they did for me. I just don't think it's a good formula for raising children that's all.

Anyway, one day my grandparents made a mistake. They brought me to New York (Brooklyn) for a visit. (As nearly as I can remember I was about five years old) What a magical place it was! What impressed me most were the lights because at home after dark everything was black. New York City was like a fairy-land to me and when I saw Coney Island I felt sure that someone had opened the gates of Heaven. Never in my wildest dreams had I ever guessed that anything could be so bright and exciting.

But most important...I found out where my mother lived... and from that day on I thought of nothing else. Prior to that visit I only knew she lived somewhere but now that I had experienced that somewhere I was certain that I could find it again. Even at the tender age of five when most children are satisfied with their immediate surroundings I had suddenly become my own travel agent preparing for a trip to my mother's side.

How many times I tried to run away to her I cannot say. At that time the bus fare to New York was exactly \$4.12. I would steal it from my grandmother's purse and head for the bus terminal but always I would somehow be returned. Noone had ever told me that they wouldn't let a five or six year-older on board a bus without parents. I simply figured that if I had the money they'd let me hop on and then I would be off to see my mother.

On one occasion the bus driver actually let me get on the bus and I was overjoyed. I thought to myself that this time I had really make it. What I didn't know was that he knew my grandfather and had put in a call to him. They had arranged a place to meet and with my little heart pounding with joy at the prospect of finally seeing my mother I was driven only a matter of blocks away where my grandfather was waiting. That day, as always, I was taken home and given a beating. (Pentecostals are very good at beatings. There are so many Thou Shalts and Thou Shalt Nots in their little world that it's the perfect atmosphere for chastisement. After all, when you're beating a child to teach them the love of God, it's not really you but The Lord who is wielding the strap.)

Finally, my grandparents tired of my run away attempts and when I was about seven

years old they shipped me off to my aunts' house in Newport News. Her home was in the country and remote enough so that I guess they figured that I would have no chance of getting away. Fortunately for me I was a very observant child and with the awareness of what my grandparents were trying to do I made careful mental notes as we motored to my aunts' home. With the obsession about seeing my mother I was not going to let them plant me away somewhere without some knowledge of where I was or how to get out.

I don't remember how long I stayed at my aunts' house but it couldn't have been for more than a few weeks. I imagine it was rather pleasant there and to any other seven-year-old, the country might have been very appealing but of course my mind had been made up and I knew that it would be but a short time before I would once again try my luck at getting to New York. I reasoned that if my aunt felt secure about my being there and if I gave her no cause to be inclined to doubt my sincerity I might, in time, catch her off guard. So I toed the mark in every respect that she might not guess what was going on in my head. Then one day when the opportunity came, I stuffed my suit and shoes in a paper bag and headed back to Norfolk.

I had taken enough money from my aunts' purse for my fare to New York plus a few extra dollars. But when I arrived at the Greyhound terminal I knew that they would not let me on the bus. However, I saw a drunk and I told him that I would give him fifty cents if he'd say that he was my uncle. He was to tell the driver that my grandmother had gone to New York because my mother was ill and that I was to follow. It worked...I purchased my ticket and gave him his fifty cents, while almost shaking with delight.

Then I bought a pack of cigarettes. Imagine...a seven-year-old with cigarettes. Why had I done so? I don't think I believe in predestination but I had my ticket, my cigarettes, and suddenly a friend.

"What's with the cigarettes?" I looked up to see the smiling yet stern face of a young sailor. "Watcha gonna do with those?" I didn't know what to say. I probably had a pretty silly look on my face.


"Tell you what, you goin' to New York?" I nodded. "OK, I'll buy you a meal and be your friend all the way to New York if ya give me those cigarettes>" He smiled a toothy smile and after a slight hesitation I handed him the pack....And he was just what he said he would be...my friend, all the way to New York. There are, after all, some nice people in this world.

We made a stop-over and we ate and we ran to get on the bus and I left my paper bag with my shoes and suit behind so I arrived in New York empty-handed. But that didn't matter. I had made it all the way to New York and I was going to see my mother. The sailor gave me five dollars for the cab ride and I headed for Brooklyn and 205 Dean Street. There was only one thing wrong. I had forgotten a one. It was not 205 but rather 2105 so when the meter hit five dollars I was delivered to the police station.

The policemen would not believe that I had run away from Virginia. They could obviously see that I was lost but the Virginia story baffled them. Seven-year-olds might get a few blocks or perhaps miles from their homes but here was a kid giving them a fancy story about inter-state travel. I could see from what they were saying that they thought that I had one grand imagination.

When finally they did manage to locate my mother and she and my step-father arrived at the station the policemen seemed very surprised to find out that everything I had told them had been true.

But what did I care? At last...there before me was that beautiful face, and I was standing giddy on the very threshold of Heaven.



Roosevelt Carroll...

Dreams, Brooklyn

and the Princess...

Before we go on with my story let's go back for a moment to my birth. As I mentioned, I was born, Roosevelt Carroll, Irish-Indian-Black. What I did not mention was that I was also born effeminate. There was no planning on my part. There is no perversion in a delivery room. The necessary ingredients had come together some nine months before and after baking in the oven to an even brown I was delivered...tiny, wrinkled, vulnerable and effeminate. (The policeman who later beat me could not have known that. He simply didn't have the intelligence.)

Being born that way it would naturally follow that I would continue to grow that way. I simply had no choice. I did not wish it. I did not work at it. I had my mother's features and from the moment of conception I was destined to be delicate and slender, soft and effeminate. You cannot make a gazelle into a tiger nor a hummingbird into an eagle. I was who I was, and could I have known that society would ask me to apologize for my being every day of my life I think that perhaps I might just have skipped my birth. But of course it was not mine to know.

According to society, as we know it, we must find someone to blame for my condition. We must blame someone! I know...let's blame God. (Did you hear that Mr. Policeman? Why don't you go beat up God?)

One does not grow up effeminate alone. Everyone with whom one comes in contact relates to those qualities in one way or another. A woman will call you a pretty baby and emphasize your femininity by keeping you in dresses and long hair a bit longer than most children. My grandfather thought that he could change me by issuing me hard tasks and treating me in an extreme macho way. Society, by and large, acts as though it would just like to blink its eyes and you'd go away.

There was a young man by the name of Moses, who lived near my grandparents and apparently he saw me in yet another way. One day when I was about four years old he took my hand and led me to a shack nearby. There he removed my clothes and his and proceeded to masturbate all over my little body. He did not hurt me or threaten me. He simply came all over me and left.

When I came out of the shack with his semen on me my grandmother promptly gave me a

good Pentecostal beating. I had not known that men ejaculated. I had not known there was something called semen. I had not known that people did things like that to children. I had not known if it was right or wrong. In short, an adult can take a tiny mind and lead it where it wishes. In this case, Moses had his own peculiar brand of perversion going for him and for his deviation, I was punished.

Why do big, old people beat little children? Why is there not an eleventh commandment...Honor Thy Sons and Daughters? Only within recent years have we seen concern shown for battered children and yet we still hear of parents who brutalize and even kill their own offspring. I have met many deeply disturbed adults and invariably they tell stories of maltreatment as children. Often at the roots of such tales lies some sort of religiously inspired, fear-filled dogma.

How did the actions of Moses affect my life? What did the trauma of the sex act plus the beating do to me in later years? What might have happened had my grandmother been wise enough to take the time to explain to me that Moses had a weakness and that it was in no way my fault. What if, out of love, she had realized that sex after all was not a filthy, ugly thing? What if she had simply given me a bath and warned me never to go anywhere with strangers? I know absolutely nothing of what had taken place, yet the guilt was laid upon me as though I had seduced Moses. All this confusion issued to a child barely four!

In the years which followed I would have a reoccurring dream. I would be lying in bed in a pitch-black room. The door would open and there in the light of the doorway would stand a tall dark figure. I could never see his features but he would stand motionless and towering before me. One might imagine that as a child I would be frightened! I was! I would lie quietly in the darkness and the tall figure would approach the bed. Then he would get on top of me and hold me and make me feel warm and loved. Always when I would awaken after that dream my bed would be wet.

Who was that stranger? Was he the father I had never known? Was he the stern grandfather who was so aloof that you could never quite get near to him? Was he perhaps Moses, who in fact never had hurt me but in his own perverted way had shown me warmth? Was it some sort of apparition foretelling a future being formed by my girlish psyche? I'm sure a psychiatrist would have a ball with those questions, but for me there has never been an adequate answer.

My grandparents' home was filled with absolutes, and the rod was the sure way of

enforcing them. Being lithe and rather quick of foot I was not easily caught nor held for "proper" punishment. So it was that my grandfather devised a method of tying me to the bed before inflicting chastisement. He used a length of rope which allowed me but a small distance to move which simply meant no escape. It was a sure method used in place of intellect. I know that I was rather precocious and I know that my grandfather was of the old school but I still fail to see the wisdom in ever beating a child.

Well, let's get back to Brooklyn.....

I now lived with my beautiful mother, but like all fantasies my childish dreams of a fairy princess were fast coming to an end. Since leaving Virginia she had given birth almost yearly and I had moved into an overflowing household. The five room apartment was shabby and bare. There was torn, half-worn-out linoleum on the floors, which I must say my mother tried to keep as clean as possible. Most of the furniture looked as though it had been gathered in from off the streets. Like all tenement apartments there were few closets so the place was always cluttered. There were pillowcases filled with laundry everywhere. Walls were cracked and wallpaper was peeling. The bathroom was, in a word...ugly. The nicest "room" by far, at least to me, was the fire-escape. I would spend hours out there perhaps indulging myself in trying to extend the fast fading dream of my fairy princess.

Where to sleep was on a first-come-first-served basis. There had been six children living there upon my arrival, and there were twins yet on the way. That would make eleven people in five rooms so a bit of magic had to be employed just to figure out where to sleep.

Breakfasts were the same as the above. If you happened to be late, more than likely there would be no more food. They were no longer the bacon and eggs breakfasts of my grandparents. They were generally syrup on bread meals. (Hardly what today's nutritionists would call sufficient for a proper diet yet I'm sure all that my mother could afford.)

I think that it is important to mention here that the Pentecostal background had much to do with the situation. Pentecostal women are brought up to do the man's bidding, with no view to modern intelligent thought. My mother was forever pregnant. Contraception or abortion were out of the question, and though poor as church mice the baby factory never closed its doors.

I Sang a Song...Of Fear... and Good-bye...

It is not just occasionally that you hear or read about the problems of a step-child. They range all the way from sexual abuse to maltreatment, from resentment to ignoring. In my particular case I guess it was resentment more than anything else. I was another mouth to feed, another child under foot...and certainly the child of another man. Put these together with my being effeminate and even with my mother's love I never stood a chance.

My step-father was not a nice man. He mistreated us all at will. He was a consummate drinker with a personality not capable of handling alcohol. I don't wish to call him evil because perhaps circumstances dictated what he was, but to a child reaching out for love a bully certainly seems to be evil. I was not his child and in little ways he never let me forget it. My mother was afraid to show me too much love because of her fear that he would think her to be neglecting his children. There was no way in which I could please him therefore I began to fear him.

Looking back, I believe he resented my looks because I did not remind him of himself. He also resented my effeminacy. One day he told me he didn't like the way I walked and with that almost broke a two-by-four hitting me on the buttocks. I remember running to the roof in tears and that was the first time I can recall thinking of suicide. That's a pretty heavy thought for a child of seven.

Filled with fear now, I would often run away. I would not run far because I didn't know where to run. Once I ran to a children's shelter and my stepfather came to get me. By now I was so frightened of him that when we got on the bus and he was paying the fare, I ran to the back, climbed out a window and ran away again. Try and tell a kid that the beatings he's getting are for his own good!

I was also afraid of a bunch of kids who lived on the second floor. They would pick on me unmercifully and I could hardly leave the apartment house without their "comin' down" on me. I was the sissy, the faggot, the fairy. At seven or eight a child's mind just isn't capable of understanding any of this. All one understands is the hurt and the loneliness which comes from non-acceptance. It was as though I were made of two things...a body which told everybody what I was... and the real me inside, looking out at the world through tears, asking for love.

Close by there was an A&P and I managed to get a job delivering groceries. Oh, I forgot to tell you something...I loved to sing! More than almost anything in the world...I loved to sing.

(In later years I am convinced that this love saved my life by giving me a reason to keep going.) Not only did I love to sing but somehow I was gifted with a lovely voice and, I must confess, a goodly amount of "ham". So, when I would deliver groceries I would tell the people that for a few pennies extra I would sing them a song. Looking back, I have to laugh at my audacity, but for all that the people thought it was cute, I'd sing a song or two and walk away with a nickel or dime. That was pretty big money in those days especially for a seven-year-old.

One day I happened to sing at Deacon John Gordons' door and his wife invited me to their church to sing that very same evening. I knew my stepfather would not allow it but I wanted to go very badly so I somehow managed to sneak down the fire-escape and get to the church. There is something about a boy soprano that touches people's hearts and that's what happened that night. I was a hit, especially with the Deacon and his wife.

Afterwards, I told them that I was afraid to go home because I knew I would get a beating. They interceded and upon seeing the conditions there at home, they suggested that I come and live with them. For one thing they were childless, and I'm sure they also felt that my singing would add a nice dimension to their church services. They seemed like very nice folks and I was eager to give it a try. I was relinquished almost gladly. In fact I heard my beautiful mother say, "Take him...I don't want him around my children...he might attack them or something!"

At the tender age of eight I was becoming accustomed to hearing negative things said about me but never had I guessed that I would ever hear such an utterance from my mother. Now I knew that even my story-book princess, in whom I had put all my hope and trust, was forsaking me, and though I did not understand exactly why - I knew that I had to leave her. (A few months later I heard her say to Mrs. Gordon, "I know I did him wrong, I hope God will forgive me.")

So at eight years of age I packed my few belongings and headed for Deacon Gordons' home filled with hurt and disillusionment. I can well remember fighting to keep the tears back, hoping all the while that my mother would have a change of heart. But of course she didn't. At the same time in the midst of all the emotional confusion, I somehow felt a great surge of relief at not having to return to the cruelty of my stepfather.

It was on that day I said, "goodbye", and closed the door on my birth-right. The right to have a mother. And to this very day we are still basically strangers.

The Gordons'

Deacon Gordon and his wife were fine people as people go and I know they meant well by taking me into their home. I was the child they had never had for whatever the reasons and if they did not at once express love for me they certainly made up for it with generosity and kindness. As a matter of fact I think they went well out of their way to spoil me.

I responded almost immediately to the warmth of Deacon Gordon. It was unlike anything I had ever experienced. He was kind and gentle and fast filled the bill of the father I had never known. He was compassionate, thoughtful and caring and he did his utmost to show me that he was genuinely concerned with my welfare. I especially remember that he called me son which warmed my heart as nothing had ever done.

Mrs. Gordon was equally good-hearted if not quite as demonstrative in expressing her feelings, and she did indeed go about spoiling me. It was no longer a catch-as-catch-can existence as it had been with my mother. Now there were family breakfasts and dinners, church-going and prayer-meetings/ I had my own room and clothes and good food and everything else that I had not had before and yet...I was still a stranger. The change in life-style was so radical that it left me somewhat bewildered and I think my eight-year-old mind kept saying to me, "this will not last because you don't really belong here."

I know that I was rather a precocious child and I guess that I took advantage of the situation. I was forever asking questions and being the only child in the household got far more attention than I had known in my lifetime and perhaps more than was good for any one youngster.

I was also hyperactive which I'm sure eventually led the Gordons' to question whether or not the heightened pitch of activity in their household was exactly what they had bargained for. I suppose that day by day, little by little, I was beginning to get under their skins and wearing down their patience. I know that that was not my intent by being out-going, curious and lively I suspect that I was far more demanding than I should have been.

I can't remember just how long I stayed with the Gordons but I do recall a Christmas and a summer. I particularly remember the summer because we would go for long rides in the car and once we even went south to try to locate my real father. Unfortunately we had no luck.

Then there were the picnics and church outings and the likes when we would drive to

woodsy, country places to escape the heat and monotony of the city streets. It was on one such outing that the beginning of the end of my relationship with the Gordons took place. It seems that I wanted to go for a hike in the woods against Mrs. Gordon's wishes. She insisted that I remain with the party but persistent as I was I kept badgering her to let me go. A lady in the group finally suggested that she take a sapling from a tree and give me a sound whipping. Mrs. Gordon said that she would not but nonetheless broke off the sapling and when we returned home there was the stick in the car. She later issued an ultimatum that if ever again I gave her trouble as I had on the outing she was going to use it on my hind-side.

Well, that was it! I had known such treatment before and there was no way that I was ever going to let someone beat me again. So from that day forward until the Gordons finally let me go I cooled to Mrs. Gordon. I guess that I had built up such defensiveness by that time that the threat alone was enough to make me frightened and distrustful.

What went on behind the scenes those next few days or weeks I don't know but one day I found myself being delivered to the youth center on East Twelfth Street and I was never again to know a home. (I forgot to mention the Twelfth Street Youth Center. Whenever I had run away from the cruelty of my stepfather I had invariably ended up there because I knew they would give me refuge if only temporary. So quite naturally they had quite a record of the runaway escapades of one, Roosevelt Carroll, and though I had not been there for a goodly while, they didn't seem surprised to see me.

One of the difficult things about being a child is that you really have no chance of speaking for yourself. I had always wondered why the Center had systematically returned me to my stepfather's abuse. It was as though no one had been really interested in my side of the story. Today we read of case after case where youngsters are sent back into the very homes where they were badly mistreated, even brutalized and finally we read that the child has been maimed or killed by psychotic parents. And all the while the little one has little or nothing to say about the issue.

From the Youth Center I was taken to the Juvenile Court where my future was to be decided. The Gordons had come to the conclusion that they indeed could no longer abide my presence and knowing that they could not return me to my mother's house they decided to let a Judge dispose of me in whatever manner he saw fit. (Shades of Dicken's England)

The Judge was apparently perceptive enough to see that my seeming instability had its roots in a less than desirable home life, as opposed to something inherently wrong with me,

although I've often wondered just exactly what went through his mind as he peered down from his vantage point upon this eight-year-old effeminate boy.


Whatever his personal thoughts he was there to do a job and something had to be done with me. From his words I concluded that I was really not a bad child but rather the unfortunate product of circumstance. He noted that he did not feel that my case warranted a walled-in detention facility so he chose instead Berkshire Farms, a training school set in the hills of Upstate New York.

There was no way that I could plead my case before the judge. There was no opportunity to sit alone with him and tell him of my problems nor about the way in which I had been treated since my birth. It was simply a matter of a few adults, none of whom I knew, none of whom knew me, weighing whatever information they did or didn't have and making an expedient, hurried judgment on one Roosevelt Carroll, misfit.

There was some reference made to my being effeminate which I'm sure was somehow taken into consideration regarding possible foster home placement. I think the point that I'm trying to make is that there was never a time when I felt that anything I might have to say about me might in any way alter whatever it was that they were deciding. (not that they were about to ask) I had been put on their checker-board that day and the game was to be played out.

When the game was over I was taken as I was...luggageless, toyless, clothesless, toothbrushless to a waiting station wagon which served the Juvenile Court. I was issued into the back seat by two burly men and we drove off to I-knew-not-where.

I will never forget the feeling of bewilderment and fear as I sat by myself in that big back seat with tears in my eyes. Nor will I ever, ever forget that my mother never showed up that day.



Berkshire Farms

The school was made up of cottages, each of which housed twenty to thirty boys. Each cottage had its Mom and Pop, whose job it was to supervise the lot. I was placed in Sloan Cottage and my Mom and Pop were Mr. and Mrs. Robert Meehan.

Berkshire Farms had what they called the Group System. The groups ranged from one to six and you climbed the ladder according to work habits, deportment, reliability, perseverance, etc. If you were in Group One you were pretty much in the doghouse. If you made it all the way to Group Six you fairly well had the run of the place. As I recall, you could generally find me in Group Two or Three which most probably meant that I was not buying all they were selling. (Well, who is perfect?)

We were all paid a small amount for doing chores...enough money for fares home (for those who had homes) at Christmas, Easter or whenever. It never amounted to much but at least it was a way of teaching the boys that they would have to work for what they got. Withholding monies was also a way of making on toe the mark chore-wise.

I was really too young to evaluate things but I would now judge that most of the boys were similar to me in previous social situations. Many were from broken homes, ghettos, homes not capable of support, and some I'm sure were there because of minor run-ins with the police. Most of them were from the Inner city...the cauldron of ills and grief.

Beyond the Group System lay The Mom and Dad System. According to one's specific emotional needs the kids would reach out to one or the other. If you were a "Mom's Boy" you would help her mainly with indoor chores. "Pop's Boys" were given outdoor chores and worked along with him. All of the boys vied for position with either Mom or Pop and like any school-age kids looked up to them with a kind of admiration and respect. They were your mother, your father, your teacher, your protector, your emotional mentor, your all-in-all. I especially liked Mrs. Meehan and with my decidedly effeminate traits became one of Mom's boys.

One night, after having been at Berkshire but a short while, I awoke in our dormitory sleeping quarters to see Mr. Meehan standing over one of the boy's cots. There was an ample amount of moonlight coming in through the windows so that, though dark, I could still see

rather well. I watched in silence as "Pop" reached down and put his hand in under the boy's bed clothing and began fondling his genitals. I watched in childish disbelief, squinting my eyes so as to avoid detection. Apparently the boy thought it wise to feign sleep because I saw no reaction from him and finally "Pop" left the room.

The following day it was obvious to all of us that there was some kind of trouble afoot. There was an undercurrent of tension everywhere and I suspected that it had something to do with what I had seen the night before. Sure enough the boy had wakened to the fondling and had with a great degree of vigor complained about it.

I cannot for the life of me remember the bottom line of this story but I do remember that the boy was transferred from our cottage and we all understood that the school director had given him a solid trouncing. Whether or not he left the school I cannot recall. At any rate, for the next few months everything was quiet and we heard no further talk of the incident.

Then one day at an opportune time Pop moved in on his next unsuspecting victim...me. Pop was a very clever, subtle man, underplayed to say the least. All teachers are manipulators, for good or bad, and I suspect that the younger the student the greater the opportunity for the instructor. I had seen him watching me from time to time and wondered if he had seen me watching him that night in the dormitory. However nothing had ever been said and a few months had gone by so those thoughts were entirely out of my head.

We were off on an outing with Mom and Pop and all packed into a school bus. I was sitting in the back and Pop came over and sat by me. Mom was up front with a bunch of kids and we were all a sardine can of noise and laughter, giggles and shouts and whatever else goes along on an outing bus. We rode along for some while and then several of the kids went forward doubling up on the seats and singing songs.

With no one around us Pop produced an explicit adult sex book and turning to a particular raunchy page suggested that perhaps I might like to read it. He knew by now of my inquisitive nature and reading ability and I guess he figured he could hit the mark with me. At nine years of age I had never seen anything like that and of course sexually I knew no right or wrong, no good or bad.

I began to read and as I did I was both intrigued and embarrassed by the feelings I was experiencing. I looked up to see Pop smiling at me in an understanding way, encouraging me

to read on. A wink and a nod and a look of, "I'm sharing this only with you", made me feel that perhaps it was all right and perhaps it was something that guys did. I had been mostly a Mom's boy since arriving at the school so I really wasn't accustomed to Pop and his ways.

I read on and Pop just sat there smiling his approval and watching me closely. He never said another word and when he surmised that I had read all of the juicy parts he took the book from my hands, gave me another smile of, "Hey, wasn't that fantastic", and put the book back into his pocket.

He was in no hurry. He had all the time in the world. He was after nine year old prey and from experience he knew just how to get it. He certainly was not going to take the risk of another adverse encounter such as he had had in the dorm a few months before so he was simply going to take his time and set up this little effeminate piece of flesh very carefully.

(I must repeat the word effeminate from time to time. Let me explain why. Funk and Wagnalls Dictionary defines effeminate as follows: Having womanlike traits or qualities to a degree unbecoming a man; womanish; unmanly...characterized by weakness or self indulgence. Note if you will the negative connotation. It almost suggests a congenital defect which by definition means: existing prior to or at birth. In other words a person is born with a given quality which the world chooses not to accept and that individual, being so judged, is condemned for a lifetime. He will be subjected to ridicule, belittled, damned, abused, even tortured and killed because society as it now stands is too intellectually immature to understand that a womb can, from time to time, issue a male who does not look like a football player.)

Berkshire Farms was physically a very lovely place. I can only guess at its size because anything bigger than a city block seemed enormous. I would venture that there might have been better than one hundred acres though the surrounding farmlands might have given the illusion that it was much larger than it really was. There were woods and fields and well kept lawns. There was the main school, a cafeteria, a gymnasium and various administration buildings. Add to that all of the various cottages and you've got quite a layout.

Anyone viewing the place would assume, and rightly so, that Berkshire would or could be an ideal spot for the raising and schooling of youngsters. I suppose many an inner city kid would have given his eye teeth to be able to spend time there, because it truly was a delightful place topographically speaking. There was only one thing wrong... I hated it! Oh, not the

physical property but rather the institutionalized living into which I had been thrust.

I was timid and very much a loner. Berkshire functioned, as do all such places, on a kind of group motivational plan. Everybody did the same thing. Everybody swam together, ate together, played ball together, studied together and worked together. Everybody boxed together because it was said boxing built character. (What character building has to do with beating another youngster up or having your own lights turned out by some bully is still something I cannot fathom.) Probably for the robust kid off of the city streets Berkshire was fine but for me it was a kind of hell.

I was teased by many of the boys. I was laughed at and made fun of. I was bullied and punched and kicked and harassed and somehow the teachers allowed most of it to happen viewing it as character building.

"I don't want to wrestle."

"You will wrestle!"

"I don't want to box."

"You will box!"

"It's free-for-all-time! OK, everybody at it!"

You were suddenly on the bottom of a pig-pile and the boys were giving you unnecessarily hard punches and kicks. They would be really trying to hurt you and in this big, old, wonderful, macho world we live in you were supposed to be learning through your pain how to build character. What the hell has pain got to do with character??

It was awful being "different". I was made fun of constantly, and always with reference to my being a faggot or fairy or homo. The older boys would pull down their pants and go through all sorts of vulgar routines. I'd get kicked or punched or slapped at their slightest whim and they seemed to take great pleasure in asserting themselves whenever they could. You'd be amazed at the extent of the vulgarities learned by city street kids. Nothing is left up to the imagination, and their vocabularies which they seem to bear with mutual pride are a compilation of filthy, filthier and filthiest.

At night I would lie in bed afraid to fall asleep. I would wait until I felt sure that the others were asleep before allowing myself the luxury. What an awful way for a kid to have to approach the beauty of sleep. Bedtime prayers were gone. Only fear was left.

Out of defense I became a loner. I would withdraw whenever I could when there was a group function, and it seemed that every function was indeed a group one. I could generally be found well behind the rest out of preference and when I had the opportunity I would try to sneak away to be by myself. This is not a natural instinct but little by little I was being forced out of the group by discourtesy and/or willful aggression. It seemed that no matter how I tried to belong and to be accepted there were always those who took great pleasure in making my lot one of misery.

If and when I could escape I would wander off into the woods where I would sit in my favorite tree and daydream. Invariably my thoughts would turn to music and gentle things. One begins to imagine a better world when the real world around is filled with hurt and vulgarity. The trouble was that it was only in my head and always I would have to go back to the reality of living at Berkshire.

I was bashful about dressing and undressing in front of the others. I had become so accustomed to being made fun of that I would avoid it like a plague. If we went swimming I would linger in the water longer than all of the rest so that by the time I had to dress I would face as few stares as possible. Actually it was not the stares which bothered me because I had a fine, healthy body and certainly nothing to be ashamed of. It was the gutter language and the taunting which turned my stomach. Kids can be so cruel when they want to be.


It was paradoxical that on the one hand I was lonely yet on the other hand I was of choice a loner. I guess it was the only protection that I knew and by withdrawing I could at least save some of my childhood sanity. It was as though just because I was there, just because I existed, the kids had the right to torment me. I tried everything I knew how to get them to like me and indeed I guess that some did, but for the most part I had to deal the the gang-like taunts of the toughs.

One of the reasons I did enjoy being alone was that when I got to my aloneness, wherever it might be, I could sing. I loved music and I could walk into a song and find solace there. I said walk into a song because I would literally lose myself in music and everything else would seem to disappear.

There were the old hymns I remembered plus a great variety of half-learned popular songs and I'd jump into a melody with complete abandonment. I'd sing until I knew no more

of a lyric and with hardly a break in the tone I'd swing into another and another song. I imagined that I could actually see the notes drifting high into the trees and I felt that somehow God could hear me singing there in the woods.

I always felt that God enjoyed hearing me sing. I would get a deep, warm feeling like there was a big smile starting to grow inside of me and it would grow and grow until it was all over my face. In my child's way, I would pretend that I was on a big stage and that thousands of people were listening to me. It was such a wonderful release from all of the tensions of living at Berkshire and I'd just pour out my soul there in the woods. (I guess now that maybe God never did hear those songs from that lonely little misfit but if you had told me that in those days I would have given you some kind of argument.) They were very special times indeed and certainly the beginning of my life-long love of music and singing.



Pop Meehan

One day I noticed that I was getting glances from Pop and those glances seemed to frequent themselves as time went by. They were warm glances, even loving, and I began to feel that maybe Pop really liked me. I further reasoned, with my nine-year-old mind, that if I could get close to Pop the kids would perhaps not pick on me so much and would certainly cut back on their vulgarities toward me. With this thought in mind his glances were returned as I tried to reach through space to get closer to him.

A couple of weeks later we were out on the hillside clearing away brush for a toboggan slide when suddenly Pop was at my side. He led me away from the rest of the group on the pretext that there was work to be done further up the hill and that he needed my help. When we arrived at the spot he quickly informed me that he really didn't have work for me but that he just wanted to be able to talk to me privately. He led me to believe that now that I had been at Berkshire for some time he and I should really get to know each other better. He told me that he thought that we should become very good friends and of course I concurred inasmuch as I knew it would help my status at the school. No, it was more than that. Pop was offering me warmth and friendship and I had been without it for so long that I eagerly accepted.

After I told him that I would really like to be his friend he hit me with a barrage of questions.

"Do you ever think of me?"

"Do you ever dream of me?"

"Would you like to become one of my boys?"

"Wouldn't it be nice if we could spend more time together?"

"Did I hold you or kiss you or anything like that when you dreamed of me?"

"Did you like it?"

"Did it feel good?"

He went on and on picking away at my brain and suddenly I knew just as sure as anything that somehow he was romancing me. Imagine, a nine-year-old boy being hit upon by a forty-year-old man!

Then he was close to me and he put his hand on my shoulder and suddenly I felt warm

and cared for. It was a hand a father might lay on his child to show him affection but of course in this case it was certainly not that.

"I think we're going to be very good friends, Carroll", he said, calling me by my last name. "Would you like that?" I nodded my head and then he smiled and headed down the hill. He was a clever man. He was using all of my weaknesses to feed his perversions. He held all of my basic childhood needs in the palm of his hand and probably from past experiences he knew exactly what he was doing and exactly how to manipulate me.

About a week later...

"I'm going off the farm! Who wants to go with me?"

"Me!", "Me!", "Me!", came a chorus of voices.

"Carroll, you wanna go?"

It was almost too good to be true. Such trips were on a very selective basis and to be chosen was really something extra special. And what an occasion it was! Pop even bought me a double scoop vanilla cone.

What I did not know was that Pop had begun dealing his cards. He now had me reaching out to him and seeing that I was responding he then pulled back so that I would reach even further and harder. He was simply taking his time about the whole matter, cultivating my need.

Remember I was a Mom's boy and generally helped her with the indoor chores. When Pop felt me reaching out to him he purposely called me a Mama's boy and told me to go inside and do my work. Then I would look out the window and see the other kids working along-side of him and I would start to feel a strange emptiness. In short, he had started to toy with my brain and was succeeding very well in manipulating me.

When we went on hikes or outings the boys would all race to see who would walk next to either Mom or Pop. I now found myself wanting to be with Pop instead of Mom and I was jealous of the boys who gained Pop's favor. Hell, I was just a little kid wanting to belong, that's all.

Then little by little he warmed to me. Little by little he allowed me to get closer to him and as he did so, he gradually let the other boys know of his acceptance for which I was visibly grateful because my relationship with them automatically improved measurably. Finally I was part of the group and finally, or so I thought, Pop had included me in his thinking and cared

enough to allow me to be one of his boys.

A few weeks later he invited me to help him in the recreation hall. He was putting together an electric train set on a ping-pong table; setting up a whole miniature town, complete with tunnels, bridges, houses, railroad station etc... It was evening and the building was such that you could walk along outside and see into the room where the train set was being constructed. Little would anyone know, looking through the window at, Robert Meehan, alias "Pop", alias counselor, alias New York State employee, alias Pervert, that under the table on his little nine-year-old knew was a frightened child servicing his "new-found friend".

I would guess that Pop was about forty. I can't be sure of that because a child's perception of age is often inaccurate but I think that I'm just about in the right ball park. He was fairly short and had a beer belly. His hair was always well combed and his shoes well polished. His clothing was rather like the uniform-of-the-day, militarily speaking. He invariably wore a plaid shirt and well pressed khakis. So on the surface he was relatively presentable but... underneath he stank.

I didn't know what to do. I couldn't run because there was nowhere to run to. It wasn't that we were fenced in because Berkshire wasn't that kind of facility. We were however fenced in by space. I wouldn't have had the slightest idea of where to run to or how to escape. I had no family, no one to take me home. In those days, the adult was most generally right when it came to any kind of confrontation with a child and I had already witnessed to that during my run-away escapades for which I had been sent to Berkshire.

Pop had simply taken out his half erect penis and had told me what I must do for him if I wanted to remain in his good graces and wanted to continue to be one of his boys. In short, I was faced with survival and survival's name was Robert Meehan. He was my "Pop" and my only immediate adult benefactor and it was suggested that things could only go badly for me if I chose not to make him happy. I was assured that if I did as he bade me, we could indeed become close friends, sharing our intimate secret with no one but ourselves. It was supposed to be something special and beautiful, according to him, and it was further suggested that though it was a new experience for me it was something that I would soon learn to enjoy, even wish for.

From that evening on, Robert Meehan, pervert, used me whenever he wished. He would wake me from my sleep and I would have to service him. He would call me from my chores for

his pleasure. He would create any manner of excuse as to why I should not go home for a holiday just so I could be there at Berkshire and he could play his ugly games. With all of the boys away he could do just about what he wanted to do wherever he wanted to do it.

I mentioned that he stank. He would come for me at times when he smelled so rotten that I would come very close to vomiting and yet I was somehow afraid to tell him so. My life at Berkshire had become appreciably better because Pop was "getting his jollies". He had apparently put out the word that I was no longer to be harassed and while that didn't necessarily bring me any busom-buddies it did rather assure me of day to day smooth sailing. Believe me, I was appreciative of that.

Bob was another "winner" at good old Berkshire Farms. He was the athletic instructor and he was endowed with what can only be called a horse-cock. (Please forgive me, but there is no other way to describe it.) Never before or since have I seen such a "bat". On any good day I'm sure he could have hit a home run with it. And oh, didn't he love to show it to the boys! He truly was a real sicko!

Then there was Jameson. He was older than I by a couple of years and a very retiring boy. In fact, if I remember at all correctly, he might have even been severely introverted. At any rate, one day during swimming I had gone from the beach to use the toilet. I looked out the back window and saw Bob leading poor Jameson up the hill into the woods. A few minutes later Jameson came running down the hill looking like a frightened deer. He kept looking back over his shoulder as he ran and when he got close to the beach house I could see that his face was streaked with tears. Bob's horse-cock had claimed him and the poor kid was hurting.

Knowing that I was Jameson's friend Bob approached me and asked me to speak to him. I was to say that if Jameson promised not to tell he would receive a big bag of candy. I passed the message along and it must have worked because I never heard of any repercussions.

For my good work in intervening, Bob graciously decided that I should be his next victim. However, with me he was more considerate. He did not insist upon violating me as he had Jameson. He said that he would see to it that I was never mistreated while away from Pop and under his jurisdiction as long as I would remain after swimming sessions and fondle him.

So by the age of ten I had become a two-time loser and was being indirectly trained by the State to become a willing participant in homosexual encounters. I've often wondered if Judge

Whatever-his-name would have thought twice before sending me away had he known the truth of what seems to abound in his all-male schools. What better place for an avowed pervert to find employment! What grand pickings from among a multitude of displaced, disoriented kids!

But why me? Why did I have to become the object of their perversions? The answer was illusive then but very clear to me today. I looked feminine. I had not asked to look that way but there I was...slender, effeminate, even pretty.

I cannot explain the desperation I felt in the knowledge that there was nowhere I could go to escape these two perverts. If the reader considers his or her own mental capacities at the age of nine or ten it must be obvious that at that age one simply does not have the know-how nor where-with-all to be their own keeper. These two adults who were supposed to be my mentors were instead my captors binding up my mind and my body in their perversity. Alone and afraid and without parents to rescue me I was simply at their mercy.

But I made it. Somehow I made it, if only through the kindness of time. I ran from the two men every time I had the chance. I would volunteer for work details or disappear into the woods or just plain hide. I made mental notes on all of the unthinkable places where a youngster might be undetectable and there was almost no area of the Farm where I did not have such a spot to slide into. What a lousy way for a kid to have to live.

One day three of us kids decided that we would try to run away. But as I mentioned before we were fenced in by space. Jameson and I and one other kid, whose name alludes me, took off for two or three hours but not knowing where we were or where we were going ended up sitting on a big rock in the woods. It was almost funny. There we were, three big adventurers, all scared to death and without the vaguest idea of where we were. We finally voted unanimously to go back to Berkshire and thus ended our Mark Twainish escapade.

I do have one great memory from Berkshire Farms. We had a group of five kids who did "The Hambone". Do you remember the song? "Hambone, Hambone where ya been?"... Well anyway, we put together this little group of five and we worked until we had the whole rhythmic thing down pat. We'd slap our hands against our knees and thighs and arms and shoulders and we'd put on some kind of rhythmic show! I guess we were just about the hottest thing to ever hit Up-State New York. If you didn't believe it, all you had to do was ask us. We'd get invitations to go to an Elks Club or Rotary Club or maybe a country fair and we would really strut our


stuff. As good as that, or better, was the fact that when we'd go on such trips we'd get fed like none of us had ever eaten in our lives. There were pies and cakes and ice cream and you-name-it, and for all of us it was a chance to see how the other half lived.

After three and one half years of Berkshire Farms I was at last ready to go home. Why at that time, or who made the decision, I don't know to this day. All I can remember is the feeling of elation when I learned that my "sentence" was up and that the Gordons had agreed to let me return to their home in Brooklyn. I was given a thorough lecture on my responsibility and told that I must toe the mark once I returned home. If not, there was a return-trip ticket just waiting for me.

You can just imagine my excitement! There was packing and saying goodbye to everyone. It was also the custom that on the day before discharge a boy would have extra special privileges. Mine were unique to say the least. Robert Meehan, pervert, took me off campus to his own home and issued me the special privilege of having my little boy rectum reamed four times in one day by way of saying goodbye and wishing me well.

I don't mean to sound stoic because it surely hurt, but my young heart was so filled with joy at the thought of leaving Berkshire that I allowed Pop his last act of perversion in full knowledge that the next day I would leave him and his ugliness forever. I can even remember that he kissed me as if to say that he had true affection for me and that there was something else worthwhile in the world besides my going down on him. But I didn't care because I was leaving. No more Meehan, no more Bob Horsecock, no more loneliness. I was going home and nothing he could do could detract from that.

I have never been back. I imagine the school is still there. I imagine it still has its share of perverts. I imagine some judge still looks down from his bench at some little misfit, and "sentences" him to a few years at Berkshire Farms, believing all the while that he is doing the child a good turn. I imagine that there are still frightened little boys being used by their instructors there. I imagine that even at this moment there may well be some youngster crying himself to sleep, wishing against all possibility that he be freed from the ugliness. And last, but not least, I imagine I can see a little effeminate boy, who looks very much as I looked being led into darkness by some "respectable" State employee.



Just a Note...

I want to make it clear that this book is not an endorsement for, nor a condemnation of homosexuality. This is simply my story for good or bad. This is what happened to me and perhaps it will foster understanding if nothing more. I am not proud of my life nor am I necessarily ashamed of it.

So often we hear over-simplified exhortations from the Jerry Falwell, Born-again types. There is no one who gets a greater kick out of lambasting the homosexual than these holier-than-thou, right-wing clergymen. Yet given my circumstances as a child I highly question whether they would be so pompous or know-it-all-istic.

I think that it is time that we understood that every human being is born differently and that every combination of genes carries with it its own, as yet unpredictable future. The same God of Whom they speak...The same Creative Force Which they have anthropomorphized...The same Loving God Who is supposed to forgive all..."It is He That hath made us and not we ourselves."(Psalm 100)

There is the she-seed and the he-seed and no one on this earth can predict the result of the mating until it is before us. We do have modern methods by which we are able to detect certain defects in the unborn while still in the womb but there is no way by which we can ascertain what the infant will look like at birth.

In my case I was born with my mother's features. They came, if you will, straight from God and there is no human being alive who has the right to say that I cannot live with them. So many of the pompous do-gooders willfully assail me and/or my kind, thoroughly convinced that to be effeminate is to be ugly, undesirable, unclean or whatever. I have watched time and time again as several of the fundamentalist television preachers, ie, Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell etc. have first mimicked an effeminate being and then condemned them. I can only say to these poor, misled, so-called Christians that I will gladly join them in their thinking the day that they discover a better way to create a human being...the day that they become God.

Miss Anna Walker...

When I left Berkshire Farms I returned to the Gordons, who were kind enough to once more allow me to live with them. Looking back, I suspect that I owe Mrs. Gordon an apology for the way I behaved, both before and after going to Berkshire. I was young and very confused and there had been no stability nor love in my life. They simply spoiled me and I really didn't know how to handle it. At the same time I had this effeminate thing about me and I was searching desperately for identity.

Through the Gordons I came in contact with The Adelphi Singers. They were a gospel group made up of gay men. Their leader, Sol, a very warm and kind human being, was impressed with my singing and I was invited to concertize with them. I was not to be part of the group, per se, but he thought that it would be an attraction to have a young boy soprano perform with them; one who could "pull out all of the stops."

The group had a great sound and you can well imagine how excited I was to have the opportunity to perform with them. I truly loved to sing and because they were so popular I began performing for substantial audiences. Somehow that in itself afforded me the attention I had never gotten and soon I found that I would rather be singing for a crowd of people than doing anything else.

The Adelphi Singers were so well known in the Greater New York, Black Church circle that I soon found myself singing as often as three or four nights per week. In fact some weeks we would perform every night and sometimes as much as twice per night.

When you figure that I was still only twelve years old you can imagine how exciting that was. Unfortunately the radical change from the Berkshire years of loneliness to this rather grand state of total acceptance did not exactly make for a smooth transition, and sadly enough I fear my ego got a little out of hand. At least Mrs. Gordon thought so. Then one day we had a colossal blow-up over something which I had done and it was suggested rather forcefully that I be sent back to Berkshire Farms. Now you know there was no way in Hell that I was going back there, but the very fact that there were no blood ties between the Gordons and myself, no deep-felt emotional bond, made it possible for her to suggest my being sent away again. (Up until that time in my life there had always been somewhere someone could ship me if and when a problem arose. Imagine if all of the parents of the world just shipped their kids out of town whenever they had a disagreement. What insanity!)

Anyway, with the threat ringing in my ears, I ran away once more, this time to Sol's house. He and his lover had a delightful apartment and they agreed that I could stay with them.

In those days it was definitely taboo for two men to live together so they posed as brothers, but of course by now I knew better.

My stay with them lasted only a short while because, as I overheard them say one night, they were afraid of possible trouble from the police. They mentioned something about harboring a minor and they felt that having such a pretty boy there might draw attention to them which would not be healthy. Besides, his lover concluded, my presence was cramping their style, love-making wise. (I guess it was the same way parents feel when they are limited to late night togethernesses due to having a houseful of kids.)

All of this was rather confusing to me but very shortly afterwards I was invited to be absent and Sol delivered me to his mother's house. Unfortunately she decided that she could not take care of me so once again I packed up my singing-suit and went with Sol to a friend's house. The friends' name was John Razz, and he was a gospel singer and would-be preacher.

Now are you ready for this? Guess what John loved more than anything else in this big old world? You guessed it...pretty, young boys! I hadn't known this of course, but I later found out that he had had his eye on me for some goodly while. Just my luck! He had seen me perform with The Adelphi Singers and had made up his mind then and there to try to get me.

I had been free from any and all sexual abuse since leaving Berkshire Farms and Sol and his lover had truly been more than kind to me. They actually had seemed like big brothers, gentlemanly, caring and thoughtful. But good old John Razz had other ideas and had I known them I would not for a moment have stepped inside his door. Underneath whatever he presented to the public was a sick, disgusting, evil personality which became obvious almost as soon as Sol walked out the door leaving me there.

John Razz was a vulgar animal of a man. He had none of the subtleties of a Robert Meehan nor did he try in any way to hide his lust. He had a stench about him which permeated the entire apartment making it akin to living in a zoo, and this stinking human being came after me almost as soon as Sol drove away.

Upon finding that this young boy could not physically accommodate him he brought all his anger to bear, and beat me unmercifully. From that day on I was his prisoner. He monitored my every move. He told me when to get up and when to go to bed. I became his housekeeper, dishwasher, toilet cleaner and slave. Any time he didn't like the way I looked at him or was displeased with my actions in even the slightest way he would beat me. He followed me everywhere, never letting me out of sight and he warned me daily that he would hurt me if I tried anything.

When finally I could stand it no more, I began trying to run away, but always he would

find me. And always he would beat me, with an admonition that the next time it would be worse, and worse and worse. He even had a gun with which he would threaten me. In fact, one day I ran down the stairs and out across the yard. I looked back over my shoulder and there was John in the window with the gun pointed straight at me. "Try walkin' across that fuckin' lawn an' I'll kill ya" he said, and when I returned upstairs he beat me like he never had before.


John liked girls as well as young boys and because I was not allowed out of his sight I was forced to be present when he and his girlfriend had sex.

She was a gal impressed by size and truly pornographic in her observation of his endowment. Picture, if you will, the aesthetics of the moment. A young, delicate boy of little more than twelve years of age being forced to sit and watch this pig-of-a-man rutting away with the woman screaming her delight to the ceiling. Talk about sick and bizarre! Like the old saying goes... "You'd have to have been there."

Why me? Why me? (I have asked that question thousands of times in my life.) There I was, this young, music-filled lad trying to make my way in the world and it seemed as though every time I walked around a corner I would get slapped in the face. But one thing I did know...I was going to get away from stinking, old John Razz, if it was the last thing I did. Never before, or since, have I hated anyone so much.

I was still singing with The Adelphi Singers, with Razz ever present. At last, fortunately for me, someone noticed his mistreatment of me and brought it to the attention of Miss Anna Walker. Dear Miss Anna Walker...piano playing, soul singing, angel of a lady. Bless her forever! She spoke to her boyfriend who was a mountain of a man and he in turn confronted John one evening after a concert. With his size alone he informed John that I would be moving out and move I did that very night.

To this day I do not know what was said but I never again had one bit of trouble with John. Anna's boyfriend picked up my things and drove me to a church building where they both lived. They gave me a room, wished me well and told me not to ever worry about him again. God bless them! I shall never, never forget.



Little Boy Wonder

I was now about twelve years old. Again I must say that time is an illusive thing to me and in those years of no system, no orderly progression or continuity, six months one way or the other may escape me. I was so busy being bounced around like a rubber ball that I seldom took the time to stop and ask myself where I was.

I was introduced to Bishop Pierce Johnson, and for the next year or so I would be in his care and in his service. I think that I can safely say that if I lived to be one hundred I'd never again meet as colorful a character as the Bishop. I know nothing of his background or theological training. I suspect he was somewhat of a self-made man and perhaps the title of Bishop was conferred upon him by himself. I do know that he was a dynamic little man, sort of a beige Charlie Chaplin. He was a sixty year old eighteen-year-old with the get-up-and-go of half a dozen men.

Bishop Johnson wore a penciled-in moustache which was tapered at the ends, coupled with a black toupee. It gave him the illusion of being younger than he was by several years, though indeed with his vitality he really didn't need it. He was always impeccably dressed in elegant suits and colorful silk ties, and the shine on his shoes was almost enough to blind you. I guess you might call him a strutting little peacock but in those days it was somehow uplifting to see a black man who, from all outward appearances, had made it.

The Bishop was a religionist of sorts, thought today I have some difficulty in putting my finger on exactly what he did stand for. Mostly, I suppose, he was a kind of charlatan who gave the people what they wanted and thus had a substantial following. You must understand the poor, black ghetto dweller to appreciate how a man like the Bishop gains and keeps his popularity. For most ghetto people there is no future... period! They are destined to live out their lives in poverty, filth, rats, cockroaches and hopelessness. The housing is bad, the streets are bad, the schools are bad, the parks are bad, the police are bad, and yes, alot of the people are bad. The ghetto is a bubbling cauldron of grief and the force fanning the fire is poverty.

On any good day on any bad street in any of our ghettos you will observe two things - the prevalence of liquor stores and churches. Both of these offer an escape from the inevitability of a nothing life. The liquor blurs the ugliness of the day to day hopelessness while the churches tell the people not to despair because of an after-life which awaits them on the other side of the

River Jordan. Pathetically enough, the average ghetto dweller is not sufficiently educated so as not to fall dupe to this age-old fallacy. For some damnable reason both of the above seem to cloud over the reality of living nothing-lives and the pattern seems to perpetuate itself year after year after year. (I've often wondered how many millions of people have died having waited all of their lives for the Second Coming.)

Another thing you will find in every ghetto is the playing of the Numbers. Week in and week out the Numbers are a possible dream-come-true. Everyone plays them...prostitutes, vagrants, working people, mothers, pimps, church-folk and clergymen. Noone seems to be immune from the Numbers fever, and if you weigh it it is all perfectly understandable. Winning might mean a car or a new color television set or a chance to get an apartment with a few less cockroaches. In a country where one is perpetually sold things via the media and where one is continually told how unhappy they will be without whatever is being hyped it's no wonder that poor people invest regularly in a chance to gain some footing in the impossible dream.

Numbers, of course, were and are illegal. That is, until the political factions discovered that they were a good way to raise money for whatever they felt necessary. Then, all of a sudden, it was perfectly alright to play the numbers. The so-called immorality of it all vanished with the State's participation. It's called Lotto.

It was supposed that the Bishop had a sort of E.S.P. and through his dreams could pick the weekly number. He had concocted a "dream book" in which were listed a variety of objects, all of which had a corresponding number. At the end of each service he would speak of his dream and the theme or object of the dream would then be referenced at home. In other words, he never gave out an actual number so that anyone could accuse him of fostering the so-called numbers racket.

If he spoke of roses one would simply find roses in the "dream book", and next to it would be the number he was suggesting for the week. If you were and outsider you'd more than likely have no inkling of what was going on but certainly his followers knew and they were sufficient enough in number to cause me to believe that there really was something to his extra sensory perception. It's one thing to pull the wool over a congregation's eyes theology-wise, but when it comes to Numbers you couldn't hold on to them very long without hitting the mark more often than you missed it.

The Bishop's congregations were large and, to the best of my remembrance, he packed

the church whenever he decided to have a service. Much of the time there would be standing room only, with chairs filling each aisle to take care of the overflow. Each person would pay five dollars admission. That was the fee for the "Blessing". (Number) In addition to that there would be the spiritual donation or consecration offering. To top off all of this he sold candles for five dollars, incense for one dollar and his very special oils for ten dollars.

Bishop Johnson always said that if he didn't make twenty-thousand per service he felt as though it had been a bad day. After each gathering we on the staff would count the money and when I say there were buckets of it I mean just exactly that...Buckets and buckets of it! Multiply that by some seven or eight services a week and you have some inkling of the kind of money the Bishop was pulling in. He simply was making money hand over fist and his followers apparently were more than willing to give of their hard earned dollars.

Bishop Johnson would arrive at church in a chauffer-driven limousine. He would appear in the pulpit garbed in bright colored robes...blue, pink or fuchsia. The satiny robes would often be trimmed with Maribou and he looked more like a stage actor playing royalty than he did a preacher. He was a showman from the word go who seemed to know exactly what the people wanted and who knew just how to give it to them.

He was like a little peacock. He'd strut and prance and kick his heels in the air. He'd laugh and tell the congregation that he knew there were many half his age who could not do that. He was proud and cocky and above all sparkling. When that little man took to the stage he seemed to light up the whole church with a sense of hope and possibility. His inspiration became the people's inspiration. His excitement became their excitement. It was as though he could reach out with his two hands and pick up the whole congregation and lift them above the sorrow and dreamlessness of the ghetto.

I have heard it said that what the ghettos need is day-to-day, on-the-street-religion, not weekend, ceremonial church-going. They need a constant uplifting on an everyday basis, not ritualistic escape. On the other hand, I saw what the Bishop was capable of doing there behind the bars of the ghetto and I must confess great admiration for him. He was selling hope in the midst of hopelessness. He was selling merriment in the midst of drudgery. He was selling possibility in the midst of utter impossibility.

The Johnson Tabernacle stood on the corner of Brevoort Place and Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn. Typical of so many of the so-called storefront churches the building had not originally

been built as a house of worship. Whatever its origin, Bishop Johnson had converted it into his special tabernacle and while it lasted it fed the hearts and minds of thousands.

On one side there was his pulpit and on the other side there was his golden throne, canopied in red velvet. I suppose now that I might look back upon the audacity of the Bishop ascending his throne there in the middle of the ghetto. I suppose now that I am grown something inside of me cries out at the injustice of a society which forces people to find escape through such as the Bishop. Yet, are we not looking at a miniature Vatican or Saint Patrick's Cathedral? Have not some men always capitalized on the ignorance of others? Has someone not always take the mysteries of life, the un-answerables, and used them for their own self-enrichment?

This next Sunday won't millions of people all over the world go into places of worship and look with great reverence upon someone who calls himself, "a man of God"? And won't he be wearing a robe and speak of mystery and fantasy? And won't the people leave some of their money with that man when they go away? And won't many of those people return to their ghettos having changed nothing, absolutely nothing, in their lives. And won't at least some of those people wonder about the disparity between what they were told was God's goodness and the way that they are forced to live?

For all of his show business, all of his foolery, Bishop Pierce Johnson was giving his people what they needed most...hope. Yes, he was playing the Numbers. Yes, he was issuing his "blessings". Yes, he was, in some ways, pulling the wool over his congregation's eyes. Yes, he was getting rich off of the poor of the ghetto. Unable to change the course of their own lives they were turning to him for direction and he, no more able than they, saw the great opportunity to enhance his own position through their needs. He simply combined Show Business with the Numbers and added Jesus, an unbeatable combination.

The people loved the Bishop and followed him like children. In a manner not dissimilar to that of Jim Hones and his Guyana followers, the Bishop would warn them of possible trouble from the outside. There were those, he said, who were looking to harm him. His sermons would generally have political overtones as he would rally the congregation to be supportive of him and to stand behind him. He was, of course, talking to both their minds and their wallets.

He drew all of the attention to himself and let the people know that he was their chief benefactor...their help in time of trouble. What better way to hold power? If indeed someone did have trouble and could prove it, he was most generous with his money. He was there, "to help

away at him in print. The Bishop felt that his tabernacle was his tabernacle and that noone had a right to interfere with what was going on there. On the other hand, The Amsterdam News was out to dig up dirt that would help them sell newspapers so they zeroed in on the Bishop.

They wrote articles suggesting impropriety on his behalf. They questioned his sincerity and tagged him as being a charlatan. They viewed the Johnson Ensemble, all of whom I mentioned earlier were gay, in a very dim light and added to their articles a homosexual innuendo. They were out to get the Bishop and they didn't care much how they went about it.

Suddenly into the picture stepped the district attorney, most probably egged on by the newspaper. I imagine that he was going after the Numbers angle but, as I mentioned before, the Bishop never came right out and said anything about them so there was no way that he could put his finger on him.

As a final resort an under-cover man was sent in to do the job and after appealing to the Bishop he was given a staff position. He seemed to be a likable fellow and once inside of the organization he began "promoting" Bishop Johnson. Though extremely well mannered and discreet, the Bishop was nonetheless gay and apparently could not resist the advances made by this new member of his staff. It was entrapment of the first order but it worked and the Bishop was hit with a morals charge.

In those days the consenting adult law was not observed and homosexuality was very much closeted. The Bishop, scared out of his wits at the thought of incarceration and not really knowledgeable when it came to the law, made the fatal mistake. He offered the man a bribe to keep his silence and it was the bribe and not the morals charge which sent him to prison.

(Oddly enough I had not liked the man and had told the Bishop so. He had laughed at me in my youth and told me that he was supposed to be the one with the E.S.P., not me. He admonished me not to worry.)

During this time I had gone to the hospital for a minor operation. I was still pre-puberty and apparently the District Attorney's Office thought that they could get to the Bishop through me. One day I was visited by two of his men who tried to get me to say that Reverend Johnson had had sexual relations with me. They were going after the minor angle and thought that they could persuade me to confess to something which simply had never happened. In truth, Bishop Johnson had been like a father to me, nothing more.

Frightened by their visit I called him to see if perhaps he could have me removed from

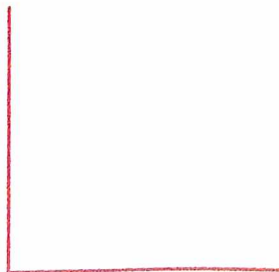
the hospital. I told him what had happened and that I was afraid that the men might return. I can only guess at his embarrassment at my being dragged into the sordid mess but he did, in fact, have me removed from the hospital.

Upon my release he informed me that it would be necessary for me to leave his organization. I think by then he knew that they were out to get him by hook or by crook and he clearly did not want me involved in any way. Perhaps too he was afraid that they might sway my young mind and get me to take their side against him. I really don't know what was going through his head. All that I remember is that I was terribly saddened by the prospects of having to leave him.

It was a tearful parting to say the least. The Bishop suggested that I return to my grandparents in Virginia because he told me that he could think of no other place for me to stay in the Brooklyn area. He was truly concerned about my well being, while at the same time I thought I detected a strange sadness draped like a dark cloud over him. It was unusual for him not to be perky and full of zest but in retrospect I am certain that he was being tormented by his own impending doom, and it was impossible for him to hide both his sadness and his embarrassment.

It was indeed an awkward moment as he wished me well and simultaneously tried to apologize in a rather abstract way for the sexual implication behind the whole matter. While he certainly knew of his own lack of guilt he was nonetheless hurt that such an accusation had been brought to my attention. After all, he had truly been a parent image to me as well as my minister and I think he felt shame at my knowing, via the District Attorney's men, that he was suspected of child molesting.

As for me, I knew that it was the end of our relationship and of Little Boy Wonder, and of singing, and of a place to live, and of friendship, and of feeling wanted. Bishop Johnson threw all of the cliches at me about being brave and holding my chin up etc. etc. etc. but none of it did any good. I simply opened up and cried thirteen year old tears.



So Long Bishop Johnson...

During the year I spent with Bishop Johnson and the Johnson Ensemble, I was attending Macon Junior High School on Macon Street in Brooklyn. That was one of the stipulations that the Bishop made concerning my singing with him and living across from the church. He insisted that I go to school religiously because, as he told me, my whole future depended upon the size of my brain.

As a child I had always loved to read and out of that love had come a pretty substantial reading ability. I can remember being tested once in an early grade and I can recall the teacher saying that I was a couple of years ahead in my reading speed and comprehension. In other words, I had all of the potential of being a very fine student. To add to that ability I had the constant support of the various members of our singing group who would help me whenever I needed assistance, and would also provide me with books and magazines and newspapers. One might surmise from the above that I had a pretty good shot at being a scholastic success. Wrong! I hated school with a passion.

It was not the schooling in itself which bothered me because I had always been inquisitive and loved learning. Rather it was the going to school which was the torment and I can only describe it as being akin to going to Hell. Once more my effeminacy stood in the way of my being accepted along with the rest of the kids and I stood out like a sore thumb.

I would awake each morning with the dread of having to make the trip to school. There was no sure route, no safe path. I would be harassed at every other corner by gangs of kids who somehow felt it their daily duty to belittle me as much as they possibly could.

Out of desperation I finally spoke to the principal who agreed to give me a special pass which would allow me to enter the school building fifteen minutes early in the morning and leave fifteen minutes early in the afternoon. It was his only answer to my problem and it did indeed help to minimize the taunts and vulgarities to which I had become accustomed. I don't know what he would have done had I not been adamant about the issue because he at first approached the problem with a boys-will-be-boys attitude. Thank goodness he finally got my message.

With all that had happened to me up until that point my inner being was still molded of

those churchy sorts of things which had been given to me by my grandparents. At thirteen I was still an aesthetic, gentle youngster filled with thoughts of Jesus and good and right, if not fear. You can well imagine how the tough, black street-kids with their “mother-fuckin” talk could at once destroy me. By that age I had heard every filthy word ever devised and the saddest part of it was that they had all been directed at me.

The only good thing that came from that period of my life was that I became a very adept runner. I got so that I could spot trouble before me and/or behind me and my little old feet would start to move, enabling me to both escape and get in a substantial amount of forced road-work. As a result, I became known as a pretty fast runner, especially by those who delighted in chasing me, and so it would be that whenever we would have relay races in school they all wanted “the fast faggot” on their team. What a crazy world, huh?

One night there was a talent contest at the school. At the time I was still singing with Bishop Johnson and was still being billed as “Little Boy Wonder”, so my “chops” were in good shape and I decided to enter the event. I thought that maybe, just maybe, if the kids heard me sing they might like me better. I had had such terrific success with church organizations that I reasoned that my talent must be substantial enough to warrant plaudits even from the school kids.

It was a big night and the auditorium was packed to overflowing with parents and kids. John Wiley, the accompanist for the Johnson Ensemble, had agreed to play for me and I just felt that with him doing his thing nothing could go wrong. He was a gospel player who could tickle those keys upside down and backwards, standing on his head if need be. He was something else!

I had chosen a knee-slapping, had clapping gospel song and as I began singing the whole auditorium seemed to come alive. Without any exaggeration whatsoever I soon had them actually dancing in the aisles. I was elated and as soon as I saw the whole audience joining me in my song I really cut loose. It was my moment and was I ever going to milk it! By the time I finished the entire auditorium was on its feet and I received a thunderous applause. It was my first real taste of heaven.

John Wiley left right after my number and I stayed on to see the rest of the show. When

it was over I remained in my seat for a bit until most of the auditorium was empty. Then I headed for the front door.

Outside there were scores of kids milling around on the steps and the front sidewalk. When they saw me come through the door bunches of them turned and walked toward me, grouping around me so that there was no avenue of passage. My first instinct was that they were going to be congratulatory in keeping with the response they had shown after my singing during the show. But as I looked at the scores of faces I was suddenly aware that that was not their intent.

My heart began to pound and I got a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach as I looked in vain for an opening, an avenue of escape. I took all the courage that a thirteen-year-old can muster and began to walk through what seemed to be a fast-forming gauntlet. Somehow, somehow, they allowed me to pass through their ranks and just as I was beginning to say to myself..."thank you God"...somebody shouted, "get the faggot!"

Without looking back I started to run. I ran and ran with the sounds of their feet and their jeers ringing in my ears. Dozens of them were chasing me and screaming vulgarities into the night air. I ran and I ran until my lungs and legs ached and still they were chasing me. By then the tears were streaming down my face and I could see people turning to watch me running in my terror. I could even hear some of the onlookers cheering my tormentors on as I raced by them.

Block after block I ran, pursued all the while by the screaming gang of bullies whose invectives pounded in my ears. I was all of the filth that their minds could muster up and they were shouting it at the top of their lungs.

If speed is a virtue then thank God for speed because I somehow managed to stay ahead of the pack until, rounding a corner, I saw the building where I lived. I never looked back and hardly broke my stride as I burst through the door and raced to my room. There I threw myself on my bed and after what seemed an eternity I cried myself to sleep.

That night at thirteen years of age, I vowed never to step into a school again... and I never did. What's more, nobody cared. To my knowledge no one ever tried to contact me nor tried to find out why I wasn't in school. I simply became one of those statistics you read about. I

became a dropout whose learning experience had been snuffed out by a mob of unruly kids, hell-bent on making this youngster pay for having been born effeminate.

Enter Charles Dean. Charles Dean was a man who was interested in pretty boys. It was as simple as that. He was employed by a major film company in New York City and was considered quite a catch by the gay community. I had heard his name mentioned on several occasions though I must say with never any reference to his sexuality. He simply was a man about town and everyone seemed to know him and speak well of him, so when we finally met I was duly impressed but certainly not informed of his sexual leanings.

Apparently from that first meeting, which was after a gospel program, Charles Dean locked his sights in on me. Charles was a consummate piano player and had his own gospel group and he was also a follower of Bishop Johnson so quite naturally he began showing up frequently at the tabernacle. I can recall him watching me closely as I performed and upon asking someone about him I remember being told that somehow he was a person to be avoided, due to his seemingly insatiable sexual appetite. Imagine saying that to a thirteen year old kid. I must admit however that whoever told me was aware of my tender age and therefore sort of glossed it over with rather abstract innuendo. I, being bright, caught on immediately however.

I must say out of fairness to all of the Johnson Ensemble that while I was performing with them and living across from the church I was indeed protected from any and all sexual advances. They were all good people and sincerely concerned with my well being. I was nonetheless being weaned on the gay way of life.

Wittingly or not, the dress, the mannerisms, the speech patterns, and everything about those with whom I was associating spelled out gay with a capital G. None of it was intentionally directed at me nor was there any attempt whatsoever to draw me into its clutches. It was simply there and permeated everything as the gay way is prone to do.

At any rate, during the hospital stay, which I mentioned before, I had virtually no visitors save one. You guessed it, Charles Dean. Perhaps he was perceptive enough to sense my loneliness or perhaps he thought to strike at a moment of acute vulnerability, but whatever, he was my one visitor. He would bring me books to read, goodies to munch on, and he would take time to sit and talk with me. In all truth I was so lonely that I looked forward to his visits and

deeply appreciated his kindness and thoughtfulness. Noone else seemed to care at all.

I remember that on one occasion I was feeling sorry for myself and was lying in bed crying. (Thirteen-year-olds do cry once in a while) It was late at night and well after visiting hours and I was alone and blue and noone had come to see me that day. Suddenly my door opened and there was Charles with a big boyish grin on his face. He stepped quickly inside and closed the door behind him. "I just snuck up the back stairs", he said, looking like a little kid who had just gotten away with something. "If you don't tell, I won't tell", he grinned, as he approached my bed stealthily like some kind of undercover agent.

He looked so funny that I couldn't help but laugh through my tears and with both of those emotions pouring from me I was as vulnerable as a new-born baby. He sat on the edge of the bed and held me in his arms until the tears subsided, as any mother or father might do upon seeing their child distressed. As for me, I had not felt such warmth or concern for the longest while and I reacted to his tenderness as I'm sure any youngster would. I was grateful for his presence and appreciative of his kindness and his arms around me somehow spelled out love. I had had noone to tell my troubles to and suddenly he was there and attentive and caring and it meant the world to me.

Little did I know that Charles knew exactly what he was doing. What seemed to be a spontaneous reaction to my unhappiness may well have been just that, but behind the kindness, and the caring and the visits and the candy and what-all there was a predator sizing up his prey. He was going after my mind and body and he was as slick as he could be.

When I finally told him that Bishop Johnson was going to send me back to Virginia you can just bet he had the perfect solution to the problem. I was to agree to go and pretend to take the bus to my grandparent's home. However, he would meet me on the far side of the bus terminal and would take me home with him. He convinced me that I really didn't want to return to Virginia and that I could have a wonderful time staying with him in Greenwich Village. He told me how exciting the Village was and how much I would love living there. He went on to expound all of the virtues of Greenwich Village and his lovely apartment etc., and, before I knew what was happening I heard myself agreeing to do as he bid. He had simply taken my mind in its vulnerable condition and molded it as if it were putty.

A few days later after the Bishop had taken me from the hospital and after I had packed my things and said my goodbyes I was driven to the bus terminal. The Bishop was not one to mince words and in awareness of his impending doom he was perhaps even more open than usual. He told me that I was a young sissy and that without his having proper legal authorization he could not possibly allow me to remain with his church any longer. He was scared and I guess that I understood, although I must confess that my understanding was being overshadowed by my sadness at having to leave him and "Little Boy Wonder". It had been a glorious time of my life and perhaps the only time which had afforded me any sense of meaning. Now it was over, and when he dropped me off at the bus station and we had said our final goodbyes, I cried bitterly as I waved at his parting limousine.

Even today, these many years later, I still think of Bishop Johnson from time to time. I can still see him prancing before his congregation, lighting up their lives with his charm and vibrant personality, giving them hope where hope did not exist. I don't care what that sick old world of yesterday said about him. He took this little being and gave it love and a home and, for all too short a time, dignity. And for just a few fleeting moments of this sorry life he gave me...Little Boy Wonder.

Enter...

Charles Dean

True to his word, Charles Dean was waiting at the bus station. As I approached him with my tear stained face he gave me a warm, assuring smile and held out his hand to me. He nodded his head as if to say, "don't worry, I understand and everything is going to be all right." It was a comforting feeling to see him there and to know that I still had at least one friend left in the world.

(How often I've thought about the millions of runaways who, not unlike myself, have turned in quiet desperation to some seemingly sincere adult. They come to our cities daily searching for meaning or purpose to their lives with no knowledge of what counterfeit means. What most of them are searching to find is some sort of substitute for parental love and of course they are too young and inexperienced to know that it simply does not exist on the city streets. There is invariably an ulterior motive behind any act of kindness.)

So it was with Charles Dean. I'm not suggesting that he was an evil man because he most certainly was not. He was not one of those people you read about who turn youngsters into prostitutes or junkies. I guess that he probably saw me for exactly what I was and, being a seasoned homosexual, I imagine that he knew just what my future promised to be. He probably figured that all he was doing was just helping it along.

At any rate, Charles decided that he would turn me into a combination housekeeper-housewife-toy. I was still only thirteen and when most children would be out playing ball in the park I was issued an apron and instructed to take care of my household chores. Needless to say, I was less than competent in that particular field of endeavor and no bit of coaxing on his behalf was going to make me very successful at that charade. I think that eventually I began to get a clear picture of what was expected of me but somehow I knew that I would never quite fit into that mold. Charles may have been a very bright guy but even at thirteen I was no pushover myself. I didn't mind doing a little housework but I certainly was not mentally nor emotionally equipped to become an unpaid domestic. C'mon, I was only a kid!

Charles' apartment was sizable and was on Bleeker Street near Fourth in the heart of Greenwich Village. There is no question that the Village has its unique qualities and quantities. It

does today and it did then. I suppose you'd call it an arty place with its quaint, narrow streets and its seemingly endless array of little shops, bistros, pubs and coffee shops. Almost nightly the streets are filled with milling people who seem to be there for almost no other reason than to walk the byways and watch the people watching the people.

Like all areas in almost every city it has and had its good and bad. Contrary to the life-style of the artistic, money possessing, successful Village dwellers who love its Bohemian atmosphere, the Village offers quite another kind of living to those who are "don't-haves". In those days, much as today, the streets were filled with hippies and/or beatniks and whatever other long-hair types were so symbolic of the Sixties. On weekends in particular the streets would be so jammed that cars could barely pass through and anyone desirous of parking a car would have to do so at a goodly distance and walk to wherever they wanted to go. You would see license plates from just about everywhere and the streets would be jammed with kids out doing their thing. God only knows how many of them were runaways or kids like myself who were trying to find some kind of life for themselves.

Charles worked each day so as soon as I got my chores finished I would head out to view the sights and to get to know what I could of the Village streets. I know that I should have been going to school but Charles never mentioned it because it clearly was not in his plans for me. So, rather than get an education where children are supposed to get it, I roamed the streets searching for I-knew-not-what.

One day while doing my street routine I met a fellow by the name of "Frenchie". (That's all the name I ever knew.) He was sort of a hippie type or love-child or whatever. (I never could quite figure it out.) We chatted for some goodly while and I thought that he seemed like a nice enough fellow. He was pleasant and reasonably well spoken, if not a little on the shoddy side, and near the end of our conversation he informed me that he had what he called a "pad" nearby where all of the kids hung out. He told me how to get there and then as he walked away he said, "Hey, why don't you stop by sometime."

Days later I did just that and just as he had said, the place was packed with kids. It seems that he had an open invitation to all sorts and conditions of people and they took him up on it whenever they had the notion. It was a hangout, if you will, and the door was always open to

just about anyone who wanted to visit. A lot of the kids looked like street-kids who probably had no other place to go except there.

As with all the rest, "Frenchie" told me that I should feel free to use his "pad" whenever I wished. It was a place, he said, where I could get off the street and relax a little. "The door is always open", he added. He further suggested that because of my age I probably shouldn't be walking the streets during the daytime because I was certain to call attention to myself and more than likely the police would pick me up for not being in school. That had a certain ring of logic about it and I further reasoned that it would give me an opportunity to meet alot of the kids, so I told him that I would probably accept his invitation from time to time.

Now for the apartment... It was on the top floor of a tenement building on the "other side" of Greenwich Village. It was a four or five flight walk-up and very much on the shabby side. The kids who visited the place were indeed kids but considerably older than me. Most of them, I would say, were in their late teens, and their visitations to "Frenchies" were most generally made for the purpose of making out. It seems that "Frenchie" got his kicks from either watching them or just knowing that they were "doing it" in his apartment. Here we go again, folks!

The place was filled with all sorts of printed sexual materials. There were magazines and photos for every sexual taste and at least a portion of "Frenchies" freakism was satisfied by turning the kids on with the pornography. Thinking back on it I'm sure there were probably drugs used there as well, though I can truly say that being only thirteen I never had used them and really wasn't aware of others doing drugs.

All that I can reflect upon is the fact that some of the kids seemed very free with their "expressing" themselves and in retrospect it seems to me that they could very well have been on drugs of one sort or another "Turning on", "getting high", "getting stoned", "dropping acid", etc. were all common terms of the Sixties and I'm sure that they were all happening there in the Village and like as not at "Frenchies", I just have to say that I never saw it, that's all.

Now, was I intrigued by "Frenchie" and his den of sport? Yes, I suppose I was. I was young and inquisitive and had no life save the drabness of my housekeeping job. Young minds are sponges looking to absorb all that they can of life and mine was no different. The only

trouble was that my programming was a little off-beat and discolored. My, how I would rather have been studying Shakespeare! But that simply wasn't in the cards for me.

One afternoon shortly after I had arrived at the "pad" a very striking girl stopped in and for some reason turned her attention to me. I was just sitting in a corner minding my own business but I could feel her intense stare. Finally she got up from her chair and approached me with an invitation to go into the other room and make love. It was not just a verbal invitation but also a manual one. She simply sat down next to me and began rather playfully rubbing my crotch. The playful turned to sensual and the sensual turned to utter stimulation and before I knew it I was being led by the hand into the next room where I experienced my very first climax.

Later I was told that she was an insatiable nymphomaniac who never got enough sex. She told "Frenchie" that I was the Prettiest boy that she had ever seen and that she just couldn't help wanting to make love with me. At any rate, that night at the tender age of thirteen I had my very first climax with a twenty-two year old nymphomaniac who I never saw again.

Now, let's briefly run through my first thirteen and one half years of life:

I hadn't asked to be born.

I hadn't asked to be born effeminate.

I hadn't asked for my parents to break up or forsake me.

I hadn't asked for the severity of the Pentecostal expression.

I hadn't asked for my mother's ultimate rejection.

I hadn't asked for the correctional school nor the Meehan perversion.

I hadn't asked for my lost childhood.

I hadn't asked for the John Razz beatings.

etc., etc., etc., etc..

What I'm trying to say is that good adults make good children and, in turn, good children make good adults. Another observation which must be made is that life does not deal cards fairly. In our society both the Christian and the Jew love themselves and their theologies.

But just be certain in either case that you do not present them with someone who is born "different". Up until this very day they are incapable of handling the problem.

Suddenly the so-called theology turns to ... "Hey, look at the faggot!", or, "Mrs. Feldman, have you noticed that the little Horowitz boy is different? Better not let our kids play with him!" God, they'll never know how much that hurts!

When I was young I used to sit and listen to the church-people talk about me. Adults always think that a child doesn't hear but, to the contrary, I heard everything, and began questioning myself at a very early age in a manner no child ever should. Why was I sick or strange or weird? What was wrong with me? Why did adults hate me so? Why did people point at me and talk about me? Would I ever be like other people? Were the grownups and kids always going to laugh at me? Was there any point to living if you had to hurt inside all of the time?

You simply don't ask a child to come up with the answers to such questions and you shouldn't create an environment in which he'd have to.

Now for the biggest question of all... What the hell was God thinking of when He blew breath into my lungs?



Observations of the Writer thus far...

Carol and I have had many meetings and seemingly endless telephone conversations. She has been to my home on several occasions and we have talked until the wee hours of the morning with the tape recorder humming away.

She has met my four children, who range from eight to nineteen, and they share a mutual respect and affection for each other. We have sat in the back yard, smelling the roses and chatting about everything from soup to nuts. She has swung on my kid's swing which hangs from an enormous willow tree and climbed yet another which makes enormous look small.

On that occasion I found her high on a limb leaning against the trunk which splits itself into six towering smaller trunks. It actually looks as though six separate trees had been glued together at the base and grown thusly. Carol had tears in her eyes and when questioned about them said, "I suppose it's foolish of me to feel this was, and maybe a lot of people wouldn't understand, but I am so deeply touched by the beauty of this tree. My life has been so full of ugly that this incredible tree just makes me cry."

I felt suddenly very humble. I had been brought up with everything. My father was a New England clergyman and he and my mother had given us the most desirable home any child could ask for. There was always love to spare and enough concern and warmth to take care of ten children, though we were only four in number. We thought together, laughed together, vacationed together, dreamed together, worked together, and prayed together. We communicated on virtually every level and even today, these many years later, are in constant touch. I swear that if they had been the world's parents they would have rewritten the book of life.

Instead we must live with age-old hatreds and prejudices in a world which seems unable to grow up. We must give birth to children with no consciousness beyond the sex act. We must turn them out into the streets with little or no foundation for living and, like Carol, let them stumble along and shift for themselves. Is it any wonder the world is screwed up?

Carol and I stood looking at the tree together and strangely enough both feeling just about the same thing, yet having had such different lives. I laughed at her tears, perhaps out of

my own embarrassment, and she begged me not to. She knew full well that there was no hurt intended in my laughter but it, coupled with her own emotion, seemed too much for the moment. I apologized and we went on to talk about nature.

We observed that one can't speak of nature without considering human nature, because it is through the condition of the latter that nature is perceived. As one of the scorned of our society who had been walked on most of her life she nonetheless had a very healthy view of nature and of its beauty. She mentioned that one day she would love to have a home of her own surrounded by woods, deep in nature. It was not surprising that she also mentioned...away from people.

What are we anyway? Half woman-seed, half man-seed? Who dictates how we are to come from the womb, and what we are supposed to turn out to be? Once we are born and given the form which will be ours to live with for the rest of our lives who has the authority to tell us we must remain so? I have yet to meet a human being who had the answers to these questions, though for countless years the legalistic side of our society has somehow come up with rules, regulations and punishments for all those it felt were different.

I personally find it rather comical when I observe today's Right To Life groups, Anti-abortion groups, etc... On the one hand we are being told that each fetus has the right to live, yet history has thus far written that that right must be followed by a specific dictum or that life is worthless. A closer look will show that most of those who are on the anti-abortion team are of some sort of religious persuasion, and as often as not the very same people who would willfully make that saved life one of absolute hell if, by chance, it turned out to be different from their expectations.

Why Carol is a gentle, loving, thoughtful creature is almost a mystery. How she has survived all of these years is enough to befuddle any mind. I know where my love comes from but how or why she has any at all eludes me. She has known mental tyranny almost since the day she was born, and yet she is still capable of expressing love.

(I want to make it clear that Carol is no pushover. I have heard her primal scream from time to time as she has been mistreated or misused. It was the scream of the wounded animal and I noted on these occasions that I would not necessarily choose to be her adversary.)

I mentioned the word tyranny and I believe it deserves a bit of thought here. The

present Women's Lib Movement is an act against tyranny.....male tyranny, sexual tyranny, political tyranny, religious tyranny. The tyranny of strength has written the pages of history. The Jesuses of the world have stepped in from time to time and tried to alter the strength concept but to no avail. Man has simply taken the gentle words and sort of regrouped them in an effort to reinforce the strength idea. "Onward Christian Soldiers", is a wonderful example of the misapplication of gentle thought.

The Bible itself was chiefly written by the macho Hebrew male. Judaism was and still is, for the most part, a religion of man and his God. In most temples the world over the women sit apart while the men communicate with their Deity.

It is also interesting to observe that as we pass from Genesis to Revelation we see the evolution of God, from a God of war to a God of love. All of that comes from man's mind and if we view the present day world it would seem that we are preparing to reverse the biblical order. Be that as it may, there is still Carol, and love after all is the only thing worth considering.

Billy...

Charles Dean let me go. I wasn't at all living up to his expectations and he informed me that I had worn out my welcome. Frankly, I was relieved and delighted to be leaving but that old question which had nagged at me most of my life came once again into focus. Where to go? I didn't have the foggiest notion. I couldn't stay at Frenchie's apartment. That was strictly a drop-in-for-an-orgy kind of place, not somewhere one lived. So with no other alternative I headed back to Brooklyn to see if Sol might be able to help me.

Sol and his lover allowed me to bunk in with them on the condition that I look for another place to stay. They also invited me to sing once more with the Adelphi Singers and of course I eagerly accepted their invitation. They were really fantastic guys. There was absolutely no reason why they should help me out except that they were just good people.

One afternoon after we had finished doing a church concert a young man by the name of Billy approached me. He had come into the city with his gospel group and he had heard me sing and wished to congratulate me on a job well done. He told me how much he had enjoyed my singing and we spent some goodly while chatting about music, performing etc. We saw each other on several occasions thereafter and always we would talk about our mutual love which was music.

I liked Billy immensely. He was talented and open minded. He seemed to be sincerely interested in the arts and was talkative and pleasant in his mannerisms. He learned of my plight living-wise and asked if perhaps I would care to live on Long Island with his family. I don't have to tell you how many disappointments I'd had living with someone so I respectfully declined his offer. However as the weeks went on I knew that I really did have to move, out of fairness to Sol, so when Billy asked me again, some time later, I accepted.

I was now fourteen, add or subtract a week or two. I was welcomed into Billy's house with much cordiality and was made to feel right at home. It was pleasant for a change to live with a family with all its trappings and I started to feel sort of human again, save for the ever present, deep-seated awareness that no matter where I was I somehow didn't belong. Since leaving Berkshire Farms that feeling had somehow embedded itself in me and exists in some measure even to this day.

Billy was into music up to his ears so we had much in common. He took me to his church where I not only sang but also, if you can believe this, became choir director at the age of fourteen.

Because of limited space I shared Billy's room and it was not long after arriving that he let me know that he was interested in something more than just friendship. I really liked him and had been alone so long that, though hesitant, I sort of passively welcomed his advances. He made me feel warm and needed and being close to my age he communicated what seemed to be a mutual teenage physical need. (Actually he was four years older than I but we seemed of an age.)

Billy offered me my first homosexual relationship. I did not think of it as such because I was too young to consider labeling. It was not good or bad, right or wrong but rather gentle, affectionate and somehow meaningful.

Because of limited space we were forced to sleep together and one night I awoke to feel his arms around me and the warmth of his body against mine. I lay there with my eyes closed, still half asleep, and Billy very tenderly made love to me. It was done quietly, even surreptitiously, because his older brother lay sleeping in the same room. When it was done Billy kissed me on the back of the neck and then fell asleep where he was with his body still close to mine.

Nothing was said about it the following day and in truth nothing was ever mentioned during waking hours. He was rather like a big brother to me in so many ways and our relationship was such that at church or wherever, I did, in fact, appear to be a relative or younger brother.

What I did not realize was that Billy also had a girlfriend and, at least for the time, was playing the bisexual role. At his age he had a substantial sexual appetite and was servicing us both without our knowing it. She apparently would be first at her home and I would be what you might call desert.

Then one day she became pregnant and the whole thing was brought out into the open. We proceeded to have rather a heated argument about it because very frankly I was deeply hurt. Billy was the first person with whom I had actually communicated on an intimate basis and emotionally I was terribly upset.

To protect himself he pulled out all of the macho stops and in answer to my puppy-love pleas he hit me. I, in turn, was so angered by his sudden heartless display that I called the police.

When they finally arrived at the house and before I could say a word, Billy told them that they should not listen to anything that I was going to say because I was nothing but some sort of

sick faggot. I was mortified and didn't know what to say or which way to turn. There was the one person in the world who I gave a damn about and who had romanced me of his own volition telling the police right in front of my face that I was some kind of pervert. The saddest part of it all was that they had but to look at me standing there with my feminine features and they were already in agreement with him. I suddenly realized that it would not make any difference what I said because Billy had jumped in ahead of me and played his part so convincingly. It was instantly Macho and Macho versus me and all at once I knew that I didn't have a chance.

I think then and there I got my first glimpse of what would one day come to pass. I had just competed with a girl and lost and a flash of my being beautiful came to me. Had I been prettier and more feminine perhaps I would not have lost him, or at least I felt that I would have had a better chance.

When the police finally left I could see nothing but disdain in his eyes and he turned and walked out the door. Two days later he came home and informed me that by the time he returned that afternoon he did not want to find me there. There was nothing I could say or do to change his mind and though it hurt more than anything I could remember, I left.

The Street Sissies...

I headed back to Brooklyn where I called Deacon Gordon and asked if I might stay with them for a few days until I could make other arrangements. He was indeed very kind over the phone and with little or no hesitation consented. I don't know why but for some reason I went instead to see my old friend, Sol. I think that I had a feeling that perhaps the Gordon thing wouldn't work out. We had not had very good luck before and though Deacon Gordon had said yes to my query, I felt that maybe Mrs. Gordon wouldn't be quite so inclined to accept me back.

Sol was his old self, as concerned and thoughtful as ever. When I told him of my predicament and of the Billy incident he seemed to understand immediately, and needless to say it did me good to be able to pour out my heart to someone. I'm sure I must have really bent his ear that day, but good, old Sol was patient enough to hear me out until a good deal of the hurt had subsided.

He and his lover were living in a building which had recently been condemned and they were on the verge of moving. I don't know what came over me but suddenly I got the crazy idea of living in their soon-to-be-vacated apartment, and with that decision I began the loneliest, most desperate time of my life.

The apartment had no heat and no lights. The water still ran but of course without heat there was only cold water. When they moved out the place was stripped bare save for an old mattress which was thrown in a corner on the floor, and the apartment with all of its imperfections looked somewhat like a fall-out area.

There is much to be said for wisdom but I'm afraid there's not much to be said for fourteen-year-old wisdom. I had absolutely no idea of the future nor of my ability to support myself. All I could see was that at least for the time being I could have a free place to live and could be on my own. Living with others had hurt me and being still upset and rather disoriented I made the foolish mistake of moving into that roach infested, cold, dingy hole of an apartment. (I like to think of myself as being intelligent but looking back at that decision I'm afraid I have reason to question.)

If was late Fall and already the streets were becoming cold and windy. When I would return home in search of a little warmth the apartment was as bitter as outdoors. I of course had

no income so I would spend the days wandering the streets searching for discarded, returnable bottles. They were worth two cents apiece and with whatever I could collect I would buy penny candy. For weeks on end that was all I lived on and to this day I don't know why I didn't get sick.

On an occasion, Sol would contact me and I would sing with The Adelphi Singers, earning two or three dollars. I think it was those concerts which somehow helped me to pull through because as soon as I got my few dollars I would head for the nearest delicatessen and buy the biggest sandwich they could "build". Talk about nectar from the gods! I would close my eyes and imagine myself to be in paradise. Unfortunately the singing jobs were few and far between so I was forever hungry, save for an occasional donation of food sent upstairs to me by a nurse and her daughter who still lived in the other-wise deserted building. (I've forgotten their names but whoever they were, God bless them forever!)

My concert suit was becoming too small and considerably shabby and my shoes were almost worn through. I had no way of repairing either and I could not buy new things and I was not about to beg. Sol, bless his heart, was good enough to at least pay for cleaning on several occasions but for the most part it was straight down hill.

Finally one day the nurse and her daughter moved out and I was left utterly alone in the old ramshackled building. I would come home and climb the long flights of stairs to my hell-hole and try as best I could to get warm. I'd sit in the corner on the old mattress, cover myself with old, dirty blankets I had found on the street and stare at the hopelessness of just about everything.

To add to my problems I was afraid of the dark. I don't know where it came from, and perhaps it's not so unusual, for a youngster, but I was petrified at the thought of being alone in the blackness. (To this day I sleep with a light on) So when the night came on I would leave the building and walk the streets in search of light. Every night, all night long, I would walk alone just trying to be away from the blackness.

It got colder and colder as Winter hammered at the door and finally the snows came. There is nothing more bitter than city streets in Winter. The gusts of wind show absolutely no mercy and one is hard pressed to find any kind of shelter. (Even today when I see a bum who I know is homeless I get a sick feeling deep in my stomach because I have touched his hell.)

I had only a cloth coat and by now my shoes had holes that went right through to my socks. I would put on layers of whatever clothes I could find and as soon as the darkness began I would head out to try to find a warm doorway of perhaps a grating through which a bit of heat might escape from some building. It was always touch and go because I did not want to be picked up by the police and risk the chance of being returned to a place like Berkshire Farms. Somehow I always managed to stay one step ahead of them and would catch a bit of sleep here and there, wherever I found warmth. Mostly I would cry myself to sleep, shivering and praying that maybe God, in his mercy, would let me die.

It was at that time in my life that I began to sense the great disparity in our so-called democratic way of life. Don't get me wrong...I haven't evolved into being a Communist or anything like that but when you sit hungry and freezing in some doorway without any idea of how you are going to make it through the next day and you view heated limousines and Cadillacs and Lincolns driving merrily through the snow you've got to think that perhaps there's something wrong somewhere. Perhaps it has always been thus and perhaps it will always remain so but it's still wrong in my book and I don't care what anybody says to the contrary.

Then one night, as both heaven and hell would have it, I met a group of what were and are affectionately called "Street Sissies". They were mostly teenagers with basic sexual disorientation, not unlike mine, who found great delight in cross-dressing or transvestism. They all lived together, pooling their resources, and they spent their time happily playing at being girls. They would while away the hours putting on makeup, wigs and perfume. They loved wearing female clothing and for the most part were indeed very feminine and convincing when dressed in their girlish attire.

I had seen them on several occasions but had always managed to avoid them. I was now of an age when the dirty names I had been called as a child were coming into focus and I was beginning to understand just how much the world in general disliked the thought of our existence. For that reason I, being the survivalist that I was, had voted to steer clear of them.

But that night I came around a corner and there they all were just steps ahead of me coming my way. I was cold and lonely and they all came up to me as though they had known me forever and started chatting in their decidedly girlish manner. They told me that they had seen me often and they asked about me... where I lived, what I did, etc. etc. It being an exceptionally

cold night they asked if I'd like to go over to their apartment for a little warmth, an offer I somehow could not refuse.

As we walked to their apartment which was only blocks away I suddenly noticed that I had become "she". Wouldn't "she" look good in drag! Doesn't "she" have lovely features! Wouldn't "she" be beautiful with makeup on! Can't you just see "her" with mascara and lipstick!

They couldn't seem to say enough nice things about me and for some reason I found no offense in their referring to me as "she". I remembered being called that when I was little because I was feminine looking and someone who didn't know me might very well have called me "she". I had dim memories of people being corrected and being told that I was, in fact, a he. In my loneliness I guess it didn't matter much what they called me, I was just so appreciative of having companionship, not to mention the warm apartment we were headed for.

Upon arrival they made me feel right at home and we sat and chatted as only girls would. They were all wrapped up in fashion and hairdos, in makeup, high heels, panties, bras and the likes. It was as though I had walked into a whole new world and yet a world which felt strangely comfortable. There were modeling books and fashion magazines scattered about the apartment. Everything about the place said that girls lived there and the conversation was totally one-sided...feminine.

Several of the kids were really pretty and they were all either petite or very slender and girlish. It was indeed hard looking at them to think of them as boys in any way and yet I knew that they were. It was in truth a whole new experience for me and yet, strangely enough I had the feeling that I had been there before. When your mind is hit with a barrage of newness like that it's very hard to assimilate all that's being issued to you but for some reason I was drinking in the conversation with little or no difficulty. I was fascinated by the way they looked in their girlish apparel and intrigued by the transitions they had made from boy to girl. Certainly those unschooled to this sort of thing would never be able to tell were they to pass them on the street.

Finally one of the really pretty ones (I've forgotten her name) asked me if I thought that I'd like to see how I'd look in makeup. I hesitated and finally said no to her question but there was such instant enthusiasm from everyone that before I knew it I was being placed in a chair in the middle of the room and they all came at me like a bunch of starving beauticians.

They admonished me not to look until they had finished their work and as though glued

cold night they asked if I'd like to go over to their apartment for a little warmth, an offer I somehow could not refuse.

As we walked to their apartment which was only blocks away I suddenly noticed that I had become "she". Wouldn't "she" look good in drag! Doesn't "she" have lovely features! Wouldn't "she" be beautiful with makeup on! Can't you just see "her" with mascara and lipstick!

They couldn't seem to say enough nice things about me and for some reason I found no offense in their referring to me as "she". I remembered being called that when I was little because I was feminine looking and someone who didn't know me might very well have called me "she". I had dim memories of people being corrected and being told that I was, in fact, a he. In my loneliness I guess it didn't matter much what they called me, I was just so appreciative of having companionship, not to mention the warm apartment we were headed for.

Upon arrival they made me feel right at home and we sat and chatted as only girls would. They were all wrapped up in fashion and hairdos, in makeup, high heels, panties, bras and the likes. It was as though I had walked into a whole new world and yet a world which felt strangely comfortable. There were modeling books and fashion magazines scattered about the apartment. Everything about the place said that girls lived there and the conversation was totally one-sided...feminine.

Several of the kids were really pretty and they were all either petite or very slender and girlish. It was indeed hard looking at them to think of them as boys in any way and yet I knew that they were. It was in truth a whole new experience for me and yet, strangely enough I had the feeling that I had been there before. When your mind is hit with a barrage of newness like that it's very hard to assimilate all that's being issued to you but for some reason I was drinking in the conversation with little or no difficulty. I was fascinated by the way they looked in their girlish apparel and intrigued by the transitions they had made from boy to girl. Certainly those unschooled to this sort of thing would never be able to tell were they to pass them on the street.

Finally one of the really pretty ones (I've forgotten her name) asked me if I thought that I'd like to see how I'd look in makeup. I hesitated and finally said no to her question but there was such instant enthusiasm from everyone that before I knew it I was being placed in a chair in the middle of the room and they all came at me like a bunch of starving beauticians.

They admonished me not to look until they had finished their work and as though glued

to the chair I did as they asked. Then they painstakingly applied makeup to my already girlish face and to top it off, one went into the other room and brought back a lovely wig. When they were finished they took me by the arms and spun me around and around in the center of the room until I stopped facing a mirror.

When I saw myself reflected I could not believe my eyes. They had indeed transformed me into a lovely girl and they all stood around me gazing at the vision in the mirror. To this day I cannot truly explain what I felt seeing myself that way, but for a split second I think I felt that I had at last found myself.

The thought was fleeting because of the excitement around me, but not so fleeting that it did not touch something deep inside of me, where it exists this very day. I suddenly knew why there had been the "Pop Meehan", the John Razz, the Charles Dean in my life. They had all been attracted to my femininity and though they had, in truth, related sexually to my boyishness there was little doubt in my mind that they had been drawn to me by my obvious female characteristics. Thinking back on that night, it now seems to me that that experience was inevitable and had it not happened in just that way it would have happened sooner or later.

To add to the transformation one of the "girls" brought out a bra and urged me to try it on. After much encouragement and insistence by the whole group, I finally slipped into it and as soon as I did one of them popped a pair of foam rubber falsies into place, then topped it all off with a pretty sweater.

I know, I know! Some of you are thinking, "What a bizarre situation!", "What foolishness!". "How stupid or sinful...or whatever!" But I can assure you that it was not like that at all. When I turned to the mirror and saw myself I was indeed a lovely teenage girl. Yes, I was astonished at the sight but that mirror was not lying to me and for the first time in my life I believe I was seeing what others had seen, and all due to a bit of makeup.

You women readers, please weigh that for a moment. Once you have put on your makeup and walked away from a mirror, but for your memory, you have no idea of how you look. It's quite possible that you might smudge your lipstick or streak your mascara or whatever but you have no awareness of it until someone tells you, or you once again confront a mirror. I would judge that most of you buy the bill of goods that the mirror sells you, as it tells you that you need a little highlighting here or a bit of softening there or perhaps a touch-up on your

lipstick.

For those of you who may be somewhat mannish in your appearance you try to skillfully soften your features or perhaps you decide to wear no makeup at all. The point which I'm attempting to make is that without something to mirror your image you would have no way of knowing what you looked like nor why people were attracted to you. You would simply have to take pot luck with your guesses.

I had never really thought about what I looked like. That is not to say that I wasn't concerned with my appearance or cleanliness or grooming but as a youngster I really had never studied my features nor categorized my looks in any way. Now all at once I was seeing a girl in front of me and like it or not that girl in the mirror smiled back at me in somewhat of a knowing way. I was looking at myself looking at myself and I suddenly seemed to be someone different than the person I had always thought I was. It was strange, almost eerie and yet truth was looking me straight in the eyes and telling me a new story. Of course I did not know it then, but from that night on, my life would never again be the same.

So the "Street Sissies" had shown me a new me and had, in effect, brought me out of the closet at the age of fourteen. In a sense, they had unwittingly offered me a mask behind which I could hide from the stupidity of the world. I looked so natural as a girl and not at all the "Faggot" small minded people had called me.

Reason it out yourself: A frowzy housewife can leave her home to go shopping looking frowzy and she will be viewed by all who see her as a frowzy housewife. If on the other hand, she takes the time to groom herself and present herself with a little pride her public will not see her in this fashion but rather as an attractive, "together" woman.

I had never thought of myself as a homosexual until the so-called enlightened heterosexuals around me had started calling me dirty names, even as a child. Now all of a sudden I was looking at a "tool" which I might use to protect myself from those uncaring, thoughtless people who would try to make my life as miserable as they could throwing epithets at me. So much for the heaven of that evening, Now for the hell!

The "Street Sissies" told me that looking the way I did I could make a lot of money. All that I had to do was to walk out on Eastern Parkway and let men pick me up in their cars. They said that every night, well into the wee hours of the morning, there were men cruising in their

autos looking for sex. It was easy, ;they said, because all the men wanted was a blow-job which only took a few minutes and I would be able to make five or ten dollars apiece. They said that they all did it and that it beat starving, and they offered to show me the best places to work the trade.

They convinced me that if I followed their advice I could really make good money and wouldn't have to walk around in search of returnable bottles anymore. They explained how I should always look "real". (Their expression for looking completely girlish) They said I should always wear a padded bra because young breasts attracted the men. They said that most of the men were "straight" and that the illusion of breasts allowed them to rationalize picking up what they knew to be "queens." At the same time, the wearing of a soft bra and falsies meant that if the police came along you could slip out the falsies, put them in your pocket and the soft bra would naturally flatten itself out under your shirt or blouse.

They said that all I had to do was pick a spot under a street light, preferably at or near a bus stop. That was so I could simply say that I was waiting for a bus if the police came along or if I was approached by an obviously undesirable driver. Other than that, it was a snap, they said, and they even offered me clothes to wear if I wanted to try it.

They filled me in on a lot of little things and I was amazed at how street-wise they were. They had it all down to a science. As we talked on, all of their stories were somewhat similar to mine. They were all young, some homeless, and most unable to get a job because of their age. "Besides", one commented, "who the hell is going to hire a fairy?" They all laughed at that and I found myself joining in.

My head was spinning and it was as though I had entered another world. I was of an age when I should have been listening to my parents discuss what they thought I should study in school, but instead I was being coached for life by these street kids.

When I finally left that night and headed back to my lonely, freezing, deserted building I cried most of the way home. I felt so confused and lost and it was indeed a bitter night. The sidewalk was stinging my feet through the holes in my shoes and the old cloth coat I wore was only a suggestion of warmth. As I climbed the stairs in the darkness and opened the door to my frozen hell-hole of an apartment I thought my heart would break. I thought I knew right and wrong. I thought I knew good and bad. I thought, I thought and I thought some more but

everything was somehow out of focus. All I could see was the vision of myself there in the mirror in the apartment of the "Street Sissies", and beyond that nothing seemed to make any sense.

Two nights later I took my first step out onto Eastern Parkway and in ten minutes had made five dollars. It was so easy. A car pulled up, I opened the door and got in. I did what I had to do while the man drove along, and in what seemed only minutes he dropped me off near where he had picked me up after handing me five dollars. Five dollars! That was more than I could earn in a week of searching for bottles.

The die had been cast and for the next four years I lived off the streets. I am not proud of that period of my life so I will not go into details. In fact, I sincerely wish with all my heart that I could simply erase those years from my life. Unfortunately I can't, but thank God, time has a wonderful way of healing hurt.

I had to live. I was too young to get a job and as the "Street Sissy" had observed...who wanted to hire a fairy anyway? I was also too young to get an apartment. Even if I had the money noone would rent an apartment to a kid. I had noone who cared, noone to turn to and I can tell you with every fiber of my body that at fourteen or fifteen that is one hell of a position to be in. I was totally responsible for my own existence, yet had none of the tools with which to insure myself even a meal, save for walking the streets. I was on my own, period, and there was nobody who was going to help me or give me anything or do anything for me if not myself.

You have no idea what it is like to be effeminate in this world we live in. You can't imagine how it feels to walk down a street and have complete strangers come up to you with utter vulgarity and filth. The very fact that you are "different" seems to give people the right to totally mortify you in public. How many times I've had faggot or queer or cocksucker screamed at me in public while people looked on in at least passive acceptance of the tormentor. There is nowhere to hide, nowhere to run. There is no escaping the moment which seems to stretch itself into an eternity. All eyes turn to you, as you, in turn, try to somehow climb into yourself and hide.

In those early years there was no counter-balance in my life. There was nowhere I could go to hear someone say, "we love you and we understand." I was to the eye a faggot and it didn't matter that there was gospel music ringing in my heart. It didn't matter that I was like

anyone's son or daughter who had been brought up with the finer Christian principles. In fact, nothing of what I was inside mattered at all because I was simply judged by what met the eye.

I don't know why but I've often thought of the Salem witches. Today we know witchcraft to be about as valid as purple bananas yet in those times "Truth" said, "You are a witch." Then "Truth" burned you or hanged you to death. It is not really so unlike that today and I fear we are not quite as grown-up as we would like to think. What a shame!

I have never met anybody who did not want love. I think from the moment we are born we all reach for it. I certainly am no psychiatrist but I'd be willing to bet at the core of most people's problems lies the need for acceptance and love, and I'm sure that I am no different. The only difference is that I am locked inside a body I was given at birth and society has been instructed to abhor that which I seem to be. Just like the Salem witches, I am prepared on any good day to be crucified by someone's unthinking vulgarity. For example, this very day I dressed up to go to see an agent about a singing engagement and as I walked across Broadway at 54th Street a police cruiser pulled along side of me and one of "New York's Finest" called out so that everyone could hear, "Hey you must be an entertainer or a fag because you're too well dressed and niggers don't dress like that!" Can you beat that? He put all of his animosity into one sentence, laughed at his own cleverness, and drove away leaving me with people staring at me from all sides. Well, no matter.

The kids I met were survivalists and they had shown me how to at least exist. I could become a pretty girl in a matter of moments and while the world was most unaccepting of a faggot, it was most receptive to an attractive girl.

When I would be dressed prettily, I would get wolf-whistles from passing cars rather than the belittling filth to which I had become accustomed. With a bit of makeup I seemed to transform not only myself but the world around me. Everything was more gentle and kind. I no longer had the feeling that I might have to stand and defend myself on every corner. The whole world seemed warmer and more civilized and yet I knew that I must always have one eye open for trouble...always be on guard.

At the age of fourteen I did not consider myself a homosexual. I guess that I could say that at that age I did not think of myself as anything save a person. Life was there to be lived and it went from where I was to somewhere out there in space. I had to survive, I knew that, and

that imperative was all that I was aware of.


From the time that I was three, men had walked me down the road of their homosexual expression not mine. I had been manipulated on many occasions but never had there been any conscious effort on my behalf to commit myself to any particular life-style. Almost every gospel singer and minister I had met had had his "friend". I was effeminate so naturally gay men would reach out to me, perhaps because I mirrored their former selves, or perhaps because they could see my future, which of course I couldn't.

As a youngster without the knowledge of the variables or alternatives of life I had simply let happen what happened without any commitment on my behalf. It might seem that I had been through the mill by the age of fourteen but I can assure you it was somebody else's mill and not mine.

On the one side there was the "Straight World" calling me ugly names and hurling epithets at me at every chance. On the other side was the "Gay World" reaching out to me with care and understanding. On the one side was the "Straight World", the drivers of cars, the seekers of sex. On the other side was the "Gay World" which treated me with respect and courtesy.

Yet in my mind I had categorized none of this. It was simply a question of acceptance versus rejection and that was all. In fact, I guess that I never gave any of it much thought until, at the age of fourteen, I was arrested for female impersonation and saw HOMO stamped in big black letters on the arrest sheet. That may sound strange to you, even terribly naive, but I swear it's the truth as I remember it.

During those would-be-forgotten four street years I was arrested and jailed seven times. The shortest period was for one week and the longest was for ninety days. The latter was because I resisted arrest. I was walking home one night having visited some friends, and I was almost there when waylaid by the police. I thought it was wrong for someone to be arrested for walking home but they of course had different ideas on the matter. When I resisted I was handcuffed and tossed into the cruiser and whisked off to jail. Hey, it's bad enough today, but in those days to be black and effeminate you didn't have a chance in Hell!



Learning... ...Those Four Years

I think that love and sex belong in two separate categories. I do believe that they can be found together but only when ideal circumstances put them together. Most western religions speak of the ideal...man meets woman...marriage...children...and they lived happily ever after.

Life is simply not that way, at least for most people I have met. There are millions who don't have that wonderful one-to-one relationship. What are they supposed to do? How are they to find affection? Are they supposed to go out and kill themselves because they don't happen to fit into the mold that some celibate clergyman says they should.?

We have made sex a dirty word and we go on and on keeping it dirty. We do so by saying that it can only be experienced one right way. That of course, makes all other ways wrong. I am certainly not advocating promiscuity but everyone is not desirable or lovely, handsome or virile, or in a position to be married. In those four years I met many men who were not ugly, nor perverted, nor immoral, nor sick. All they wanted was a few moments of togetherness. In fact, it has been my experience that many people walk in quiet desperation because of deep-seated, God-given needs which have no "right way" of being expressed. They have to seek the shabbiest of circumstances, the ugliest of surroundings in which to touch a little warmth.

How foolish it is having police cars prowling dark streets trying to catch people looking for love. Think about it! It is absolutely absurd, yet predicated on old-hat religiosity which goes on and on. The so-called men of God, the holier-than-thous continue to lay down the laws restricting one human being from touching another. Is it any wonder that if you want...give your regards to Broadway (to paraphrase the popular song) you'd be giving them to a line-up of porn theaters and sexual freak shows? In fact, that's just about true of every city in our country,

So, the-powers-that-be want to keep the city streets clean, and nightly, they turn out the police squads to insure themselves that they will see no hint of impropriety as they drive in their limousines to see their mistresses. (So much for philosophizing.)

I turned to the streets out of need because I simply had to live, and yet after I had clothes and food and shelter I realized that I was one of those people who had to put love and sex together. My early upbringing had come back to haunt me, and while I guess that I was grateful

for it, it nonetheless presented me with an unwelcome problem. The only way that I could escape it was to turn to liquor, so at the age of fifteen I began to drink. I would buy a 47¢ pint of Golden Spur Wine and numb myself as best I could, just enough to be able to go through the motions in someone's car. I guess deep inside I hated what I was doing but I knew I had to provide for myself.

I taught myself to be totally detached and I could be a hundred miles away in my mind. It wasn't necessarily due to a learned morality, though, perhaps there were faint echoes from the past, I don't know. It was just that I wanted love and wanted to put whatever sex I had to express together with that love.

But in the meantime there was the rent... and the food... and the clothes... and the choice was not mine to make. So I religiously bought my 47¢ pint and after downing it would head for the street. It became a routine which was only broken when by chance I would hit a particularly generous "customer". Then I would skip as many nights as I could until necessity drove me back out onto the street.

So, at the time when most kids were just starting high school, having dates, going to football games and such, I was a teenage street hooker. (Even seeing that on paper in front of me makes me somehow disgusted.) What a waste of time and energy and brain-power and youth! Damn! And all of those things unredeemable.

I was almost eighteen now. My high-school had been the streets. I had no future because there simply was no future. I lived day to day, bottle by bottle and my dislike for what I was doing had grown so strong that my intake of liquor had also increased. Now I would work the streets only when I absolutely had to and even then it was a real chore to talk myself into it. You see, my inner self was giving me hell and telling me to stop the nonsense and start searching for beauty. The only problem was that from my vantage point there was no beauty and I really didn't know where to look to find it...

...I do have to say that what few, good feelings I had in those awful days I could trace, through the garbage of my life, back to my dear grandparents. I am sure now that whatever strengths I had, whatever brought me through, was entirely of their doing. I can't for the life of me put my finger on anything specific that they had said or done in those early years, and I know that I was unhappy much of the time that I lived with them, but I also realize that they

were the only stabilizing force that I had ever known in my lifetime so I truly believe that all of the credit must go to them...

By now I was a fairly steady cross-dresser. Let's face it... I looked terrible in male clothes. My friends used to say that I looked like a lesbian and you've got to believe that that was something to live with. There just seemed to be no winning on either side. Yet my face was feminine, my walk was feminine and my figure was slender and girlish, so more and more I turned to wearing female clothing.

All the while there was a thought that would not leave my mind. I did not want to be known as a homosexual. I mentioned before that I had not consciously categorized myself in any way but as time went on I could see that the world around me was certainly less than liberal when it came to labeling. In those days, the early sixties, there was much more of a stigma attached to being gay than there is today. Now there's Gay Rights, Gay Liberation, Gay Parades, Gay talk shows, Gay clubs, Gay churches, Gay telephone hotlines etc., etc., ad infinitum. But in those days it was something one simply swept under the rug.

The treatment I was getting accustomed to in public, plus the general negative labeling of anything which had to do with being gay had begun to form patterns in my thinking processes. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in an unhappy state. I didn't want to have my days filled with ridicule. I didn't want to have to reserve my living hours for the twilight, while walking in fear or shyness during the daylight hours. I didn't want to be categorized and thus limited in my friendships. I wanted, in the worst way, to be able to fit into society without recrimination or belittlement. There was a normal world out there and I wanted to be part of it.

Did every party I went to have to be a gay party, every function a gay function? Couldn't I perhaps go to church without being stared at or shied away from. Couldn't I stop and talk to a little child without having the parents rush to its side and hurry it from my presence? Couldn't I smile at people without their thinking that there was some kind of homosexual motivation behind my smile?

Couldn't I ride on a subway or bus, or just walk down a street without having to avert my eyes from everyone and everything around me for fear of some kind of unthinking recrimination? Couldn't I walk out my front door, firm in the knowledge that I would not be made fun of?

I can't remember all of the questions that I asked my self in those days, but I do remember that there seemed to be no clear-cut answers available. I did however come to one conclusion. The problems had never come about because I was a homosexual. They had come about because I looked as though I were a homosexual. There are, in fact, many gay people who live comparatively normal lives. They are doctors and lawyers, teachers and dancers, truck drivers and plumbers. We pass them everyday on the streets with no idea whatsoever of their sexual preference. And that is as it should be. Can you imagine walking up to a heterosexual couple and asking them what they do in bed? Of course not. That's their private business and though it may be twice as varied as any homosexual relationship it's still noone's business but theirs.

My problem was that my appearance telegraphed to all who saw me a 'suggested homosexuality' and they only had to let their imagination soar after that initial click of the mind. As a general rule, we do not know what another person is thinking as they look at us but for some reason, if the thought is sexual they seem most inclined to communicate it in some way. In those days intimation of being gay brought on all manners of embarrassing public display.

If you were walking down the street and detected any group of young men coming your way, you did your best to cross the street, duck into a doorway, or avoid them in any way that you could. They could be black or white, Puerto Rican or whatever, but you shied away from them like a plague. If you didn't, it was more than likely that you would have at least two blocks of harassment, of vulgarity and filth. I can only say that you would have had to walk in my shoes to know the utter mortification which I was forced to experience time, after time, after time. The truly sad part of it all was that I did not feel deep inside that I was any of those ugly things that people chose to call me.

(I know that I am drawing a very thin line and perhaps asking for a little too much understanding but deep in my heart I did not want the gay label stamped on me.)

Fred

One day as I was sitting in a coffee shop on West 72nd Street trying to figure out the next move in my big city survival fight, I was approached by a very nice looking man who introduced himself as Fred. He was a husky, macho-looking, carpenters' supervisor who worked for a large company, overseeing a substantial work force. He was soft-spoken and very pleasant with a sort of laid-back manner, and after treating me to a second cup of coffee we sat and chatted for perhaps a couple of hours.

The conversation ran from soup to nuts and back again. and as we talked I sensed a warmth and sincerity about him. He had what seemed to be a very intelligent mind and his eyes communicated concern, while his whole being seemed to have a certain animal magnetism. He finally said that he was heading home to put on some dinner and asked if I would like to join him. I hadn't had a decent meal for several days so with little or no hesitation I consented to be his guest. He picked up the tab, and we headed north of Amsterdam Avenue, chatting and laughing as we went. I really liked the guy and felt very good about being with him. He was just very natural, with a total masculine outlook on life and he seemed to sort of unzip his mind and let me see into it. He told me about his work and his responsibility and about how much he enjoyed doing what he did. He also told me that he was gay, though you would never had guessed it had you passed him on the street.

Well the bottom line to all of the above is that after dinner we made love and he invited me to live with him. At first I didn't believe him, perhaps because I was black and he was white. I wanted to because I liked him a great deal and his apartment was very nice and I had been so long on the streets, but something in my head told me that this wasn't real. He was amused at my hesitation and laughingly insisted time and time again that he was serious and that his offer was genuine. He was extending his hand in friendship and concern, predicated though it was on mutual sexual attraction.

What joy! What relief! No more street scenes, no more ugliness! No more searching the avenues for a living! No more roaming the gutters! I had lived a hundred years and was still only eighteen and now someone was saying to me, "I care enough about you to want to take care of you."

The first few months with Fred were glorious. I felt sheltered and cared for. There was always food and heat and affection. Fred was attentive and thoughtful, a good provider and a

warm companion. He was very understanding of my ways and made no bones about my cross-dressing. He told me that if it made me happy that I should do it whenever I liked. He did say that he had always been attracted to young guys, inferring that the dressing thing was not his preference, but he nonetheless allowed me the luxury of doing my thing.

On weekends he'd throw parties and I would delight in acting as hostess with my high heels and hose and dress. I hit it off immediately with his friends and they readily accepted me into their circle. They were rather a cross section of all kinds of people, predominantly gay, or at least understanding of the gay scene and almost weekly they would flock to our apartment for partying.

I didn't realize it at first but Fred was a real party nut. His get-togethers would start Friday night and sometimes go until Sunday night. People would drift in and out, come and go, and the party would go on and on. Fred would hang blankets over the windows so that no one would know that the sun had come up or have any conscious awareness of time. It was madness, sheer, unadulterated madness but when you're young you don't exactly have your head screwed on right.

Then one day came the revelation. Fred felt that we should have what he called, "an arrangement." He informed me of his need to have others sexually, and he suggested that rather than waste a lot of money getting hotel rooms or the likes he would like me to consent to his bringing people home to the apartment. Very matter-of-factly he observed that the apartment was indeed large enough so that he could indulge in his indiscretions without my having to watch. He further observed that he thought that I should be understanding of his needs and allow him this freedom of expression because, after all, it was, the best thing for him, and what he really needed.

The best thing for him? When in the world was something going to be the best thing for me? But no matter, because I was not going out on those streets again. So I became the dutiful companion-housekeeper-hostess-sometimes-lover. Not yet nineteen, I felt as though I were the madam in a freaked out male brothel. Fred had an appetite for sex which was extraordinary and once he had the green light from me our (His) apartment was like Grand Central Station. I had bartered my affection for a decent place to live, traded my love for security.

If Fred was a sex freak he was also a pill freak! Our (His) apartment was filled to overflowing with pills of every size, shape and description...to take you wherever you thought you might like to go. Actually it was not as bad as it is today, because now there are far more

various kinds of drugs on the streets than there were in those times. Nonetheless, we always had more than an ample supply of "Ups" and "Downs." "Get stoned" was the motto and though I never saw LSD or hallucinogens, it was so easy to get higher than a kite from Amphetamines and booze. Then you could always level things off by taking Barbiturates or you could mix them all together and see what happened. Up, down, sideways, it made little or no difference to the kids who showed up for Fred's parties. If they're alive today only God knows.

The parties always began as parties and ended up orgies. The pills would remove inhibition and a good amount of reason and most generally leave the guests horny. It was what Fred wanted...it was what Fred got. Those "Ups" would keep a party person going around the clock and if and when things began to lag he would simply pop another pill or two.

As I said before I became the hostess. I'd keep things going in the living room while Fred had his "thing" going on in the bedroom with his friends, my friends, or for that matter, anyone's friends. I'll say one thing for good old Fred... noone could ever accuse him of discrimination.

But frankly that's what pills and booze do to you. They erase half of your thinking power. They lift you to a point where you're a non-stop talker, a non-stop dancer, and of course in Fred's case, a non-stop-you-know-what-er.

To my knowledge there were no junkies in the group, noone on hard drugs, but in a sense we were all junkies. We were young and foolish and hooked on ignorance. I'd like to pretend that I was smarter than the rest but I wasn't. I too was on the pill merry-go-round and it wasn't until the day when I sat in a corner listening to my heart beat that I knew I had to get off. I could actually feel it pounding like a hammer in my chest and I knew that this self abuse could not, must not go on.

It's amazing how we willfully abused our bodies and more incredible how they withstood the abuse. What's more incredible is how, without a question, we would pop a pill into our mouths without having the slightest idea of what it really was or what it might do to us. We would simply take the word of whoever was offering it and sit back to experience whatever sensation we might get from it. Stupid, stupid, stupid!

As time went on I realized that I was in the wrong place but for the life of me I couldn't seem to come up with any alternative. I did cut my pill-taking back to an occasional "high", and in so doing my mind began to function more reliably but still I was at a loss to know how to make the needed change in my life. Living where I was certainly beat the street scene and yet I

sensed no tomorrow, no growth, no possibility. If you will remember, the sixties were the height of the rock-and-roll, do-it-now, instant gratification period. Noone around me seemed to be viewing the future, only the moment. If it felt good you did it.

We lived close to Riverside Drive with its walks and parks and benches. It was there that I took my maturing mind whenever I wanted to sort things out. It was so nice to be able to touch nature and I would spend hours there away from my ever increasing dismal situation. I would take to daydreaming and let my imagination soar.

Imagination is, I believe, both a blessing and a curse. It lets one escape an ugly or less than desirable situation through the door of hope, but at the same time it can be deceptive insofar as it is not reality. I suspect that all great things have indeed been fathered by the imagination but only when it has purpose and direction. Otherwise it affords little more than a temporary escape. Be that as it may, in those days I relished my moments in the park and invariably the moments stretched into hours as I daydreamed of better things. Someday, I thought...someday.

I lived with Fred for a little over three years and though much of that time was spent wishing I were somewhere else I truly do not know what I might have done with that period of my life had I not met him. I know that I learned a great deal from the experience, and while it was no college education (street kids don't go to college) it nonetheless opened my eyes to clearly viewing many things which I knew I didn't want to make part of my lifestyle.

Then one morning, without any warning, Fred said, "Carol, when I get home tonight I want to find you gone."



Fourteen Dollars

a Week...

I moved into a fourteen dollar a week room in the West Eighties. There are countless buildings in New York City which from the outside suggest a certain respectability. Architecturally they might even hint of grandeur but one step inside will take that whole illusion and pop it like a balloon.

Tiny rooms, little more than cow stalls. Dark, dingy, narrow hallways. One toilet floors. Walls, paper thin, with layer after layer of chipping paint. Doors which barely lock, giving only suggested protection. Single, naked-lightbulb lighting for each room. Bare floors, dotted with globs of paint from years of don't-give-a-damn, do-it-as-cheap-as-possible, bare-minimum painting. And to top it all off there were/are always the roaches. Let's not forget those dear, ever-present guests. (I have actually lifted thirty year old carpeting and swept up shovel fulls of dead roaches.)

I've often wondered what landlords really think about people. Even the word landlord comes from another time and place. He owns the land and he is the, "lord." You are the peasant. You take what you get and you like it or you get the hell out. If there's no heat, no hot water, no lights or whatever and you don't like it... get the hell out!

Being black, I've certainly known what prejudice is and I trust by now that most of you readers are aware of its ugliness, but if you really want to know its dimensions you've got to be a minority and be poor. That's when you cease being human.

One thing that I've never been able to understand is how the Jew, after having complained for centuries about anti-semitism, prejudicial treatment, bias, bigotry, and you name it, can turn around and become a New York landlord and proceed to do to his tenants all of those things about which he has complained for centuries. Invariably, my landlords have been Jewish and invariably I have watched them mistreat their tenants. I am certainly not taking a shot at their religious preference but I'll tell you one thing... their sociological attitudes need some pretty close scrutinizing.

(At the time of this writing I live in a Mid-Manhattan, second-rate hotel. I personally have decorated and embellished my apartment to where I'm certain it has to be the nicest quarters in the building. I purposely chose the hotel because of its convenience to everything and the seeming safety it afforded being mid-town.)

Shortly after moving into the building it was taken over by a new management group made up of European Jews. In other words they rent the establishment from the actual

landowner for a given amount and then they make what they can by manipulating rentals, forcing out long-term tenants etc... Since the day that they took over the hotel they put their greedy mark on the place and it has never been the same. Their love of the "Dolla" is so strong that nothing else matters.

One old lady died, lying on the floor, clutching the phone. She had had a heart attack but because she was in arrears on her rent they had plugged her phone allowing no calls. She died trying to get help. Months of mismanagement produced months of broken boilers, heatless Winter months, lightless corridors, frightening fires and virtually nonexistent services. Upon taking over the building the new managers fired all black help, save for two old maids, who until this day are the soul keepers of the eleven story building. You'd have to see them at the end of a work day. They can hardly walk. Management fired union help and hired cheap desk help. Elevators were in constant disrepair and weeks would go by when many of the old tenants would have to climb as many as eleven flights of stairs to reach their rooms. Management's answer to any and all complaints was a standard one. I quote, "If you don't like it here then get the fuck out!"

Upon grouping together in a tenants committee and presenting our case to the court, as city government would have one believe one can do, we got a colossal run around. Their lawyers arrive in court as though they had just been sent by the Temple to rectify all mistakes and answer everyones' pleas. Salve is temporarily put on the wounds and the people leave the court believing they have accomplished something, not realizing they have unwittingly placed their names on managements' hit list. From that day on you are treated with such discourtesy, such contempt, that even a dog would move eventually.

One of my friends, a venerated, old, newspaper racetrack reporter is today in a nursing home because of a severe case of double pneumonia he acquired while trying to make it through two Winter months of virtually heatless existence. He would sit in a local pub sipping hot tea until late at night in an effort to keep some warmth in his thinning aged body. Then he would return to his rented icebox of a room and after covering himself with everything imaginable he would try to sleep. Pneumonia finally caught up to him and it's a wonder that he's alive today.

When I tell you these people don't care about anything but themselves and their money I mean... these people don't care about anything but themselves and their money! I cannot emphasize that too strongly. The day that they took over the building all semblance of morality, ethics, common decency, care, concern, brotherhood, and love bowed to the almighty "Dolla" and died, and yet they are the same people who will scream Anti-Semitism at the top of their lungs, wanting us all to be guilt ridden and ashamed. I have met such people over and over and

over again and they are always the first to tell you how badly they are treated for being Jews. (There is a truth about themselves that they refuse to see and they excuse their own ugliness by blaming the world.)

I used to sit in the window of my fourteen dollar a week room and watch the cars go by, heading for Riverside Drive and subsequently New Jersey or Connecticut or Up-State New York. They would be leaving the city for some sun-lit place where the soul can breathe and the spirit can be lifted; going to a spot of their own choosing, their own desire. But when you are poor there is no such place, not such choice. You take only what you can get. You look in your pocket and hope that you've got enough to buy almost nothing...and that's exactly what you get, almost nothing. That is precisely what my new home was.

I could not live by myself because after my deserted building experience I had vowed never to do so again. It was just too frightening and lonely an experience. So I found a roommate and together we shared my cubicle to the tune of seven dollars apiece per week. Even that ridiculously low rent was about twice what the sty was worth.

I hope that God has a special place in the Hereafter for landlords. It should be dark and dingy and just cold enough to chill them to the marrow. Encircling it, just out of reach, should be a ring of sunshine. In that sunshine should be an enormous sign towering over their dingy habitat. It should read in big gold letters...DIGNITY... and they should have to stare at it for all eternity, remembering, remembering, remembering.

Well, so much for my fourteen dollar a week room...

One day I ran into someone I had known years before when I was singing with The Adelphi Singers. He told me of a gospel group that was looking to sort of renew its act and was looking to add one more voice. I found out where they were auditioning singers and presented myself for consideration. Frank Baylor, the leader, took one look at me and said, "Hey listen, you either put on a dress or grow a moustache...one or the other." I opted for the latter and with much encouragement given to my limited facial hair I managed to do what he requested. It was a chance to sing again and I would have glued on a beard for the opportunity.

The group was called, The Ambassadors, and they already had had an album release by M.G.M. and they were still signed to them. However, as only my luck would have it, they were on the decline and I was to sing with them for only about six months before their demise. But at least for that short period of time I was making legitimate money and singing. Yes, I was singing, which meant more to me than anything else in the whole confusing world.

The Jewel Box Revue...

For some reason female impersonation has always fascinated people. I'm not certain exactly why it does but it has been my experience that clubs or theaters featuring impersonators most generally do a pretty fair business. Dressing in drag has been a foil used by countless comics over the years; Milton Berle, Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Red Skelton etc. Successful movies and television series have featured actors dressed in drag, and currently "Tootsie", starring Dustin Hoffman, is the rage across America.

For close to thirty years, beginning in the Nineteen Forties, The Jewel Box Revue was one of the top (if not the top) female impersonator shows in the country. Its' home base was New York City and the Apollo Theater in Harlem was where it was presented, to what was generally a standing-room-only audience. (If I remember correctly it was just about the largest drawing show ever to appear at the Apollo, save for perhaps, James Brown.)

The Revue also toured Europe on several occasions and made the rounds here in America, packing them in much as they did at the Apollo. The troupe was made up of twenty-five men and one girl, and the 'gimmick' used was to see if the audiences could pick out that one female from the lineup of female impersonators. The difficulty came from the fact that the stage would be filled with utterly believable, totally feminine, strikingly beautiful impersonators who were 'unreadable'. At the end of the performances the audience would just about fall apart when they would learn that the one female in the group was in fact the masculine appearing Master of Ceremonies.

In 1967 when the show was returning to the Apollo for its yearly stint I got word that they were looking for new talent. I promptly removed whatever facial hair I had cultivated to sing with The Ambassadors and headed out to audition for The Jewel Box.

"Well pay you a hundred-twenty-five a week, O.K?" I had only just stopped singing and upon hearing those words I stood there with my mouth wide open.

"Well, do you want the job? Maybe you'd like to think it over?"

Think what over? Were they kidding? Just give me another minute to digest what they said and I'll give them a resounding hallelujah!!!

I can't begin to tell you how I felt going home to my fourteen dollar a week room. Surely the gods had smiled on me. No more hamburger-a-day-existence. No more wondering where the next dollar was coming from. No more feeling like an unwanted human being. I had actually been hired as a singer and more than that, a girl singer. What an incredible day that was!

Actually I had been hired as both a soloist and a showgirl. In The Jewel Box Revue everyone doubled even if they were chosen as a specialty act. They would do their featured thing and then join the chorus line during the entire ensemble performance. It made no difference to me however, because just having the job was so wonderful that I would have even swept up after the show had they asked me to.

I loved each and every moment of it. We always had a great band and beautiful costumes and I would get out there on stage and sing my heart out, almost always assured of a standing ovation. It is quite common for a female impersonator to pantomime a record due to the fact that men's voices are of a lower register and would therefore sound rather ridiculous coming from a beautifully coiffured, elegantly attired lady. In my case however, I was gifted with having a very unusual range and by featuring the upper part of my voice I sounded just like a woman. This meant when I performed I could actually use my own voice instead of resorting to pantomime.

I loved working there for another reason. It really gave me a chance to learn stage presence and to observe all of the facets of both the impersonation art and the performing art. The Apollo audiences were always receptive and yet very critical, so you learned little by little, mistake after mistake, to perfect your routines and to improve your act. It was difficult at first but then I guess I was born with just enough 'ham' in me to pull it off in fairly decent shape.

The Apollo was similar to Radio City Music Hall inasmuch as it presented both the stage show and a movie. The movie allowed us a little respite in between shows but even at that it was still rather a rigorous routine. Each stage show was about ninety minutes long with many, many costume changes and we would run around back-stage like a bunch of chickens with their heads chopped off, slipping into this or that while waiting for our next cue.

The productions were always extremely well executed and the audiences always seemed to eat us up. As time went on I learned that I could really sing and the experience alone was causing me to become more and more proficient. When I was a kid it was understandable that people liked to hear a boy soprano sing. Who in the world doesn't like a boy soprano? But as

you move into the professional world the criticism becomes more acute and people are not quite so willing to take you at face value. They really want you to perform and can react very negatively if you don't. Many is the talent that has come to New York believing that it had enough substance to survive, only to find its candle blown out.

Again let me say that the Apollo audience was tough and if you weren't good they would take little time in letting you know, and giving you the "Hook". You can imagine my delight when I got my first standing ovation and the incentive it gave me to always strive for perfection. I know now that much of it was psychological inasmuch as there had been all those years when not one soul in the world had given a damn whether I lived or died. Suddenly here was the little run-away kid from Virginia being praised for performing and looking out across the foot lights at thousands of smiling faces. It's no wonder that I fell in love with the stage.

This period of my life had rather a profound effect on me. Sure, it was show business. Certainly, it was pretense. Without question, it smacked of the unreal. But for the first time in my life I was presenting myself to the world as a woman...

"Ladies and Gentlemen... The Jewel Box Revue proudly presents...

Miss Carol Durrell."

It was an impersonation show, yet I took special delight in knowing that thousands of people were wrestling with their own minds as to whether or not I was the one real girl in the Jewel Box. How delicious I would feel on stage in a lovely gown! How very much like a fairy tale come true. My psyche had been essentially female for years and now I was expressing it publicly without fear of some sort of reprisal. I felt completely natural walking on stage in a gown. There were no feelings of shame or self-deception. There was nothing ugly about what I was doing. There were no policemen around to call me a dirty faggot. There was only the sound of my heart beating happily inside of me and my mind telling me that I was more contented than I had ever been in my life.


Being on stage was the counter-balance I needed in my young existence. If my life off-stage had been somewhat tormented up until then, my performing seemed to give it purpose and meaning. I was old enough to accept, if not understand, the way that society was destined to

treat me. I cannot say that I liked what I knew to be true about non-acceptance but at least I was aware of its dimensions.

Being 'different' can certainly make a person paranoid. You're never sure how you are going to be treated. You want to relate to people but you're afraid of ridicule. You want to go to the park to enjoy the sunshine but you're always on the lookout for the police. (In those days they'd pick you up or run you off just for sitting on a bench, being convinced that you represented something perverted and publicly unacceptable.) When you walked down the street you looked straight ahead, avoiding people's eyes, and always moved right along as though you had some important place to go. You had to try to become your own best friend and try to give yourself the understanding which you almost certainly knew would come from no one else. I think the saddest part of it all was that you found yourself becoming part of what is still called, "the twilight world". It was infinitely easier to walk down a street at night than during the daytime. On stage you were being looked at for your beauty and talent but on the street you were looked at and treated as though you were some kind of freak.

I think that you can see why the gay world feeds upon itself. I think that I must once more say that I want to draw a distinction between the strictly gay existence and the life style almost dictated to those of us who are born effeminate. You can't put a pair of football shoulder pads on one of us and pretend that we're macho. You can't wear a leather jacket, ride a motorcycle, and make believe that your femininity will simply drive itself away. It's there to stay...every second of every minute of every hour of every day...forever. For me to swagger down the street like some construction worker would be an absurdity and for me to try to speak with deep, rich, male vocal tones would be equally ridiculous. I was what I was, and I am what I am and there's just no changing it.

At any rate, singing gave me purpose and if I could dress up and feel beautiful, if only on stage, at least that part of my life was complete. I would have to learn how to handle the rest of it little by little, day by day, if I could. I knew that it would not be easy but the alternatives were virtually nonexistent and as sure as I was breathing the writing was on the wall.



Hormone Treatments...

It was during this period that I began taking female hormones. At first I took only the pills that were available through my friends. After several months of that I found a doctor who gave me hormone shots which were considerably more effective. In a short period of time I felt a general softening of my entire body. My organs were diminishing and my breasts were beginning to enlarge. I had been told that I would experience a kind of knot behind my nipples and sure enough one day there it was. It produced a slight feeling of discomfort akin to a dull ache but I can only describe it as a wonderful sensation.

As I progressed with the hormone treatments I began noticing not only the all-over softening of my body but the definite development of female characteristics. My breasts were filling out beautifully and my hair had become softer and more silky. My skin seemed to take on a new velvet-like texture and my muscle-tone seemed to soften. My entire body, being basically feminine to begin with, seemed to be putting up no struggle with the female hormones and, being virtually hairless, it gave no hint of any noticeable battle of the sexes. I was more or less like a young girl coming into puberty, that's all.

I can't begin to tell you how many times I thanked God for what was happening to me. I had asked, "why", so many times in my life and had never gotten any kind of acceptable answer. I had walked in fear and confusion for so long that those two emotions had seemed to become a part of me. But now, with the taking of the hormones, everything seemed to be falling into place and I began to feel good about myself. I had the honest feeling that I was simply finishing the job which had been started at birth but never completed.

I've listened to the Anita Bryants' of the world with all of their holier-than-thou attitudes and while I appreciate the democratic concept of everyone being able to speak his or her mind I also have the right to think and say that a great many of the most vocal people don't know what they're talking about. Picture, if you will, Anita being born with genitals. Now tell me just how adamant do you think she would be in condemning everyone who wasn't one-hundred percent heterosexual? She would be just as confused and unstable emotionally as I was and she'd search just as long and hard as I did to find identity.

Of course there's always the other side of the coin. Perhaps she'd welcome playing the role of the martyr and spend her whole lifetime in some religious retreat where she could relish

her differences and bask in the pain of it all.

I went through only eight years of formal education so I don't pretend to have all of the answers but it seems to me from my experience that God should be reintroduced to all of the world as Intelligence, with our minds as His home. When I hear prejudicial, old-hat ideas, even from the Bible, my mind says, "That's not God anymore!"

I say the above because much of my life has been like living in a toilet. I had no parents to guide me and few teachers to teach me. I think that I was aware of my own innate capabilities and yet noone really ever took the time to hone them to sharpness. Most adults with whom I came in contact were too busy chasing my little brown body to care about my mind. Paradoxically they were mostly churchgoers, well versed in reciting all of the old, familiar Biblical passages, and yet somehow incapable of understanding that you don't burp a child into the world, throw it away, misuse its little body, and then later on sit in judgment of its adult form, damning its very existence. Our prisons are filled today with abused children grown taller. In many cases their anti-social attitudes were created and fostered by the very people who brought them into the world.

So in my personal survival search what was I to do? In the eyes of our so-called Christian society I was a freak. I think it safe to say that my mother also saw me in that light. My body can give personal testimony to the fact that many of my childhoods' adult would-be mentors, had little more in mind than to avail themselves of my body, and satisfy their own perverted sexual needs.

The world was saying to me, "What kind of freak do you want to be, kid? How far from good can we drag you before we spit you out and then condemn you for being who you are?"

But that was not my question. Mine was, "What kind of a beautiful human being would you like to be?"

After all world, it's just possible that God really does make little effeminate, potentially homosexual babies. That may blow the minds of a few rather vocal, anti-homosexual, fundamentalist, television preachers who think they are going to change everybody to look just like themselves, but the truth is that it has occurred for thousands of years and might well go on occurring for a few thousand more. It seems to me that perhaps this is as good a time as any to sit down and try to figure out some intelligent way of living with reality.

The 82 Club...

The only trouble with The Jewel Box Revue was that it afforded only about two months of work per year and you certainly couldn't live on that. By the time I joined the troupe it was actually on the decline and the owners had gotten older and no longer wanted to work the year around. We therefore would do a month at the Apollo and then perform in Washington D.C. for a month before wrapping it up for the season.

So, three of us from The Jewel Box decided to put together a trio which we called, "The Illusions." We were billed as... The Illusions That Create Confusion, and we would perform on weekends in New York City and at various clubs in New Jersey. We knew that we could always slip back into The Jewel Box if and when they needed us but in the meantime we could at least have gainful employment.

There was Comic-singer Dodi Daniels... Dancer, Don Marshall... and Singer, me. At the risk of sounding immodest, we put together a darn slick little show and while it was far from the extravaganza that The Jewel Box was, we would really knock them out when we'd perform. The only problem was that, unlike working for The Jewel Box, we had to supply our own costumes which took an appreciable bite out of every dollar we made. I don't think I have to tell you ladies what gowns cost, but believe you me, entertainers' need a lot of changes and that spells nothing but M O N E Y! Furthermore, female impersonators are somehow expected to be very elegant in their dress so you didn't just go out and buy a gown, you went out and bought a GOWN!

One evening after a performance at a little club in New York City, I was approached by Kitt Russell, the director of shows for The Club 82 on 4th Street in Greenwich Village. Kitt knew that both "The Illusions" and The Jewel Box Revue were part time engagements and offered me a full-time job at the 82. Like The Jewel Box, it was a female impersonator showplace which was well known both in this country and in Europe. Most especially it was a full-time night club, offering steady dollars.

I thought about it for all of two minutes and then told Kitt that I would be delighted to take his offer. It was rather ironic because several years before, in dire circumstances, I had

called The 82 in hopes of getting a job. At that time they had informed me that it was not their policy to hire Negroes. (The word Negro was still "in" then and so was the prejudice, unfortunately.)

I had heard, via the grapevine, that the kids who performed at The 82 really worked their tails off for maybe one hundred dollars per week but at least they had steady employment. I reasoned that now that I was taking hormones on a regular basis it would indeed be wise for me to have that assured income with which to defray the costs, which were substantial. The club itself was one of long standing and I knew that if I toed the mark I could be fairly sure of long term employment which up until then had eluded me.

So it was that The Club 82 became my second home for the next several years. I use the word home because it was rather like a family place for the entertainers, affording us not only a place to earn a living but also a spot where we could be our preferred selves and communicate with others like ourselves. Not being accepted by the world in general it at least put us in constant contact with others who, for the most part, had our same aspirations, hopes, fears and whatever.

It was not a family place as far as management was concerned. Pete Petillo, the owner, can only be described as a bastard. He was coarse, gruff and sadistic with an ego which said, "I am God." He treated all of the kids like dirt and had a few phrases he truly enjoyed sharing with all of us just as often as he could. "You're scum! You're slime! You're nothing! You're a bunch of dirty faggots! You're all nothing but filthy cocksuckers!" etc., etc., etc. How he loved to run off his dirty mouth at us.

Pete's sister Anna, was married to Veto Genovese and I can only speculate that The Club 82 was a fairly solid Mafia money-maker. There had been another partner in the business who for one reason or another had somehow gained someone's disfavor and had been found stuffed in the trunk of a car with a bullet in his head. There were, in fact, several things mentioned in "The Valachi Papers", which caused us to believe that we had been living a part of that story, yet there wasn't a one of us who was going to be dumb enough to ask any questions.

Pete Petillo had a certain charm about him which caused one to consider vomiting. He ran the club with an iron fist, and from time to time we'd find that fist holding a length of rubber hose. Yes, Pete had some degree of sadism in him and I can remember him letting loose with it

on at least one occasion. Kim August, one of the featured singers, called in sick one night. Pete stormed out of the club along with a friend of his and headed for her apartment. Upon arrival he promptly started beating her with the hose until, in her pain, she consented to come to work. That night she performed sitting in a chair center stage and when she changed into her costume prior to the show her back was covered with black and blue welts. He had really given her a severe going-over.

On any good night you considered yourself lucky just to get a smile out of Pete, or for that matter even a suggestion of a smile. It just might mean that you would be fortunate enough to get through the evening without his usual vulgarity. You had to toe the mark at all times. If you were on time, performed well and bowed slightly from the waist as Pete walked by chances are you would be alright. If not, look out!

Pete had that Mediterranean macho thing about him. He was boss and that was that. He had a demerit system whereby you were fined for being tardy or for appearing on stage with any slight flaw in your costuming. The fine would be levied upon you at his slightest whim and generally meant you lost an entire night's pay, which none of us could really afford to lose. It made no difference to Pete though because he knew that most of us were in need of the job and he knew he could manipulate us almost at will. A real jolly fellow that Pete Petillo!

The club itself was quite lovely. It was spacious and accommodated several hundred people. It was mirrored and chandeliered and carpeted and had a sizable working stage. We would always have a live band and for the most part pretty substantial and varied shows. Everything taken into consideration it would have been an ideal place to work were it not for good, old Pete Petillo.

Like almost any nightclub, The Club 82 attracted all sorts and conditions of people. There would be tourists, out-for-a-good-time-folks, gays, straights, families, bachelor parties and you name it. Then of course there would always be the lonely men looking for some kind of sexual encounter. A psychiatrist would have had a ball on any good night at The 82, because there would be just about every kind of motivation sitting there sipping on whatever it was sipping on. Just as humanity was given abundant imagination with which to turn to art or music or architecture, or to put itself on the moon, so it was given ample imagination to apply to its sexual expression. I'm not suggesting that I heard it all at The 82, but I can't imagine much of it

escaping these ears of mine.

Quite naturally the club would attract the closet transvestite. You could generally spot him, sitting alone, sipping on his drink and drinking in the clothes you were wearing. More than likely he would be wearing panties or pantyhose under his business suit and if he were outgoing enough he would eventually approach one or the other of the performers in hopes that perhaps he could get together with them after the last show and do some cross-dressing, for which he of course was willing to pay.

Several of the "girls" had steady customers who frequented the place and they would be assured of a pretty handsome fee at the end of the evening just for dressing the guy up. There would be little or no actual sexual contact, because the true transvestite got his kicks from the dressing itself. I might add that it was rather a harmless game after all.

I wouldn't even dare venture a guess as to how many transvestites there are in this country. I know of a great many publications catering to the TV, and I understand that there are many clubs and chapters throughout the country where men can meet and find a kind of togetherness with others who love cross-dressing. Transvestites range from homosexual through a variety of in-betweens all the way to the strictly heterosexual, and many are even married and are joined by their wives in their cross-dressing endeavors.

I'm sure there are just about as many varied motivations as there are transvestites, but according to articles I have read by psychiatrists they have unanimously concurred that the cross-dressing personality is for the most part passive and not one to be feared.

Aesthetically one must admit that the world of women's clothing is, as a rule, far more appealing than that of the men's. Men's clothing, in the western world at least, is still an offshoot of the militaristic with its tight collars and ties and all around restrictiveness. A walk down Madison Avenue will show you little to cause you to turn your head, and year after year the styles seem to have been stamped out of the same mold. There are grays and browns and drabs of all kinds not to mention the seeming lack of any new attempt at stylization.

It's almost as though someone said one hundred years ago, "From this day forth all of you men who wish to succeed in the business world must wear drab and restrict all color to neckties."

Nature generally issues to the male the bright colors but not to us modern day mortals.

We create women's fashions of sensuous materials and brilliant hues. We make them to swirl and/or cling to accentuate body shape and motion. We make them provocative and sexy. We make them diaphanous, revealing, even suggestive, to enhance the women's appearance in every way, and quite obviously to attract the eye of the male.

I can understand a man being drawn to a woman who is beautifully dressed and if that personality is somewhat fetishistic I can likewise see him being attracted to the clothing without the woman. I think that you have to admit that there is a lot more beauty in a pair of women's silk and lace panties than there is in a pair of men's cotton briefs with Jockey-Jockey-Jockey-Jockey-Jockey written all around the waistband.

Oddly enough, many of the men with whom I spoke concerning their love of cross-dressing were, by and large, straight and often divorced. Alimony had taxed them so heavily that at least a portion of their so-called masculinity had been taken from them. By that I mean the monetary success by which our society judges a man today. Without ample monies to be attractive to a new money-viewing woman, these men had gradually replaced the interpersonal relationship with varying degrees of cross-dressing. By doing so they retained a feminine reference in their lives without the sociological demands.

One man, who I especially remember because of his outstanding intelligence, class and sincerity, was the president of a Fortune 500 corporation. His psychiatrist had recommended that he visit our club because he had detected the man's need or desire to transvest himself. He was a man of position and power with thousands of employees and much responsibility and he had a need to get in touch with his gentler, more passive side. He said he found true contentment wearing women's clothing and feeling feminine, though understandably he had to take great care against ever being detected. I suspect that he felt safe visiting our club in Greenwich Village and viewing others who, like as not, had some of his own aesthetic inclinations.

I certainly am no psychiatrist so I don't know all of the implications concerning this matter, but I do feel that there are none so important or frightening as to make the world too terribly up-tight. I think the thing to remember is that we all have our imaginations or creative selves which have been formed by our own singular experiences and providing we do not hurt others with our fantasies we should not be afraid of them.

Today we can look back upon those times when men wore lace and powdered wigs and

tights. You certainly have to chuckle a bit at those fancy get-ups and yet it was the thing of the time and was readily accepted by all. I'm sure noone sat in our first Congress and laughed at George Washington for wearing a wig, yet today it seems absurd. Picture, if you will, our present-day President appearing on television for his State of The Union Address wearing a powdered wig tied back with a red ribbon. C'mon folks, you've got to chuckle!

Larry...

Love At Last...?

I met Larry at an after-hours club. There are many such clubs in New York City, known only to those who frequent them and, of course, the police. I would say that they are owned by and large by the Mafia and exist chiefly due to police payoffs. They are illegal but legality on the streets of New York is interpreted by the police and insofar as they are paid to turn their heads there is no illegality.

In past years the downtown after-hours predominantly gay clubs paid dearly for the "right" to be open. The drag queens were safe only in designated areas. If, for example, the club were in the center of the block they were allowed to walk on that side of the street and around the corner on that same side. If they were found elsewhere in the vicinity they were subject to being picked up by the police for so-called street-walking. In other words, for all practical purposes the club owners or their "fronts", as was generally the case, rented the sidewalks from the policemen on the beat.

Perhaps the police rationale was that it was better to have the clubs and the queens under surveillance in a contained area than to have them wandering at will through the city streets. Whatever their motivation they were clearly partners with the Mafia when it came to breaking the law.

After-hour clubs open just at the time when all legitimate clubs are required to close. I'm sure many of you have been in a pub in the wee hours of the morning when the word went out that it was, "last call."

That simply meant that you had time for one more drink before closing time. To insure promptness in closing, pubs often keep the bar clock set ahead five or ten minutes just so that they will have no trouble shoveling out the patrons (drunks) in time for curfew, which in New York is four A.M. For after-hour clubs that is opening time.

When you enter such a club you invariably find yourself in a vestibule with yet another door through which to gain entry to the club itself. In that vestibule you are frisked for weapons and looked at rather closely to see if you're already too drunk or doped-up to be allowed to enter. After-hour clubs and regular night spots are similar in that regard. They don't want trouble.

One night after I had finished performing at The 82 Club, I walked over the The

Washington Square, on the corner of Third Street and Broadway. It was a very popular gay after-hours spot in those days and a place that some of the kids would frequent in order to wind down after entertaining all night. It was packed to overflowing that particular night and after finally working my way through the almost impassible club I luckily found a barstool and sat down to an orange juice.

Minutes later Joe, the manager, came over to me and said that he had a friend who would like to meet me. He asked if I minded and noticing my rather quizzical look he assured me that the man was indeed his friend and in fact had worked with him for quite some time. Politics are found even in after-hour clubs and insofar as I was never required to pay the admission (\$5.00), because they knew me to be a performer at The 82 Club, I thought that I could at least reciprocate with this courtesy.

Joe returned in a matter of moments with a man whom he introduced as Larry. We shook hands and exchanged salutations and Larry asked if I would care to join him in a drink. I agreed, and as he turned to order from the bartender I studied him more closely. I was delighted to find myself in the company of a very handsome, well dressed man who I judged to be well over six feet tall and who had an extremely attractive profile.

As he turned back to me with our drinks in his hands he gave me a warm smile and right away something told me I liked him. I was also aware that people around us were taking notice of our meeting and I later learned that many of the "girls" had tried approaching him in the past but to no avail. I guess that what I was sensing was an undercurrent of envy from the onlookers.

I should be candid about after-hours clubs. While for some, they are places to hang out after everything else is closed, they are, for most, places to go for a "pickup". If a person has sex on their mind and hasn't made a contact during the normal hours there is always the after-hours club as a last resort. Being aware of this I was at first apprehensive about this man seated next to me. On second thought however, I had a pretty good feeling that Joe would not try to steer me wrong.

One may, in fact, spend hours at one of these places without being bothered at all if the management knows you and the word is out that you simply are not available. In later years I entertained at some of the after-hour clubs and was never bothered at all. Oh, that's not to say that some scrawny young hopeful didn't occasionally get up enough nerve to approach you but

all you had to do was give him an "are you kidding" glare and he'd melt into the woodwork. At any rate, Larry was no scrawny kid and we hit it off right from the start.

I don't know what it was exactly but I found this man to be someone with whom I felt very comfortable, and I guess that I was hoping that he felt the same about me. Apparently he did because he made no effort to leave and we just sat there and talked and talked for hours. I did notice him glancing at his watch on several occasions but when I kiddingly asked him if he was bored or had a heavy date waiting for him, he said no. He told me that he had lent his car to Joe to take a girl home and as the time went on he ventured that perhaps Joe was doing just a bit more than just driving her home. He said it with a twinkle in his eye and of course I knew what he meant.

Well, we waited and waited and talked and talked and I must confess that I enjoyed every minute of it. With all of the adversity behind me I was by now conditioned to look for genuine kindness and sincerity in everyone I met. One naturally builds up a wall of skepticism after having been walked on so many times and I must confess that I weighed people's words and actions pretty carefully before committing myself in any way. So, with all of my conditioned responses and with whatever wisdom I thought I had, I talked with this seemingly charming, sincere man for hours, twelve to be exact. Little did I know that I was about to commit myself to a relationship which was to last for the following ten years.

That morning at some time during our marathon talk Larry interrupted himself and said, "Look don't get me wrong, I'm not gay and I don't like faggots!" He said it rather emphatically and it hit me, like a bolt out of the blue.

"I'm not a faggot," I replied, half out of defense and half out of truly believing that I had indeed been born different. "Do I look like a faggot?" I countered, "Does this face look like the face of a faggot?"

Larry looked at me rather sheepishly and apologized. Then he smiled at me with a wolfish sort of smile and said, "No, it certainly does not." My question gave him an opening to look closely at my face and at the risk of sounding egotistical I had the distinct feeling that Larry was enjoying what he was looking at.

Hours later, I glanced at my watch and was dumbfounded to see that we had spent so much time together. I told Larry that I really had to be going because I had to work later that day

and was much in need of at least a few minutes of sleep. He tried to persuade me not to go to work, but I made it clear that I had to because I needed the money and didn't want to jeopardize my job.

By now Joe had returned with Larry's car and after apologizing for having kept it so long and exchanging a few hushed comments, which I'm sure had to do with his successful sexual accomplishment during his long absence, he handed Larry the car keys. I think he was somewhat surprised to see the two of us still sitting there talking after all those hours and perhaps equally surprised that Larry showed no anger at his tardiness in returning the car. He looked first at Larry and then at me and then back to Larry again, as if to say, "Hey, you two kids really hit it off didn't you!"

Later, Larry drove me the few blocks back to The 82 Club where I figured I could catch a few winks in the dressing room before the first show of the evening. He was still not in favor of my working that coming night but by now he knew that he could not dissuade me. He said that he wanted to see me again and I suggested that he come to the show later on. He said that he would, then he said that he wouldn't, then he left me with a, "Well, maybe."

Inside The 82 Club, I did what I could to catch a cat nap and ready myself for the evening's performance. I must confess that it was quite the vogue in those days to "pop" benzedrine pills whenever someone wanted an extra lift. Having stayed up around the clock I reasoned that I'd better up my energy to help me through the night.

Each performance I looked out across the footlights trying to get a glimpse of Larry, but to no avail. During our breaks between shows I peeked out through the curtains hoping to see his face but he clearly was not in the club. I felt my spirits drop a little more after each such search and finally I reconciled myself to the fact that he was not going to show up.

When it came time for the Finalé I approached it with less than enthusiasm. I knew that Larry hadn't exactly promised me that he would show up that night, but as the old saying goes, "Hope springs eternal," and all night long my hope had certainly been springing. Now it was time for the final number when each of the acts would parade on stage to take their bows and as we lined up awaiting our musical cues I really felt disappointed. How easy it is for the heart to rule the mind.

My cue came and I pasted on my best performer smile and tripped out on stage to the

sound of applause. I walked to the footlights and started to sing and as I did so I looked straight down into Larry's eyes. He gave me a wink and a quiet smile as if to say, "See, I told you I'd be here," then he joined the audience in applauding.

Needless to say my heart instantly felt as light as a feather and my pasted-on performer smile was replaced by one of genuine heart-felt happiness. Larry had kept his (sort of) promise and in my world where promises had come cheap and dependability had indeed been a rare commodity I suddenly was looking at the bright light of hope. Maybe, just maybe, this man meant love for me at last.

After the show I hurried to the dressing room and changed. The others kidded me a bit at my excitement and the speed with which I donned my street clothes. Their remarks were like high-schoolish taunts. "Carols' got a boyfriend, Carols' got a boyfriend!"... "Go get 'im girl!"... "Hey, did ya see that good lookin' guy givin' Carol the eye?"... etc. etc.

I laughingly shared a few thoughts with them which I shall not repeat at this time out of respect for the readers ears and then I headed for the door, only to hurry back having forgotten my coat. "You see what I was telling you girls," somebody said. "Love will do it to you every time!"

She was right. Love will do it to you every time. Thank God.

Larry was waiting outside and we drove over to The Washington Square and parked across from the club. There we sat and began our talking once more as though it were just a continuation of our conversation of the night before. Once again there was the warmth. Once again I felt contented in this man's presence as we talked about everything from soup to nuts.

Then suddenly, from out of nowhere, Larry began to shout. It frightened me so that I backed up against the car door and grabbed the handle preparing myself for a quick exit. He started hammering his fists on the steering wheel, and as he did so he let go with a profusion of rather disconnected utterances.

"Why me?" he shouted. "Why, after all these years?... Damn!" "If I was going to be this way why the hell didn't I have some hint of it all these years? I'm not this way, at least I never thought I was. What a dumb, stupid joke to play on me! What the hell is wrong with me anyway?"

It all happened so fast that I didn't know what to do. I had only been acquainted with this

guy for one day and I really didn't know a thing about him. Had I lucked into some sort of psycho? Was this guy going to turn on me and try to hurt me or something? I lifted the door handle but the car door was locked. If I wanted to get out I'd have to turn and lift the button on the door before I could get it opened. I was sure that he would see me and then maybe he'd hit me or try to kill me or something. I'm not over-dramatizing the moment because I was really scared and in truth our city streets are filled with lonely, psychotic, even violent people about whom we read every day. Who was to say that Larry was not one of them?

Then, as quickly as his shouting had started, it stopped.

He turned to me with the look of a child who had just spilled his glass of milk and quietly said, "I'm sorry." He must have seen the apprehension in my eyes because he said, "Please, Carol, don't be frightened...let me explain. Look, I'm not gay. I'm no fairy, no homo, no faggot, no nothing like that. I met you last night and was attracted to you, and I came back tonight because I really wanted to see you again. I've never in my life talked to anyone as long as I did with you last night, in fact, I've never wanted to. From the moment I dropped you off at the club I've had nothing but you on my mind and it's wrong."

"Why is it wrong, Larry?"

"Because I know what you are, and who you are, and I'm really a straight guy and this whole thing is crazy. And if I'm who I just said I was, why am I here and why do I feel so damned attracted to you?"

"Look, Larry," I said, "I am who I am. I am not something I planned. I don't understand anymore of why I am what I am than you do. I only know that since the day I was born I've been a mixture of conflicting emotions and I've been trying like hell to put myself in touch with my real self. I'm not a faggot either, Larry, although the world has seemed to want me to be one. I've already spent thousands of dollars to try and alter the hoax that was played on me at birth and I'm not going to stop until I have a total sex-change."

"Carol, please try to understand. I'm not mad at you or anything like that, it's just that I'm trying to understand myself and my feelings. I'm not after sex with you. I'm not out running around like all of those guys in there looking to get laid." He pointed to The Washington Square. "I just saw you and wanted to meet you and now you seem to be buggin' my mind and I'm a man, dammit!"

I laughed. I just couldn't help it. He looked so cute trying to explain himself and his masculinity, about which I had absolutely no question, nor would anyone who saw him. He was a rugged, good looking man and noone in the world would ever in a million years say that he was anything but a totally macho kind of guy.

"Hey, let's stop this bull and go get a drink, OK?" Larry said. "I'm thirsty as hell."

He got out and ran around the car and opened my door. "We can figure it all out later on", he said, as we crossed the street to the club. "Hope it's not too crowded. I don't feel like standing up."

Larry said that he was not gay and I believed him but in the back of my mind I questioned why he was at The Washington Square in the first place. It was clearly a gay after-hours club and someone off the street just didn't wander in there. You had to know what it was and where it was to be there because there was no blinking sign outside inviting you in, and the windows which were blackened gave you no inkling of what was inside.

Months later I knew the answer, which was tied in with a whole involved sequence of events beginning years earlier. Larry had taken a "rap" for some member of the Mafia, for which he had been given thirteen years in prison. Apparently he was, "Mr. Closed Mouth", and in appreciation of his silence he was given a job upon his release from jail. That job was collecting receipts from after-hour joints, thus his presence at The Washington Square the night we met.

The Mob does not play games, so when I say that Larry was "Mr. Closed Mouth," I mean that he was just that. The ironic part of the ten years we were to spend together was that at the end of that time, I knew little more of Larry than I did that very first night. His outgoing personality was a total cover-up for whatever lay in the inner man and Larry only let you know what he wanted you to know. What deep, dark secrets are hidden inside of him only God knows and until this day I cannot say that I know what makes the man tick. That characteristic stood him in good stead when one day he was called to a "Sit-down" by the Mafia big wheels. They were displeased with something about him, which we will talk about later, and it would have clearly been his demise had not the bosses known that Larry was totally capable of keeping his mouth shut. As I said before...the mob does not play games.

Well, it was another night just like the previous one. We sat and talked and talked. We avoided anything further from our car conversation and just rapped on and on about anything

and everything. I had by then been up for almost forty-eight hours (young people do dumb things) and I could feel myself starting to wilt. I suggested to Larry that perhaps we had better cut the "evening" shorter than we had the previous night and he reluctantly agreed. I think that he was also beginning to feel the wear and tear of staying-out-all-nightism.

He drove me home to my fourteen-dollar-a-week-hole-in-the-wall and walked me to my door, wishing me a good sleep. From my window I watched him pull away in his car and I thought to myself, "You're going to fall in love with that guy, Carol, and I sure hope you know what you're doing."

We saw each other for about six weeks. Larry would pick me up after work just like clock-work and it was nice for a change to have someone I could depend upon. I never questioned if he'd be there...he just always was.

Then one night, as he was driving me home, he seemed strangely quiet. I was tired myself so I just leaned my head back against the seat and we drove along in silence. As we turned the corner onto my street I finally asked Larry if anything was wrong and he shook his head. He luckily found a parking space right in front of my building and pulled into it and turned off the engine.

He turned to me and looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Carol, I want to make love you you...is that alright?" My heart did a little turn-over and I nodded my head and smiled. We got out of the car and he took my hand and we walked up the stairs. I was ashamed of where I lived but he would hear none of it. I explained that I had been spending my money on hormones and electrolysis and the likes and that I had little left for living. He quieted me and said, "Don't worry we'll take care of things."

We undressed and got into bed, and, as with all new lovers we both felt very awkward. Larry said that he felt confused and clumsy and didn't know what to do. He was of course referring to my maleness which through hormones had diminished but was nonetheless still present. What he was trying to say was that he wanted me only as a woman and could not relate to anything else. I understood, and with whatever I did or did not know, I led him in the love-making. It was gentle and warm and tender and utterly unlike any of the ugliness I had known before. When we were through, Larry turned to me and said, "You must get your sex change. When you do I'll make my home in you." What a beautiful thing to say and how loved I felt for the

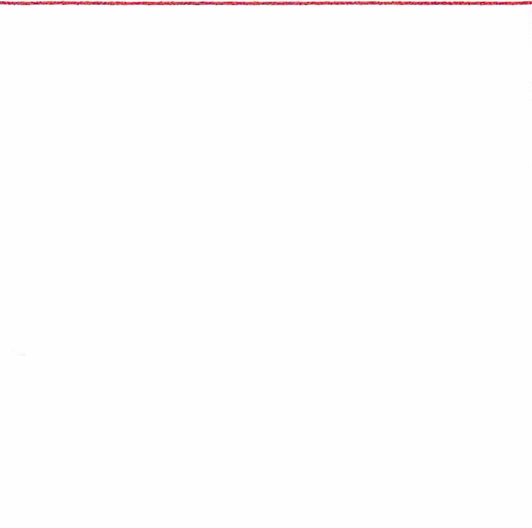
first time in my life.

A week later for Thanksgiving Larry gave me a beautiful Black Diamond Mink Stole and shortly after that he told me that he had found a lovely apartment where the two of us could live. It was all too wonderful for words. After all the years of being knocked from pillar to post, here at last was a human being actually saying that he wanted to live with me. What a beautiful feeling!

We settled into our new five room apartment and began to gradually decorate and furnish it. It was a fantastic feeling to be able to go out and actually buy new furniture. We took our time, buying it piece by piece until we had put together a delightful place in which to live, and for the first time in my life, I had a home I was proud of.

As for our personal relationship there were some things to be desired, but on the whole it was more than satisfactory. The sexual angle was strained because Larry had meant what he said. He was not a homosexual and would have no part of whatever maleness I had left. I looked feminine and dressed feminine and had the body of a girl except for you-know-what. There were many nights when I would have to relieve myself privately after Larry had contentedly fallen asleep, but I imagine that's true about a lot of wives.

I can't fault Larry for what he did or did not do sexually, because I know now that his mind was too firmly structured heterosexually to allow himself to relate to maleness. He had been honest with me that second night in the car and I was saving every penny I could toward the day when I could rid myself of the barrier. It would be only a matter of time until I could present myself to him as a total woman.



Days and Nights...

Larry had a day job as well as his evening Mafia stint. He worked at The Pan American Building for Grumman Aircraft, in some capacity or another, so with his jobs and mine we were bringing home the bacon in pretty fair order. One day he went out and bought a new car, much to my delight. There was a small hitch to it. It had something to do with Larry being on parole so the car was registered in my name for whatever the technicality might have been. Larry explained it away, giving one excuse or another, and I accepted his explanation and put any further questions I might have had out of my mind.

I said that Larry worked days for Grumman Aircraft, mainly because Larry told me that that was where he worked. To this day I do not know if that was true. I do remember trying to reach him there and being told that no such person was on their payroll. He later explained it away by saying that I must have reached a temporary worker who didn't know the staff and very probably someone on a different floor or something.

(Years later, Larry's mother told me that Larry could look you straight in the eyes, make you cry from the depth of his seeming sincerity, and tell you the biggest lie you ever heard. In short, she said that he was a master of deception and always had been, but during those first few years of being together I had no real knowledge of his chronic deceitfulness. Perhaps that's what the Mafia found so appealing in him.)

Perhaps he did work for Grumman, perhaps he didn't. If he didn't, then to this day I do not know where Larry went when he said he was going to work. I do know that one day he came home and said that he had been fired and that's the last I heard of Grumman.

I guess that I never got down to any serious questioning concerning his job because Larry continued to have ample amounts of money and continued to provide well for us. I imagine that there are a lot of wives who have little or no idea what their husbands do all day. They are satisfied in the knowledge that their man supports them and their children and beyond that they don't really care too much.

But.....Almost from the day that he was supposedly fired from Grumman, he began receiving an inordinate number of phone calls. Of course I could not hear what was being said on the other end of the line but the conversation from our end was always basically the same, with a kind of mysterioso to it. "Yes, they have the money." "Yes, I'll be there on time." "Tell

so and so to meet me at such and such a place." Larry would come and go and come and go and I still hadn't the vaguest idea of exactly what was happening.

No, that's not completely true either... I had a pretty good idea that Larry had taken to dealing in dope. At the time I was only guessing but once you've been around the nightclub crowd and the after-hours bunch you fairly well know the score. I didn't push him on the matter and he wasn't about to venture anything so it was my speculation alone that told me what he was into. It later turned out that I was right all along.

Now for the really sad part of the whole thing... Larry himself got hooked on the stuff. I don't know exactly when it happened or even when he started what was to become his habit. He did tell me later on that he used to go to the place where they prepared and "cut" the dope and he said that without some sort of protection against breathing the dope into your lungs, you could get hooded just hanging around. We're not talking about cocaine now, we're talking about the rough stuff - heroin.

If Larry was secretive and, "Mr. Closed Mouth", when I first met him you can well imagine what the heroin did to him. Let me say first that Larry was no dummy. He had a very sharp mind and was nobody's fool when it came to almost any kind of a discussion. I think that I might even say that Larry had the potential for being some kind of big success had he only been able to put the ingredients together properly. Unfortunately, in a big city, it's often the macho peer pressure that leads a young man down the wrong path and I think that that's probably what happened to him with his early Mafia connection.

I mention the above because it somehow seems doubly painful to see an otherwise intelligent human being throw his life away by sticking a needle in his arm. Somewhere down deep inside of Larry, there must have been some kind of inferiority complex which led him to not believe in himself enough. I later learned that even when I met him he was taking "speed" which accounted in part for our first seemingly endless talks. "Speed" gives one a false sense of security and a gift of gab quite capable of wearing the ears off a brass monkey. Unfortunately, the false fortification can well end up as mortification because the "highs" get harder to reach and the "lows" get deeper and deeper, with self esteem almost vanishing. (A friend of mine told me that she had seen him just a few weeks ago and from what she said, my once very dear man is slowly but surely destroying himself.) But I'm getting ahead of my story.

I suppose that if we had had a more normal relationship from the beginning I might have

detected Larry's dope problem earlier. But I was working nights and he was working days and at least partial nights, so with those kinds of schedules there was a great deal of time spent apart, ample time for hidden vices. We sort of met at the end of each other's working day and with our differing cycles one of us could appear tired while the other could seem as bright as a berry. It wasn't until I started to find cigarette burn-holes everywhere that I really knew the score. They were on the couch, on the rugs, on the chairs and the floor. On two occasions I even awoke to find our bed on fire. Now you know that something like that has got to wake you up in more ways than one.

My disappointment was profound. Watching someone you care about willfully destroying himself has got to be one of the hardest things in the world to experience. The whole personality seems to disintegrate. Communication ceases. Honesty disappears. Heroin simply steps in between two people and you are forced to go into competition with it. The only trouble is that you don't have one chance in Hell of winning, and Heroin knows that, even before the sparring begins.

Go straight down the list of human emotions and capabilities and you will find that they have all been attacked by this formidable adversary. You try reaching out to help but the individual is owned by the poison and responds to almost nothing. Love goes. Communication goes. Honesty goes. Truth goes. Warmth goes. Passion goes. Heroin becomes the lover.

I became accustomed to sitting and watching Larry nod-off, right in the middle of a conversation. His eyes would be glassy and his eyelids would begin to droop. He would sit there and then little by little he would fall forward until his head would almost hit the floor. Then he'd pull himself back up and start the procedure all over again. What a pitiful sight.

As Larry's habit increased, and dope habits always do, it got to be worth about two hundred dollars per day, perhaps more. There was no way in Hell that he could find that kind of money so, little by little, my savings were depleted. I had been putting away whatever I could toward the eventuality of my sex-change and twice, I had gone from several thousand dollars in my account, all the way to nothing. Don't get me wrong... I was not giving money to Larry to buy dope. On the contrary, I was giving him money for treatment... or so I thought.

The addict, like the alcoholic, becomes a consummate liar in order to feed his habit. In those days there were no methadone clinics so you would have to search out a private doctor to get treatment. We found such a doctor on the Upper East Side. His fee out in front was one

hundred and fifty dollars and each visit after that cost us fifty dollars. I went with Larry for the first visit and then I would dish out the money at fifty dollars a clip for the many, many, many following appointments.

How trusting and foolish I was to believe that Larry was actually taking the money and going to the doctor's office. I would simply view a relaxed, seemingly contented man returning from his doctors' appointment and assume that the medical approach was working. We were going through every dollar which came into the house but that didn't matter to me as long as I knew that Larry was gradually getting back on his feet.

Because of my night job at The 82 Club, I naturally did my sleeping during the daytime. One day I was awakened by a noise in the apartment and something told me to investigate whatever it was. I got up quietly and tiptoed out of the bedroom. There was Larry, preparing to cook up a "fix" for himself. He turned abruptly upon sensing my presence and tried to hide whatever he was holding behind his back. Suddenly all of the "doctors appointments" came into focus and I knew for certain that I had been playing the fool. Just to confirm my suspicions I later called the doctors' office and learned that they had not seen Larry for months. I cried my heart out. I had never been taught to dream nor to have any great hope for the future. Noone had ever helped me to plan my life nor had inspired me in any way to try to touch the stars. I had had to formulate my own dreams and try to guess at what might be waiting for me around the bend. But I knew One thing... I had made this man, this love, this relationship, a truly meaningful part of my life and I had thought that love was the most important thing on this earth. Now I was seeing it crumble right before my eyes and it absolutely tore me apart.

Larry just got worse. He was so deep into dope that he had little or no control over himself. He would awaken in the morning glassy-eyed and with bad stomach cramps. I would hear him vomiting day after day after day as he was becoming more and more a whimpering shell of a man. At the same time, to protect whatever pride he might have had left, he used every possible excuse known to man to explain away his condition.

I was lost and desperate. We had exhausted every argument and I had emptied my self of all feeling, all emotion. I felt burned out and useless and had cried myself dry. Our relationship was disintegrating right before my eyes and there was not a damn thing that I could do about it. You don't reason with heroin. So, out of desperation, I threatened suicide.

Bellevue...

It was my night off, but, I headed for The 82 Club anyway. Larry followed me and we ended up fighting on the street as we went. I had a pocket full of Quaaludes and beyond the threat I really felt that I didn't want to live anymore. I had been through months and months of despair over this man and it had finally gotten to the heart of me. I just wanted to try to find some kind of peace and there was just no living with the despair any longer.

Upon arrival at the club I went to the dressing room to see my closest friend, Dietrich St. Jude. (A short time later Dietrich was the victim of a hit and run accident. She was riding her bike in West New York, New Jersey on September 12, 1974, when she was struck and killed. I mention this out of testimony to her gentle life. She would not have hurt a fly and yet some bastard killed her and ran off. God bless you, Dietrich, wherever you may be.)

I told Dietrich that I was tired of struggling and that I had come to say goodbye to her. I wanted her to know that I thought of her as my best friend and I wanted to thank her for all of her many kindnesses. I know that I was by no means rational and I vaguely remember her trying to dissuade me from doing what I was about to do, but all that I could feel was the hurt and I wanted it to stop at any cost. I was not afraid of death. In fact, in the condition I was in, I looked at it only as a blessing. (I know now that I was really crying out for help but at the time I had no such wisdom.)

I got a Coke and sat down in a corner and washed down a handful of Quaaludes. I sat there for awhile and then everything went black. (I obviously didn't kill myself but I assure you that there were times later when I wish I had.)

When I came to, I was in some hospital but I didn't know where. They had apparently pumped me out and robbed me of the peace I was seeking. I was still in a stupor but a feeling of panic came over me and I looked frantically for a way out. Having been unconscious when I was brought in, I had no idea which door went where, or where corridors led to, or what floor I was on, or anything. I only knew that I felt like a caged animal and my one thought was to escape.

Larry had followed me to the hospital and had left taking with him my clothes and my money which meant that I had no reasonable out. That made no difference however, because in

my irrational state I'm sure that I would have run from the place stark naked. I guess that I was raising quite a furor because an old nun approached me and asked me what was wrong. She seemed very intent upon helping me. However, at that moment and in my state of panic, I saw her only as one of my captors. I shouted at her to call Larry and have him bring me my clothes so I could leave and she quietly responded, "I'll see what I can do, Miss."

There was a guard standing nearby who overheard her and threw in his "two cents." "Hey, that ain't no Miss, Sister, that's one of those!" He put all of the venom he could into the word those, and he further ventured that he would be happy to tie me up so that I wouldn't escape. He did just that, and if I was panicked before, now I was almost insane to get out of there.

I somehow managed to slip out of the ties and with all of the energy that I could muster I jumped off the bed and headed for the door and freedom. I raced down the corridor, led only by my instinct, and turning a corner I saw an exit sign. It was the stairway and using the railing as one might use a pole for vaulting, I took the stairs two and three at a time. I was like a scared rabbit with the hunter behind and I was hell-bent for freedom.

I ran through the outer door at full speed and headed down the street with the sounds of shouting behind me. Come to think of it, it must have been quite a sight to behold. There I was, barefooted and wearing a hospital gown opened all the way in back with everything including my imagination showing, running for dear life down the city street without the vaguest idea what street it was or where my feet were taking me. I can't help laughing thinking back on it but at the time my fear was so great that nothing mattered except that I get away from that place. (As long as I can remember I've been a claustrophobic personality and even today, I will get off crowded elevators and walk rather than feel closed in. I think you can imagine how I felt being tied up with no chance to escape.)

So there I was hot-footing it down the street with God knows how many people in pursuit. I was still blurry-eyed from the drugs I had taken so everything was sort of swimming vision-wise but that didn't affect my feet any. I was out to beat the world record for block running until I looked ahead of me and saw the hospital van coming at me against the traffic with its lights flashing and its' siren blaring.

I turned and ran the other way only to run straight into the "that's one of those" guard.

He grabbed me roughly and twisted my arm behind my back, holding me there until the hospital van pulled along side. I was crying and screaming as they opened the back of the van and sat me on the floor. I was crying and screaming when they closed the van door and I continued my "serenade" all the way to Bellevue.

As I sat in the reception facility at Bellevue my head slowly began the trip back to normal. Little by little my brain cleared as I tried to explain the circumstances to the young doctor who had been assigned to my case. He somehow could not reason that I would try to commit suicide because of Larry's dope problem. I could not seem to make him understand that the months of tension had taken their toll, having a dire effect on my personal stability.

Time and time again I told him that I was a singer...that I was employed...that I had a bank account and that I had just become so distraught with seeing someone I loved doing everything possible to kill himself that I too had temporarily gone off the deep end. I tried to assure the doctor that I would not attempt suicide again but I could plainly see that he was not buying my story. In short, he thought that I was crazy and thought that I should be committed for some deep-seated insanity. He swore right to my face that he would have me put away, and from everything I saw he certainly was working to that end.

I begged him to let me go home. I asked him to contact Larry and have him bring my clothes and things. In answer to my plea he produced a needle, jabbed it in my arm and that was the last thing I remembered until I awoke in a ward with all sorts of crazies looking at me. It's a wonder I didn't "give up the ghost" right then and there.

When Larry did arrive and saw that they had thrown me in the proverbial snake-pit he raised holy hell and they moved me to a ward where I would be safer. The "brilliant" doctor had never taken into consideration my effeminate nature nor my obvious physical changes, nor apparently anything beyond his duty as keeper of the bughouse. He seemed to be bucking for points or something.

I remained at Bellevue for three days and all the while that young doctor was trying like hell to have me committed... It was as though he had read the first six chapters of a text-book on abnormal psychology and after all of that "deep study" had concluded that he was Sigmund Freud.

It's truly frightening to hear your words, your ideas, bouncing around a room with

noone present who seems to want to listen or understand. It seemed as though I could comprehend everything that they were saying but they (especially that one young doctor) seemed not to want to understand the terrific pressure under which I had been living but without someone there to vouch for me or back up my words, I was like a sheep bleating in the wilderness.

Thank God, Larry finally came through for me. He checked things out, probably with one of his Mafia buddies, and found that they must come up with a 'Show Cause Order' from the Court in order to have me committed and upon presenting that information to the powers that were they finally, after three days, released me.

On the morning of the fourth day he appeared with my clothes and informed me that he had arranged for my release. At first I didn't believe a word he said but when he handed me my clothing and said, "Come on, let's get outta here", I didn't hesitate for even a moment. Had I been a fireman with the station-house gong clanging in my ear I could not have dressed faster.

The only way that I can describe leaving Bellevue that morning is that it was like being born again. The air never smelled sweeter, the streets never looked cleaner and I never felt more alive or vital. At the same time I was very aware that I was leaving Bellevue with a totally new perspective on life. I knew that this man walking next to me had been chiefly responsible for what had happened and I knew deep inside of me that I would have to depend on my own wisdom from that day forth. In my search for love I had reached out and embraced self-destruction.

...Reflections

Decisions...

During my first few years with Larry I was actively pursuing my sex reassignment. I had thought out everything as carefully as I knew how, every possibility, every alternative. My final decision was that I would rather live the rest of my life as a woman and risk the possibility of having no relations with anyone than to remain the strange, lost, effeminate boy that I was. I knew that I was not happy wandering through the homosexual world. Obviously, many of my friends or acquaintances were homosexual and it was not my lot to judge them or their lifestyle. (The same remains true today.) I am simply stating that for a multitude of reasons, I knew that it was not for me.

Again let me emphasize that the choice was not really mine to make. The decision had been made for me at birth. As an old friend of mine once said, "There are men born who have no right to be called men."

I agonized long and hard over the problem. Intellectually I found that I could come to grips with the issue but emotionally it gave me great trouble. We walk all our lives with those things which are hammered into our little heads as children and I certainly was no exception. I had been given my share of "Christian" sin, self denial, shame and ungodliness. Though as functional a part of our lives as eating and breathing, my mind had been conditioned to see physical desires as being impure or unclean. Sex existed in a shadowy place, as it still does today, and I was not supposed to look there. Thousands of years before some goat-herd had said something which had found its way into scripture and that utterance was supposed to be more important than my life. At that time there was no knowledge of Biology, Physiology or any other ...ology for that matter, save perhaps the preoccupation with Genealogy recorded in the book of Genesis.

I wondered then, and still do, how many millions of people have lived bearing my stigma. Hitler threw people like me in with the Jews for extermination. That was his answer to the problem. New York Cops beat us up on the streets. That was their answer to the problem. Society at large refuses to hire us or let us live decently without harassment. That's its answer to the problem. (I read recently that there are some thirty-five hundred of "Us" in Bombay, India. Effeminate men are ritualistically castrated and then live their lives as prostitutes or entertainers and when they die they are taken from the city at night and buried standing up. That's Bombay's answer to the problem.) Who knows, perhaps one day some "humanitarian" wizard

will develop something called a Faggot Pill, the taking of which will insure instant death and thus rid society of any discomfort at having to view an effeminate child of God.

Please forgive me, but every now and then I get just plain angry. Both society and organized religions are predicated on conformity, uniformity and discipline and when one of us comes along they are simply at a loss to know what to do. Inasmuch as we don't fit into their pattern the easiest thing to do is damn us.

As I was saying, I was actively pursuing my sex reassignment. I was taking hormones regularly and had begun electrolysis for the removal of what little facial hair I had. (It was little more than peach fuzz.) Today, I have to laugh when I see the ads for electrolysis. They make it sound all so painless and easy but frankly it's a pain in the neck. (Please pardon the pun.) It took me weeks and weeks of having awful blotchy looking skin. In fact it looked so bad that I didn't even want to venture out of the house....

To feed his dope need, Larry had sold off everything, piece by piece, and in only six weeks our lovely apartment was little more than a skeleton.

I sat on the floor in the middle of the living room and sobbed my heart out. It was hard enough fighting my own personal battles without the added torment of living with a totally unpredictable junkie. I knew that I still cared for Larry but I also knew that he was no longer strong enough to hold up his part of our relationship. The bare rooms seemed to give silent testimony to the fact that whatever togetherness we had had, had now dwindled down to a point of no return.

When Larry finally appeared he was all promises, all pledges. He swore all sorts of things on all sorts of stacks of Bibles, but in my heart I knew that I was only listening to words. Larry by then had even lost his own self-respect and his whimpered excuses were pitiful to hear. Heroin had stolen his soul, as it were, and I knew that I could not play lover and therapist any longer. I knew that no matter what I did nothing would make any difference until Larry could come face to face with himself.

A junkie and a preoperative transsexual... how's that for a pair? In the eyes of society, talk about the blind leading the blind! We now lived together, that was all. His insistence on my sex-change had dwindled to a, "Well, if you want to", or, "Live for yourself... do your own thing." Larry had simply walked into a stupor and was content, to live there, void of all discernible emotion. God, how it hurt to see him in that condition!

The most important lesson I was to learn from this period of my life was self-

dependence. I had thought or at least hoped that I could find love somewhere in the world and idealistically I had dreamed that it would come with concern, respect and integrity.

Now, by striking out with Larry, I knew that my only salvation lay in perceiving my own maturation and in understanding my own responsibility to myself. My future lay clearly in my own hands and not in someone else's. I also learned, through viewing Larry, that self-respect had to come from within and not through the dictate of either the public or a love partner. I had never been taught to love myself and had searched for personal meaning in the eyes of others. I knew now that that was sheer foolishness. In the final analysis, we live in our own little worlds and we must find contentment, if not happiness, there.

I suspect that there are those who find love with all of its preferred dimensions, yet from the current divorce statistics I would surmise that all too many don't. Perhaps it is all just a sign of the times, with all sorts of people from all sorts of varying backgrounds coming together in large cities and trying to put conflicting ingredients together. I do know that the problem confounds even the so-called experts, and divorces continue on the rise.

For those of us who are "different" the same holds true. We seldom can exist in our so-called home towns so we come to the cities where we can be sort of assimilated. There, in our aloneness, we reach out for love, hoping against hope that we can find a relationship of mutual respect and concern. Unfortunately for most of us we fall dupe to the same problems facing all "displaced" people. There are not the common grounds upon which to come together. The old saying, "Marry one of your own kind," while sounding narrow-minded, even bigoted, has a certain practical wisdom to it. It is saying that like experiences and conditioning have a better chance of making it together. It seems to see beyond the media touted sexual impulses to a world of common experiences and aspirations.

Larry and I were proving to be as different as night and day. Love's bubble had burst and though we still lived in the same quarters, I knew that I had to think for myself and care for myself and yes, even love for myself. It was what the theologian might call, "A day of discovery."

I was unloved because I had been told I was unloved.

I was a faggot because I had been told I was a faggot.

I was a freak because I had been told I was a freak.

I lacked respect because I was looking to find it in others.

Suddenly, I realized that if I could take all of the beautiful qualities I had searched for outside

myself and bring them home to roost inside myself I could become a fine, new person. If I gathered up kindness, trust, faith, warmth, love, gentleness and integrity and made them a gift to myself I felt that perhaps I could undo the years of maltreatment and hurt. I knew now that noone was going to do it for me and that if I had any hope at all in the future I would have to stand on my own two feet. With this new awareness, I turned to my singing and the inevitability of my becoming a woman.

My Sex Change...

I had been saving every penny I could for my sex-change. I had prayed earnestly and fearfully over the matter and had come to the conclusion that it was absolutely the only answer for me and my life. As a matter of fact, I had several times accumulated enough money for the operation but had put it off out of my own fear and moralistic conditioning. Biblical teachings are basically Hebrew Macho when it comes to sex, and they give absolutely no harbor to the effeminate male. Everything that I had been since my birth was unnatural and immoral according to scripture and yet I had been created in the self-same way as the heavy-weight boxer or the olympic athlete. I knew that I had not asked to be born nor to live this half-man, half-woman existence and yet I could not seem to free myself from a deep sense of guilt.

Had I been born with a cleft palate, surgery would have been quite acceptable. Had I been born with malfunctioning limbs or organs, surgery would certainly have been recommended. Had I been born with any number of deficiencies, immediate action would have taken place to save my life or correct the impairment. But, mention the word sex, and the world seemed to want to hide its head in the sand and pretend that the naughty, even dirty thought would just vanish.

I could of course just sit where I was in a nowhere negative state or I could take affirmative action and hope to find light at the end of the tunnel. I had prayed diligently over the matter for years, guided all the while by all of the man-made negatives I had been told to accept. I found that approaching prayer from anything but a positive viewpoint was a total waste of time and of course I refused to slash my wrists just to make the holier-than-thous happy. I reasoned that I had to look at my life objectively and communicate with Life and/or God from a practical, humanistic posture. I had to stand up straight and tall and unashamed and look Life right in the eye without all of the negatives which had been heaped upon me since birth. I would get my sex-change and rectify the error of my birth.

In July of 1969, I entered Yonkers Professional Hospital in Yonkers, New York to have my first bit of surgery. I was to have breast and hip implants, to fill out my body and give me a total female appearance. In years past, liquid silicone had been used for such operations but the liquid had had a tendency to stray in the body so the implant had been developed. It was basi-

cally a plastic bag filled with the silicone which could be easily inserted and would hold its shape without the danger of moving about.

A hair-line incision is made beneath the breast and the bag is inserted beneath the soft, fatty tissue. After the healing, the scar is virtually unnoticeable and the soft tissue overlying the silicone bag gives a natural look and feeling to the breast. Having never had body hair and having taken hormones for quite some time my body had already taken on a soft female fullness. The addition of the implants worked just beautifully and at once gave me the dimensions I had always wanted...38-24-38. I was as delighted as I could be!

I had two reasons for wanting the implants. The first, of course, was that I wanted a lovely female body. The second was that I had been taking hormones for a goodly while and I did not want to over-do something which might eventually be injurious to my body. In those days one had to do much of one's own thinking on such matters because the field was relatively new and, sad to say, there were doctors who were in the game for little more than the money. Hurray for capitalism!

There were then, and still are now, more than a few doctors in New York City (and I dare say elsewhere) who carelessly go about the business of treating the needs of transsexuals. What better group of people to prey upon than the semi-lost, identity-searching, confused 'she-hes'? These doctors charge just about anything that the traffic will bear and will pump you just about as full of whatever it is you want to be pumped full of as long as you have the money. I know kids who have had so much liquid silicone pumped into their chests that it suddenly starts to fall under its own weight, becoming shapeless and unsightly. Of course they over-did it, but had the doctor had any scruples to begin with it would never have occurred.

Because I had heard of the adversities of others I chose to undergo my sex-change very deliberately and carefully. I was in no hurry to see it happen over-night because I wanted to be certain of each step, each alteration. For that reason the entire process eventually took me about six years to complete and today I am delighted with the results, although I can honestly say that the road was a rocky one.

On May 17, 1973 I went to Beth Israel Hospital to visit a sick friend. I myself had not been feeling well for several weeks so I decided to have a physical examination while there. For some reason I had been having reoccurring fevers. I would get hot flashes and then run a fever

of around 102 degrees for a matter of hours. Then it would go back to normal, only to slide back up to around 102 degrees again in a few hours. What was even more disconcerting was that I had detected small nodules appearing on my arms and legs. When you are going all out for beauty I don't have to tell you what that did to my psyche. So while I was at Beth Israel I decided to go to the emergency room and take my chances at being looked at.

After waiting for what seemed hours my name was called and I was issued into a small examination cubicle. I told the doctor what my symptoms were and after examining me thoroughly he called in two others for consultation. They all seemed bewildered by the nodules and upon checking my temperature they found that I was indeed running a fever. After much discussion and outright guessing they voted to admit me for observation and with that I began a two and one half month stay at the hospital.

Test after test after test was taken for every imaginable possibility, every surmised illness, but they seemed to be unable to zero-in on a prognosis. For days on end they tested and retested, conferring as they went, but to no avail. All the while I seemed to be getting worse and by then the nodules were beginning to appear on my forehead, much to my dismay.

Finally, biopsies were taken and the prognosis was that I had contaminated silicone straying throughout my body. It had taken weeks for them to put their finger on the problem and now they were faced with a dilemma. They had never before confronted anything like that and they were at a loss to know what to do. They expressed deep concern over the fact that the silicone might travel to my brain and I also learned that they had found traces of it in my liver. They were anything but hopeful and clearly informed me that I was most probably in for a life and death struggle.

They took tests morning, noon and night, as they unsuccessfully wrestled with my problem. In fact they took so many blood samples that I was becoming a human pin cushion. It seemed that every time I rolled over in bed there was another needle coming at me. I finally became so impatient with all of it that I requested that they stop the testing. I was so full of holes and so emotionally drained by then that I simply wanted no more of it.

Almost as frequent as the needles had come, so came the questioning. By now there was a seemingly endless staff of medical personnel on my case and each, in his or her turn, would quiz me about the silicone. Where had I gotten it? How much had I taken? How often had I

taken it? Who had given it to me? Had I had previous trouble? Etc., etc., etc. Afterwards they apparently would get together and compare notes on my answers hoping to find some loop-hole or discrepancy in my story.

Finally one day, Doctor Ellenbogen, staff physician and eventual friend, came to my bed-side with a more than serious look on her face. "Look Carol," she said, "If you don't tell us the truth we may not be able to save you." I argued that everything I had told them had been "Gospel" and I told her that I simply could not understand why noone would believe my story. "Why would I lie?" I countered. "You're telling me that I might die if you don't get the proper information from me so why in the world would I lie to you if my life is at stake?"

Dr. Ellenbogens' face softened and she sat down on the edge of my bed. "Please Carol, just once more...tell me the whole story," she said. "I want to be absolutely certain of each detail." When I had finished she looked at me quietly and said, "You know something, I believe you."

It was then that she explained why there had been all of the interrogation and why all of the doctors had seemed to be doubting Thomases. The doctor to whom I had gone for the silicone had denied all of my claims and without his confirmation the Beth Israel staff had been at a loss as to how to approach my case. "Your doctor stated that he gave you silicone on only one occasion," Dr. Ellenbogen said. "He flatly denies just about everything you've told us concerning frequency of injections and the amounts of silicone given. He claims that you must have gone elsewhere to get the shots."

I couldn't believe my ears. I had spent literally thousands of dollars on my initial surgery and subsequent silicone injections and every red cent had been given to the one man who was now pretending he had had little or no dealings with me. Even having been told that my case was very serious he still insisted on his fabrication. He apparently was perfectly willing to let me suffer, even die, so long as noone blew the whistle on what I learned later to be his illicit practice. He was clearly trying to protect his swinging transsexual-transvestite-hormone-silicone-pumping station, the very same one in which he personally had pumped contaminated silicone into me.

I was absolutely furious when Dr. Ellenbogen told me that this same doctor had said that he had only given me a little silicone on one occasion... an outright lie! I sat up in bed abruptly

and pulled up my hospital gown. "Well if that's all he did where do you think all of these came from?" I snapped, showing her several small scars caused by the over-sized silicone needles that the doctor had used on many occasions. "I certainly don't sit around drilling holes in myself!"

"Don't go away, I'll be right back," Dr. Ellenbogen said, as she headed out the door. Moments later she returned with a tall, stately, gray-haired gentleman who she identified as being the Chief of Staff. She asked me to show him those same scars and as I did so I heard her say, "See, I told you she was telling the truth. That guy is lying straight through his teeth."

When it comes to medicine all of us are pretty much like children . We know little or nothing, so we put ourselves into the hands of doctors with little more than child-like faith. Think back to when you last saw a physician due to illness. He or she examined you, diagnosed your problem, and sent you on your merry healing way. You had virtually no choice but to believe what the doctor said and follow his instructions.

In like manner I had gone to Doctor Benito B. Rish, whose office to this day is at 103 Central Park West in New York City. He was the doctor who had given me my first surgery and who had pumped silicone into my body in amounts far exceeding what he was willing to own up to. He was also the man who had obviously pumped contamination into my system, and only God knows into how many others.

"There goes a Rish nose."

"Rish is my salvation."

"Body by Rish."

These were just some of the sayings which circulated in the transsexual "underworld", because under everyone's clothing there was some of Benito B. Rish's handiwork. A medical opportunist if there ever was one, Dr. Rish realized years ago that there was much money to be made from the gay world, and for a price he would do just about anything anyone asked.

His waiting room was generally filled to over-flowing and there was a receptionist who sat outside his office door to collect the cash in advance of whatever treatment you were there for. Cash on the line was the only way Rish worked, partially because he knew that most of the kids who came to him were poor, would-be transsexuals who were not steadily employed and partially because he was a greedy son-of-a-bitch who more than likely got some of his kicks

from cheating the Internal Revenue Service. Whatever his motivation...No Dough...No Go!

Insofar as cosmetic surgery or sex reassignment is not really a medical problem as such, but rather a psychological problem, it is fairly much up to the whim of the individual as to what he or she desires. Doctor Rish did it all. Perhaps your nose was too large, your Adams apple too noticeable, your chin too masculine. Perhaps you'd like your face rounded out or lifted. Perhaps you were a big hairy truck driver with a whim toward cross-dressing and you wanted hormone shots. Perhaps you wanted silicone or implants. Perhaps you wanted to round out your fanny or widen your hips. Whatever your wish...just take it to Rish! (But don't forget to bring cash.) More about him later.

By now I would awaken mornings and not be able to straighten up my body. Handfuls of pills were given me daily and my progress, if indeed there was any, was closely monitored. Because the folks at Beth Israel had no experience with contaminated silicone they contacted Dow Corning, the manufacturer, and a specialist was flown in for consultation. (I was later told that the man had actually invented silicone) He was naturally extremely concerned because Dow Corning had put silicone on the market and it was a very valid product for surgical reconstruction following accidents, disease, or the likes. I had to go all through my story again with this man but somehow I didn't mind so much because by now I at least knew that everyone was trying their best to keep me alive. When I had reiterated everything he looked at me and said with a very somber voice, "You know don't you Miss, that you very well may not pull through this." Talk about a solid slap in the face!

With that possibility in mind, Larry talked the hospital into allowing him to throw a birthday party for me. For all we knew it just might have been my last birthday. The day of the party I was so sick that I joined the well-wishers for only a short while before going back to bed. So much for the party.

By then it seemed that I had the whole hospital in my corner and I understand that my unique case was even written up in special medical reports. Very simply, no one there had ever tangled with contaminated silicone before, and everyone was hoping and praying and probably trying everything they could possibly try to rid me of the poison.

And speaking of poison... The whole staff was duly angered at Dr. Rish. Time and time again I over-heard different doctors talking about the lack of ethics of good old Benito. Several

of them mentioned that he ought to be brought up on charges before the Medical Board and that he had no right to practice as he did. I can only reason that they cooled as time went on and modified their thinking somewhat as they considered that it would be the word of a black transsexual against that of a "reputable" doctor. In those days the thought of a transsexual in court was something akin to envisioning a circus.

I communicated most with Dr. Ellenbogen during my long stay at Beth Israel. She was a lovely person who reached out to me with her warmth at a time when I was clutching for straws. When you've been told that there is a slim chance of your recovering it's amazing how very precious life becomes and how very important it seems to touch another human being . Dr. Ellenbogen gave me that concern and affection and I shall be eternally grateful to her.

To this day I can't really say what went on in my body nor how I was eventually cured. Whatever the treatment it gradually worked and after two and one half months I was told that I could go home. Somehow they had broken down the contaminated silicone and it had been eliminated from my system. All I can say is...Bless everyone who fed me a pill or gave me a shot or took my temperature or emptied my bed-pan. God bless you all a thousand times over.

Now...
Lets Get Back To...

Doctor Benito B. Rish...

I understand that since the scare of my hospitalization he no longer gives silicone. However, to keep gas in his Rolls Royce, and the mortgage paid on his Westchester estate, I have been told that he has taken on another doctor to pump away for him. (At the time of my dilemma I was told by the Dow Corning specialist that Doctor Rish was not even licensed to give silicone. No wonder he refused accurate information.)

I bring up the Rish story not because I want to muckrake but because with his failure to come to my rescue at Beth Israel I seriously question his professional ethic, then and now. I think that he is in business to make money and beyond that I think you'd have to search like hell to find any other attributes befitting a doctor.

In fact, a couple of years after my Beth Israel stay I was in a car accident and I needed him to testify for me in court...

I had been hit by a drunk driver and I needed Dr. Rish's testimony to confirm my claim that the impact had dislocated an implant. At first he refused but when I told him that I needed the settlement for my sex-change he greedily jumped on the band-wagon figuring that he would have a large fee coming. In addition to the expected fee, he also charged me five-hundred dollars for appearing in court on my behalf. Like the true opportunist that he was, he knew that I needed his testimony and put a substantial price on it.

The bottom line to all of that is that I won the court case and when it came time for my surgery I contacted another doctor and gave him the job. As for the five-hundred dollar fee for the court appearance...well, he's still waiting for it. Hallelujah, there's still a bit of justice left in this world of ours!

Another reason for my bringing up the issue is to possibly protect others who follow me. Transsexualism is not an occasional phenomenon anymore and with the advanced medical techniques more and more effeminate persons are turning to plastic surgery. Much of what happened to me was because of the ignorance of the times and much of that ignorance has today been let out of the closet, but, we still have a long way to go. We must look the truth of life straight in the eye and know that there will be born many like myself with the so-called

effeminate stigma. Certainly we can one day find the intelligence to allow them to live some kind of life without having to hide in shame.

Leviticus 19:22 says, "You shall not lie with a man as with a woman. It is an abomination." Because that was written by who knows who, and because for some unfathomable reason society seems to prefer to live in the past and not undertake some solid, rational thinking the transsexual is forced to receive much less than first-class treatment in most cases.

I remember a little song that I used to sing when I was young. "All things great and small... The good Lord loves them all." But, according to early biblical writers, only if you do what we say and follow our rules. In the light of modern thought that seems utterly absurd.

I have known many people who took their own lives because they could not bear to live the way that they were born. They were forced by society to live in the shadows where it became so dark that they could never again face the sun. They were so ridiculed and made to feel so ashamed that they simply could not stand to live any longer. That is wrong, and I shall scream it to the sky as long as I have breath. What's more, there is no group or cult perfection which has either the substance or the right to condemn others, particularly in God's name. That is a sacrilege in itself which far outweighs any human condition or weakness.

As for the Benito B. Rishes of the world... They have always been and most probably will always be, and but for an occasional word of truth issued against them, they will continue to maltreat their fellow man for the worshipped dollar.

Please forgive this seeming outburst but sometimes at night, when I lie awake and alone in the middle of nowhere, I think of my dead friends and I become so angry and frightened at the way the world continues to think...



My Father...

I never met my father until a month before he died. He had separated from my mother when I was a matter of months old and though I knew what his name was from sometime during my childhood, I never knew of his whereabouts nor in fact if he were alive or dead. Finally, in 1973, twenty-eight years after my birth I met him.

I had returned to Virginia Beach to my Grandparent's home for a family reunion. I was by now totally feminine in appearance, though I had not yet taken the final step in my sex reassignment, so I was accepted as the entertainer from New York... the granddaughter.

Among the fifty or sixty people gathered at my Grandparent's home was my older brother, Swanee. He had been my mother's first child and had been born out of wedlock and subsequently raised by my father's brother, Linc. My mother had sort of farmed out her first three children and we had all been raised apart with little or no awareness of each other. Upon meeting Swanee he took me to be perhaps his mother's sister, having had no previous knowledge of my existence.

In those days one just didn't come right out and say, "Hi there, I'm your transsexual brother who is now your sister." Of course, my Grandparents knew who I was, but their religious upbringing led them to be silent about the whole matter and just sort of sweep it under the rug. At any rate we all got along splendidly that day and everyone seemed warm and receptive so I never thought to throw my "bomb" into the celebration.

Late that afternoon Swanee and I got to talking about our childhood and our mutual father's name came up. With its mention, Swanee now deemed me to be a sister he simply hadn't heard of and as we talked further he informed me that he knew where my father lived.

I told him that I had never met my dad and after a few more minutes of discussing the matter Swanee excused himself and went across the room to speak briefly with his wife. Upon returning he asked me if I could stretch my stay one more day because, he added, he'd be delighted to drive me to Baltimore where both my father and my sister lived. I was elated, and that night I slept but very little in anticipation of at last meeting my father.

The following morning after an early breakfast we said our goodbyes and headed for Baltimore. I can't exactly describe how I felt as we drove along. I guess it was a mixture of

giddiness and fear, anticipation and hesitation. How do you say hello to a father you have never seen, to a father who never cared enough to say hello to you? Who was I going to meet? What kind of man was he? Would he like me at all? How would he react to a son turned daughter? My head was spinning as we drove along but at the same time my heart was singing.

When we arrived in Baltimore we drove to the wrong end of town and down a street of shabby houses. (Blacks always seem to live on streets with shabby houses) Swanee pulled the car over to the curb and pointed to a house across the street, telling me that he would wait in the car. With trepidation I opened the door and walked across the street on what I can only describe as rubbery legs. I could hear my heart pounding with every step I took, as though it were measuring the distance I had to walk to my father's door. I wanted to laugh and cry at the same time but instead I swallowed hard and breathed as deeply as I knew how in an effort to keep my composure. I climbed the stairs and knocked on the door.

A woman answered and I asked if Arisha Carroll was at home. She said that he wasn't but that he was in the neighborhood somewhere. I told her that I was with Swanee, and that we had driven all the way from Norfolk to see Arisha. She kindly offered to help us try to locate him and joined us back at the car after a few moments of preparation.

We drove up and down the streets for I don't know how long but with no luck. The lady pointed out all of my father's favorite spots, all of the places where he might possibly be, but to no avail. Having had no success in locating him we finally headed back to his house to drop her off. She apologized for not having been able to be of more help to us, saying that she could most generally find him on a moments notice.

As we approached the house and were in the middle of thanking her for her efforts she suddenly shouted, "There he is on the porch!" I turned my head quickly and for the first time in my life my eyes looked upon the man who had made me. My heart did a complete flip-flop and ended up somewhere in the middle of my throat. All I could think of was, "Thank You, God."

He was a tall man with light skin and freckles, and he was smoking one of the biggest cigars I had ever seen, as he rocked away in an old wooden rocking chair. He could have been twenty years old for the amount of hair that he had but now in his early sixties it had splashes

of gray in it. He wore a small moustache and his eyes were wide and deep brown, with wrinkles at the corners which somehow told me that this man knew how to laugh.

The introductions were strained. I suddenly had at least two tongues and absolutely no idea of what to say next. Of course, Swanee introduced me as Arisha's daughter, not knowing any better, and my dad being gracious and I'm sure confused over the whole matter accepted it, at least on the surface. We shared a goodly amount of small-talk as each one of us kind of groped for whatever one is supposed to say when the awkwardness of the moment is just a little bit overwhelming. My dad suggested that perhaps we should drive over to my sister's house, which he said was nearby, so once again we got into the car for the short drive. As we drove I could feel my dad's eyes boring into me and I must confess that it gave me no little amount of discomfort. What was he thinking?

My sister was not at home so we turned around and headed back to my father's house. This time we went inside and the lady who we first met, who incidentally turned out to be my father's girlfriend of the past twenty-two years, went about fixing us a snack and cold drinks.

I don't exactly remember the sequence of events but at our first opportunity to be alone my father turned to me and said, "Look Carol, I've been in a lotta places... I've done a lotta things... I've met a lotta people... and I haven't exactly been an angel... and if you say you're my daughter I guess that you know what you're talking about."

He couldn't have been more charming as he sat there in disbelief as I explained to him the fact that in actuality I was his son Roosevelt, and that I had undergone a sex-change. He did look somewhat bewildered by the whole thing but nonetheless kept his composure as I encapsulated twenty-eight years of living into about three minutes. When Swanee and my dad's girlfriend returned to the room we instantly dropped the subject and chatted a bit about the reunion at my Grandparent's.

A few minutes later I followed my father into the kitchen for a soft-drink refill. I was no sooner there than he turned abruptly and pointing to my chest asked, "What are those?" (He was still confused by the whole thing.)

Almost simultaneously he reached over and pulled down my tank-top, revealing my rather well developed breasts. I think that he was trying to prove to himself that I was not just some sort of pretense. "Well I'll be!!! he exclaimed, with a look of complete incredulousness.

"What science can't do!"

I explained briefly what and how and why and when he spoke again he said, "Just don't tell your sister, she'll never understand." His words seemed to echo the world's thoughts.

We visited for another twenty minutes or so during which time he confided that he had loved my mother so much that he had vowed never to get married again. He told me that he had lived with his girlfriend for over twenty years but with no eye toward marriage. I would like to think that he was trying to tell me that although my life had been no bed of roses at least I was born out of true love. Maybe that would help just a little.

Swanee was anxious to leave because of the long trip back to Norfolk and with his insistence, I reluctantly got up to say goodbye. We all walked to the car and got in, opening the windows for our final farewells. My father reached in his pocket and took out a roll of bills. He stripped off a few and handed them to me through the window. "Here, buy yourself somethin' girl," he said, refusing to take no for an answer.

I waved as we pulled away from the curb. I felt wonderfully warm inside and I knew beyond knowing that I loved that man standing there on the cracked sidewalk of that shabby Baltimore neighborhood. He was my blood and I was his and we were both a part of each other's lost dreams.

I watched through the rear car window as he became just a dot. How prophetic that moment as he disappeared from sight. He died less than a month later and I was never to see him alive again.

I traveled to Fayetteville, North Carolina for his funeral. I went first to Norfolk and Swanee drove me the rest of the way there. We talked about everything and nothing during the trip and upon arrival at the little church we entered in silence. As we walked down the center aisle I noticed a large wreath next to my father's casket. On the ribbon it read... From Swanee, Polly, Tiny, Carol and Roosevelt Jr.. Tiny, of course, was my mother and the others were his children or at least thought to be. I suddenly realized that noone there knew who I was, because I was listed twice.

I had thought that perhaps my Grandparents had explained me to the family but now I knew that they hadn't. It apparently was a topic too delicate for them to handle, or perhaps

they might have thought that I had done the explaining myself. At any rate, I decided that as soon as the service was over I would try to get Swanee aside and tell him the truth. Unfortunately the opportunity did not arise so I left Fayetteville and headed back to New York City with noone being the wiser.

About a week later I called my aunt and after discussing the matter at some length I asked her if she would be kind enough to pass the word along to my brother. By now I felt a bit awkward about revealing the truth to Swanee, but I didn't want to deceive him any longer. He had been so nice to me that I felt I owed him the courtesy. Looking back, I don't know why I made such a big deal of it, except that in those days, sex-change meant pervert and I didn't want anything to spoil my new-found relationships with my long lost family.

Shortly thereafter I received a phone call from Swanee and to my complete delight he called me, "Sis", and told me that he had gotten the word and that I shouldn't worry about anything because he said he understood. Furthermore he invited me to visit his family anytime I had a mind to. He said that he would also pass the word along to my sister and he told me not to worry because he'd take care of everything. How relieved I was and how grateful for his thoughtfulness.

I've seen them both on several occasions since my father's funeral and each time we've been together they've shown me both courtesy and love and I'm grateful indeed that their minds are big enough to grasp the whole situation. I'm sure that they have questions about me and about why I chose to do what I've done with my life but they've never pressed me for an answer.

As for my lost father, Arisha Carroll... He was a curse and a blessing all rolled up into one. I seldom thought of him before I met him, but today I can see him clearly in my memory and I wish somehow that we could have known each other better. Who knows, maybe, just maybe, we might have been good friends. I do know one thing. There's a tiny place in the corner of my heart where he'll always find a home even though he never gave me one.

Anger...

The Writers' Observations...

As I interviewed Carol there seemed to be some ingredient missing. I would listen back to the tapes and think long and hard about her story and about the words she used to express herself. There seemed to be a void somewhere but for the life of me I couldn't seem to put my finger on it.

Her stories always had a carefully thought-out dimension to them. She seemed to be weighing each word, wanting them to come out exactly right. I never once questioned her truths because I could clearly see that she was indeed unzipping her soul for me and was telling me things I knew she had never revealed to anyone before. Still I felt perplexed and upon submitting my first draft to a very erudite friend for her comments, her reaction to Carol's story was that it was all too nice.

"Are you kidding?", I responded. "You or I would have fallen apart, had we lived her life. How can you get, 'all too nice', from reading her story?"

I questioned Carol as to what she might glean from my friend's comment and it seemed to perplex her to no end. We talked about it at length and Carol assured me that she had told me the truth in every instance. One conclusion which we arrived at was that she had tried to approach her life intellectually with perhaps the forbearance of some kind of saint. After all, we were going about the writing of her life and trying to put into print many less than desirable situations. She had tried to be exact in her presentation of facts and in that spirit she seemed to be missing something... but what was it?

I called my friend and over the phone she spoke one word... ANGER.

Many of us have been brought up to control our anger while others, it seems, are reared to let it soar. The suggested gentleness inherent in the rather aesthetic Christian approach to life was obviously a part of Carol, and the turning of the other cheek a part of her rationalization. She somehow had reasoned almost from the beginning that she was a preordained loser and would be subjected to hurt during her lifetime. If she fought the system she would be hurt. If she didn't fight the system she would likewise be hurt. In short, it didn't matter what she did because of what she was. She further reasoned with her very perceptive, yet untrained mind, that she would seek as much peace as possible and while this afforded her

no escape from many of the miseries of life it nonetheless minimized many serious confrontations.

(It was rather like having a policeman standing at your car window writing out a speeding ticket. You may argue the situation and be totally convinced of your innocence but you are damned sure that you are going to get that ticket that he has begun filling out. So in resignation you shut your mouth and humbly accept the ticket and the fine.)

Without telling Carol that the 'missing link' was anger we got together for our next session. I asked her to repeat this story or that and asked her to reevaluate her feelings about them. I asked her to try to remember exactly how she had felt at the time of happening and admonished her to try to get away from her well-tempered adult evaluations.

I think we all make of history what we want to make of it but even in a carefully sought out remembrance we lose the emotion of the time. We lose the hurt, the disgust, the pain. We lose the mortification, the degradation, the scream of the soul begging for dignity.

I started very quietly to question her about tales already told and committed to print. I chided her for this and I negated that. I made fun of her, derided her and even accused her of being the instigator of certain less-than-pleasant situations.

She looked bewildered by my words and actions and I could see her sinking deeper into the couch cushions as I proceeded with my verbal onslaught. At the same time I thought I could see something in her makeup that was changing, something that was beginning to boil deep down inside her skin. My friend had been right. There was a veritable cauldron boiling inside Carol and as soon as I was sure that it was there I told her what I was doing.

I hit her right in the belly with my thoughts and told her that I wanted to hear her screams. I had her story, at least that which she had chosen to share with me, and now I wanted to hear it all over again but this time from her gut. I wanted her to step out of the woman she had become and get down to the depths of whatever feelings she could remember.

It was a frightening evening for both of us. I was playing psychiatrist and she believed in me enough to let me do it. I challenged her with vulgarities. I became the punk, the cop, the inmate. I became the judge, the construction worker, the sniggering church folk. I went at her brain as best I knew how and all of a sudden it happened. The doors opened and the tears came to her eyes and the screams began.

"I didn't want to tell you because it's so degrading and I was afraid of what you might think of me, besides I've tried to put alot of things out of my mind. I've been pretty successful except for nightmares. There have always been those damned nightmares. Otherwise time can be very kind because it helps me to forget.

When I was just a teenager, maybe fifteen or sixteen, I would be picked up on the streets by the police. They'd take me to the Brooklyn Detention Center, remove my girls clothing and put me in prison garb. I wouldn't tell them my real age because I didn't want to be sent back to a place like Berkshire Farms.

When it came time to be taken to court or perhaps to be taken from the court to Riker's Island they would handcuff several prisoners together and put us in the wagons. The large trucks had two compartments... a large one in front which could hold maybe a dozen or so prisoners... and a small one in the back which held five or six.

It was very likely that you could be handcuffed to a murderer, a robber, a rapist or all three... or more. I swear that those sadistic cops knew exactly what they were doing because they would fill up the front of the wagon first and then issue me into the little back compartment along with whomever I happened to be handcuffed to. That back section was completely closed off from the rest of the wagon and there was no communication with the driver or the cop in the cab."

"You take good care of our little faggot now,...be good to her guys... remember it's a long ride... plenty of time for fun!" Those sons-of-bitches were setting me up and taking great pleasure doing it. I remember pleading with them on several occasions not to put me in the back but they'd just laugh and pretend they didn't hear me. I was raped numerous times on the way from Brooklyn to the New York Courthouse. There was no way that I could escape because I was handcuffed on both sides and so whatever animals I was attached to could get their jollys by sodomizing me. Then, of course, there was the ride from the court back to Brooklyn and then from Brooklyn to Riker's Island, with the possibility of the whole thing happening again. God, how I hated those rides and most especially those bastard cops.

And what do you do, when you are awakened at night by the sound of your cell door being opened, and there in the dark you see the guard standing with his penis in his hand. He says something like... "You take it baby or you get it," and what are you supposed to do?

Once you've seen what goes on on the inside you're never too sure but, there in the quiet of the night, with noone to see, you just might become one of those statistics you read about. Man Found Hanged In Jail Cell. So what do you do? You please the PIG and it goes away.

The incredible thing is that the very thing for which you have been jailed is often fostered almost from the time of your arrest... and often by the same bastards who arrested you. Don't forget, I was just a pretty kid in those days when being a pretty male was somehow sinful, but those cops were adults and knew exactly what they were doing.

There was no thought to rehabilitation or psychiatric care or anything else that I could see. You just spent your time in jail and took whatever came your way. On one occasion one of the guards who was a rugged, well built, little guy who used to knock people around with much relish came to me at night and told me to do his bidding. He further suggested that he would like to see me when I got out. Sure enough, with my records at his command, he appeared at my place one day after I had been released. What Hypocrisy!

Or take the time that I was eating out with a friend of mine... We were sitting in a booth minding our own business having dinner. All of a sudden there was a young punk standing by our table hell-bent on giving us a hard time. (I say us when actually he was directing all of his vulgarity at me.) In as nice a way as I knew how I very politely asked him to please leave us alone. When he persisted and raised his voice to a level where the whole restaurant was turning to look at us I finally got mad.

"Why the hell don't you step outside you filthy mouthed son-of-a-bitch," I told him. "Let's see how much man you really are." So outside we went along with a few of his friends. "Hey," I said, "I'm supposed to be the faggot, the sissy... how come you've got to have all of these guys to fight your battle for you? Aren't you man enough to stand up for yourself? I should be the one with the army!"

Then, wouldn't you know it, out came the knives and I turned and hailed a passing police car. There was no way that I was going to be maimed by those punks. The cruiser pulled over to the curb and the police got out and the bullshit began. It seems, according to punk number one, that he was dining with his girlfriend when I approached him in front of her with a proposition. He was so enraged that he invited me outside.

There was not one word of truth that left his lips and when I tried to plead my case,

telling them of the knives and of the harassment noone seemed to be listening. The knives of course were out of sight by then.

“She’s not a girl, she’s a faggot,” shouted punk number one, with all of the venom he could put into the word. From that moment it was all straight downhill, and by then the entire restaurant had emptied itself out onto the street to watch the spectacle. I was nothing short of mortified.

Finally the cops told me to, “Get the hell outta here,” and I returned to the restaurant to collect my friend and pay by bill. As we were walking away from the place we heard the cops talking to the punks giving them advice for future reference.

“The knives are out guys, just remember that. Look, when one of these fags gives you a hard time just get together and kick the shit outta them. Don’t forget, they’re faggots and nobody’s gonna blame you.” (Legal representation at its finest!!!)

“Angry? Sure I’m angry and I have been for years... Listen to this... Cocoa, murdered... Dotty, murdered... Tina, murdered... Bunny, murdered... Terry, murdered... Diane, murdered... Tony Lee, murdered. (A lovely dancer once at Radio City Music Hall. Someone stuffed rags in her mouth after tying her up and then beat her to death.) Tiffany, overdosed... Brigitte, suicide... Francois, suicide... Barbara, suicide.

I could go on and on, and by the way, I could well have been on that list myself. To my knowledge all of the above were taken to the morgue where they had a tag tied around their big toe. There was never a mention of their murders or deaths in the newspapers. After all they were fags and nobody gave a damn. You can bet your bottom dollar that there are a lot of killers walking around this very day who are free mostly because they murdered a fag and nobody cared.

The real bumner comes when you’ve spent your whole life in transition and then upon death, however it comes, your fear-filled, guilt-ridden family decides to turn you back into a male prior to your funeral. So they slit your chest open and remove whatever silicone they can. Then they cut your long hair off and stuff you into a male suit before laying you out. Hey, talk about brutal and uncaring! Why not close the coffin if it’s such a big deal and let you lie in peace as you wanted to live? But no, instead the last anyone sees of you is some effeminate, freaky looking man. That has actually happened to people I’ve known and I think it’s a

damn shame. And why? Because everyone wants to play God.

But wait a minute... let's be objective about this whole matter and see where the poison comes from. You can't help but wonder when all of your life you've been mistreated. You sit in tears and try to figure out where all of the hatred got its start.

Are you ready for this... it comes from the Bible. Sure, right from the book where love and understanding are supposed to be taught, from what people call "The Holy Book." Someone once told me that, so I investigated and sure enough it's true.

In the book of Deuteronomy it clearly says that women shall not wear men's clothing and men shall not wear women's clothing. (I trust the writer never heard of jeans.)

It also says that a man who is wounded in the stones (testicles) or has had his penis cut off shall be outcast.

Interestingly enough that comes right before the section where they tell you how to bury your excrement, and right after the section where they tell you to murder every man in a city which you might capture.

Now don't forget, these are the "Laws of God" which must be observed! Anything that the writer didn't like was an Abomination. How he (?) loved that word!

In Leviticus, the book prior to Numbers, it tells all about owning slaves. It clearly tells the people that they should buy and own slaves and that those slaves and their children should be theirs forever. They of course should be taken from among the heathen.

Did you ever notice how that word heathen gets kicked around. Anyone who doesn't think or believe as you do becomes a heathen. Biblically, non-Jews were heathens. In America, the Indians were heathens. To white Christendom, the black Africans were heathens. The dictionary says, "One who has not adopted Christianity, Judaism or Islam." God, do you know how many people on the earth are so-called heathens, blessed with the chance to be slaves?

Now, with such as this as a moral or spiritual guide, how the hell do you expect modern man to be intelligent? If that's a "Holy Book" then I'd rather believe in The National Geographic! No wonder the white man thought it was OK to go over to Africa and take slaves. It told him to do so right in the Bible.

I don't want to get on a religious kick here, but underlying almost everything I have

done in my lifetime thus far there has been an awareness of a certain religiosity. There was kindness and thoughtfulness to be considered. There was understanding and love. But the world around me seemed to want to strike out at everything it couldn't or wouldn't understand and when it got so that I was afraid to go out of my door or walk down a street then this so-called Christian society which is supposed to be biblically motivated became but a little short of Hell.

I literally have scars all over my body just because someone didn't like my mode of living. I never asked them about their lives nor did I show any animosity toward them. I never tried to hurt them in any way nor did I have any desire to. And yet I have had to pay all of my life just because someone didn't like the way I looked and was not intelligent enough to mind their own business.

I never eat a meal without first saying Grace and thanking God for whatever is before me. But many is the night when I've laid awake, cursing life and its injustices. I've prayed until I've almost been wrung out and wished to Heaven that there was somewhere that I could hide. But I'll be damned if I'll let this small-thinking society of ours put me in my grave before it's time.

I don't know... maybe life is just some kind of cruel joke. Maybe it was made for 'Twelve IQ' policemen and religious bigots. Maybe the Bible is true and someday all of the rest of us will be able to escape to some other planet and leave all of the so-called believers here on earth to chew each other up. After all, God is said to be the justification for all that's going on in the Middle East and just about everywhere else on this poor, bloodied planet of ours.

But I'll tell you one thing. I'm going to hold on just as long as I can and when I go... I'm going out singing. Maybe not about life as it was... maybe about the way I always hoped and dreamed it would be. And let me tell you this... there'll be an awful lot of others singing along with me.

Angry? Who me? Heck no... I'm absolutely furious!"

The Final Step...

I was admitted to Yonkers Professional Hospital on April 21, 1974. I was to take the final step in my becoming a woman and I can vividly recall the euphoric state of mind that I was in. After almost six years of soul-searching and planning I had made my decision and I knew that it was irreversible. The years of torment would come to an end and in one more day I would have the female body I had dreamed of all of my adult life.

I don't think that I had ever been particularly brave. Bravery is something which is taught out of bravery and my world had been filled with mostly weak people. So I went deep within myself to find the courage I needed to submit to sexual alteration. I knew that I would be confronting pain. I knew that my life would never again be the same and that I had to reconcile myself to the fact that if, after the operation, I was not contented with the way things turned out, I would have to live on in spite of my discontent. In short, I was putting away discontent, with a fervent prayer that I would not find it waiting for me around the bend.

I must confess that I now have to laugh a little at my naivete. Would the faggot become a woman, or would the faggot become a transsexual faggot? Would the non-male become a woman or just more of the non-male? The gay would doesn't really want the transsexual because basically, the transsexual has removed that which is appealing to the homosexual. The straight world doesn't really knew yet what to do with a transsexual unless it is to stuff her (it) into a smutty little corner reserved for prostitutes and perverts. The few times that I had heard of a transsexual being anywhere close to happy was when they were fortunate enough to have money, thus independent, and able to communicate with the world on their own terms.

Most kids are disowned by their families and turned out of their homes penniless so they are dependent upon employment, housing, unemployment benefits, welfare or the likes. Believe me, it can be a desperate situation when most of these doors are closed to you because someone doesn't like the cut of your jib. With the Gay Liberation Movement some avenues have been opened to more liberal treatment employment-wise, but for the transsexual, for the most part, the categorization of "Neither-Nor" can be devastating. The public simply doesn't know what to do with them, and what's more, doesn't seem to care.

I know or have known several who are or have been extremely bright, capable people yet

had to end up "turning tricks" because noone would hire them. Others, as I mentioned before, became so despondent at the way that they were forced to live that they took their own lives.

As I lay in bed awaiting my operation my head seemed to spin in and out of a thousand questions. I don't think that any of them were new, but they all took that opportunity to visit with me one more time before the happening, and by that time I guess I almost welcomed them as old friends. My decision had been made and I would just let them have one more go at me before my surgery. I vowed not to cross-examine myself anymore.

I won't go into any of the details of the operation. Let me just say that my doctor was Michael Morressey, and that he was a dynamite plastic surgeon. I simply asked him to make me like a woman and using every bit of skill that he possessed he did just that. He came highly recommended and I felt secure in having him do my operation. Bottom line... a beautiful job! Thanks Michael!

I might add here that there were bad doctors around in those days, as I imagine there still are today, and I have friends who were fouled up for life because they couldn't afford a dedicated, pains-taking, qualified doctor. In those days people were running all over the globe trying to find someone to give them a sex-change and I felt especially lucky to have found a good, reliable surgeon.

I was supposed to remain in the hospital for two weeks following the operation but after a week I thought I'd go bananas and asked if I might go home. Doctor Morressey gave me the nod, providing I agreed to stay in bed at home for one week more. I swore that I would be the perfect patient and while he was still in my room I was dialing my cousin, Louise, to come and get me just as fast as she could.

Driving home I felt beautiful. I knew that noone seeing me would know the difference from a week before but believe you me, I had a smile on my face from ear to ear and I felt absolutely beautiful inside. What was more, I was going home to Larry as a woman and I was remembering his promise to me. "When you become a woman I will make my home in you."

Well, so much for the fantasy. I lived with Larry for another four years and fulfilling his pledge to me we made love either two or three times. That was it...two or three times in four years! Four long, empty, desperate years! Why did I stay? I don't know. I know that I did feel somehow obligated to help him try to beat his dope problem and perhaps I felt that I owed him

something for the good times. I know that I considered myself to be his wife and felt that loyalty was important. As a matter of fact, I was totally faithful to him during those last four years even though some of my friends thought that I was crazy. If I went out to perform somewhere I would leave at the end of the evening and come home alone by cab.

I suppose that all of that came from my religious up-bringing. If you loved someone you were faithful, that's all there was to that. I imagine that that sounds silly to the modern reader, especially one who is predisposed to believe that transsexuals are really a swinging bunch of people, but nonetheless I stuck it out faithfully with Larry for four long years until I simply couldn't take it any longer.

I was worth more than nothing. I would see happy couples together and I would get this awful, lost, empty feeling inside, making me almost sick to my stomach. I had reached the lowest point of emotional poverty and I knew that there was not even a hint of light at the end of the tunnel.

The paradoxical thing about our relationship was that everyone thought that I had a solid "marriage" going with Larry. When I would go out to sing, dressed up to beat the band, of course I would never mention anything about our home life. Everyone just assumed that all was well as I'd sing and socialize and sparkle on the stage. But always I would leave alone and go home to nothing.

My saving grace was to be found in my newly-born femininity. I worked at it daily and yes, pampered myself. I took to buying lovely clothes and to very careful grooming. I had always loved long, beautiful nails and took great pains in cultivating mine. (To this day I spend hours on them.)

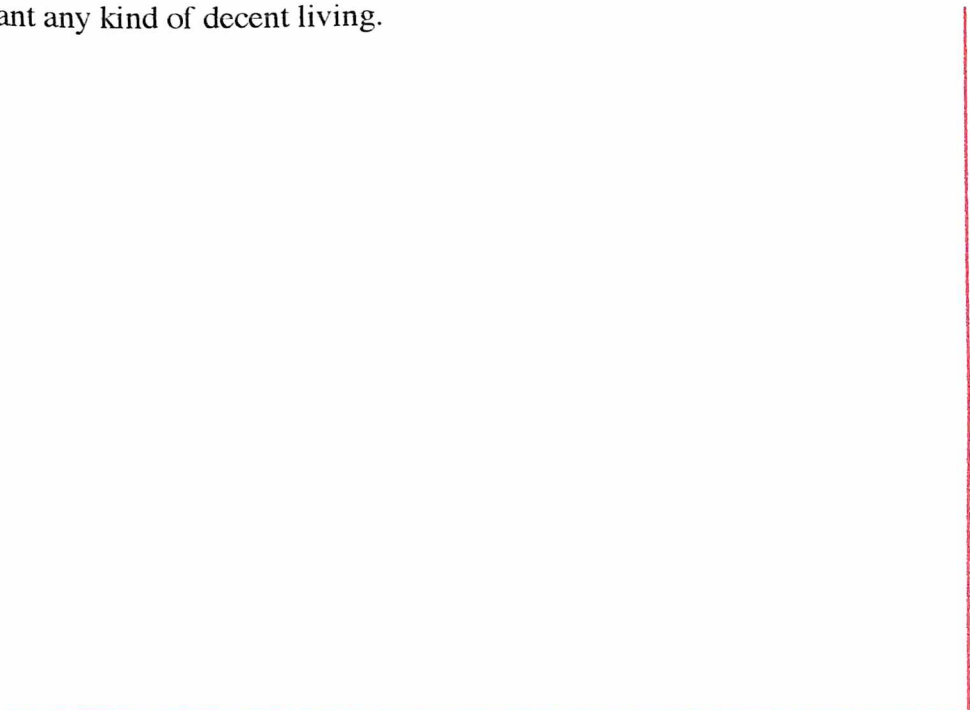
I also turned to my music with great vigor. If there was one thing I loved most in the world I'd have to say it was music. It was also one thing in the world that people couldn't fault me at. They might dislike a number of things about me if they wanted to put their minds to it but when it came to singing and performing I knew I was good and so did they. I absolutely loved singing and being on stage and there was hardly a moment when I didn't have one melody or another swimming around in my brain.

The only problem was (and still is) that there weren't too many places willing to hire a transsexual singer. My dream was to be able to record and play the better clubs, but once again I

would bump into the narrow-mindedness. Noone, other than the gay clubs, seemed to be able to get up the gumption to take a chance at hiring me. Still, I sang wherever and whenever I could. There was no more Club 82 and no more Jewel Box Revue. I would do private parties, semi-gay clubs, concerts and occasionally, only occasionally, a straight place.

The small clubs pay very little and often I would have to give my back-up combo as much as I was paid for the whole job which simply meant that I worked for nothing. On such occasions I was glad that Larry still brought home a little bacon because at least I could perform and keep my singing voice in shape. By and large entertainment is a pretty tough business no matter how you look at it.

By that time there was no relationship left between Larry and me. I would awaken in the morning to hear the front door closing and he would be gone just as long as he wanted, perhaps overnight. I would lie there and try to figure out what to do with my day, as well as the misery that I was now living in. There was virtually no communication and I knew that I could not live any longer with an addict no matter how much I cared for him or wished to help him. Now it was just a matter of time and figuring out what moves to make to relocate myself. When you're a black transsexual you don't exactly find landlords running to offer you apartments. As a matter of fact, more than likely you have to have someone else, preferably white, rent the apartment for you if you want any kind of decent living.



Being Arrested Is Not The Worst Thing...

One night I had a call from a girlfriend of mine who tended bar at a club which I had frequented. She invited me to join her and her boyfriend for drinks, and with Larry out somewhere and my not having a booking for that night, I consented. I was rotting on the vine anyway so I thought that it would do me good just to get out of the house.

Her friend was a New York City policeman and after we had socialized for a couple of hours we were joined by the desk sergeant of the local precinct. We had a very pleasant time chatting and enjoying each other's company and when the evening was over I was invited by the sergeant to accompany him to another club. I went along but soon detected that the good sergeant had other ideas in mind.

Upon arrival at the club we were told that it was closing time but of course the sergeant flashed his badge and they agreed to serve us. I begged out of the drink however because I felt that I had had enough liquor for one evening. I also knew that there was a very good chance of having to go through a scene with the now amorous sergeant and I wanted to have a clear head to be able to handle it. There was simply no way that I was going to go to bed with him.

I suggested that he have the drink and that I walk up the street to an all-night deli to get a sandwich. I told him that I'd meet him back at the club in ten minutes, which of course I had no intention of doing. He was pretty well smashed by then and didn't see through my ruse so he consented and I left the club.

I had only gone half a block when I was picked up by the police and thrown bodily into a cruiser. I was so angry that I let loose with a barrage of invectives when I heard them call me a faggot whore. In fact, I had all I could do to control myself as I joined them in swapping vulgarities.

When we got to the precinct I tried to explain to the desk sergeant that I had just left a fellow policeman at such-and-such a club and had been there all evening with both him and his friend, another of New York's Finest. I further told him that I was a woman and most assuredly had not been out working the streets.

The arresting officer lied and told him that he had seen me soliciting truck drivers and when I flatly called him a liar, he started punching me around. Damn! You know, there's a law

against resisting arrest and another law against striking a police officer but nowhere is there anything written about letting some self-ordained Nazi punch you around a police station. I'm not exactly big and threatening so I guess the clown figured he could prove whatever masculinity he had by asserting himself.

When he was through with his sport he threw me into the lock-up with a bunch of kids who had been picked up that evening. Apparently they had swept the streets clean that night because the detention room was packed. Luckily for me, several of the kids knew me as the featured singer from the old 82 Club and some of them knew that I had gone through a sex-change, so when they saw me resisting being thrown into the cell they joined in in my support. They all shouted at the cop saying that I didn't belong in there with them and that I was a singer and a woman etc., etc., etc. They were screaming the truth at the cop with every word that came out of their mouths but he was listening to none of it.

Finally I asked to be taken to the hospital and was driven to Bellevue. After all, it had only been two months since I had had my surgery and I was duly concerned that the cop might have undone something or another.

The attending doctor said that he really wasn't qualified to examine me thoroughly and suggested that I return with the police, get a court judgement the following day, and then go to see my own doctor in Yonkers. I was returned to the precinct and the next morning on my way to the courtroom I was pulled aside and issued out a side door. The word was that the cop who had arrested me had somehow gotten the truth via the grapevine and knew that if he followed through on the court thing he would be in trouble. He sent me an apology which he considered sufficient to cover the issue and I, in return, issued a formal complaint to The Civilian Review Board. That was the only possible thing I could think of to get back at the bullying cop and while it hardly seemed sufficient, somehow at least I knew that when he came up for promotion he'd hopefully have points against him.

Being arrested is not the worst thing in the world that could happen to you and if you're innocent, chances are that you can prove your case in court. It's the brutality that really turns my stomach and no matter what anyone says, it absolutely exists and probably to a greater degree than any of us care to imagine. The sad part of it is that there's very little anyone can do about it.

Let me tell you a perfect example. There was a young queen who lived on the lower East

Side and she had spent thousands of dollars having her face done. So strong was her desire to be pretty that she was willing to live in a slum just so she could save her money for plastic surgery. She had had a nose job, her teeth capped, plus facial shaping. Capping alone had cost her about ten thousand dollars so we're not talking about peanuts.

One night, after years of depriving herself in the quest for beauty, a cop in two minutes undid the entire thing. He smashed out her teeth, broke her nose and dislocated the silicone she had had put in her face. We haven't seen her since and I imagine that that cop, sitting in church with his wife and kids on any good Sunday morning, has put her completely out of his mind although in that reckless, ugly two minutes he probably destroyed someone's hopes and dreams and life. I don't see how she could have possibly gone through that whole rebuilding process again.

I want to make it clear that I realize that there are some good cops out there. In fact I have met many. I remember when I was singing at The 82 Club, there were some young policemen on that particular beat who were friendly and warm and concerned. They knew who I was and they'd wave to me from their car or pull over and chat with me, wishing me well with my evening performance. We were on a first name basis and they were indeed nice fellows.

Unfortunately, in all too many cases, you would see a change in some of the young ones over the first two years. I don't know whether that was due to the city streets or whether it was the older cops who changed their heads but the change was most certainly discernable.

For example, you would see a problem of one sort or another on the street and you would stop to observe. Two young cops would arrive and with what seemed to be a great deal of perception and patience would try to get at the root of the matter. Then onto the scene comes another cruiser and out gets an older policeman, perhaps a sergeant. He outranks the other two and promptly undoes everything that the young men were trying to accomplish. With officiousness and even crudeness he jumps into things, judges the situation too quickly, pushes people around and thereby teaches the younger men how the old timers "handle" people.

One day I heard a man swapping word for word with two cops. In short, he wasn't letting himself be intimidated by them and was making certain that they knew it.

They walked him around the corner and explained to him that they would rather he didn't talk to them in that manner in that particular area. It seems that they had stopped him in his car

and that he was not from that neighborhood which was predominantly Black and Puerto Rican. I stood and listened as they told the man that they had to show force in an area like that. They said that they had to be tough with the Niggers and the Spics to be able to keep them in line and they'd appreciate it if he would cool his temper and just forget the whole thing. I never did hear what the specific complaint was but finally the man, who was white, was somehow reached by the cop's prejudice. He laughed with them and said that he understood and joined them in their bigotry.

On Sunday evenings I used to go to Lu Lu's Bar on Second Avenue, between 12th and 13th Street. My girlfriend, Dee, was the bar-maid and her boyfriend was a cop. It became sort of a cop hangout and Dee told the guys who I was and furthered it by saying, "Don't worry, Carol doesn't like Niggers anyway." (She gathered that "profound" bit of truth because once I had said that I preferred dating white fellows) At any rate, that put the cops at ease and they felt that they could talk in front of me.

Believe me when I say that 'Cop-talk' isn't very nice to listen to.

"Hey, that nigger we arrested..... we really busted his ass, didn't we!"

(Sound of laughter.)

"That fuckin' spic..... I really gave it to him... there was blood everywhere!"

(Sound of laughter.)

"Man, did we blow him away!" (Sound of laughter.)

"Hey, I clubbed that mother-fucker so hard his brains must be
down in his shoes!"

(Sound of laughter.)

I knew that whoever they were talking about, if he were still alive, would have his day in court, where he would be judged innocent or guilty and treated accordingly. But there in the bar everyone was guilty and the guys seemed to take great pride in being able to tear someone up.

It was sickening to listen to, particularly because they were talking about my people and all of the unfortunates of the slums. Street people live by their wits and I knew that there were some bad ones, but they were quite a different "class" from the poor slum dweller, who unfortunately was being grouped in with them. It was bad enough to be poor and uneducated with lit-

tle or no hope of ever getting out of the slime but when you were treated as though you were made to live in the slime that's quite a different matter. Most of the time you would have thought that the police were talking about animals instead of human beings.

As it happened it was Dee's cop boyfriend whose buddy had been the one who beat me. After that occurrence we ceased being friends because her boyfriend made it clear to her that he had to be able to depend on his fellow officers in time of trouble. He knew full well that I had been in the right but nonetheless told her to tell me to "cool it." When I pressed charges against his buddy, Dee and I simply parted ways and I never went to Lu Lu's on Sundays anymore. I just wasn't going to let that sonofabitch get away with pummeling me in the name of the Law.

The Coup de Grace ...

As I mentioned before, with the eroding of my relationship with Larry, I turned with vigor to my performing. I was fortunate in getting a substantial amount of bookings and began traveling quite a good deal. Most of my bookings were in the Greater New York area but on occasion I would head out of town to Indianapolis, Buffalo, Providence, Washington, etc..

With the "What A Drag" tour, I bussed throughout the Mid-west and had a fantastic time. I was the only black with the tour but it fortunately made no difference. The Mid-westerners were cordial and receptive and seemed to have a different outlook on life than did New Yorkers. They were somehow warmer and less ready to criticize and that in itself was a delight to experience. They just seemed to be more relaxed about life, more courteous and more laid back.

One of my dreams is to one day buy a home out of the city. I'd like one hidden from view with lots of trees and enough land so that I could grow flowers and perhaps a vegetable garden. I've never quite accepted the idea that human beings were supposed to live on cement and like it. Oh, I suppose that if you have enough money to live on Park Avenue or Fifth Avenue you could get by, but for most city dwellers that choice is out of the question. The saddest part of it all is that while the central section of the city is being rebuilt and glamorized for big business and the wealthy-set, the lesser sections of New York are being allowed to go straight to hell as the landlords let their buildings run down while still collecting their rents. They continue to do so until one day they simply walk away from a building and leave the city with no choice but to claim the property for back taxes and dispossess the tenants. It's a damnable situation where the dollar reigns supreme.

One day Larry left me a note saying that he was going to check himself into a hospital. I was utterly surprised by it because I didn't think that he had the strength to fight his habit. Not only was I surprised but I was elated as well. Unfortunately with his proven dishonesty I could never be sure if I was being presented with the truth or just another ruse.

I had already made up my mind that I had to leave him and this promised absence, if it were true, would give me the opportunity to find a new place to live and try to put my life back together. I just knew that I couldn't go on living with a junkie any longer because by that

time all hope was gone.

One day I was visiting a friend of mine who lived on East Ninth Street, and I found that there were apartments available in the building where she lived. It was an awful building compared with where I had been living, but by then Larry had played such havoc with my head and heart that I decided to take one of the apartments.

I sold whatever was left of my furniture and found someone who would pay me for taking over the old apartment. They were very anxious to get it because the rent was only two hundred and five dollars per month and for five rooms that was an absolute steal. I rented a small truck and after a private, tearful goodbye to the place which had been both heaven and hell to me I closed the door for the last time and left.

Larry had indeed put himself in the hospital for drug rehabilitation and this time it was Beth Israel, which had a no hanky-panky policy. There was twenty-four hour supervision, no visitors, no leaves, no nothing... only rehabilitation. I was delighted.

Meanwhile I set up my new apartment, such as it was, and went about trying to put my life back in order. I was singing quite a bit then and traveling more than usual so I really didn't spend that much time at home. The new apartment was more like a storeroom for my belongings, and come to think of it, it sort of looked like a storeroom as well. It certainly was a far cry from the nice apartment that Larry and I had shared.

The building was on Ninth Street between Avenue C and Avenue D, which today can only be called a fall-out area. It truly looks like London after the bombing. There are large lots filled with debris and garbage, and I'm sure thousands of rats. An out-of-towner driving through would think the entire block deserted. Most of the buildings have store fronts, now boarded up or with large sheets of rusted metal nailed up where the windows used to be. The city has claimed many of the buildings for back taxes and they sit there as rat-havens, ugly and decaying.

If one looks closely in between the boarded up store fronts they'll see doorways leading to dingy, barely lit hallways and yes, places where people actually live. Hundreds of people live on the block...Blacks, Whites, Puerto Ricans, Welfare Recipients, Pushers, Addicts, Babies, Children, Lifes' Dropouts, the Lost and the Damned.

The street is strewn with garbage most of the time because nobody really cares. Little

children and stray dogs share the street and empty lots and cracking sidewalks. Someone turns on a hydrant half a block away and garbage flows by in the gutter.

Despair on the block is profound. When you pass glassy eyes you can thoroughly understand the dope trip, and whatever you want is available there on Ninth Street. A bag of this, a snort of that, a shot of whatever. I know for a fact that some of the people thereabouts, are desperate enough to kill for a few dollars for dope. Yet, nobody cares... not the city, not the police, not anyone.

The building where I lived has a few tenants left today. The city took over the building for taxes and the inhabitants, mostly welfare people, pay a portion of their welfare checks to the city which has become the landlord. That means, in effect, that they have no landlord. There is no one to clean the place, no one to check the heat and hot water, no one to put out the garbage etc., etc., etc., The tenants will live there until one day when the city turns them out. Then they will move on to the next hovel.

Anyway, Larry spent over a month in the hospital and the only communication we had was by telephone. I guess that I was proud of him for sticking it out and as the old saying goes... "Hope springs eternal!" Maybe, just maybe, this time he'd kick the habit and get back to normal.

On the day he was to be released, I went to the hospital with his clothes and money, only to learn that he was not there. They double checked for me and the report was that he had left the day before. That evening at five or six o'clock there was a knock on my door and there stood Larry, high as a kite, holding a dozen dead roses.

I went absolutely hysterical. I cried, I screamed, I smashed lovely vases and art objects and I gave him a tongue lashing which was so vulgar that I blush just to think of it. I looked at the dead roses he was carrying and asked him when he had gotten them. He looked at me with blurred blue eyes and like a little kid told me that he had just bought them. It was so pathetic, and yet I took the dead roses and put them in a vase and filled it with water. At least his gesture was loving even if he was a lost soul.

Larry had no place to stay, so out of concern for his welfare, I told him that he could bunk with me that night. I was foolish to let him come back into my life that way, but I didn't want him out on the streets in the condition he was in. He slept over and then was gone in the

morning, only to return the following evening looking stone cold sober. Talk about your Jekyll and Hyde! He was full of apologies and promises and God knows what else, and in cautious, good faith, I told him that he could stay there when and if he needed to, providing he do his utmost to rid himself of his dope problem.

As it was, Larry had started an out-patient methadone treatment which was designed to get him off of heroin. Unfortunately, those kinds of programs generally do little to reform the individual. They simply substitute one kind of dependency for another. Those people with money, stand outside the clinics and buy the methadone they want from other patients, who often collect enough money to be able to go back to the hard stuff. In Larry's case the methadone was sufficient enough to replace the heroin but he took enough of it each day to fill six or seven bottles.

The whole dope thing is like a vicious circle. If you've had a problem with dope and are on welfare, the city is insistent upon your regular visitation to the methadone clinic. Without those visits, you are dropped from the welfare roll so naturally you're going to make your trips to the clinic. They know some of what goes on by way of the outside merchandising of methadone so they insist upon your downing some of the drug while you're at the clinic. In other words, instead of helping you to stand on your own two feet and break your dependency on the drug they just about force you to continue your habit by threatening to withdraw your welfare payments.

Traveling as much as I was at that time I gave Larry a duplicate key to my apartment so that he could keep an eye on things while I was away. In all honesty I guess I was telling him that he could stay there whenever he wanted to, providing he continued to work hard on the drug problem. (Love is a crazy thing.)

He seemed to clean up his act considerably and over the next few months he began working and bringing substantial amounts of money home. Then one day he surprised me by saying, "Hey Carol, how'd you like to own this building?" It seems that he knew a lawyer who had managed the building for some unsavory characters and apparently they had decided to let the building go for back taxes. In other words, they had let the place go downhill as far as they thought they could without getting into trouble with the authorities.

Larry told me none of that however, and a couple of days later he showed up with

ownership papers on the property. I promptly went to a bank and opened a business account in the name of Carey Realty, and then hurried back to tell all of the tenants that I was the new owner. They were naturally surprised and at the same time delighted because I got along well with the tenants and they knew that if I were living there myself I would see to it that the building operated properly. The one mistake I made was opening the bank account and registering both Larry's name and mine. He had, after all, somehow acquired the property and I felt obliged to have him listed as one of the owners of Carey Realty. I should have known better by then.

I started right out figuring how I could improve the building and the tenants were overjoyed. Most of them were on welfare and quite unused to anyone trying to better their situation so they handed over their welfare checks almost gladly as they started to see improvements taking place.

Now, I was collecting rents, earning money from singing and also banking whatever monies Larry chose to give me. In short, we were all at once solvent and I thought that perhaps now we were on our way back to some form of normality. Well, I couldn't have been more wrong.

One day I had a call from the bank saying that Carey Realty was overdrawn. I went to the bank to discuss the situation with one of the officers feeling sure that the bank had made some sort of mistake. I was shocked to find that Larry had been cashing checks right and left without mentioning anything to me. Upon my insistence the bank dropped his name from the account and I went home to confront Larry with the issue. He of course apologized and gave me a batch of excuses as to why he had been in need of the money. I knew that he was lying but having dropped his name from the account I figured I was at least safe in that regard.

Wrong again! Larry's next move was to perfect writing my signature. Again, being short of funds, I went to the bank to argue the issue with one of the officers. Upon close scrutiny I detected the forgery and covering for Larry, I told the official that I had made an error in my bookkeeping. I made my apologies and told the man that I would straighten out the account and then left for home to give Larry a more than solid piece of my mind. I knew that behind whatever Larry was doing was a monkey on his back and I was trying so hard to hold the real estate thing together and still be somehow compassionate with my live-in junkie.

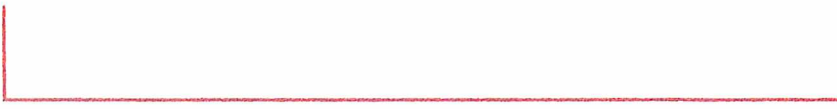
Again there came the apologies and the I'll-never-do-it-agains, but I guess that deep in my heart I knew it was all a lost cause. Dope owned Larry by that time, lock, stock and barrel and the only possible thing for me to do was to be wary of his actions at all times. I could allow him no access whatsoever to the checking account and I had to monitor it regularly to be sure that he hadn't come up with some new way of dipping into the till. It was difficult for me because I was still traveling and would be away for days at a time. While out of town all I seemed to be able to think about was what was going on back in New York.

Finally, came the coup de grace. One of my tenants was missing a check for a substantial amount, fourteen hundred dollars, if I remember correctly. The tenant had followed through on it, thinking that perhaps it had not been sent. He was informed that it had been sent, and what's more our local postman recalled delivering it. Something clicked in my head and I went upstairs to the apartment and started searching. Sure enough hidden under some clothing in the bureau drawer was the check. Apparently Larry just hadn't gotten around to cashing it yet.

I saw red!! I mean, I saw bright, bright red. I was so damned furious that I could have blown steam out of my ears. That was it! That was the last straw and then some!

When I saw Larry later that day I told him that we were through for good. No more deceit, no more lies, no more nothing! I told him to get his body up and out for good. I had known about his cheating me but I was not going to allow him to cheat my tenants who had faith in me.

The end of a ten year relationship should have some sort of heart-rending, tear-filled, grandly emotional exit lines, but poor Larry was so lost by then that he simply listened to my tirade and turned around and walked out the door. Almost immediately thereafter a girlfriend of mine stopped by and I asked her if she would mind running after him and getting the apartment keys. I just didn't want to face him again. She returned moments later and handed me the keys and it was over.



Miss Guilded Grape...

In 1976, I was chosen "Miss Guilded Grape". The Guilded Grape was a night club on Eighth Avenue between Forty-fifth and Forty-sixth Streets in New York City. They had their yearly beauty-talent contest and I won. I tell you this only as a preface to my next story because whenever there is a winner there must of necessity be a loser. Actually my story does not deal directly with anyone who I might have beaten in the contest, but rather with someone who sympathized with one of the losers or perhaps just didn't like the idea of me winning.

It was late afternoon and I had gone to The Guilded Grape to visit with friends and have a cocktail. The club was rather crowded for that time of day and many of the people were kind enough to extend their congratulations and best wishes to me for my having won the "Miss Guilded Grape" contest. A couple of the folks even toasted me with rather outlandish, extravagantly worded toasts, followed by the customary clinking of glasses and all of the other fun making.

I guess I was basking somewhat in the afterglow of an extremely pleasant evening and of course my victory. I would be less than honest if I said anything different, though to tell you the truth, I've never been one to strut about or to brag. I just felt good, that's all, and my friends were most cordial and thoughtful in joining me in some impromptu celebrating.

After an hour or so, I excused myself and went to the ladies room to freshen my makeup etc. It was rather a small room and upon arrival I found three or four 'queens' already there. They seemed to be just hanging around the powder room "dishing the dirt" as the saying goes so I paid them little mind. I proceeded to take care of necessities and then found a corner spot in front of the mirror where I began touching up my makeup.

Suddenly, for God only knows what reason, one of the Puerto Rican 'queens' started in on me with her mouth. (In retrospect I can only assume that the kids were 'high' because otherwise none of this story makes sense.) At any rate, she started in to bad-mouth me, as I stood there in utter disbelief.

The sentences came fast and furious. "Who did I think I was? What made me so special? I'm just as good as you are! You're no better than anybody else! I've got as much money as you have!"

With that, she took out her bank book to show me her savings, all the while rattling on

with negative after negative.

"You're no prettier than the rest of us! I don't see why they picked you! etc., etc., etc."

I stood there absolutely flabbergasted at what was happening as she went on with her tirade. Finally I told her that I didn't care what she thought or how she felt about me and that I just wanted to be left alone.

After a few more moments of badgering me she apparently had had her fill and as she opened the door to leave she kicked me. It took me a few seconds to register what had happened and then I opened the door and took off after her. (I may have aspired to be a gentle soul but I certainly was no masochist.)

The 'queen' who had kicked me had gone out the front door and was standing with one of her friends just outside. As I passed the bar in pursuit I reached over and picked up a beer bottle and when I opened the door out onto the street I caught the flash of a drawn knife. All that I could think of was my face and I was wise in the knowledge that Puerto Ricans are pretty handy with knives. A cardinal rule when there is a knife produced during an argument is to move fast and try to disarm the person. Without hesitation I swung the bottle and hit one of the 'queens' in an attempt to knock the knife to the pavement. Unfortunately, they were standing close together so the bottle struck the arm of the one who was not carrying the weapon.

There was a shout... a scuffle... an on-the-spot policeman... and the 'queen' with the knife disappeared. She was the friend of the one who had kicked me.

The cop was white and I was the nigger. He slapped handcuffs on me with my hands behind my back and then let the 'queen', whose arm I had hit, beat me. I tried to protect myself but it was an impossibility. With my arms pinned behind me there was no way that I could avoid the punches which came fast and furious. I bent over in an effort to protect my face as she kept hitting me and he kept holding me so that she could. By then my nose was bleeding and my mouth was cut but she just kept hitting and he just kept holding.

The doors of the club burst open and the people came streaming out to watch the excitement. A friend of mine grabbed the 'queen' and threw her to the sidewalk. He could see that I didn't stand a chance especially with the cop holding me while the beating went on. Cruiser after cruiser with sirens blaring arrived from all directions and it appeared that we were on the verge of having a baby riot. I knew that a good many of my friends wanted to get

to the cop who was holding me because fair play was nowhere in sight and he was the sole perpetrator of the ongoing ugliness. They heard me screaming the truth to him while trying to avoid being brutalized but his only reaction was to encourage the 'queen' to go at me more.

There had to be close to a hundred people there by that time and everyone of them was right on the edge of their tempers.

Finally, the cop who was holding me threw me into the back seat of his cruiser. When I say threw me I mean he literally threw me head first into the car, and still he had not made even one attempt to listen to my side of the story. I could hear my friend, Cocoa, explaining to a sergeant that the others had started the fight and that I had reacted out of fear of being knifed. The truth was finally being heard out there on the sidewalk, though by then the damage was done and I was unfortunately closed up in the cruiser with the prejudiced sonofabitch who had handcuffed me. He was so filled with hatred that he was listening to none of what was going on outside, only the sound of his own vulgarity.

He sat there baiting me, talking filth. "You fuckin' niggers are all alike!" "You God-damn fuckin' nigger faggots... you motherfuckin' cocksucker... you stinkin' piece of shit...etc., etc.

With each utterance from his puke-filled mouth and his '12 IQ' brain I retorted with a tear filled, "fuck you!", and each time he heard the words he hit me in the mouth. It was perfectly alright for him to use every vulgarity known to man but I was supposed to just sit there void of any self respect and let him go at me with his utter filth. Looking back, I guess that I should be happy that he had me handcuffed because I swear if my hands had been free I would have gone for his throat and he could have laughed as he blew me away.

The 'queen' didn't want to press charges because she knew that she and her girlfriend had started the whole thing. Nevertheless I was taken to the 54th Street Precinct and placed in an upstairs room. After a while a cop came up and said that the charges had been dropped but Patrolman '12 IQ' had another idea.

"Keep that fuckin' nigger here", he shouted. "I'll go down and make sure that the charges stick."

He then went downstairs where he threatened the 'queen'. He told her that if she didn't press charges he'd get her. He said that he knew where she lived and the streets where she walked and that he would make her life absolute hell if she didn't. (I know all of this because she later came to me with her apologies and she told me everything that went on that

night. Her exact words were, "Mommy, I sorry... he make me do it.")

The police have a wonderful little thing called...Losing You. If you are arrested and they want to be certain that you are not bailed out, or if, for whatever their reason, they want you to be kept incommunicado, they simply move you around town to different precincts. I did have enough presence of mind to ask to make a call because I knew that Larry knew the ropes and would follow up on things immediately. They allowed me the call and Larry said that he'd get right on the problem. "Hurry, Larry", I implored, "I think they're going to try to lose me!"

Patrolman '12 IQ' shouted, "He'll never find your ass!", and then I was put into a cruiser and driven up through Central Park to some precinct in Harlem. On the way I tried to explain what had happened to the two officers in the front seat. One seemed somewhat sympathetic but the other one told me to shut my mouth or they'd stop the car and work me over. "Better yet", he said, "we'll take you into the park and shoot you and tell 'em you tried to escape." I never said another word.

I was taken to court the following day and made to hang around for hours. Larry, who arrived with bail, saw the arresting cop talking to the 'queen' who had a bandaid over her nose. The cop, on the other hand later told the judge that the complainant was in the hospital in critical condition and unable to appear in court.

At the courthouse you are first taken to a room where you must verify fact as to name, address etc... The staff is made up of non-police personnel and when I walked into the room they all looked up from their work to study me. When they saw my condition... bloody, torn dress, swollen face, cut mouth etc..., one of them blurted out, "Wow, what happened to you?" I simply glanced at Patrolman '12 IQ', and the gal said, "Never mind, you don't have to answer."

From there I was taken to courtroom number one and on the way I made it clear to Patrolman '12 IQ' that I was no streetwalker and no push-over and certainly not someone whom he could brutalize and get away with it. I told him that I was going to sing my song right down to the last note and before I was through the judge was going to know the truth despite his lying and deception.

Upon arrival at the first courtroom, Larry, bless his heart, came over to speak to me. He told me that he had heard the cop tell the judge about the 'queens' critical condition and when he had finished speaking with me he went over to talk to Patrolman '12 IQ'. Larry made

it clear to him that he knew about the game the guy was playing and that there was no way that he was going to allow me to be railroaded.

Shortly thereafter the cop took me from courtroom number one down through a basement corridor to courtroom number two where he thought that he could proceed without Larry's interference. Unfortunately for him, Larry knew the ropes and appeared in a matter of minutes, wearing a don't-try-to-pull-the-wool-over-my-eyes-grin. In his hand he held the bail money which he waved at the cop as if to say, "You're not going to get away with this crap."

I was finally released on my own recognizance after being assigned a public defender, and I went promptly to file counter-charges against the 'queen', naming the policeman as co-conspirator. I also filed charges against him with the Civilian Review Board.

The bottom line to this entire fiasco is that the case was thrown out of court. On the day of trial, my lawyer spoke to the 'queen' who clearly told him that she did not want to press charges but had done so because of the cop's insistence. My lawyer suggested that if she drop the charges I too would drop my counter-charges and that being done, we both walked away from the whole stupid mess.

Patrolman '12 IQ' appeared in court that day with his tail between his legs and his head hanging. I can only assume that he had been contacted by the Civilian Review Board and had his wrists slapped. That was hardly enough punishment for what he had done to me but I was so delighted to have the whole mess over with that I pressed the issue no further. Unfortunately that same cop is probably still out there somewhere wearing a gun and mistreating people. I truly believe that policemen should be required to undergo substantial psychological testing before being issued either a shield or a gun. Regardless of what one reads in a newspaper or sees on a television tube, police power is awesome if not regulated, and if you don't believe me try being a black transsexual facing a bigoted, small-minded, power-wielding patrolman sometime. It will do more than just open your eyes.

Well, my life goes on. If I had this much of it to do all over again I'm sure I would do many things differently...

I probably would remain with my Grandparents this time and try to work things out the best I could. I would certainly remain in school at all costs, because without education in today's world you're one step short of being dead. I would study music and art and perhaps designing. I would read every book that I could get my hands on and never let a day go by without learning...

I would wish to be born a woman the second time around. I make no apologies for that. When I look at the world with all of its' conflicts it seems to me that it is in need of gentleness and softness. There is no corner of our globe which is not up in arms over some matter of man-made foolishness and the male of the species continues to hate and hurt and kill. He continues in his lust for wealth and power with seemingly little interest in aesthetic beauty or compassion or love...

I would also wish to be a mother, and being so, I would love my children with all my heart. I would not, could not, leave them as my mother did me. I would do my utmost to understand them and to fill their minds with wisdom. And if, by chance, I should give birth to a little effeminate boy I would try to see that he too be brought up in love and dignity, fully aware that God does indeed make little effeminate boys...

But, of course, I cannot live again and tomorrow waits. I suppose that I will greet it with yet a little fear born of years of ridicule and hurt. I imagine that I will still be a bit apprehensive about the sincerity of people. I realize that with the telling of my story I will now be looked at with different eyes, because I know that the world has not yet grown up.

From this point on there can be no hiding, no deception on my behalf. I have chosen to show the world my soul and I hope that my honesty does not prove to be my undoing. Some will call me brave. Some will call me fool. Some will say that I should have taken my 'different' life and hidden it away. Some will continue to curse me out of their own lack of understanding.

But for now I shall turn to my music and sing my heart out. I want every remaining moment of my life to be a song in praise of this life and this breath...

If I am judged let it be in God's time, not now...

It is now in the hands of the printer and will be ready for the press in a few days.

I have been thinking much lately about the future of our country and the people who will inherit it. I feel that we have a great responsibility to pass on to them a land that is free, fertile, and full of opportunity.

I have been thinking much lately about the future of our country and the people who will inherit it. I feel that we have a great responsibility to pass on to them a land that is free, fertile, and full of opportunity.

I have been thinking much lately about the future of our country and the people who will inherit it. I feel that we have a great responsibility to pass on to them a land that is free, fertile, and full of opportunity.

I have been thinking much lately about the future of our country and the people who will inherit it. I feel that we have a great responsibility to pass on to them a land that is free, fertile, and full of opportunity.

I have been thinking much lately about the future of our country and the people who will inherit it. I feel that we have a great responsibility to pass on to them a land that is free, fertile, and full of opportunity.

I have been thinking much lately about the future of our country and the people who will inherit it. I feel that we have a great responsibility to pass on to them a land that is free, fertile, and full of opportunity.

