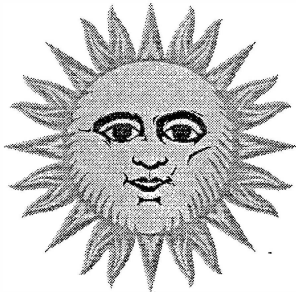


Your SOFFA VOICE

Volume 3, Issue 2

June 1, 2000

*Have a
great summer!*



Relationships

by

Robyn Walters

Transgendered life can be full of surprises and big moments, from that first "Mom and Dad, I have something to tell you," to the first time beyond the front door in the right clothes, to meeting others like oneself, to falling in love, to peeking under the sheets in the hospital and saying, "Yes!"

Transgendered people have the same hopes and dreams as other members of the human family. They wish for acceptance, understanding, and a Significant Other to love who'll love them back.

Of course, semantics sometimes get in the way. Is a heterosexual male to female (MTF) transsexual who loves women now a lesbian? Is a lesbian female to male transsexual (FTM) who still loves women now straight or still lesbian? Questions such as these along with questions of validity (e.g., is he really a man, now?) can make relationships difficult. Gender changes most often end marriages or other partnerships. They can also make new relationships difficult.

Are you in relationship with an FTM?

I am

Is the relationship easy for you or difficult? Do you understand what your partner is going through? Does it bother you that he isn't the she you fell in love with what seems like a lifetime ago?

Our relationship seems to be less stressful than several I've seen shared on a news list for SOs of FTMs. Are Emery and I somehow better at relationships than others? Do we have some secret approach to transsexual issues? Well, no and maybe.

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AMBOYZ SOFFA CONTACTS

National SOFFA Coordinator:

Loree Cook-Daniels: 707-648-2113;
Email: loreecd@aol.com

Local SOFFA Coordinators:

-New York City: Natalie: Email:
natalie@everest.hunter.cuny.edu
-Tennessee: Tracy: 615-431-9540;
Email: WrkingGal@aol.com
-Minnesota: Beth: 612-376-7648;
Email: kent0021@maroon.tc.umn.edu
-Arizona: Debra: 520-903-1421; Email:
debra@hwr.arizona.edu
-Toronto: Kaia Kruus, 416-466-0235;
FAX: 416-466-8812 ; Email:
kaia@ca.ibm.com
-San Antonio, TX: Debra: 210-434-
6044; (leave msg on answering
machine);
Email: debra@mac.hwr.arizona.edu
-Richard Brown in Delaware, (gay man,
tg ally): Delaware: Richard Brown:
302-366-1805; Email:
horned@sprintmail.com

We also have SOFFAs serving in regular positions:

-Lee Smith, Midsouth Coordinator, is
a SOFFA and also the Online Outreach
Coordinator:
PO Box 118, New Haven, KY, 40051
Email: STHRNEOYZZ@aol.com or
Alphavamp@aol.com
Phone: 502-549-3846

-Arlene Sandoval-Guerra is the
Southeast Region Spanish-speaking
Liason
(ally): Latino/a Issues: (Se Habla
Español)
Email: asandoval@aol.com

From The Editor

Greetings!!

I sure can tell it's summer!! The BBQ invitations have started and I am itching to go play instead of going to work. Another sign of summer is it's annual renewal time for subscriptions. Surprise!! Now that the newsletter has been in production for well over a year, June was set as the official month for renewals.

Many of you who have been getting the newsletter for over a year received a letter about your renewal in your envelope today. I certainly hope that 'Your SOFFA VOICE' has been a good source of support for you. If it has, then I urge you to renew your subscription right away. I do this on a completely volunteer basis, so your subscription fees go to pay for postage and supplies.

I also want to urge everyone to send in written submissions!! This is a completely amateur publication, so we don't pay attention to pesky things like correct grammar or punctuation.

SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY!!!

There...I said it!

Take care everyone...I hope you all have great summers!!

~ Jodi

P.S. For more information about sending in submissions, please email me at: SOFFAUSA@yahoo.com

By the way....

The columns, From The Brothers and Men Loving FTM Men, are on vacation and won't be available for this issue. Rest assured, however, they will be back for the next issue coming in August!!!

Cont. pg 6

View from a SOFFA

You Don't Know Dick: Courageous Hearts of Transsexual Men

~by Ruby

This award-winning documentary video is a must see for anyone coming to grips with transgender issues. Despite its confrontational title, "You Don't Know Dick" presents the stories of six transmen with honesty, compassion, and humor.

The men presented in the video are a diverse group of FTMs who work in fields ranging from the arts to auto mechanics, from law enforcement to gender activism. One gave birth to three children (all interviewed in the film). Some were married to men prior to transition. Others tried to live their lives as lesbians before realizing the truth of their identities. Most are now heterosexual, while one professes his newly found gay male identity with the giddiness of a teenager who has just discovered the joy of his own sexuality for the first time.

All of their stories make it clear what they do have in common: the courage to embark on a journey of self-discovery and to recover their dignity and an identity once denied them.

In addition to the stories of Ted, Michael, James, Max, Stephan, and Loren*, "You Don't Know Dick" stands out among films currently documenting trans lives for its thorough inclusion of SOFFAs. There are more than thirteen interviews with lovers, family members, and friends whose lives have also been touched by this deeply transforming experience

While the guys' stories are fairly tightly woven together--often cutting from one person's story mid-sentence to another person completing the same thought--the stories of the SOFFAs are a bit less cohesive. We see the tentative acceptance of a mother when her new son wants to practice taking ladies on a date by escorting her to dinner at a nice restaurant. We also see the faint twinge of grief a daughter expresses when she realizes that, even though she is genuinely happy about her parent's transition, there are still days when she "just wants to be with her mom."

The film also addresses how transition affects both new and long-term (pre-transition) friendships. One

woman, a longtime friend of Ted's, is able to laugh with him now that he is a few years into transition, but she vividly recalls the serious reservations she initially had, "This is a hard journey. I'm still not totally comfortable with it." When James decides to tell one of his friends and co-workers about his past life, he learns that, even though revealing yourself as FTM can be a major challenge to the assumptions people make about you, friendship is a strong bond that is often strengthened by sharing this profound truth about yourself with others.

This excellent documentary of trans lives is unfortunately not currently widely distributed or easily attainable. The only distributor I could find who had the film was the Center for Media and Independent Learning (see below for contact info). My recommendation for those interested in getting their hands on a copy: contact the media department of a library near you and get them to order this video! It is a significant contribution to any collection of transgender resources. ♥

Awards and Recognition

Natl. Educational Film Festival Gold Apple Award
American Psychological Assn. honoree
Sydney (Australia) Intl. Film Festival Documentary Award
New England Film & Video Festival "Videosmith" Documentary Award
"Best Documentary Film," New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, 1997
Selected for screening at more than a dozen film festivals worldwide

Distributor

University of California-Berkeley
Extension Center for Media and Independent Learning
2000 Center Street, Fourth Floor
Berkeley, CA 94704
USA
ph: 510/643-2788 fax: 510/643-9271
<http://www-cmil.unex.berkeley.edu/media/>

Running Length: 58 min.

Format: VHS Color, 1997

Catalog #: 38409

Sale: \$250 **Rental:** \$95

* James Green, Max Valerio, Stephan Thorne, and Loren Cameron are also featured in *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits*, a photographic collection by Loren Cameron available from Cleis Press.

Transitioning in Relationships

A Common Ground Column

by Loree Cook-Daniels

In the Lesbian/Gay community, taking a lover when one's already in a committed relationship can either be a matter of course ("so who's his latest trick?") or a very, very big deal ("she did what!? You immediately tossed her out on the street, right?").

Mine was supposed to be a matter of course. Marcelle's and my relationship has been "open" for all of its nearly 17 years. Inept flirts that we are, however, that openness remained untested until recently, when someone saw through the bumbling and responded. We quickly discovered reality is very different from what we expected.

When we've not been overwhelmed by the dozens of issues unearthed by my falling in love, Marcelle and I have been fascinated by a totally unexpected commonality: the issues our marriage is facing now as we cope with my loving two people are amazingly similar to the issues we faced when he changed genders five years ago. It's made us wonder if these aren't issues that are common whenever one partner undertakes any significant growth or change and thereby radically threatens the marital status quo.

Who is driving this thing? Sometimes both members of a couple embraces change wholeheartedly: they both have always wanted to buy a house, or have a child, or move to Hawaii. When the change is instead sought by one person, the emotional terrain becomes more complex and ambivalent. Even though I "agreed" to Marcelle's sex change and he agreed to my taking a lover, these were changes only one of us initiated and really wanted. That's a crucial point. Instead of actively seeking out changes he wants, the "trailing" partner in such cases is forced into a mostly reactive position: do I go along with this, resist it, or try to negotiate it? By itself, this is a tough position to be in, particularly for people who are used to having more control over what happens to them. However, there are many other issues to deal with, as well.

How come what we had wasn't good enough? There are lots of possible variations on this theme. I didn't understand why being a Lesbian with me wasn't good enough for Marcelle. Intellectually he knows that

people are far too complex to have all their needs met by one person, but that's logic; the heart speaks another language entirely. When one-half of a couple changes, the trailing partner has to come to grips with the knowledge that what used to work is no longer good enough. That can challenge the trailing partner's self-esteem.

Will you still love me? Did you ever? Some people go beyond acknowledging that the status quo is no longer good enough and begin to wonder whether it was ever good enough. Past interactions may be reviewed in the light of newly activated insecurities: "Has she been faking it?" "Has he been unhappy all along?" Even relatively self-assured partners may wonder whether they're up to the task involved in keeping pace with their partner's growth. I worried what would happen if Marcelle began to like himself after he transitioned; would he become too self-assured to tolerate my neuroses?

How can you be so happy when I'm so miserable? New lovers are notorious for creating multiple levels of good feelings. Other changes -- like getting a much-longed-for promotion or entering a long-delayed graduate program -- also create feelings of exhilaration, progress and accomplishment. These pay-offs aren't directly felt by the trailing partner, who instead faces the messy work of trying to assimilate the major change and all its ramifications. Resentment can settle in on both sides. The happy partner gets resentful that she can't fully enjoy her good fortune because of her cranky partner, and the trailing partner gets resentful that the changing partner is so oblivious to everything she is going through.

I'm learning things I'd rather not know about myself. One of the things the trailing partner may be examining is his own beliefs and values. We all want what's best for our loved one; we may be confused or disappointed when reality proves we're not as unconditionally loving as we'd believed. I believed I was a staunch anti-sexist until Marcelle's transition showed how many stereotypes and prejudices I actually held about men. I was appalled by my newly uncovered inability to live up my professed beliefs, and daunted by the huge task of bringing my values and actions back into alignment.

Marcelle is undergoing similar self-flagellation as he struggles to live up to

Cont. pg 6

We probably aren't any better at relationships than others are. We've each had two failed marriages. But I do have an advantage in dealing with my FTM because I am transsexual, too. Likewise, he has an advantage in dealing with my transition. We understand.

An MTF and FTM relationship seems made to order, at least for those transsexuals who are somewhat flexible about sexual orientation.

I remember being asked many times if I wouldn't want a man after surgery. "Oh, goodness, no," I'd reply. "I'll definitely be lesbian."

Slowly, though, the idea took root, becoming at least a possibility. And once I accepted that it could be so, something wonderful happened. I met a man, a wonderful man, a very special man - Emery, a female to male transsexual.

Over the period of a year, we came to know each other and drew closer through email, letters, gifts, phone calls and visiting. We are now considered a lesbian couple by those we meet casually or in business situations, although our timing was such that we married legally on Valentine's Day 2000.

Why is this relationship 'made to order?' We think it's the element of understanding and acceptance. Who better to understand the changes a transsexual is going through than another transsexual? Who better to share in subtle changes in sexual orientation than someone who is more or less exchanging places with you?

Just being an MTF TM couple is not enough to ensure a lasting relationship, of course. All the other attributes must be there, too - unconditional love, communication, respect, willingness to share 100/100%, friendship and commitment - but it may be a help.

We are planning to do some research and to write a book on the subject, someday. Check back with us after we've been married 10 years or so.

In the meantime, may your relationship be blessed with peace, light, love, understanding and great patience. ♥

~Robyn is a semi-retired naval engineer with a BS from the US Naval Academy and a PhD from MIT. She and her husband, Emery, live on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington. Between them, they have eight children and 10 grandchildren. Robyn will have SRS in early June on her 63rd birthday.

Chest Surgery: An SOs Perspective

~by Jodi Burchell

I sat here for about an hour trying to figure out what to say about my recent chest surgery experience in Maryland with Jesse. There is just so much to this process...the surgery itself, the trip, the feelings involved concerning the surgery, before, during, and after. The fear, the anticipation, the excitement, the relief. How can I possibly say everything I need to say about the whole process? In 1000 words or less? I don't think it's really possible.

After all, we spend months, sometimes years, waiting for chest surgery. We watch our guys bind. We see their discomfort both physically and mentally. We watch as they look in the mirror, making sure there are no clues, nothing to give them away. We know the fear of being discovered. Not only do we fear that look in a stranger's eyes when they realize that not all is as it seems, but we fear the hurt our man feels when he sees that look too.

We know about the disgust he feels by having a non-male chest. We watch his daily struggle. Many times, we aren't allowed to touch that part of him at all and we even feel self-conscious about looking too long when he comes out of the shower or changes his binder.

We watch and help him as he researches doctors and procedures and the costs involved. We offer our opinion on other guy's results, help him to make those final decisions and ultimately, to set the appointment for surgery. In the meantime, we save money. We take out loans. We pool available funds on credit cards or open new ones. We anticipate paying for this for months or even years to come.

We both grow more and more anxious as the date approaches. We know that he is probably more anxious than we are, but he is strong and proud and hides it well. We feel other stress too. Change doesn't always come easy. Fear of the unknown can be a huge thing for some of us. We may have unanswered issues about his body post-surgery. Will we be able to adjust to his new man chest?

Cont. pg 6

his self-image as someone secure enough to share his partner with others.

You're already changing from what I knew, so how can I trust you? Once the status quo becomes disrupted, all sorts of things become possible. This can be a wonderful opportunity; the communication between Marcelle and me has improved a hundred-fold since this new development. It can also be tremendously frightening. Marcelle kept telling me that he would still be the same person once he changed from "she" to "he." But how could I trust that? How can he be sure I know what I'm talking about when I say I still love and want him? He'd never lived as a male before, I've never had a lover before. Reassurances lose potency when the only thing both sides know for sure is that the future isn't going to be like the past.

We all want to have relationships in which people are allowed to grow and change and become happier and more fulfilled. Implementing those ideas may be tougher than we think. If you or someone you know is in the midst of one of these changes, be gentle. It's hard, but very worthwhile, work. ♥

Cont. from pg 2

The following special contacts are also SOFFAs:

- Legal Issues: Phyllis Randolph Frye, Esq: PRFrye@aol.com (lawyer and transwoman)
- Medical Issues: Dr Kathryn Thomas, PhD, RN: 410-625-1095; Email: katesx@juno.com (gender therapist)
- Family Issues: Mary Boenke; Email: MaryBoenke@aol.com (parent of tg)
- Official Jewish Mother: Leslie Ann Alpert: Email: fluffy@access.digex.net (ally)

If you think you'd like to be an AmBoyz local, regional, or SOFFA contact, see the American Boyz website, <http://www.netgsi.com/~listwrangler> for a "job description" and then contact national SOFFA coordinator, Loree Cook-Daniels, at:

LoreeCD@aol.com
or American Boyz's Coordinator-in-Chief, Gary Bowen, at: transman@netgsi.com.

Will we be satisfied and comfortable with it? We remember some of the bad results we have heard about or maybe even seen with our own eyes. Will it turn out like we expect? We hope and pray that it will and that the surgery will ease the burden that he's lived with all of his life.

Finally, the day comes and its time for his surgery. We watch and listen intently as the doctor draws lines on him, takes pictures, and talks about procedures, expectations and possible dangers. We say goodbye and watch as the nurse takes him away. And then, we wait. We pray that there will be no complications. We push our worries back...and we wait. Finally, hours later, the nurse comes and tells you that he is out of surgery and that you can see him now. When you see him, you notice that his chest is flat and that he is groggy, but basically, okay. You comfort him by telling him that you are there and that you love him, and you secretly thank your higher power for protecting him.

You help him back to the room and prepare to nurse him. You watch as he deals with the pain and the soreness and you comfort and help him as best you can. You both look at his new chest...bandaged, bruised, stitched, swollen, complete with drains. But, ultimately, you are thrilled. You watch as the bruising fades, the stitches disappear, the swelling goes down, and finally the drains come out.

And then, for the first time, you touch his new chest. You run your fingers along his skin, feeling the flatness...the tightness...and the slight curve from his pecs underneath. You feel a certain amazement and you look into his eyes as both of you acknowledge that he has a wonderful man chest now. There is no more shame in his eyes as you touch him. No more hiding. No more fear.

You watch as he looks at himself in the mirror. He flexes, admiring his new chest and smiles. You watch as he puts his shirt on. No binders. No extra layers. There's nothing there to hide anymore. And you both smile.

It's moments like these that you realize that it was all worth it. The anxiety...the stress...the pain...the worry...the financial burden...all to get to this very point. All to see and feel that sigh of relief.... to know that he's one step closer to his goal.....and he's happy.

I love you Jesse ♥

ANNOUNCEMENTS

~~New email lists

Several new lists have recently been formed for female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs) looking to date and establish intimate relationships and for those people looking to establish relationships with an FTM partner. These lists are located on the World Wide Web at www.onelist.com.

FTM_Dating is a list designed as a place where FTMs both gay, straight and bisexual can meet people (TG and non-TG) who are attracted to or open to the idea of dating or being a partner to an FTM. The list supports all orientations and all lifestyle choices including but not limited to polyamory, leather/BDSM, heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality.

TG_leather is a list focused on FTMs and their SOFFA's who are active in the leather/BDSM/fetish community. The list is open to top, bottom, switch, polyamory, FTMs, MTFs, third gender, intersexed leatherfolk and their SOFFA's and play partners. Discussion is on changes in leather identification with TG identification, places to play, meeting people who are TG friendly to play with, etc..

Transgenderedcouples is a list for TG people in relationships where all partners are transgendered and dealing with gender issues. It adds to other SOFFA groups such as FTMSOs, NyteCafe in being a place in which the unique issues that arise from both partners transitioning or dealing with gender ID may be addressed in addition to shifts in orientation that often accompany these types of relationships.

Already on the web for some time are two other more global TG dating lists:

- ◆ **Trans-personals**
- ◆ **Trans-dating**

Please check these out also (I do not moderate them so I can't speak for their content but want to make their presence known as well.)

Looking forward to seeing you there!

Zane Barlow

List moderator for FTM_Dating, TG_leather and transgenderedcouples

~~New WEBSIGHT!!

There is a new websight out there dedicated to answering all those questions about being a SOFFA of a transman. Check it out at:
[Http://members.xoom.com/ftmsofaq/](http://members.xoom.com/ftmsofaq/)

~~New Email Support List

I'd like to invite all the straight-IDed wives/lovers/girlfriends of FTMs out there to join us on a new list called NyteCafe. The purpose of the list is to provide a relaxed, informal space in which ladies whose roots are in the heterosexual community can chat about the issues and concerns that are specific to them. To subscribe, email me personally at Nyteflyer1@aol.com or Access ONElist site at <http://www.onelist.com>. Enter the name of the list, "NyteCafe" and then click on "join"

~Support Email List

FTMSOs is a closed online email support list for SOs of FTMs. Any type of SO is invited to join regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or background. To subscribe or for more information, email FTMSOS@yahoo.com or go to the egroups websight. The address is <http://www.egroups.com>. Just enter the name of the group and follow the instructions.

~New Local support group – Nashville, TN.

The Nashville Knights is a newly formed support group for FTMs, those persons who are born female and are questioning their gender, and their SOs. Anyone within driving distance of Nashville is welcome to participate in the local activities. Future plans are to have periodic meetings as well as recreational activities. For more information, please email Nashvilleknights@webtv.net.

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FOUND ON THE WEB

CELEBRATE GAY PRIDE MONTH IN JUNE BY ...

"THINGS YOU CAN DO TO ERADICATE GENDER OR MULTIPLY IT EXPONENTIALLY"
(by Molly Biewald & Shoshana Rosenfeld)

1. Spend a day in drag.
2. Write to organizations that call themselves "gay and lesbian" and ask them to change it to "QUEER."
3. Think twice before you ask people if their child is a boy or girl.
4. Join the transexual menace.
5. Have a conversation about the gender revolution with a friend while riding on public transportation. Make sure you're overheard.
6. Go to conferences like the Femme Gender Conference in San Francisco, OutWrite in Boston and meet other gender revolutionaries.
7. Read a good book on gender liberation.
8. Refer to everyone by the incorrect pronoun.
9. Challenge the binary gender paradigm over Thanksgiving dinner.
10. Organize to get the diagnosis Gender Identity Disorder removed from the DSM IV.
11. Refuse to check off your sex when filling out forms.
12. Join mainstream lesbian and gay groups and speak up for transgender inclusion.
13. Hang out with children and teach them how to cross-dress Barbie and G.I. Joe.
14. Write about your experiences with the evolution of your gender identity.
15. Support queer art with your time, talent and money.
16. Talk to a femme dyke about how she experiences power through her gender identity.
17. Make art that explores gender.
18. Experiment with new ways to accentuate your queerness using language, dress, movement and, or course, accessories.

Poetry

At an Angle-You Through Cut Glass

*Reflections spill more than you favor.
I imagine what I miss behind the mirror.
I read your body for clues just out of reach.
You stand still, watching me from your left
shoulder urging me ahead of what I know,
besides the soggy new that yesterday was
fresh in paper cuts through my most
giving palm.*

1994

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American Boyz

American Boyz is a support and social group for people who were born female but who feel that is not a complete or accurate assessment of who they are and our significant others, friends, family, and allies (SOFFAs). Our membership includes Butches, FTMs, Transmen, FTV's, Gender Outlaws, Transexals, Drag Kings, Boychicks, She-Bears, Shapeshifters, Tomboys, Passing Women, Amazons, Intersexuals, Female Guys, Boss Girls, Transgenderists, Sirs, and our SOFFAs. We provide education, support, social events, newsletters, online forums, local meetings, political action, and a national conference.

To learn more about The American Boyz, send email to amboyz@iximd.com or

*check out the websight at
<http://office.iximd.com/mailman>*

Or send SASE to: The American Boyz, 212A S. Bridge St., Suite 131, Elkton, MD, 21922 FAX: 410-620-2024