

Town labeled 'Sex Change Capital of the World'

EDITOR'S NOTE — To say that Beulah, Colo., is off the beaten path would be an understatement. But for people who yearn to change from male to female, and vice versa, it is the center of the United States. That's because Dr. Stanley Biber lives and works there.

By G. D. BROWN

Associated Press Writer

TRINIDAD, Colo. (AP) — Dr.

Stanley Biber sent away for another surgeon's drawings the day he himself changed a man into a woman.

That was a quarter of a century and more than 1,000 sex-change operations before Biber could boast of performing two-thirds of all the sex-change operations in the world.

He does it here, he says, a remote southern Colorado town of 6,000 people, notably distant from big cities and any major medical research institution.

"It's not a peculiar place to do it," Biber says. "This just happens to be where I live and work."

The straight-lined red brick homes and buildings of Trinidad sit on hillsides above the Purgatoire River, below a sandstone butte called Fleeter's Peak, 100 miles south of Pueblo, the nearest Colorado city.

ONCE A STOP on the Santa Fe Trail, Trinidad later served as a hub for the area's coal mining. Most of the town sits today. From any direction Trinidad is an isolated place.

The distances don't faze the 58-year-old Biber, a man in

driving a gravelly voice from his office clinic said the day before undergoing surgery to make her body match the female clothes she'd worn for eight years. "If I'm going to take the step, I want the best."

THE BEST IS GOOD enough to fool a gynecologist, Biber says. The best is also quick; someone who goes in male at 5 a.m. can come out female at 5 p.m.

"We know there have been some who have been married and not told their husbands," Biber said last week, one reason missing after the word that week's four sex changes. "We warn them not to do it, but we let it happen."

In the end, he adds, the successes can be measured by the number who are never heard from once they leave town, Biber's plea for participation in a six-month follow-up survey.

"Thirty percent we lose to follow-up," he says. "Those are the patients who are either moving into new areas of society and becoming completely female,"

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IT HAS BEEN SIX years since Anna Louise Jenkins started her sex-change operation. Her mother, the night she disclosed she was going to Colorado for a sex-change operation. She still can occasionally, but her mother has died.

Six years ago, Anna was George, a married man who worked as a supermarket produce manager by day, then bought home at night to do a dress.

"When I went through is something I have never seen or heard about in a magazine."

Anna Louise Jenkins' mother's first name — her former wife's middle name — and her maternal grandmother's last name — are both Trinidad "because I was born here," she calls Sept. 2, 1979 — the date of her surgery — her birthday.

The only one of Biber's patients who elected to stay here after surgery, Ms. Jenkins thinks it's a good idea. That about her experience as a man, as she can, talks to psychology students at the local junior college.

"I KEPT IT to myself for 31 years," she says. "I always had difficulty making friends because I was a chief baker and cookie specialist at a local bakery." If I reach one person and give a little more understanding, then I feel I've done some good."

At her home later, Ms.

Jenkins beams as she displays her new bed, curtains and bedheads she sewed herself, a slew of dogs and cats and kittens.

She brings out a photo of a first birthday card for "Lisa" O'Brien, the first doll in her collection, the one she was forbidden as a child — and of a dark-haired man in a tuxedo. San Francisco who read her story in a paper and began courting her by phone.

In November, she married him in a small ceremony and a ceremony at her house. She baked her own wedding cake.

"The only wish I have is, I'd like to have a little girl. My friends say I'd start her terribly. I suppose I would."

Nearly a quarter of those who come to him for surgery are parents, Biber says.

ARTISTS' RESIDENTS don't welcome the label "Sex Change Capital of the World," but there is little of the furor that first surrounded the rumors of what Biber was doing at Mount San Rafael Hospital.

It was 1959, and Biber's first sex-change patient was a social worker who had accompanied various children to the doctor's office over a period of years.

"One day she came to me and asked me if I'd do her operation," she said. "She was a transsexual," Biber remembers. "I never heard of what a transsexual was. She looked completely female to me."

Biber talked with the doctors who had started the social worker on a regimen which had prescribed female hormones to get her started toward womanhood. Biber had a Johns Hopkins University degree, he says, and he how-to drawings and he used them to finish the social worker's transformation.

More than 1,000 transsexual changes later, fewer than a dozen have been female-to-male operations. There are relatively few transsexual cases in Biber's office from transsexuals still in the lengthy pre-operative screening process he enforces.

MOST TRANSEXUALS come to Trinidad as women born into male bodies. The female-to-male procedure is more difficult, and is still considered experimental.

Biber thinks mainly about his experiences with what is formally known as transsexuals, sex-organ surgeries. Transsexualism remains largely a mystery to the scientific community.

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"But not abruptly," he adds. "I might suggest more counseling, or I might suggest trying something else, like breast implants and seeing how it goes for a few months."

The surgery is inexpensive by medical standards — \$3,225 for Biber and his team, another \$3,000 for the hospital.

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