

## TRANSLUCENT TRANSEXUAL

by **Lynnell Stephanie L.**

Gender Benders

Interview with "Sheman"

"I see you as my beautiful Sheman...a combination of masculinity and femininity."

— Ronda Bedgood (from her poem "Sheman")



His girlfriend call him Sheman, as a way of accepting his gender identity. He calls himself "Carl." When I first met Carl, I knew that there was something different about him, I was not surprised to learn that he is a borderline female-to-male transsexual. His looks are those of a "Stud" (butch lesbian). What makes Carl different then most studs is he identifies as a man.

Carl was born a genetic female, his birth name is Caroline Madgett. After realizing he was different, like so many others, Carl found sanctuary in the lesbian community. There, he could dress and grow into the man he is today without anyone questioning his manly appearance. It is not unusual for a butch lesbian to carry the demeanor of a man.

After feeling comfortable with himself, Carl went a step further, having his lover and friends call him by his male name, wearing a sports bra to make his chest flat, and wearing a strap-on almost everyday to feel more like a man.

I asked Carl if he considers himself a female-to-male transsexual. "I really don't know the correct definition of a FtM. I consider myself a man, but I don't know if that qualifies me as one ... I wouldn't mind taking the hormones [testosterone] ... to make me a little more masculine, but I don't want to have the surgery. I do know someone like me. I call him my brother. His name is Dee. I'm a milder version of him—he looks more like a man. He considers himself a man." Since Carl is a man who dates women, does he consider himself straight? "That's a hard question, I never really thought about that. I know I like women ... I'm a stud. I'm a true stud, some studs say they're a stud,

but when it comes down to it, they're not."

As to what it was like coming out as a man in a lesbian relationship, this is what he had to say: "It was scary, I kind of played it off though. I made her think I was in the life ... in the gay life ... but I really wasn't. She didn't know she was my first lover. She'll know now, but she didn't know then. It was interesting. I was kind of nervous but I got the hang of it, seems like everything just fell into place. I always thought about it ... I knew what to do."

Being a gender bender or transsexual can be difficult for anyone. I asked Carl if he wishes he was born a genetic man.

"Sometimes I do, maybe life would be a little bit easier. When people don't understand who I am, sometimes I do wish I was one [a genetic man]. It's hard to walk up to a woman and talk to her, because you don't know how she'll accept you. I tell them that my name is Carl and what I like, and what I don't like, and then it's up to them. I've dated women that said, whatever you do to me, I should be able to do to you. I tell them, 'then I'm not the man for you.' They look at me like, huh? They don't get it. I'm a man ... a true stud. Ain't nothing going up in me."

Carl, an only child, says it is difficult for his mother to accept him this way. "I wish she was more understanding. She don't approve of it, and says it's an abomination." Her mom says the church she attends, Church of the Open Door, "is the church of the devil. I go to Church of the Open Door because they accept me for who I am. I can go to church and not hear that the life I'm living is a sin and I'm going to hell. I believe God is a loving god. If

it's a sin then why is he [God] still blessing me, because he is ... I'm saved, and I believe I'm saved," says Carl. His mother knows about him, but refuses to call him Carl. As to changing his name legally to Carl, he says eventually he will. I asked him about the nickname "Sheman" his lover has for him, and why Sheman? "She's learning, it's hard for her to adapt, but she's learning. She calls me Sheman because she says she don't want a man, and it's a way of her accepting me. She told me when I say man she looks at it as a biological man ... I'm not a biological man. I consider myself better than a biological man. ... Seeing that I date lesbians, my features look like a woman, they have the best of both worlds. I've been told I have the same kind of mentality as a man. I feel like I am a man, when people call me "she" I correct them. I wish that people could see me for who I am, but people only see the outside. If they get to know me better, they'll see that I am different, that I'm not a woman."

Carl is a Computer Operation Supervisor for a major banking company. Before our interview ended he received a call from his job, a computer malfunction. It was interesting to see and hear this intelligent 28-year-old Black man—a gender bender—fix the problem, and get back in the rhythm of the interview. Whether they are gender benders or transsexuals isn't important. What's important is they are heard and taken seriously. From man to woman or woman to man, we are still human.

## Standing Up Against Hate

by **Robert [REDACTED]**

On Tuesday, Oct. 7, I got ready for my job as I usually do. All set for work, I opened the front door of the house I share with my partner John to find that our rainbow flag had been set on fire. Despite having had two flags stolen previously from our house in Logan Square, I was unprepared by this latest attack on our queerness.

I immediately phoned my job



to let them know that I would be late and as I relayed the incident to my co-worker, I found myself losing control of my emotions and began to cry. She was the first person I told about what had happened and during our conversation the reality of it finally hit me—while I lay in bed upstairs someone or some persons started a fire that could have spread to the house and could possibly have injured me.

After calling work I then proceeded to call my partner John at work. I also called the Chicago Police Department, Horizons Anti-Violence Project, the State's Attorney's office, Mary Morten (Mayor Daley's liaison to the queer community), Commission on Human Relations Chairman Clarence Woods' office, our alderperson's office, and just about everyone else I could think of—I was not going to remain silent and let this go. Talking on the phone also served a therapeutic purpose—it helped me to not feel so alone and so vulnerable.

A police officer came to the house to fill out a report. The flag burning was listed as arson, which is a felony, and it was also listed as bias motivated. Investigators from both the Police Department's bomb and arson unit and the civil-rights unit also came to investigate. They asked if I had any idea who might have done this and I really couldn't give an answer because we have had no problems with our neighbors since moving here in October of 1995.

Needless to say, I didn't make it in to work that day because I feared that I or John would return from work to find the house burned to the ground. I left the house once to get some

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## WATERMELON WOMAN

Cheryl Dunye's romantic comedy  
will be screened at the Chicago  
Lesbian & Gay Film Fest Nov. 13.

Pictured are stars Cheryl Dunye, Guinevere Turner,  
Lisa Marie Bronson, and Valerie Walker. See page 22.