

NOT 'QUITTING THE GAME' - JUST SWITCHING SIDES

by Rupert Rai. B.A., P.R.. Director. "GENDER WORKER"

Just about the time of my last birthday (Feb. 10), I decided to give myself a long-overdue present - time, time just for me. For the first time in 10 years. I decided to put myself first - before it was too late and I died of overwork. We all reach the crossroads at sometime or other during the course of our lives, and this was mine.

I finally faced up to the fact (painful as it was) that if I did not give up my involvement with the Metamorphosis Medical Research Foundation (which I founded in December 1981, and ran its day-to-day affairs single-handedly for over six years, including the full production of 24 newsletter issues and seven magazine issues), that the chronic burn-out syndrome from which I had been suffering since May 1986, would ultimately turn me into a "zombie". Indeed, it had already taken a serious toll on my physical and emotional health and was now placing my very job in serious jeopardy. My family doctor had warned me about overdoing it and had urged me to cut some of my commitments at the start of 1986, and had given me an electrocardiogram the year before because I had complained of chronic pains in my chest and arms. As a matter of fact, I suffered a minor nervous and physical collapse in January of last year and its symptoms have persisted up till now.

If you do not know what "Burn-Out Syndrome" entails, please read the book "BURN-OUT" by the psychologist who coined the term, Dr. Herbert Freudenberger. To give you a rough idea of what I and so many other resource providers to the transgender community have gone through, I'll quote from the book: "A Burn-Out is someone in a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward." And again: "Burn-Out: to deplete oneself, to exhaust one's physical and mental resources. To wear oneself out by excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectation imposed by oneself or the values of society."

The catalyst, the "straw that broke the camel's back", was such a little thing, but to me, it signified the culmination of weeks, months and years of futility of trying to provide an educational resource and a communications medium to the transsexual world. I had always been such a fastidious perfectionist and wanted my newsletter or magazine (as the case may be) to be just perfect. Yet, when I went to pick up the latest (and final) issue of "Metamorphosis Magazine" (the first issue to appeal to a mixed readership of both men and women), the printer had produced it according to the wrong specifications: 5 1/2" instead of 7". I was just devastated...crushed...beyond despair. At that moment I realized, with a flash of insight, that my long-term aspiration to one day have enough money to establish gender centers or clinics around the world would always be beyond my grasp. And that my short-term hope of acquiring sufficient funds (once we had managed to gain a charitable number) to guarantee me a full-time salary for my duties as Executive Director and Magazine Editor was equally unrealistic and unobtainable.

So, I decided it was high time to take a break, a sabbatical, as it were, a therapeutic leave of absence in order to restore my failing health and repair my shattered dreams. The only way that I could see clear to making this a reality, was to relinquish, in its entirety, my responsibilities to Metamorphosis. Too, I was tired, oh so tired, of playing a weary game of "cat-and-mouse" with the provincial ministry (regarding bullshit bureaucratic regulations for a new name and for registration as a charity), of endlessly trying to "pull teeth" from some of the "dead ducks" on my Board of Directors and from our Board of Professional Consultants, and, of constantly having to be a surrogate parent, counsellor and/or friend to many members of the TS community. Do you know that some of these TSs (many of whom were not members of Metamorphosis) would phone me two or three times a week, at all times of the day and night anytime they were lonely, depressed, bored, drunk, or in need of information or advice. They never called to invite me out to dinner or a show or just to ask how I was. (Of course, these were mostly the unstable TSs - the "together" ones were generally not guilty of this offence) And were you aware that two really "off-the-wall" so-called TSs harassed/threatened me several times over the phone by leaving hostile messages on my answering machine in the early hours of the morning?

As a result, I tendered my resignation at our Mar. 26 Board meeting- at which time the 5 directors present voted to dissolve the corporation because they felt they did not have sufficient human resources to carry on in my absence. At our final Board meeting on May 21, we will make the necessary arrangements to legally "wind down" the organization and disburse its assets amongst the current, paid-up membership and the larger transgender community (by means of donations to similar organizations). Members and magazine subscribers who have remitted dues or subscription fees for 1988 will be refunded immediately after our May Board meeting.

It is very hard giving up "my baby" (the organization I conceived and nurtured into its "adolescence"). The group I lost so much sleep over, spent so much time and money on, expended so much physical and mental energy on, and which was never out of my mind for a single moment- which is why, of course, such intense burn-out occurred. So now, as a parent must let his teenage children leave home when the time comes, I must also let go of this entity that has been so much a part of my life. This is not an easy decision by any means, but I really see no other alternative if I am to maintain my sanity and my livelihood. I just need a chance to get away and spend some time by myself and with my lady friend without having to worry about legal and financial responsibilities, magazine deadlines, and various commitments to the membership. The organization that at one time had been the very purpose of my existence had by now become a millstone around my neck, crushing the life forces out of me.

So, I'm taking a breather - but I'm not quitting the game entirely. I'm still a 'player' in this business of "gender dysphoria", but I'm changing the rules and am switching sides. That is, I will no longer act in a peer-support role, ^{but} only in a professional capacity, as a counsellor, educator and researcher. To this end, I registered my own resource service, GENDER WORKER, with the Ontario government last fall. Yet, in my new business venture, I'll set my own deadlines, my own pace and standards of productivity, establish my own priorities in terms of activities and projects, and select only those people as clients with whom I wish to work.

Some of the tangible projects I plan to undertake, include:

- 1) an ANTHOLOGY of TS, TV and TG verse (to be used perhaps as a teaching tool for helping professionals who wish to distinguish the three populations for purposes of psychological evaluation and psychiatric diagnosis;
- 2) a practical MANUAL for F-M TSs on various aspects of passing, hormones, surgery, legal and social aspects, relationships, resources, etc. (my colleague, now in England, tells me she plans to resume work on her M-F manual);
- 3) a comprehensive RESOURCE DIRECTORY (listing the names of various classifications of helping professionals and of TS resource providers throughout Canada, the U.S.A., and possibly abroad);
- 4) a helpful HANDBOOK for non-professional resource providers serving the transgender community (eg. support group leaders, newsletter/magazine editors, peer-counsellors);
- 5) my PERSONAL MEMOIRS (by the time I get the four preceding projects completed, I should have reached 40 - the perfect time to begin reviewing my life on paper in order to share my perspective with the public).

Additional services

will include:

- 1) confidential COUNSELLING (including information/referrals in person or by letter) for male and female TSs, TGS, TVs, and significant others;
- 2) educational WORKSHOPS/SEMINARS for researching and helping professionals and students, and also for gender-dysphoric consumers;
- 3) a local LENDING LIBRARY (currently books and later videos) on various aspects of TSism, TVism, androgyny, gender-reassignment, sex and gender;
- 4) a series of INFORMATION PACKAGES for: a) professionals and students, b) female-to-male TSs, c) male-to-female TSs, (and likely for male TVs);
- 5) a bi-monthly NEWSLETTER for researching and helping professionals, students, and lay resource providers (scheduled to begin in June).

On a more ethereal side, I plan to double my efforts in the areas of:

- 1) LOBBYING (eg. to appeal to the Canadian and provincial governments to include "gender identity", "gender dysphoria" and "sex reassignment" as prohibited grounds of discrimination under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; and, to appeal to the provincial medical health insurance plans to cover the cost of electrolysis^{and} speech therapy for M-F TSs);
- 2) NETWORKING (with gender identity programs, sexological societies, sex researchers, counsellors, therapists and other helping professionals; TS and TV support groups, educational/informational/referral organizations, magazine/newsletter editors, peer-counsellors, and political activists).

In short, I'll be contributing to^{both} the professional and transgender communities in even more productive ways than I have in the past. And, I hope to cross paths with many of you again, in renewed spirits. Peace...