
The Trans Biography Project

Stories from the Lives of Eleven Trans People in BC

by Kathleen Cross

In collaboration with
the Women/Trans Dialogue Planning Committee
and Trans Alliance Society
September, 2001
Vancouver

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Introduction

This is a collection of biographies featuring trans people who reside in British Columbia.

The purpose of this collection is to educate the broader community about the experiences, needs and situations of trans people. It features a brief biography of each person, using their words as much as possible to tell their stories, share their experiences, and articulate the issues that are relevant to them as a trans, transgendered or transsexual person (a note about language usage is below). These stories are an attempt to put a “human face” on the issues of trans people and to break down stereotypes. It is our hope that this collection may, in some small way, assist in making the voices of trans people better heard and, perhaps, more understood.

Throughout this booklet different participants have used a number of terms to describe themselves and others. Some of these terms are: transsexual, transgendered, trans, tranny, trans-woman, trans-man, FtM (female-to-male), MtF (male-to-female), transformed, and gender-variant. We recognize that the language associated with these issues is fluid and the choices of descriptive terms have certain meanings to various participants. As much as possible we have tried to ensure that participants defined what they meant by the terms they were using, and in each case asked participants to describe how they would like to be identified. While we recognize that the language is constantly evolving, for the purposes of this project we have used the term “trans” as a broad category meaning anyone who defines themselves as gender fluid, whether they be pre-operative, post-operative or non-operative.

The one-on-one interviews used to write these biographies were conducted in May, June and July of 2001. All but one of the people featured in this booklet were living in the Lower Mainland during this period. Four participants have chosen to remain anonymous and are indicated by a chosen first name only, while the others felt comfortable with their names and photos being represented here. The biographies are either written in the first voice, using exclusive quotes from the interviews, or using a combination of quotes and narrative. In all cases the participants had final say over the content of their biography.

It is important to note that a few months prior to these interviews taking place, the BC Human Rights Tribunal had begun its deliberations on the Nixon/Rape Relief case. Kimberly Nixon, a transsexual women included in this booklet, had claimed discrimination by Vancouver Rape Relief and Women’s Shelter in 1995 because she was a transsexual. Many of the participants in this booklet attended the hearings and some of them refer to this case in their biographies. At the time of this writing the Tribunal’s decision is still pending.

Similarly, many of the interviewees mention the Gender Clinic. The Gender Clinic was founded in 1985, and located in the psychiatric out-patients department at Vancouver General Hospital. In 1995 the Gender Clinic was relocated and combined with Sexual Medicine and Reproductive Health. Today it is a multi-disciplinary service that, in many ways, acts as a gate-keeper for BC’s transsexual community. If medical procedures are desired (such as prescriptions for hormones, or sex reassignment surgeries) then most trans people must approach the Clinic for diagnoses as gender dysphoric and for approvals for treatments. The Clinic also offers counselling and other services to transgendered clients.

Having said that, it is important to note that this booklet is not an explanation of the medical procedures or diagnoses associated with the treatment of gender identity disorders. For that, the reader will need to refer to the wealth of information written and researched by counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists and doctors who specialize in such interventions. While many of the participants have undergone some medical procedures and talk about these in their stories, we are not intending to give detailed information of these procedures except to the point where they are part of a person’s story.

And finally, this booklet was produced as a limited run of 250 copies. The intent is to make it available to groups and organizations throughout the province, especially those wishing to use it as a companion piece

while doing workshops on trans issues. Should the demand exceed our initial printing, every effort will be made to secure new funding in order to print more.

To view this booklet, and download it off the Internet, please visit the following sites:

Trans Alliance Society: www.transalliancesociety.org
BC Human Rights Commission: www.bchumanrights.org

To inquire about ordering copies, please email: communications@transalliancesociety.org
or write to:

Trans Alliance Society
c/o 1170 Bute Street
Vancouver, BC
V5Z 4R3

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the people in this booklet, each of whom welcomed me into their homes and spoke with honesty and clarity about some very difficult issues. Listening to the stories, I was struck by the immense courage it has taken for each person to travel the path they are on. It has been a privilege to meet and work with every one of you. Thank you for sharing your stories with me — and with all of us.

Kathleen Cross, author

On behalf of the Women/Trans Dialogue Planning Committee, the Project Advisory Team of WG Burnham, Joan Meister, and Marion Pollack would like to thank the author, Kathleen Cross, and all of the individuals who volunteered to take part in the Trans Biography Project.

When the Women/Trans Dialogue Planning Committee began meeting in May 2000 in Vancouver, our intention was to increase dialogue between the trans and women's communities. As participants introduced themselves it became apparent that the telling of people's stories contained a powerful educational component that would help people better understand the diversity and experiences in the trans community. We realized that the experiences of trans people cannot be explained or defined without a more intimate sense of who trans people are and how they define themselves as individuals. Thus, this project was born.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the BC Human Rights Commission, and in particular former Chief Commissioner Mary-Woo Sims, for providing overall support for the Women/Trans Dialogue Planning Committee.

***WG Burnham, Joan Meister & Marion Pollack
Project Advisory Team***

Dannis Bragas

Dannis Bragas is 20 years old. She moved to Canada from the Philippines with her parents approximately 10 years ago. She defines herself as a male-to-female transsexual and has been taking hormone therapy. She looks forward to eventually becoming a "full-time" woman which may or may not involve sex reassignment surgery.

Dannis remembers first realizing that she would feel better being female than male when she was about 3 years old.

I remember thinking that being female would be easier. At that time, it had to do more with material things like toys and hair and dolls. Most of my friends were girls and I liked "girl toys". My aunt was very open and she would buy me the kinds of toys I wanted. When I grew older and bought my own toys, I would buy boy type toys, but if the toys were plastic characters in a series, I would always buy the girl of the set. I realized I was transsexual when I was 13. I had a friend who was quite feminine who turned out to be gay and we'd hang out in the library which is where we discovered books with stories about transsexuals.

Everyone thought Dannis was gay but she knew that she was transsexual. After high school, Dannis started a fashion design program. At that time she continued to do research on transsexuals and joined a group for gays and transgendered people at the (gay, lesbian, transgendered) Centre in Vancouver. She met gay people and enjoyed the group but felt something was missing. She then started to go to another group in a community clinic where a doctor questioned her about transsexualism and referred her to the Gender Clinic (at Vancouver General Hospital). She began taking a hormone suppressant Spiro, then estrogen and permarine, and began electrolysis.

At first, with the Spiro, I became skinny. But then with the estrogen, I became softer and more curvy. I got less hair and my nipples grew. I also felt relaxed with the estrogen. I felt naive and more concerned with relationships. Estrogen made me nicer. Without it, I was more like a gay man or someone with a lot of testosterone.

Dannis decided that she wanted the option to have a baby with her own genetic make-up in the future and in order to save her own sperm for future use, she had to stop taking hormones so that it did not interfere with the sperm count.

I don't want to regret not trying to have my "own" baby later. I'd be willing to adopt or to have someone else's but I like my genes, and it would be nice to have a baby like myself. I found a place to store the sperm and I'm now back on hormones. I suggest that all T's consider doing this before they change their biology.

According to Dannis, living as a transsexual can be both positive and negative. "Passing" can be an issue. Dannis has found this particularly difficult when deciding which washroom to use when out in public.

I'm confused because I've heard it's against the law for me to go into the female washroom but I don't feel entirely comfortable going into the men's. When I've used the men's washroom, I've been confronted over twenty times because other men thought I was a woman. I'm sick of it. I sometimes use the women's washroom and sometimes I don't. When I'm with my friends, I ask them what to do. I've never been challenged in a women's washroom though I do get out really fast. Once I was at a club and dressed up (as a woman) so I had to use the women's washroom. It was strange being surrounded by other girls because I was afraid of being "found out".

Like any other 20 year old, Dannis is interested in meeting people and dating. But relationships have difficulties. All her friends are gay and she has known only one other transsexual, who eventually moved away.

Dannis would like to have a boyfriend who is interested in her as a person, not just as a sexual partner.

The men who are interested in transsexuals are bi-curious or straight, at least, they consider themselves to be. They want something “extra” they say. Married men, rich men, poor men, young men, and old men want to be with me and they know I’m trans. I’d like something more than sex but their whole interest in me is sex. If they want a relationship, I can’t help but think that they chose me just because I’m transsexual. I accept this fact now.

Dannis feels like she doesn’t have enough support from people. Her friends are learning more but still frustrate Dannis and hurt her with their comments. She feels they sometimes discriminate against her either because they don’t like women or they don’t like transsexuals.

They treat me like I’m dirty or crazy or like I’m making it up. Gay people consider themselves above transsexuals. They sometimes make me feel like a joke. A lot of it is just ignorance.

At work, Dannis believes that her co-workers think she is gay. She began work at a clothing store as a male, and has started buying female clothing. She hasn’t told her co-workers that she is transsexual and has implied to them that she is a drag queen. She gets mistaken for a woman by customers frequently.

They come in and call me “she” and my co-workers correct them but I don’t mind. I want to go back to school or get a better job but I want to start a new job as a female. I’d love to work in fashion and with drag queens someday. When I was in school, I was a dresser for a fashion show and there were some drag queens who had some designs in the show. It was wonderful to work with them.

Everyone in Dannis’ immediate family knows she is transsexual except for her father. She told her mother a year ago and her mother told Dannis’ sister. Dannis’ brother found out “naturally”.

When I told my mom, we were in the car waiting for my sister. Before I came out, I’d sometimes cry and she would find me. She thought I had something on my mind. She said to me, “so you want to be a girl instead of a guy” and I told her that she was right. My mom told me that it was a choice but I told her that I’d always felt this way. My mom accepts me but she hasn’t read anything about transsexuals. I’d like her to try to understand what I’m going through but she doesn’t. She judges me and always expects the worst. But the more I become female, the more she is willing to put me in a female context.

Dannis and her mother decided not to tell her father about her transsexualism.

My dad’s not easy to live with and I didn’t want to make it worse. He probably thinks I’m queer and probably knows I dress as a female because he might have found clothes in my bedroom but he doesn’t know I’m transsexual. Now that I’m out of the house I plan to write my dad a letter telling him what I am.

Having recently left home, Dannis looks forward to being a “full time” woman. She feels strange being only “part time” now.

Part-time means that I go out in public shaved really close, and with nothing else. People see me as a female and the ones that knew me before see me as a “tranny”. I’m in the middle and I’d like to have no facial hair, have obvious breasts so that I can be a normal looking person — a typical “girlie” girl. When I first started, I wanted to go straight to the sex change but now I wonder. If I have a sex change, I can be a normal woman but the risk is that once I have a change, no one will want me. No “normal” man will want me because I used to be a man and no man who wants a transsexual will want me because I don’t have “it” anymore. And I worry about being able to function after SRS [sex reassignment surgery]. If I don’t have a sex change I worry that people will be interested in me not because of who I am but because I’m a sex toy —because I’m both. But I could also still have lovers and people who like me. It’s all about relationships. I want to be open. I

was born a girlie boy and then I became a woman.

Dannis is still struggling to decide which direction is best. She says:

I feel like a blank canvas where images are taking a long time to appear. For instance, a perfect canvas would be a transsexual on Spiro who could be male or female — totally androgynous. My body (the canvas) is just waiting for the paint — the estrogen — to fill me up.

Gareth

Gareth is a 53 year old transsexual man. He began his transition in 1995 and is now legally male.

Transitioning for Gareth has involved both internal and external transitions.

For me the transition process has been in three parts: internal, external and integrated. I'm almost through the external transitions — or what I call the “technology of trans”. But that is only one part of a person's identity. If you think of a person as mind, body, heart and soul, identity is in the mind, heart and soul. But the technologies are all centered around the body. So that even though gender identity is primarily internal, transitioning ends up with a focus on the external markers, what we need to do to our bodies — the medical and legal changes. That becomes so all-encompassing that the body becomes the identity. But that's only one part of it. The process started internally. For me that took several decades.

Gareth had a sense of continuity between himself/his body and his external world until he was about four. At that point he hadn't played with other kids and so had no one to compare himself to.

I had no playmates at all before that because my mother believed none of the other kids in the neighbourhood were good enough for me. Then we moved to a new neighbourhood and I started playing with other kids. My best friend was a boy my age, but I was pushed to play with the girls (my mother was into pink and ringlets) and things didn't fit so comfortably. But because our family was not doing so well at the time either, and kids take things on, I didn't realize it was a gender issue. I internalized it as “I'm not adequate, I'm not appropriate”. So I responded by putting on layers of learned expectations of female behaviour: being good, being nice.

Chronic depression caught up with me when I was about eleven. I never sought help. I just coped with it until my early forties. During puberty my sense of gender was not clearly masculine — I just thought it was my fault I was failing as a girl. I wanted to hurry up and develop breasts so that I could fit the physical concept of being female since the rest just wasn't natural for me. There was an incident when I was about twelve. I had put on a combination of clothes that gave me a very masculine look. When I looked at myself in the mirror I felt as though I was seeing myself as real for the first time. My mother made such a fuss, however, I knew I was really failing at getting it right at being a girl.

Being female was something I thought you had to learn and I just hadn't learned it yet. So I started to deliberately watch how women behaved. I studied women's movements, gestures, dress, use of language, intonation. From that time until I started to transition I carried a conversation in my head: “I'm being seen as a girl/woman — What is the most appropriate female response I can give in these circumstances?” I didn't even know that filter was there until it stopped.

Once I'd taken on the external role as best I could, I sidestepped the whole body/identity thing by retreating into my head. I went through high school as a nerd. By my twenties I was interested in ideas like the nature of illusion and reality. I also took on separatist feminist ideals. If I couldn't make it as a woman being good & nice, maybe I could make it being radical. Besides, it felt good knowing I belonged to the better half of the human race. I never actually joined the women's community. In fact, my closest co-workers for a while were men. And I numbed my self-awareness by keeping busy doing lots of volunteer work through my church and other organizations. Also, I had season tickets to absolutely everything in Vancouver. I'm sure I helped a flourishing of the arts in Vancouver during those years!

I knew a lot of people, but never got close to anybody. I had dated a tiny bit and then in my late twenties, a man came along and I had the sense that this was my last chance to get it right — to learn how to be a woman in a relationship with a man. I was involved in a fairly rigid church

structure in terms of male/female roles, (man as head of the woman sort of thing) so feminist ideals got shoved aside as I gave this relationship my very best shot at trying to be a woman. It didn't last.

In my mid-thirties I suddenly became ill with what was eventually diagnosed as a type of arthritis. I stopped trying to date, but I didn't stop my crazy work/volunteer/ social life. I just added pain and fatigue to the list. I still felt I wasn't doing enough to be adequate or acceptable. So I kept trying harder to be good and nice.

I had been woman-attracted since my early adolescence but I buried that. I didn't do anything about it until I was about forty. But I didn't know what to do. I had never connected with the lesbian community. When I read lesbian literature that talked about a sense of "coming home" I knew I didn't have that sense. And I didn't feel comfortable at lesbian events. Instead, I joined the Anglican gay group Integrity. They were all men and they kept wondering why I stayed. But I liked being with them. Some of my depression started to lift in these years. Well! A person can only live so long working full time, so busy they never eat properly, get only 3 - 4 hours sleep a night, using energy to live with a chronic illness, before something gives way. I'd done this for year and years. In 1995 my health collapsed and I was forced to drop everything except work. Suddenly the carefully constructed world of external definers disappeared out of my life. I was left too weak to run away anymore.

During my recovery I bought a man's suit jacket. (I'd been wearing only skirts and dresses for about twenty years by then.) When I looked in the mirror I met that masculine kid I'd seen briefly when I was twelve. I was working with a wonderful therapist at the time and he'd been patiently encouraging me to examine and discard all the layers of pretense that I'd built up over the years trying to be good. By the time I put on that jacket the crust was thin enough that the gender energy could break through. It not only broke through, it took over my life.

I started buying and wearing men's clothes at home and then it quickly moved to cross-dressing in public. At first I said "Oh, I'm just wearing men's clothes", but then I started to acknowledge how right it felt and then I had to admit I couldn't not wear men's clothes. And finally I had to ask myself "what's this all about?".

I had been constructing myself externally from the outside-in for so long that it took a lot of courage to accept this was coming from the inside and I could trust it. First I asked "Am I a man or a woman?". Then when I had to accept that I was a man, I faced the worst part of the transition. I felt that I had totally failed. I'd failed my mother, I'd failed my feminist ideals (besides, I didn't want to leave the winning side), heck, I'd failed my reincarnation. But I couldn't stop, because it felt more and more right, comfortable, real, me. Then I asked, "But if this is me, then who am I as a man?". Finally I realized I had absorbed role models as a kid and that energy was already a part of me. The men I felt close to were kindly, gentle, generous people. That spoke to the core of who I am. So I took a male name that means "gentle". That was the turning point. I'd wanted a name that was macho, but nothing seemed to stick. When I was able to accept that there is strength in gentleness, then I was ready to do the external transition.

I joined an FtM support group and met some neat guys and I went to the Gender Clinic at VGH where I had good support and lots of encouragement. We are so fortunate in BC to have a clinic here. Now I'm at the third part of my transition: taking the congruence of who I am and how I look as a 50 year old male, with only a few years life experience living as a man, and integrating myself into the world. So far it has gone well. I finally feel as though I fit.

When I started the transition I started questioning the rigidity of the binary — the concept that there are only two genders and we fit into either one or the other. I used to talk a lot about "queering the binary" and suggested we are all in the middle, that everybody has a bit of both genders (and a bit of both sexual orientations). I think that's a necessary dialogue, but right now I'm happy with the binary for myself. "Transsexual" implies a rigidity, moving from one side of the binary to the other. For that person the middle ground is not comfortable. And that's me. I don't really want to keen

coming out as a “trans”. I just want to live as a man now.

And the gains have been overwhelming. I work with the public and have had dozens of encouraging comments from them and from co-workers. Most friends and acquaintances have been so affirming. My partner, whom I met in 1996, has been a daily companion and champion. And finally, I feel good about myself, comfortable about myself. No need to pretend anymore. Depression’s gone. My life is much more balanced. I feel ordinary and content. Now I’m simply one more little guy in the world doing his bit to make the world a better place.

What being Trans isn’t, for me.

by Gareth

(All of these points have at one time or another been suggested to me by people, by popular opinion, or in professional, feminist or queer writing.)

1. Being so butch, that I fell off the end of the spectrum and became a man. I am not a macho man. (This seems to be a growing political stance re: butches.)
2. Homophobia about being woman-attracted.
3. Identification with male power.
4. Desire for male privilege.
5. Anti-feminist sentiment.
6. A game, a choice of being a certain way, of playing with a/several persona/e, or a passing whim.
7. A lifestyle choice.
8. Being “still a woman” with merely cosmetic changes.
9. Attempting to shock, or “gender-fuck”.
10. Attempting to get attention, be special.
11. Attempting to grab an identity, to fill up inner emptiness/ lack of strong sense of self.
12. A delusion, mental illness, instability.
13. An inability to deal with having arthritis. i.e. living with weakness and vulnerability, desiring testosterone as a way of achieving strength. (In fact, I am more vulnerable as a small man with little physical defense than I was as a tallish woman.)

Aiyyana Maracle

Aiyyana was born in 1950 on Six Nations Reserve in southern Ontario and grew up in Buffalo and Rochester, New York. She has five children and eight grandchildren and began transitioning ten years ago and then living full time as woman in 1993. She defines herself as “a transformed woman who loves women”.

Aiyyana’s story is a story about gender and race and the on-going intersections of the two throughout her life. She knew she was different even before she went to school, growing up the middle of seven children, and surrounded by the world of her mother, grandmothers, aunts and sisters. She felt she was a girl within a world of girls. It wasn’t until the first day of school when a neighbourhood girlfriend told her she could not walk with her because she was a “little boy” that she realized that something was really wrong. It was in this same time that issues of race became brutally apparent as well.

I realized that race was very important that first year. I suddenly went from being this cute little child to being this “ugly little Indian boy”. It turned my world upside down. I had a double anxiety in the segregation of being a boy separated from girls, and being Indian. But racism was paramount, with daily reminders. And in my little mind I knew deep down it was not safe for me to seriously engage in the discussion of gender. When I was a teenager and my parents committed my older sister for her indiscretions, I realized just how unsafe it was. And that scared me into silence for a long, long time. In the 1950s you hear the whispers of queers and fags and you just know that as horrible as being Indian was, being queer was even worse.

The 1950s and 60s was, according to Aiyyana, a very odd time to be an urban Indian [she prefers to this term to “First Nations”]. Her family was pushed off the reserve the year after she was born when the Canadian government first started to enforce the distinctions between status and non-status Indian. Because both of her parents had been in the armed forces throughout the war, the seeds of assimilation and integration were well rooted. And in hindsight, says Aiyyana, assimilation and integration in those days made some sense. “For them, it was survival.”

As a child she felt herself “one of the outcasts. Much of my childhood was spent with an unabridged dictionary and a stack of National Geographics as my companions”. In her later teens and early twenties she put the questions of gender into the background and consciously chose to partner with another native person so as to not make life even more difficult for her children. “Because of racism, it was hard enough being native. Being half bred was somewhere I didn’t want my kids to be.”

Aiyyana says that “to be an Indian in the 20th century in North America is inherently political”. Through her parents she became involved in the civil rights politics of the 1960s, and then the conservative side of Native politics in the 70s where she was considered too radical. But she also wasn’t terribly trusted by the more militant sections of the red power movement because of those familial ties.

Prior to the 1970s, there were no class distinctions or economic distinctions in the native community in North America. It wasn’t until the funneling of government money into native communities to help solve some of the social programs began, that educational/ financial/class distinctions occurred. Young native people today think of these political structures as the norm. Just part of the way things are and have been. This situation is recent - and neither normal nor natural.

By the time Aiyyana began to deal with the question of gender at 40 years old she had a history of over 20 years of social activism based on race/cultural politics.

I certainly had a pretty good idea of what to expect [in transgressing gender]. For years, my politics had kept me on the periphery of a number of communities - white, left, Green, lesbian, and various factions of the Native community. Through my love of language, appreciation of writing and art, and my interest in the world, I recognized myself as a humanist very early in

life. Although I was caught up in the particularities of Indian politics as a matter of survival, I believe mine to be a much more humanistic global perspective as opposed to the predominant nationalistic tendencies of Indian politics in North America. So I knew what being an outcast was.

As she approached 40, Aiyana's family started to fall apart. Her partner of 12 years left after their relationship deteriorated, the four children (three from her partner and one that she brought to the marriage) were leaving home. And Aiyana's mother in law, who she describes as "more mother than my own" was very ill with cancer. During the last few months of her mother-in-law's life Aiyana was her constant care-giver.

The day she died I took her to the hospital and they were going to take her upstairs and she sent me home to get something for her. I was only gone about ten minutes and the phone rang. It was the hospital telling me she was gone. She had sent me away while she died. A few hours later that afternoon physical things started to happen. All this energy was coming up out the ground, down from the sky, passing through me. It was as if she cleaned away the rage, bitterness and confusion, taking it with her. I cut off my hair that day, in the traditional way of honouring her.

After the funeral Aiyana shaved off her (somewhat sparse) facial hair to "see who has been hiding behind this mask all these years" and while rinsing her face she looked into the mirror and heard a giggling girl's voice say "now you can wear make-up". "And that", Aiyana says, "was the beginning". After this epiphany-like experience, the next three years were a tumble of gender shifts from internal thoughts, to a state of male androgyny, to androgyny, to female androgyny, and then living full time as a woman. "By 1993 I cleared out my closet and said okay, this is where we are going" and she has followed that path since.

Aiyana decided to approach the Gender Clinic "because few of us who aspire to surgery can afford to do it on our own, and the Clinic is where we have to go to get approved". She knew from the start that while she fit the European definition of what a transsexual was, she feels it too limiting.

Not unlike colonialism in general, there has been a colonization of gender. In my research and my travels around the world and talking to Indigenous people I have come to term Indigenous perceptions of gender as gender beyond male and female. Generally speaking, the majority of Indigenous societies in the world hold these perceptions of gender in a larger context, and see many more possibilities of gender past male and female. And for me, this perspective has very much been at the heart of my transformation. During my transformation, I've had to reclaim and recreate a language to describe this. I refer to myself as a "transformed woman who loves women". I am not a transsexual. And I am not a dyke — many brown/black women who love women find that the European notion of what lesbianism is doesn't fit. We are women-loving-women.

In her choice of language, Aiyana also steers clear of the term "two-spirited", feeling that in its popular usage, it doesn't adequately capture the much broader concepts which it originally encompassed.

With the formation of Gay American Indians in the US at the end of the '70s, they began to make space to insert themselves into the larger struggle for gay and lesbian rights throughout the '80s. From the beginning, it was only concerned about being gay or lesbian, and Native. As in the larger society, trans folks were not considered part of the equation. The term 'two-spirited' was coined in the US in the late '80s, and coming into popular usage by the early '90s was synonymous with gay and lesbian Natives, with no further connotation. The whole other rich social and spiritual context associated with these positions in Indigenous societies were dropped by the wayside. And trans people had yet to be included.

There is a small handful who are beginning to change that. I believe in the traditional concept, these people whose gender was beyond that of male or female were among the keepers of the culture. We were seers, visionaries, medicine people, storytellers, shamen, and artists. In the

reclamation of our culture, I certainly have a vested interest in determining who we special people are seen as today.

Aiyyana hopes that these broader perspectives of gender may eventually find their way into European perceptions. To that end she recently published an article in an academic journal of lesbian and gay studies in an attempt to ensure that discussions about gender variance included an Indigenous sensibility of gender and voices of those who have transformed.

As Mao said, to know the pear is to eat the pear. Outside, detached information will not tell you what that thing is. Throughout much of the 70s and 80s, Canadians wanted to know who Indian people were. And the pattern is: first the outsiders wrote about us, then, after a few years of struggle, Native writers were able to publish our own words. This is the same. You need to hear from us, not about us, to really understand who we are. Coming out of that history I know that academia and ainstream society need to hear from us. So that was why I chose to write this paper." [The paper was published in "torquere: Journal of Canadian Gay & Lesbian Studies Association" in May 2001].

Aiyyana is a multi-media artist, a writer, a director, and a film-maker. She has been a professional artist since her late 30s. She has written about and performed her gender story over the last ten years. Throughout her career, she has received a number of Arts Council and Canada Council awards to pursue her work, including the prestigious John Hirsch Prize for emerging theatre directors in 1997.

Kimberly Nixon

Kimberly Nixon is a 43 year old transsexual and identifies as a heterosexual female. She underwent sex reassignment surgery 12 years ago and has lived as a woman for nineteen years. Kimberly is currently involved as the complainant in a human rights case against Vancouver Rape Relief as a result of her rejection from the organization's volunteer training session because of her status as a transsexual.

Kimberly has always identified as female. As a child of about four years, she remembers having a sense that her body didn't match her mind.

When I looked into the mirror, I didn't see what I expected to see and it created a lot of turmoil in my early life; I grew up as a girl in a boy's body. I couldn't be myself so there was a dichotomy. Most people whose gender matches their body don't spend every waking moment thinking about gender but when it doesn't match, then it's different.

As Kimberly grew up, she continued feeling that she was a female in the wrong body. From the time she was eight years old, she prayed when she went to sleep that things would be right when she woke up the next morning. When that didn't work, she thought she would one day live the way she wanted anyway.

When I was about 11, I remember seeing Dr. Renee Richards on TV and she had had the surgery. It was then that I learned I wasn't alone and that gave me hope because I identified with her. I figured if she could live her life that way, then it was possible for me. At 18, I moved out of my family's house, still hoping.

Several years after moving from her family home, Kimberly made the decision to go ahead and pursue the surgery.

For me, it was a painful decision but I knew to be myself, I had to do something even though it might mean sacrificing my relationship with my friends, my family, and my career. Telling my dad was the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life. Many people might feel it's wrong and have guilt about it but luckily for me, I had such a strong sense of self that I didn't feel guilt or shame. It's just a variation of nature. It's not about politics and it's not about sex. It's about gender identity and that is the most basic thing.

Kimberly worked in a number of different careers both when she "had to appear male" and when she became a woman. She often experienced discrimination when people became aware that she was transsexual. Kimberly became interested in working with women who have been physically, emotionally and/or sexually abused as a result of her own experience in an abusive relationship and the help she received from Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS).

Because I was transsexual and had experienced so much discrimination, when I finally met someone, it was like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I thought it was all that I had wanted because I could be myself in this relationship. Unfortunately, I wasn't treated well and that was really hard for me because I hadn't expected to be treated that way by someone who said he loved me.

Kimberly describes the relationship as primarily emotionally abusive but when it escalated to physical abuse, she tried to get the courage to leave.

I had left before for 6 months but went back because I thought he loved me and I was trying to make the best of a bad situation, as many do. I also loved this person and kept thinking that I could do something to make it better but I couldn't. One day I was having lunch with a girlfriend from work and was telling her about the assaults. As we got up to leave, another woman

approached us and told us she had overheard our conversation and handed me a note saying that there was support out there for what I was going through and it had the BWSS number on it. I was embarrassed and didn't do anything about it for a month but then when the abuse in my relationship began to escalate again, I called Battered Women's Support Services. When I talked to the woman on the phone, I explained my situation and told her that I was transsexual and thought I would get hung up on because of it. But she treated me like any other woman she would have talked to that night. I had been afraid I'd not be believed but I was. And it was critical at the time because I wanted the hurt to stop and I found the courage to reach out. It may have saved a life.

Kimberly began to see a counsellor at Battered Women's Support Services and eventually got the courage to attend a support group.

Someone in crisis like I was is very afraid of getting hurt again. I worried that I might affect some of the women by my presence. I need not have worried. People don't often give women enough credit for their own strength, courage and survival, because in the two and a half years I attended the support groups with between 14 and 24 women in the group each week, there was never an issue. Some people might say that they were being silenced by my presence but I know from my experience that women in that situation are often so focused on their own lives and how they're going to manage to get through the next day and how to deal with things like custody, and access, often threats of violence, that they didn't even think about me.

Kimberly's experience at Battered Women's Support Services was so positive that, like many women, she wanted to do support work for others in similar situations.

It meant so much that those women were there for me that I wanted to give back and I learned so much during that time. I realized how necessary these organizations are. Often the support you receive allows you to take charge of your own life, thanks to information, referrals and support which allow women to empower themselves.

In 1995, Kimberly saw that Vancouver Rape Relief (RR) was advertising for volunteers. Kimberly had a telephone interview and then a personal interview with 8 other women and finally was invited to join the training group. Part way through the first training session, one of the trainers took Kimberly aside and questioned her gender. She then told Kimberly she wasn't welcome and asked her to leave. A Human Rights case arose out of that incident, which is still pending.

Since that time, Kimberly has trained as a volunteer at Battered Women's Support Services, Peggy's Place and the Kettle Friendship Society. Kimberly believes that the rejection from Rape Relief is based on fear and stereotyping.

Violence is most often committed by men against women and is systemic, which is why there's Rape Relief, Battered Women's Support Services, Women Against Violence Against Women, and 1,100 calls a month on the crisis line at BWSS. Women need a safe place to heal from violence and women are their own best experts on their experience. Women deserve to have their history respected and because of the perception that I might once have been male (it hurts to say that because I never identified as one), some groups think that gives them reason to exclude trans women because we might once have had privilege. But if that were the case, I would have given that up in a heartbeat because I never identified with being a male.

They create a double standard when they say you must be a "woman born woman". But I don't believe that's fair or true to our experience. Growing up as a girl in a boy's body, is very different from growing up as a boy. I do have extensive history as a woman but it's minimized [in court by RR] and I'm given absolutely no credit whatsoever. It wouldn't have mattered if it was 19 years (which it has been) or 28 years or 36 years or if I had just decided to change today.

I filed the complaint after thinking back to the time I was in crisis and had phoned BWSS. I knew then that I couldn't bear the hurt any longer but I couldn't end my life despite how I felt. I just needed some kindness and support and acceptance. I know that it takes so much strength and courage to make that call and reach out. I had a friend who had a history of difficult relationships and was fed up with how she had been treated in those relationships. She wasn't able to reach out and she jumped off the Granville Bridge in November, 2000. She was transgendered and I think it's really crucial that if a transgendered woman gets the courage to call an organization like Rape Relief, she gets the support as any other woman would if appropriate for the services. I'm not doing this for myself. I'm doing it for other trans women. I've heard some organizations say they won't support transgendered women but they'll treat them like any man who might call— they'll talk to them on the phone but they won't provide services. But I think a transgendered woman's life is as valuable as any other woman's life. They should be offered services as any other woman is. They should be screened as any other woman.

Some people want to politicize something that is innocent and is nothing more than basic survival. They do not have the right to decide who is a woman and who is not. Women in abusive relationships often have their sense of self eroded away by the abusive partner. The effects of denying someone's gender identity feels the same.

Joe

Joe is 42. He has been transitioning for 3 years and identifies as a heterosexual man born in the wrong body. He is African Canadian and grew up in Montreal.

From as early as Joe can remember he always knew he was male.

I always figured I was a man, ever since I was a little kid. I always socialized with my brother and his friends. I played all the rough and tumble guy games, like baseball, sports and playing with toy guns. When I was 12 years old, my family was in England and I saw a two-page newspaper article about an FtM [female-to-male transsexual]. They had pictures of him before as a woman and now as a man, and he looked so much happier after! And I thought, that's me! But in 1971 who are you going to talk to about feeling like a man in a woman's body?

Puberty was a very difficult time because of the pressure to act and dress like a girl.

When I was 13, my brother said I couldn't hang around with him and his friends anymore and that really depressed me because I didn't understand why. And my mother wanted me to dress up and put on make up. She wanted me to marry and have children. And she wanted me to go into nursing like she did, which in the 70s that was predominantly a female profession and I didn't want anything to do with female jobs.

When I got my first period I was devastated and when the breasts came in it was even harder. I hated it. People would say "this means you are going to have a baby" and I thought "no way!". When I was twenty I wanted to have a hysterectomy but the doctor wouldn't do it because he was afraid I'd sue him later. I got a prescription for really bad cramps, but I was a walking zombie every time my period came around from the age of 13 until I had my first testosterone shot. When I stopped having my period it was a godsend — like the first time I could actually live.

Joe kept to himself in high school and didn't tell anyone about his desire to be a man until he was twenty years old and in university. At that point, he confided in a lesbian friend but she strongly discouraged him from doing anything about it.

She said “how are you going to get a woman if you become a man? Straight women won’t like you and lesbians certainly won’t want to go out with you. You’d just wind up a gay man.” So I stayed silent about it and she introduced me to the lesbian community. But I just didn’t relate to lesbians — I never felt I belonged there. I hung around with them because at least I could explore that aspect of myself.

After university, Joe pursued a successful career in the military as an airplane technician.

From the time I was six, I wanted to go into the military. I was in the militia first for three years, which paid my way through university. Then I joined full-time and was there for about five years. I was fascinated with planes and wanted to be a pilot from the time I was eighteen. Unfortunately they weren’t letting women be pilots then, which really upset me. Instead I became an airplane technician. The last place I was stationed was Cold Lake Alberta working with CF 18s.

I met lesbians in the military. But at that time there were these big witch-hunts and purges to get lesbians out of the service, which was awful. You’d hear about them having a big purge at the Halifax base, or up in Alberta. When I was moved to Kingston, someone told me it was a good thing I hadn’t come the year before because they had a big purge. After a while I just got tired of keeping these secrets. And I got tired of the limits to what women could do. So I left the military in 1988.

During his time in the military Joe saw a personal ad from an FtM who was trying to meet women and Joe contacted him and talked to him about being an FtM. He learned about the process of taking hormones and what surgeries were available but at that time he decided his military career was more important. After leaving the military he moved to Vancouver.

I came to Vancouver to change my life completely. I had no idea how to find people who had changed their gender. I had no idea about the Gender Clinic. My first issues were survival because I had no friends or family or job. So I started looking for a job and trying to get myself together. I decided I didn’t want to pursue a career as an airplane technician because to me, working on the CF18 was the best plane in the military and working at the airport on transport planes would be like going from working on a Lamborghini to working on a Pinto.

Instead I wanted to do community work. So I volunteered at the Canadian Mental Health Association and at Rape Relief’s transition home (which is ironic to me now considering the Human Rights complaint against Rape Relief). This was in 1989. I found all the women there fascinating and they helped me tremendously when I was going through a life-skills training course. I don’t know how to explain it but it was a great experience for me and I feel as if I owe them a lot when it comes to my independence and seeing the world differently. So I was quite shocked when I heard that they would not allow Kimberly Nixon to take the training course and volunteer. I had never talked to any of them about my gender issues at that time and I realize that if I had it might have been a different story. But it was devastating to go to the tribunal hearing and listen to some of the people on the witness stand. I was just horrified that they had these opinions about trans people that I never knew about. It shocked me to hear these opinions about trans people coming from an organization that is supposed to be very leftist and radical. And one that had really helped me. I know I need some closure on this.

Joe did not find that his relationships offered much support for his feelings about being a man.

I met someone in 1989 and we were together over eight years. I talked to her about my feelings about being a man but she wasn’t thrilled about it, so once again I put it on the back burner. Every woman I was with, even in the military, didn’t want to hear about my being a man, or said they would leave me if I did anything about it. So I kept it to myself.

When that last relationship ended in 1998, Joe decided it was an opportunity to explore his masculinity. A psychologist told him about the Gender Clinic, which was a moment of profound realization for Joe. He's been at the Clinic since early 1999, started hormones, and is scheduled for a surgical consultation in a few months.

I had been warned about changes from being on testosterone. But it really shocked me that it made me see the whole world differently. Now I understand men's fascination with sports and speed and why they are so readily angry, and how they look at women. At the Clinic they told me I'd be like an adolescent guy trying to go after girls in high school, and I do appreciate women in a different way. But I'm sure it will eventually calm down.

Joe tried a number of different jobs before settling on the job he has now.

I had been living in Victoria for two years. In that time I took a four month legal course and worked in a law firm for about 9 and a half months where I learned a lot about legal research and commercial and corporate law. Then I worked on a temporary basis with different government agencies like legal services branch. When I moved back to Vancouver I had a number of jobs before I found one in the service industry. I have been working with the same company since 1993.

Joe started living full time as a man in 1999.

First, I gradually changed my appearance at work and did it in such a way that people didn't really comment on it. Then I got on the hormones. One year later I was diagnosed with type-1 diabetes and my whole world changed because of that. In order to minimize my stress, I decided to tell my company I was transitioning so I went to the union and they phoned head office and sent them documentation from the Clinic and I gave them a pamphlet made by one corporation to prepare other corporations where people were transitioning on the job. But head office said they weren't going to treat me as a guy until I had surgery. And then last week I had a performance review and the general manager asked me how I would like to be addressed. I said that since I was transitioning I would like to be addressed as sir, and he said okay, and he let everyone know. And he said if there was any harassment going on please let him know. It was great. I just kept my mouth shut about head office. I guess they don't communicate with their managers!

Joe has been estranged from his family but last year he told his aunt about being FtM, and he told his mother before she died. Both appeared to understand. He hasn't told his father yet because it has "never seemed like the right time". Almost all of his friends have understood and have offered some support. But most of his support has come from other trans people, and from his internal spiritual beliefs.

I went to a couple of FtM support groups and I met people there and I knew I could get support. I learned a lot about the politics of the trans community — which was an eye opener. I learned about the Trans Alliance Society and the different organizations for both FtMs [female-to-male] and MtFs [male-to-female transsexuals] and I got on the computer and found a huge community there. I also get a lot of support from inside. I grew up in a very spiritual family so even when I came to Vancouver by myself I never felt alone. This is my journey and it's temporary, and I have friends and family on the other side who — like spirit guides — give me support.

I think that has really helped me especially with people who are uncomfortable with trans people. I just wish people could see us as ordinary people. We work. Most of us are taxpayers. Some of us are married. We're living in this community and contributing to it. There's nothing to be scared of. In many ways, there is nothing unique about us — we just want to live our lives. For me, it turned out my mind is that of a man and I was somehow born into the wrong body. Now I'm getting a chance to correct it.

Romham Padraig Gallacher

Romham is a 29 year old queer trans-guy who has been transitioning for almost four years. He describes himself as a “queer fat tranny gimp”. He has a disability derived from complications from two car accidents, and lives with Attention Deficit Disorder, chronic pain and arthritis, and walks with forearm crutches. Here is his story.

My identity has been moving around a lot over the last few years, but generally I define myself as a queer trans-guy. Sometimes I use FtM (female-to-male) and sometimes transgender. Mostly I use the term “queer”. It’s a broader term than FtM. It becomes the catch-all term (for me) for gender identity and sexual orientation. I never really fit in when I identified as a dyke, never called myself a lesbian, and now I wouldn’t call myself a gay man. My sexual, social stuff just doesn’t fit politically or socially.

I came out as queer when I was 22 and as trans when I was 25. I read *Transgender Warriors* by Leslie Feinberg and it had a lot of resonance for me. I feel like a guy, but the term transsexual is a medical/psychiatric term because it defines someone who is, wants to, or should undergo surgery, and I’m not certain where I fit in there.

Romham began hormones in December of 1998.

I had to get myself on hormones basically by sneaking around. I’d been going to the Gender Clinic for a year, and seeing my “worker” there twice a month. They didn’t seem to understand my case, which is why I was there so much. Some of it was my disability, some of it was because I am fat and they wanted me to lose weight for all sorts of reasons. They wanted me to bind my breasts, which is very difficult for me with my disability, but they read that as not being “willing to bind”, so I didn’t present a good enough case for “passability” or willingness to try and pass. Which meant they were reluctant to approve hormones — although they had already diagnosed me as a “level 4 transsexual”.

I grew increasingly frustrated with the whole process, but I knew that what I wanted — what would keep me alive at that point — was testosterone. So I went to this doctor, made up a bit of a story and managed to get some testosterone. A few months later she found out I wasn’t really approved for it by the Clinic and she was persuaded by them to take me off. Which was really awful. I had been getting shots every two weeks, had been feeling great and was seeing some of the effects. Immediately I was back in a pretty horrible place emotionally and physically. With support from a friend, I went to a walk-in clinic and, since I had the vial already, they gave me the injections. I’ve seen a doctor every two weeks since, and I’m very happy with the testosterone, which I knew I would be.

Romham notes that the issue of surgery can be a difficult one for FtMs since a full sex- reassignment is presently not funded by MSP (the Medical Services Plan) for female-to-male transsexuals, while it is for male-to-female. For example, the approved surgeries include a hysterectomy and a mastectomy, which are funded. But phalloplasty (the construction of a phallus) isn’t covered at all and has mixed results, and metoidioplasty (constructing a phallus out of the clitoris) also isn’t covered, although it is generally successful.

I recently got approval for the mastectomy, hysterectomy and removing the ovaries, which took a long long time. Now I’m trying to figure out what to do. I don’t want a mastectomy because it won’t leave me with the body that fits me. I’m a fat boy, and getting fatter, and fat boys have boobs. But when I went in for my first consultation with the surgeon I was sitting there in a big fluffy terry robe, with my boobs exposed and she said “oh, we’ll just get rid of those”. I had all these questions written down to ask her and they all just disappeared because I was so stunned. I wanted to say “No you won’t. You’ll get rid of some of it, but not all of it!”. But for

that surgeon a breast reduction wasn't an option because all of the guys she had seen up until then — that's what they wanted. They all wanted flat chests through mastectomies.

And at that moment I realized that I wanted a reduction, not a mastectomy. I felt really destroyed inside and I had to remind myself that I could do this and just had to find someone who would respect that and do it. And as soon as I reminded myself of that I was back feeling really good about it, and set out to do something about it. And as it turned out, that surgeon could do it, just no trans guy had asked her before.

Romham feels that he would be a lot happier with a reduction because it would allow him to have some choices. Binding is painful, exacerbates his disability, and since he has large breasts it often doesn't work. He received no assistance from the Gender Clinic on how to bind safely, but had a lot of pressure from them to bind.

Getting a reduction means not having to bind or be confined physically or emotionally. But I'm just sad I have to do that in order to walk down the street and be safe. It feels like a real invasion. It's not about being taken as a guy, 'cause I am a guy and don't feel like I have to pass 'cause I'm a guy whether people respect that or see it. I'm just tired of fighting so bad.

Romham had no early signs that he was trans. When he was in San Francisco, he met someone who was transitioning, and had a body like his. Then while reading Transgendered Warriors he started to remember things from growing up and how he had denied feelings when he was young.

I felt like I was a boy until I started bleeding. Up until then I was allowed to act like a boy, although that's not what it was called, and feel really lucky that I was able to do that. (If I had been born a boy it wouldn't have been as easy to have explored girl stuff). I was allowed to, and in fact expected to, be tough, to fight with the boys and all of that.

When I came out as queer I remember thinking I'd been queer my entire life. I remember as young as eight having crushes on my mom's friends. I was called lesbo in school. Before coming out as queer I never had a sense that I could be happy. No one ever said that it would be okay, that maybe I could be happy, and there would be people in my life, that it wouldn't always be crap. I lost friends but got immersed in the queer community, was active, in addition to other political work, and it was a great time in many ways.

When I started coming out as trans the reaction was mixed. Some friends have stuck around, but some haven't and don't accept it. It's probably the scariest thing I've ever done, to come out as trans and open myself up to the strong feelings of some in the community. It's been very painful. But when I read Transgendered Warriors, I thought that maybe in fact I did exist. Before that there was no future, there was something really wrong: there was nothing.

Romham has noticed that his sexual orientation has shifted during his transition.

Since I began "transitioning" I now find myself attracted to men as well. I'm a queer boy, but still trying to reconcile a lot of hurt.

Romham has been involved with the Women/Trans Dialogue since it began in 2000. He doesn't believe that the lack of support for trans people (for example by some feminist groups not providing services or access to trans people) is just about a lack of information.

It's condescending to say that if people just had enough information they'd "understand". I'd find that condescending. I'd have been irritated if someone told me it was just that I didn't have enough information. Because I went out of my way to get as much info as I could. Also, it implies that with this magical information, folks will just "get it" somehow. And I don't think it's that simple. If it was that easy, we wouldn't still be bitching about it. And really, some of the

people who have access to tons of info on trans stuff are among the most anti-trans folks I've ever met.

I mean, there's always room for more info — it's better than none — and some folks are missing some pretty basic stuff; but it just gets to where trans folks have to constantly justify our existence & I think that's bullshit. We shouldn't have to prove we've "always existed" historically or that we've "always felt this way" (whatever way that is!) in order to take part in stuff. We all know who gets left out when we use these kinds of crap tests for admittance or acceptance or legitimacy; and it tends to be those of us who don't fit "neatly" that could really use the stuff we're denied.

I lived as a woman for the first twenty-five years of my life. It's been a struggle, but twenty years from now it'll still be a source of pride to me that I survived long enough to see the day I'd start getting my shit together. This stuff isn't easy for any of us. But I know I'm gonna walk into the local woman's health center for a pelvic exam, or a women's shelter in crisis, and these places need to be prepared for that because my boy identity doesn't take away from the fact of my woman's body, and this body doesn't erase or negate my identity. These groups or services or whatever, need to know that just cause they're a volunteer group or have certain folks they're dealing with doesn't mean they can continue to deny the reality that people identify in lots of ways, and more and more those identities can't be neatly contained in specific bodies to scrutinize or boxes to check.

It's similar to the mentality that says "because the majority of our clients don't need wheelchair access, we don't need to change or update our information or thinking and put it into action: make your own space!" This stuff is disguised in "we don't have the funds/energy/time/etc.", but you find a way to at least open honest dialogue if there's a willingness to try. That doesn't cost anything. But the cost of not doing anything or of actively fighting it, brings way more sadness and hurt than there needs to be.

Jewel

Jewel is 51 years old and identifies as a lesbian. She has been “a gender-variant activist” for the past 10 years.

Jewel’s earliest memories of wanting to be a girl are from when she was four years old.

I knew I was different, but of course I didn’t have a word for it. Although people referred to me as a young boy, and I certainly saw myself in the world as a young boy, I also had this conflicting feeling and identity of being a girl.

Jewel’s clearest cross-gendered incident, as a child, is when she asked permission from her grandmother to play dress up in her grandmother’s closet. Though being allowed to play, she knew better than to tell her parents or let on about her girl-feelings.

I had my first major gender-identity crisis on my 16th birthday. I’ll never forget how I couldn’t stop crying. I knew I had to make a decision, right there and then, to either tell someone about my desire to be a woman or promise myself that I would go on to be the best man I could - a superman. I chose the latter thinking it was the right thing to do — the most achievable. And, I wanted to make my parents proud.

Jewel has had three common law relationships prior to transitioning at age 41.

What is interesting for me is that sexually I have always been attracted to women. I’ve never been attracted to men. The thought of being attracted to a man is inconceivable, almost homophobic.

Throughout her heterosexual relationships Jewel could not successfully purge a secret obsession with cross-dressing, which created a sense of self-loathing, though she tried endless times to gain control of her behaviour.

Between the ages 19 - 38 I grew a beard to not only to project an image of maleness but to protect myself from myself. However, in 1982, I shaved off my beard and dressed as a woman for a Halloween Party. That was really significant for me because removing my beard made me feel very vulnerable and risked having “my truth” found out. In private, my beard did not interfere with my cross-dressing or feelings of feminine identity because I looked right past it; I could look in the mirror and not even see the beard.

Her two children, both adults today, come from Jewel’s first common-law relationship. Though her cross-gender identity did not directly have an impact on this relationship, her spouse and children left after seven years. It was during Jewel’s second marital relationship that she made her greatest effort to purge her cross-dressing. Regrettably, her behaviour re-surfaced and she eventually told her spouse, which resulted in the relationship ending. During her third common-law relationship she decided to be up front about her cross-dressing from the beginning.

I was cross-dressing a lot by now, almost nightly. And my spouse and I were watching TV one day and saw some transsexuals on Geraldo. Suddenly, I came to understand that maybe I was a transsexual, not a cross-dresser. Prior to that program, I had been in such deep denial that I had never heard of the term transsexual.

A few months later Jewel shaved her legs for the first time and simultaneously began to develop asthma.

I went from having mild to severe asthma quickly and I was hospitalized for a week and on oxygen. A few months later I was back in the hospital. It was during this second hospital stay that I verbalized for the very first time, telling my spouse that I needed to do something about

my desire to be a woman. And then, like a miracle, I put aside my pills and my inhaler and walked out of the hospital the next day — the asthma was gone. It has never returned.

It would take another seven months, but in March of 1991, Jewel was diagnosed at the Gender Clinic as transsexual.

On Sept. 3, 1991, I began my transition living as a woman, leaving behind everything: my children, my spouse, my business, my home — everything. Though my spouse and I had originally talked about us living together as lesbians, she eventually came to telling me: “I can’t do it. I’m not a lesbian. I need man in my life.” Though we still remain good friends, we have each moved on with our separate lives.

Telling her daughters was the biggest and most painful hurdle for Jewel. After first telling the mother of her children, Jewel and her partner decided to tell the girls while on vacation, two weeks before she moved. They were aged 14 and 11 at the time.

I told them I was going to move away to Vancouver and I was going to live my life as a woman. It was horrible. My eldest daughter became angry immediately and ran off in tears into the woods. Had my spouse not gone after her she may have never come back. She has remained angry for 10 years now and we are estranged. My youngest daughter, at the time of me telling her, appeared undisturbed by the news. This is not to say she hasn’t been affected because as hard as she has tried to be strong, to be understanding and accepting, she has suffered. Though we have remained connected for all these years, it has not been easy for her to overcome the pressures of “family issues”.

Jewel’s parents and siblings have remained supportive from the moment she told them. When she told her parents that she had something really important to tell them, they were relieved to learn that she wasn’t dying of cancer or AIDS. Jewel remembers going shopping at Eaton’s with her parents a few months after telling them.

My mom and I were popping in and out of the changing room trying on different outfits and my dad was sitting there in the chair saying what he liked and didn’t like. It was my first rite of passage — shopping for women’s clothes with my mom and dad. And that was followed by my mom and I having to pee, we sat in cubicles next to each other — that was my second rite of passage.

But the first year of transition was more challenging than Jewel had imagined.

I was so naive. That which had seemed so do-able became the unimaginable. I had lost almost everything that was dear to me, plus I couldn’t find a job. I had assumed my work history and skill set would serve me well, but I failed time after time to secure a job. I couldn’t even get a job pumping gas. I either was rejected without an explanation or I was told I was over qualified. Within seven months I had exhausted all my savings and ended up on welfare.

But I was resigned to being employed. By combining my enterprising spirit and knowledge of how “the system” works, I managed to re-establish my career by designing and implementing a public interest research project addressing trans employability issues. After three years of on-again off-again short-term government contracts, I started a fee-for-service business that has continued to evolve and prosper for these past six years.

Jewel regrets how difficult her transition has been on her daughters.

My children were so negatively impacted, both emotionally and financially. I had taken what I had thought to be sound steps in the process of providing for my children, but everything seemed to fail. It was as if we were separated by a wall of social hate and mistrust, and powerlessness. Had we lived closer we may have found a more supportive network. Just think

if we lived in a world where it would have been “Wow -your dad’s one of those? Amazing!”. But instead they felt so ashamed and fearful. They had their fears re-enforced with people saying I was crazy and irresponsible, etc. My kids had to cope as best they could in a very homophobic, transphobic world. With the knowledge and experience I have today as a social activist, I wouldn’t ever let that happen to them again.

Jewel’s present relationship began nine months after sex reassignment surgery. Her partner (female) identifies as bisexual.

It was the classic bells and whistles, love/intrigue at first sight. Within a few months we risked being intimate, which led to having sex. But before we had sex, I told her I was “gender dysphoric”, to which she replied, “Oh, you’re in transition”. It wouldn’t be for another month or so — of hot passionate sex — that I found myself using the term transsexual to describe myself. This surprised her. “You’re transsexual?”. She had no idea! She had assumed that being gender dysphoric and “in transition” was about changing from heterosexual to lesbian. She had no idea I used to be a man. Here I thought I was being open and yet it was if we were talking different languages!

Recently, Jewel’s gender identity shifted, again.

I no longer focus on being transsexual. I consider myself gender-variant. It’s a relatively new concept for me to use. I am moving away from the trans, transsexual, transgendered, gender binary mindset. The term transsexual is tied to sex reassignment surgery, which is tied to organizing the world by our genitals. I am consciously distancing myself from the stereotypical gender preconceptions I came to rely on and instead I have come to see my diversity and fluidity as being more important. At the beginning of my transition I labeled myself a “lipstick lesbian”, but today I have taken on more of a “butch dyke” persona. It feels good. Though there are those trans people who need the stability offered by the rigid gender binary, I’ve moved on.

For Jewel the future lies in a culture that will be more open-ended about gender identity.

I want to contribute to a social reconstructing of gender, where four year olds are able to talk freely about their gender feelings, a world where all forms of cross-dressing is accepted, and encouraged if need be. I want to see a society where pressures to conform are minimized, such as the assumption that sex reassignment surgery is necessary. I envision a change in attitudes and expectations that will view individualism and gender-variance as synonymous. Whether it be 20 or 200 years, I trust that one day we will de-genderize people.

And, I see feminism and trans issues as being connected. The trans movement is an extension of the feminist movement — it’s the next step in feminism in the sense that it is further breaking down gender barriers. It is about gender equity and making things more balanced, mixing it all up so that “the different” blends into “the other”.

I understand the anxiety some people feel around this issue. I understood how reconstructing gender may be foreign or scary to those who only know it as a stable force in our society. However, I have also come to appreciate that there are many other changes taking place to a whole range of social institutions and values once deemed sacred. And, as we are slowly beginning to see an attitudinal shift taking place around issues of racism, ableism, sexism, I believe we will also instinctively come to embrace gender diversity and fluidity as being something that is powerful and humanly good.

Joshua Mira Goldberg

Joshua is 30 years old, Jewish, and identifies as a gay transman. He started transitioning about four and a half years ago. Since that time he has co-founded three trans organizations and assisted in numerous others.

This whole gender identification stuff drives me crazy. I usually say I'm a transman because that's the closest word that people understand, but transgendered seems to encompass the most truth both about my historical experience and how I present in the world now.

I was born female. I went through various processes to change my body, and as a result of both hormones and surgery I am (for the most part) perceived as a man. I have some perspectives of having lived as a woman for the first 25 years of my life, and being a very active feminist; in the last couple of years I have the additional perspective of being perceived as a man and participating to some degree in men's communities.

I still cross-dress and wear "women's clothing". I don't wear it to work because there is only so much harassment one wants to deal with. But if I had my druthers I would wear women's clothing. I think it's more comfortable and there are better colors. And for me as a gay man, there are aspects of gender transgression in my sexuality that aren't necessarily about the neatly separated categories of gender and sexuality.

I had no idea even five years ago that I would go through this. It was very sudden for me. I was a very feminine looking female. I had long hair, wore skirts, was never even remotely masculine. I had recurring gynecological problems that led me to have cysts removed from my ovaries. I woke up from that surgery feeling something had changed beyond the physical level. Then I cut off all my hair and I started wearing pants and big shirts that concealed my breasts. I don't know if it was a massive hormone change or what, but it seems that overnight I became transgendered.

So for about a year I tried to be more butch in appearance, but I was too much of a sissy to be butch. And I wasn't comfortable being a masculine woman. And I wasn't a lesbian — I was gay. I knew I was queer, but having sex with men while I was female would make me heterosexual. That wasn't right. So I kept trying to be with women, because that was "queer", but it didn't work out and I couldn't understand why.

Reading the book *Stone Butch Blues* was really important in so many ways. I decided fairly impulsively this was what I needed to do. Before that I was quite transphobic. I had a friend who was born male who was a cross-dresser and was thinking about sex-reassignment, and I was really lousy around that. I put it all in feminist political terms: that he was denying he was a man, etc. I didn't have any sense that I would go through this process of becoming a man.

I found the intersection of being Jewish and trans really interesting. When I was thinking about how to be masculine I looked at the men I respected in my life who are not masculine by WASP standards. Masculinity was more about the brain and intellectual prowess than muscular power. Then I read an article that talked about Jewish masculinity and I thought, oh my god, that's it!. I'm just Jewish. I do masculinity in a Jewish way!

Before I transitioned, I had a particular understanding of gender that was based on growing up in a very strongly feminist household, my own life experience, and from women's studies at university. I had both a community and an academic perspective of how gender works — that there are two genders, and one oppresses the other. Now I realize that analysis is about 20 years out of date. What I have learned through being transgendered is that gender works in many ways. Sexism is one way

that it works — true. But there are also all these other layers of how it works.

I used to believe really strongly in transition houses. I believed there was a need for women to have access to a space where there were no men. But transition houses aren't actually for all women. They are not for anyone who is ill, or for seniors or people with disabilities who can't get up the stairs. They are certainly not culturally diverse. And although they may say they are open to lesbians, the way they look at violence is in a heterosexual way. So, they are for a particular kind of women. And realizing that got me thinking. If they really are for only a particular kind of woman, then what am I defending about women-only space? I think women-only space meets the needs of some women, no question. And I would still fight for those women to have access to what they need.

But I think many women don't want women-only space, or at least not the women-only space that currently exists. Some women might not feel safe in a women-only space because they have been abused by women, or might feel safer being around men from their cultural community than around women who don't understand or respect their cultural practices. Or they might want their male children with them past the age where that is deemed okay. There're lots of different kinds of needs and all of those needs are important and not one of them should be at the expense of others.

There is this whole focus around trans women and access to women's services that I find unnerving. I find it sad that non-trans women are so upset about it. I never believe that principles should come before people. And I really think the issues are a lot broader than that for us trans people. I'd like to see the debate be about what are the services that trans people need ("trans" encompassing a broad diversity) and what are some of the ways those services could be provided? I think the important thing is to provide services based on need.

Some trans women want to go into women-only space because they want to be with other women. Many trans women are lesbians; many of them want to learn about feminism and want to be a woman who cares about and does something for other women. So why not make their access be about behaviour instead of their bodies?

I worked at street outreach services for a number of years, and you got to be in the space if you weren't causing problems for other people. That's pretty simple. But it doesn't seem to be clear in many cases. I've seen some instances where MtFs who are following the rules of a shelter get kicked out just because they are trans. It's not open discrimination, it's supposedly about their behaviour, but there's a double standard for trans and non-trans women. In one case an MtF was asking some very personal questions that staff didn't want to answer. Rather than setting limits about what they were willing to talk about, they said she was making them uncomfortable and told her to leave. The issues are pretty clear: do you have policies around behaviour, and do you apply them equally or not? If you don't, then it's about transphobia.

I often hear women's groups who don't want to be inclusive say, "Well, we support you going off and creating your own organizations", and I keep thinking, half the population is women and you have trouble organizing. How on earth is 1% of the population supposed to organize? It's not going to happen. Women's organizations should know how hard that is.

Getting back to what the needs are, there are a number of really important health issues for trans people. For example, there is a high incidence of gynecological disease in FtMs (it's not understood why) and there's nowhere for us to go. Finding a doctor who will even examine us is really hard. Who will do a breast exam for an FtM or teach them how? Who will do a prostate exam for an MtF? So many of us have body parts that need attention but it's hard when you have strong emotional feelings about those body parts. It's even harder when doctors just refuse to deal with them. One doctor refused to examine me in the emergency room, saying that I needed to see my own doctor. Another didn't want to touch me, and then started asking me if I had had genital surgery, even though what I was in for had nothing to do with my genitals. I have many of these stories.

For FtMs it's also difficult in women's communities. Some FtMs who transitioned wanted to stay in those communities but got unceremoniously booted out. Some are experiencing being isolated from the women's communities they worked hard to create. And others are quite comfortable with separating themselves. Some stay in it as butches (not doing any physical changes).

I'm not sure where I stand on FtMs in women's spaces. For trans women, I feel it's straightforward: they are women, they have a right to access women's stuff. Whether FtMs do or not, I'm not so sure... If we are at a stage of transition where we are clearly wanting to be perceived as male, I don't think you can have it both ways. But I still have questions to women who want to keep FtMs out. Why do they want us to leave? If we've fought with them for 20 years and they like the work we do, who cares how we look?

I have to admit that there seems to be some attraction at the moment to trying out being transgendered, that gender transgression is hip. Its sort of like gay and lesbian chic was. I'm a little too cynical to believe that Hollywood movies are about representing trans people – it's more like a freak show where our whole experience gets made into a commodity — but I wonder if that's part of what makes it attractive. It will be kind of interesting to see how many people who are transitioning now will have regrets a couple of years down the road.

I do have some regrets. I regret having chest surgery. The issue for me was never about how comfortable I was with my breasts. I felt fine with my breasts. I actually kind of liked them. But there's a big difference between how you feel about your own body and how you feel about the way other people perceive you. I think it's a valid reason to have chest surgery so you don't get killed. For me, that was an ongoing issue. I used to get the worst kind of fear walking around at night because people would yell and throw things at me. So, did I have chest surgery for me? No. Did I have it for them? Maybe. I don't know. There's no place to explore what are the reasons I want this, what are my doubts? If I have doubts does that mean I shouldn't transition? Not necessarily. Maybe you just always have doubt. Is it bad to have regret? Not necessarily. Maybe all kind of loss has regret.

You know, many trans people are really on the edge, have basic needs for housing, food and some support. Many trans people lose all their support from a very early age, and so many deal with such shame. I see trans people really struggling with relationships and it's often really hard for trans people to trust that they will be loved, and love themselves and really value who they are. I think trans people need some of the really basic things I remember learning from feminism. Like having self respect or dealing with abuse issues.

We all have a unique and precious story to tell, but we are like everyone else. People need to see us as part of the human family.

Linda

Linda is a 53 year old cross dresser who identifies as a heterosexual man when she is not dressing as Linda. She is separated, has two children, and is a member of the Cornbury Society, a support group and social club for heterosexual male cross-dressers.

Linda has been exploring her cross-dressing in a focused way for three years, after the deterioration of her marriage.

It has been a very interesting journey for me. Linda didn't emerge until I was 50 although she was in my mind for a long time. But for the last three years I've been able to really express myself and see where this will take me. Perhaps the worst thing that has happened to me was that maybe my confusion over gender or my lack of real "maleness" was responsible for the end of my marriage, which is a shame. But I guess it had to happen.

Linda had a normal and relatively happy childhood.

As a youngster, I was a mild person who didn't play competitive games and didn't like rough sports. I got along well with my family. I liked to talk to my sisters and my mother. My parents were pretty normal. My dad was a very nice person and a good father although a bit distant, as I think all fathers were in those days. But I have very fond memories of being given a lot of freedom and my parents were very easy-going with me. Linda remembers being intrigued by women's clothing early in life, but didn't really think her feelings were very unusual.

As a child I didn't really cross dress, although I remember being fascinated by the dressier things that women had, like my grandmother's gloves. I experimented a bit with my mother's things but not very much and I thought it was just normal curiosity. I was furtive about it and I don't think I was ever discovered. In my teens it probably became a little more of a fetish. But unlike other boys, I never felt much of a sexual drive in my adolescence. They could objectify women and I couldn't. I think my testosterone levels have never been high. I was a bit of a loner and I had acne and very bad eczema.

Linda met her wife when she was 34. They fell in love and were married seven months later. They were married for seventeen years, fifteen happily.

It was three years into our marriage, when our first child was still a baby, that I started to realize there was this other side of me. At that time, I had tried on the odd thing that she had thrown out, thinking it was just curiosity I had never completely dressed as a woman yet. But then one day, after she had left for work, and I was still at home I tried on this very attractive suede blouse that someone had given her that was too big for her. I looked in the mirror and it was a perfect fit and I thought it looked lovely on me.

And I immediately phoned her at work, without any warning, and I told her what I had done and that I enjoyed wearing it and could it (cross-dressing) be part of our marriage? There was a silence and then she said, "I'll talk to you later." When she came home she told me "I am not going to leave you over this — yet". But she didn't want to have anything to do with it. There was no dialogue. She thought I must be gay. I told her I wasn't gay. She asked if it was sexual, and to some extent it probably was. She couldn't figure it out. She was upset and it took her a long time to get over it. She made me promise not to touch anything of hers. And I kept that promise. And the whole thing subsided.

But Linda's interest in cross-dressing didn't. Eight years into the marriage her wife took the two kids to Disneyland and Linda saw the empty house as an opportunity to fully experiment.

I shaved my legs, I painted my nails, I tried on makeup. At that point I knew I was a cross-dresser. I knew I didn't want to become a woman, and I knew I wasn't gay. I enjoyed dressing as a form of expression. And I spent hours like that. There was some sexual component to it, but it was also something other than sexual. I felt some comfort and relief that I had actually found a way of expressing something I had been holding in for a long time.

When my wife came home from the holiday, I had an honest talk about it. But again she couldn't handle it. Which was a shame. So I hid it from her. And I started collecting small amounts of clothing of my own. But one day, she found a piece of my clothing and she blew up. We stopped sleeping together and shortly after, she asked me to leave. That was two years ago. My kids were 8 and 15 and they had no idea what was happening.

For Linda, it was like walking through a door into another room. She used the time living alone to read about cross-dressing and experiment more. During that time, she found the Cornbury Society, a Vancouver support group for heterosexual, male cross-dressers. It was named after a governor of New York in the early 1700s who is reputed to have engaged in cross-dressing behavior. The intention of the group is to reduce stress and guilt, and assist in gaining understanding for associates and loved ones. Many of the members are married.

I found the men there very nice, very understanding, thoughtful and intelligent. I enjoyed their company and I appreciated the sessions on guilt and talking about my feelings. Some of the people come there on their way to realizing they are transsexuals. After all, every person who transitions starts as a cross-dresser. But we also have members who just stay as cross-dressers and don't transition. It's very individual. And some members live full time as women and identify as transsexual, but have chosen to be non-operative in the sense that they are choosing that lifestyle and that way of looking but not interested in sex reassignment surgery. Or sometimes the Gender Clinic has judged them not suitable for surgery in which case it's very hard to get it done if you are not recommended.

After a while I went to the Gender Clinic and asked to be castrated. I just didn't want any more testosterone in my body. It was fairly vain, really. I didn't want to lose my hair. I didn't want to age in a typical male way. But they wouldn't do it. Instead they gave me spironolactone or Spiro which is a testosterone uptake inhibitor. This allows your body to be sensitive to your own estrogen. It had the effect I wanted and it also had the added bonus of improving my skin — the eczema and the acne just disappeared.

I have to admit it's unusual for a cross-dresser to take Spiro, usually only transsexuals do because it has some very serious side effects, like impotence, which most wouldn't want because there is often a sexual stimuli component to cross-dressing. But that's not the case with me. In some ways I'm more gender variant than most cross-dressers, although I'm not a transsexual. I do Spiro and hair removal. But I don't want to live as a woman all the time.

For Linda, cross-dressing is an expression of a femininity in her personality that is always present.

I don't want to have SRS (sex reassignment surgery) because I don't think I can live as a woman. I don't feel the urge to do that 24 hours a day. And frankly I feel an obligation to be a father to my children. If I transitioned I don't know how much of my family I would lose. It seems pretty common that you lose some of your family. I hope I wouldn't lose my sisters, because we are very close and I'd still be the same person inside. But I haven't told anyone about my cross-dressing. I'm planning to tell my kids when they are older, but I'm chicken about telling my sisters. I have this real fear of being treated differently even though I'm not a different person. That would just kill me, to think that someone would avoid me all of the sudden because I'm not perceived to be as wholesome as I was before. So I question whether it's wise to transition. Maybe at some point, but right now it's not what I want.

Now I go out as a woman sometimes but I work as a man. I have a pony tail and I've had electrolysis so I don't have much of a beard, and Spiro has made my features a little more feminine. And I'm happy with that. My masculinity never struck me as having any particular power. It never did me that much good. I know that sounds strange coming from someone who had a good marriage for 15 years, to say that my masculinity was a failure. But I feel as if I was just never male enough to really hold it together.

Linda feels more confident now than ever before in her life. She says that the last few years have been a time of exploration and a wonderful realization of who she is. She's not sure where this will all lead at this time, but she is enjoying finding out more about her experiences of gender variance.

You know, people don't come with instruction manuals. There's nothing that tells you to beware of feelings about your wife's clothes. I had to figure it all out myself and there was nobody who could tell me what was happening. So I finally have had a chance to let Linda emerge, and it feels great.

Dean Dubbick

Dean is a 45 year old First Nations trans-guy. He began transitioning five years ago, and has recently begun hormone treatments.

For Dean, wanting to be a boy was innate and present throughout his whole childhood.

I was three when I first figured out I was trans. Well, I didn't know the word for it, but I knew that I was going to grow up and be a boy. And I was going to marry my mom and look after my mom. My mom was Cree — First Nations. And she was raised in a residential school and suffered the typical abuse from residential school. And she went to the bars looking for someone to love her. And she would keep bringing home these guys who would abuse her and get her pregnant and then leave. So she had 13 kids with 12 different guys and had a really hard life. She died when she was 33 — she had TB and was an alcoholic.

Just after three years old I was put in foster care in Edmonton and raised by a number of different people. But I never lost track of wanting to be a guy. The home I spent the most time in was very straight, French Roman Catholic, and they were not impressed with this boy theory and they did everything possible to make me a little girl. They permed my hair and dressed me in little dresses but I would not give it up. They told me I was a tom-boy, that it was a stage and I'd grow out it. But I never did grow out of it.

The process of transitioning began when Dean was 41. At that time he had been very active in the lesbian and feminist communities and it was difficult to begin to acknowledge his gender identity.

It's been a difficult process. When I started identifying four years ago as trans, I was shut out. My whole life was centred around the women's community so I had to turn my back on my whole life. My partner at the time was telling me not to go on hormones. All my friends and support system were saying, "No don't do it, don't become a guy." Women in that community would say to me "I don't have guys in my life. I don't like guys. I don't want to be around guys. Yes we've been friends for the last 20 years, we got clean together, but if you're gong to be a guy, you're out the door." I was involved in working in a woman-only space. Going to an AA meeting that was a women-only meeting. The clubs I went to were women-only.

So I had to change my own world. But I am a guy. Not only am I a guy now, I always was a guy. When I marched in rallies carrying banners, and worked in women-only spaces, I've always been a guy. It seems as if they are telling me to just pretend I'm not a guy. How screwed up is that?

It's still tender and still hard. I just feel like ... I'm being rejected for being honest. And for speaking out about what people already knew anyway. This is the way I've always looked. I've never looked feminine. I've always traumatized women in women's washrooms because they thought I was a guy. To be rejected because I speak out about who I am inside doesn't feel right. If I'd stayed silent I wouldn't have been rejected. But because I choose to talk about it they now think I'm the enemy. And if now I'm the enemy, then I always was.

The medical aspects of transitioning were also very difficult. Dean had difficulty being approved and getting onto hormone therapy.

I signed up at the Gender Clinic (at VGH) and there was a year long waiting list. I'm not very patient so I found out that there was a doctor who was giving hormones to people. I decided I needed to do this for myself, even if it meant walking away from my life. I went to see him and he did all the blood work and told me my liver wasn't healthy enough to take hormones. I've

been clean and sober for eleven years, but for some reason my liver wasn't healthy. And I was so frustrated. I was thinking, "I'm a trans guy and I can't transition? I can't go on hormones?? How the hell am I going to live my life? As what?"

So I tried to find some middle ground in between "trans" and "dyke". I tried to find some place that was more comfortable so that in some parts of my life I was a guy and other parts I was a dyke. But there isn't any middle ground. It was crazy.

After a few years, I was having a really hard time around this stuff and I met this woman who encouraged me to go to the Clinic. And I was stressed all over again. Can I turn my whole life upside down again? Go through all of that again just to be told I couldn't transition? Should I let myself get my hopes up? But I decided I needed to know that I'd really tried my very best to resolve this. And if they rejected me I had two options. One was to try to find some testosterone on the black market, and the other one was suicide — because I knew I couldn't live like this anymore, in this in-between place. And it's really hard to admit that, because I'm a really spiritual person, and I carry a pipe and I run a sweat lodge and I do all this other stuff. But it was that intense.

Luckily for me, when I saw the specialist they said there was no problem with my liver — that it was fine. And now I wonder if earlier I had just not been ready. I had quit smoking. I had a new partner who was supportive of the transition because she's not a lesbian. (She identifies as bisexual and sees and loves the male side of me). The friends in my life now have accepted it and I've learned more about trans issues and I have more supports. So now I'm more ready. The only problem was my job. I was working at a women-only drug and alcohol place on the Downtown Eastside and they were getting uncomfortable with me. I had to quit my job. I'm just really lucky that we are financially in the place where we can afford for me not to work while I do this.

Dean began injecting testosterone 3 weeks prior to this interview. Having waited for four years to be approved he was very excited. A nurse friend showed him how to do the injections himself, which has been difficult to get used to.

The first shot felt like this big rush. I was so excited that after 45 years I was finally going to be a guy! Within two days I noticed the physical effects. My energy level was up. Then I noticed my sex drive hit the ceiling - and I have a really high sex drive to begin with! I noticed that my muscles are changing. And my attitudes are changing a bit. I got a little more sexist about women, which is funny because for years I was active to empower women. I decided to write a book and I started to journal about what it was like to do this transition and to record all the changes. And the last shot I did I took a picture of me injecting myself.

Dean has noticed a lot more interest in transitioning in the butch-dyke community.

Sometimes I think the line between butch-dyke and trans-guy is really thin. I used to go this bar on Main Street back in the days when there were butches with the rolled up sleeves and slicked back hair. They were really tough looking. I mean, they scared me. There were butch dykes and ultra fem, and you were one or the other. So for me, it was really clear. I'm a guy so I just blended in with the butches. And I think about it now and wonder just how many of those diesel dykes would be trans-guys today if they had had the chance. I bet the percentage would be really high.

While Dean has been active in the women's community, he never really felt as if he fit in.

I started in the women's community years ago. I was involved in the lesbian mothers defense fund back 20 some-odd years ago and I was involved in a bunch of different lesbian groups. I spoke at Take Back the Night Marches and spoke up for the women of the Downtown Eastside. But I never fit in. I was always in trouble because I was too masculine. I was told by

this one heavy duty feminist, “you are totally disgusting. You are a sexist pig, and I’d love to keep you locked in my bedroom closet”. Now there’s a mixed message.

And being a First Nations person, I find feminism in Vancouver is very elite. It’s for the white, educated, middle class women. It’s not for First Nations women or women of colour, or poor women in the Downtown Eastside.

Dean believes that women’s services and organizations should be inclusive, both to MtFs and FtMs.

Right now there is no access for us in women-only spaces. I could go out and get raped tomorrow but I’d have nowhere to go. I see this as totally wrong. I should be able to go to women’s spaces and women’s clubs. I have been socialized my whole life long as a female and I should have the choice of when I’m going to leave and not be told or pushed out or tossed out when somebody else decides. If the women’s community ostracizes FtMs, the community is going to get smaller.

I’ve experienced women’s oppression. I’ve been abused & raped and been out there on the streets demonstrating. I still have that shared experience. For the last 25 years, I’ve been working for women’s rights, to stop oppression, to stop violence against women, to make the world safer for women. I don’t plan on changing that. I don’t plan on becoming some male chauvinist who is going to beat up his wife every Friday night. I plan on still being a feminist — still fighting to make this world a safer place for women. And as someone who was born female, I would also like to make this place safer for me, as a trans guy. And I think that’s the hard part. I feel that by refusing access to me the last 25 years are getting thrown away by others. It’s a huge cost. Bigger than I thought it was going to be. And part of me doesn’t want to let go of my community.

I was thinking that I’m not the only one transitioning. Look at how many people are affected by this. My partner, my parents, my family, my family of friends. They are all transitioning as well. And then beyond that, there’s the neighbors who I talk to over the fences about the garden, and the old guy next door whose lawn I cut. And the woman at the supermarket who is not aware of my transitioning, but she’s going to see my changes and transition with me. The women where I buy coffee at work will watch it too. Look at how many people will be affected by one life transitioning. And I think the women’s community is transitioning too. It has to. Because in the end, we have to go with our hearts. We have to look at people and see them for what is in their hearts. And I trust the women’s community and my former lesbian community, will come to see this, and see us for who we are. Just people, with good hearts.

Myriam Joire

Myriam Joire is 32 years old and identifies as a queer trans woman. She believes she has always felt and always will feel androgynous.

Myriam grew up in what she calls a “good, secure, stable and happy family in a good, secure, stable neighbourhood”. Although she felt happy as a child, she now thinks that she denied a vital part of herself while trying to please her parents, and in particular, her father. Born in Cannes, France, Myriam came to Canada (London, Ontario) in 1986 as an exchange student when she was 17 years old, and chose to stay. She went to university, started a career, got married and in 1996, moved to Vancouver. It was shortly after that move that Myriam began to examine her gender identity and sexual orientation. She started transitioning in 1999.

Myriam remembers that as a child, she felt androgynous. She felt comfortable with knowing she was male but had difficulty during puberty when she could no longer be truly androgynous. Facial hair was the hardest thing for Myriam to deal with.

I hoped that if I didn't touch it, it wouldn't grow so much. I actually wore a little goatee before it was in style. I looked silly and people laughed at me and eventually, I had to bite the bullet and shave, which I realize, now, was very traumatic for me. I did what other people wanted me to do rather than listen to myself and what I wanted to do for me.

As a teenager, Myriam was sexually involved with both boys and girls. She believed her involvement was purely experimental and consequently didn't recognize her own bisexuality. She perceived herself to be heterosexual. This self-perception continued until after Myriam had moved to Canada and married.

When I moved to Canada, it was such a big change with so much to learn in terms of language and culture and eventually, my career, that I paid even less attention to my own sexuality than when I had lived in France.

In 1996, one year after having married, Myriam moved to Vancouver and for the first time, began to recognize that she was trans [She prefers the word “trans” to the words transgender and transsexual because it is a more generic term, representing transgressions of all aspects of sex and gender.].

When I got to Vancouver, my eyes were opened thanks to queer culture being all around me, and I realized that I'd always been queer. I remember suddenly thinking, “Oh my God! This is who I am!” At the time, my definition of queer was bisexual. I had been toying with it in my head for a long time but I didn't admit it till I came to Vancouver. Although it had been a part of me, I wasn't really in touch with it. I think this awareness was not only a consequence of the change of moving, but also as a result of my father's passing away two years before in 1994. That was a milestone for me. I realized that I was letting go of some of the control he had over me. It started out with my feeling I could control my career but then it expanded to everything.

Myriam separated from her wife in 1997 at which point she started to explore her sexuality and her gender. She looked for friends in the queer community and defined herself as bisexual.

I started cross-dressing for fun and my friends thought that was neat. I did more and more of it. So then I began to define myself as a “bi-boy cross dresser”. Eventually, no matter how much I cross-dressed and expressed my queerness, I just wasn't happy. I did a lot of thinking, a lot of talking to people, and a lot of reading on the internet and in books about why I wasn't happy. I was cross-dressing a lot and I wasn't upset about my sexuality but I was really depressed. Some of my friends suggested I might be trans and suggested hormones so I decided to research that. I decided to play “what if” and imagined what would happen and what the impact would be on my life if I did transition. I thought about it and thought about it and eventually, I came to a place where the list of “no's” was much shorter than the list of “yes”. One night, I

went to a party where I felt a queer and trans energy I'd never felt before and I knew that that was what I needed to do to be happy and to fit in.

Myriam found a physician in whom she could confide in and was referred to the Gender Clinic at Vancouver General Hospital. She started electrolysis there and shortly after, was approved for hormones. She "came out" to friends, family, and to people at work, and changed her name. She then made the decision to have surgery and is currently waiting for approval.

It's kind of interesting what happened to me in terms of my feelings about my physical body. As a boy, when I looked at myself, I never disliked what I saw. I saw a happy, good looking boy and that was fine but I didn't feel completely comfortable. When I started taking hormones, and I looked at myself, I really liked what I saw and I felt really comfortable. But after doing hormones for a while, I began to feel uncomfortable with my genitals and I'd never felt that before. We're raised with such stereotypical ideas of what male and female bodies should be that I think for me, I need to have my whole body match. Now I'm part way there I want the rest, even though in my ideals it shouldn't really matter.

People should be able to be the way they want. I really identify as trans. I was born a genetic male and I can't just give up or deny my past. To me, that's denying part of myself—who I am. And to me, being able to transition and coming to terms with my gender identity and my body is all about being myself and not denying that. In a way, changing gender is just another form of body modification. I have tattoos and piercings and I see transitioning as a kind of extreme form of that. I feel that my gender identity is in the middle. I see myself more as a butch, assertive woman who is in touch with feelings. I believe I use it for the betterment of women's rights and the community. I'm a trans-feminist.

As far as my sexual orientation goes, that's shifted. I was bisexual and did socialize to an extent with bisexual men. They're fine with my transitioning. I had thought that it was a possibility that my sexuality might shift and it has. I now identify as a dyke. I sometimes wonder why it is that I'm so accepted as a dyke in my community and I think it's that I'm being myself rather than trying to be a stereotypical woman. I don't think it's healthy for trans people to try to "pass" because in doing that, they're trying to be acknowledged by a system of oppression that defines who they are rather than defining that for themselves. I don't want to do that. I've always liked to be different and now I've exteriorized that in my appearance. I want to make people feel uncomfortable so that they have to think and learn and educate themselves. I want to remind them that there is an "other".