

Tula looks like a typical model: she's six feet tall with long, tanned legs, a tiny waist and a mane of tawny, sun-streaked hair. She is so stunningly beautiful that people turn and stare at her, and yet she's shy and almost diffident when you speak to her. Her eyes are gentle and trusting, and it's difficult to believe she's experienced so much pain and suffering during her 27 years. For Tula is a transsexual.

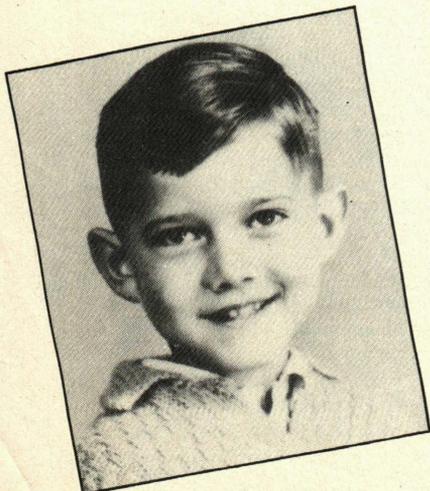
Transsexuals look as though they belong to one sex—but inside they feel as though they belong to the opposite sex. They are not gay, nor are they transvestites. Tula was born a male and christened Barry Cossey (pictured as a boy below); officially she will always be a man even though, six years ago, she took the momentous decision to have the operation to remove her hated male genitals and give her female ones.

It's impossible to calculate how many transsexuals there are in this country, although 30 sex-change operations take place every year. But many people have the operation abroad, and many never have it at all, preferring to fight against, or just not understand, their instincts.

It's inconceivable to think that Tula has ever been anything but a beautiful woman—even when she was living as a man people mistook her for a female. Most transsexuals aren't so lucky—some change sex and look awkward and ungainly.

Tula started her modelling career after her operation and went straight to the top, but her life was shattered when a Sunday newspaper printed a story about her having been born a man. Rumours and gossip were rife, and she eventually decided to set the record straight by writing her own version of her life story.* It's a fascinating and at times moving account of her life.

Now, Tula talks frankly about the events before and after the operation which changed her life . . .
Feature/Jane Butterworth



As a child I never fitted in with other children and always felt left out. I knew there was something wrong, but of course I couldn't understand what it was. I was a very suppressed child, too frightened to discuss it with anyone.

I was always being picked on at school and being called 'cissy' and 'pansy', so I tried to prove my masculinity by shaving the front of my legs because I hoped that would make them grow hairy. In my ignorance I tried to make myself as manly as possible. It didn't work.

I had a terribly unhappy childhood because I was taunted and ridiculed so much. I adored my mother but I think at the time I rejected my father—I love him now and he does me—but then I felt disappointed for my dad because I wasn't 'masculine' like my brother.

I didn't like my older brother then because he was good at football and good at school and he went around with a gang of mates while I was at home playing dolls with my sister. My sister, who's 18 months younger than me, protected me a lot at school then—we've always been very close.

Games were a nightmare at school. When it was football I'd try and forget a piece of kit so I wouldn't have to play and they'd put me on the back and I couldn't kick the ball, so the other boys used to kick me! I was so envious of the girls because they seemed to have such wonderful games to play, like tennis. They didn't have to play horrible aggressive games like rugby and football.

As I got into my teens I started looking more and more like a girl. It wasn't until I had my first sexual awareness that I knew I was attracted towards guys and not girls. That freaked me out slightly because I thought I must be homosexual, and it wasn't until later that I realised I was a transsexual. I started to get into a gay scene when I first went to London but I didn't attract any gay men because they like boyish boys not girlish ones and, anyway, the feelings and desires I had weren't the same as those gay people had—I just wanted to be a girl.

I had to move to London because things were getting really tricky at home in the little village my parents live in near Norwich. It was really embarrassing because I wasn't getting any more masculine as I grew up, but more feminine.

This was causing great aggro with my father; he was always trying to toughen me up and it didn't work. I even went into a job which I loathed in a butcher's shop, cutting up heads and things and making sausages, which was appalling.

So I went to London and felt a bit more free there. I made friends who didn't care about my appearance and grew my hair and could be more girlish—but I was passing as a girl, anyway.

I started training as a beautician and I took an evening job because

the money was so bad, working in a theatre. One evening a choreographer walked up to me and offered me a job as a showgirl . . . which made me laugh as I was supposed to be a boy then! I'd never danced before but I went along to the audition with a bikini, did a few steps and got the job.

I called myself Caroline and started living as a girl. I was working as a showgirl in a theatre restaurant and it was tough at first, so I took dancing lessons. I'd never dreamt of going into show business before then.

Then I went to see a doctor to get some hormone tablets to enlarge my breasts; I wanted to make an extra fiver a week to go topless like some of the other showgirls. The doctor happened to mention quite out of the blue that it was possible to have an operation and that was the first time I was aware you could have a sex-change operation.

The hormones made me feel sick and my breasts weren't growing fast enough, so I had an implant. Above all, I'd decided I had to have the operation to change me into a proper woman.

I told my brother and he was fantastic. My dad didn't take the news very well—I think he was a bit hurt and just thought I'd got into a bad scene. It was just that he didn't understand then. So I cut myself off from my family for a year, but then I went home and confronted my parents and we sat and talked and analysed the whole thing and, eventually, after we'd talked, my father was all for me having the operation, and even offered to pay. But I didn't want to take his hard-earned savings because it was something I wanted and it had to be my money.

To earn money for the operation I decided to do striptease.

In Europe you don't have to take everything off, so I went to Italy and got a nice act together; I'd strip down to a tiny G-string and that used to be a bit frightening sometimes, especially on Friday nights when we got military guys in. I caused quite a stir because Rome's a conservative place and there aren't many striptease clubs so I rather took the place by storm. I got quite friendly with a lot of these military guys and taking my clothes off in front of them gave me the confidence I needed—and the money to pay for my sex-change operation.

I had a terrible mishap on stage once; I was in the middle of my act, lying down with my leg in the air and I was running my hands along it and I'd just taken my top G-string off when the bottom one snapped! I don't know where I got the speed or the strength but I just pulled these two bits of elastic together and tied them, and all the guys were whistling because they thought it was great fun, and that I was going to be exposed. They had no idea of what would happen if I had been!

People were accepting me as a girl

and not knowing anything else. I was working as a showgirl, a dancer and a striptease artiste while still a man and nobody knew. Relationships were out of the question. We all need a bit of love from the opposite sex and I could never get sexually involved until I was a complete woman. It was embarrassing—men would take me out and wine me and dine me and then they'd try something on and I'd say, 'I can't, I've got a little problem,' and they'd think it was a period and try again later.

In Italy they just thought I was a virgin because most Italian girls retain their virginity until they're married, but it was so out of context with my job . . . a virgin doing striptease? I could never let on to any of them—God knows what would have happened.

Eventually I had saved £2,000—enough for the operation. I could have gone to Casablanca where many such operations are done, but a couple of people told me not to go and, anyway, when I saw a psychiatrist he said it would be all right to have it here, so I had it done in London with my family and friends all around me.

It was a very painful experience—nothing had prepared me for that sort of pain, but it was worth it! I had absolutely no doubts about the operation, it was plain sailing, really. I felt so totally left out and frustrated because I couldn't have relationships with people that, as soon as I saw a way out, I never hesitated once. I was lucky that I didn't have to suffer for too long; because I found out young, I didn't waste too much of my life. Some people get married and don't find out until much later.

Then I took up modelling. People kept saying to me, 'Are you a model?' and I never thought of being one at first because I thought I was too tall. Then I decided I'd have a go—so I went along to an agency and got taken on.

I started modelling under the name of Caroline Moon. My confidence grew as I got a lot of work. I did about a dozen centre-spreads—very tasteful ones—quite a few calendars, catalogue work and advertising, included a Smirnoff advertisement. Then my agent said there were so many Carolines on the books it would be better to change my name and suggested Tula, which is Swedish for tree. That seemed suitable, as I'm so tall.

I had a good career as a model and then I started getting harassed by a Sunday newspaper, which had been tipped off about my past. I had to start turning down a lot of work which involved publicity. I had to leave a television show called *3-2-1* on which I'd got a job as a hostess, because of press harassment, and once I'd done that I had to tell my agent about my background. She understood, and said she'd never have known and that I'd proved myself so who else need know? But I still thought I'd

better not do anything which involved too much publicity. Then I got a job as a Bond girl in *For Your Eyes Only*, which started off a lot of press interest again, and eventually the Sunday newspaper printed a story about me having been born a man.

I'd always dreaded people finding out and it was written nastily, as though I'd been conning everyone, and that it was all a joke, and it hurt me so much I got quite suicidal. The stories were picked up in America, Germany, Italy and France and it had such a bad effect on my life—for example, before, my greengrocer was always making cheeky comments whenever I went in. Afterwards, he was so rude I couldn't go in again. I also lost some friends, but they couldn't have been true friends as they couldn't have known me as a person.

I decided to come out into the open and write a book about my life to put an end to the gossip. If I hadn't, then every story that appeared about me would be called *Tula—Sex Change*.

I've had a lot of abuse. I was hurt by an article written by a feminist who tried to make out I was a mutilated man. She still couldn't recognise me as a woman. I don't know what I have to do to be a complete woman if I'm not one now. I have sexual desires like any other woman and I've had one or two long-term relationships. I've had some really nice guys who've been in love with me but there's always been this barrier because I haven't been able to tell them and, the couple of occasions when I have, I've lost them. That's another thing: now it's out in the open, boyfriends will know from the beginning and there's a chance of total love and commitment. It's hard once you get involved with someone to come out with, 'Oh, by the way, I used to be a man.'

Perhaps it would have been easier if I hadn't been attractive and was working in an ordinary job because then the eyes of the world wouldn't have been upon me. But I always felt I wanted to do something different.

Modelling means I lead a hectic life travelling, and I've enjoyed it. But even if I never work again I've been to some fantastic places, and I'd never have had the opportunity otherwise. I've also made good money. I'm grateful I've done well. Of course I regret not being complete at birth but I'm lucky because I've had surgery. I

don't feel bitter about my life, just happy and grateful things got sorted out when they did.

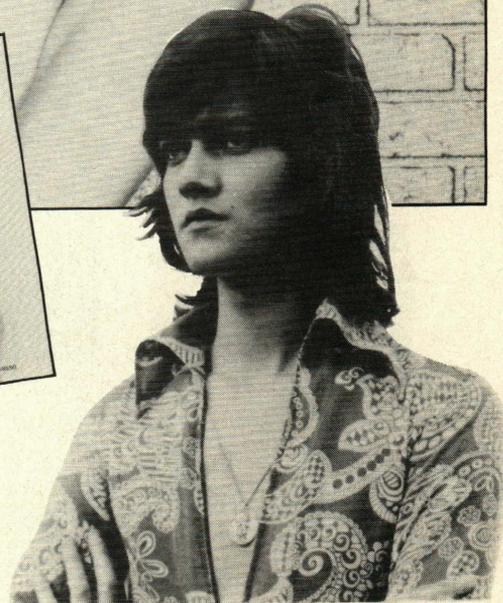
My parents understand but because of my other relatives I still only go home to see them after dark, and after living in London and travelling all round the world and enjoying my life, it's hard to accept this—but I realise it's different at home, in a small village. They don't understand.

I'm 99 per cent woman now—the only difference is that I can't have children, but then lots of women can't. I don't think I ever was a man—my birth certificate says I am but I don't think a man or a woman is determined by the physical aspect: it's mental. I was an insult as a man and now I'm just happy to be a girl. ●

**Tula: I Am A Woman* by Tula Cossey (Sphere/Rainbird, £2.95).

Friend, 274 Upper Street, London N1 (01-359 7371) is a gay self-help group, but several of its branches run social groups for transsexuals.

Tula before the sex change (bottom right) and as she is today—a glamorous model



To the outside world, Tula is a beautiful female model with a stunning figure. Yet not so long ago she lived her life as a man. Unbelievable? Now she tells 19 how . . .

“It Happened To Me”