

Trapped In Blue

The Manuscript Papers

A memoir by Donna Rose

Dedication: To the power of the Human Spirit.

*It is better to be hated for what you are, than to be
loved for what you are not*

--Andre Gide

Preface

Main Entry: **1gen·der**

Pronunciation: 'jen-d&r

Function: *noun*

Etymology: Middle English *gendre*, from Middle French *genre, gendre*, from Latin *gener-, genus* birth, race, kind, gender

Date: 14th century

2 a : **SEX** <the feminine *gender*> **b** : the behavioral, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with a person's physical sex

I suppose there is really no easy way to say this. It is hard to work unnoticed into a conversation. I have struggled with all the options. Subtle? Blunt? Or maybe not even mention it at all? Trust me - I have tried them all.

Although I try to avoid generalizing, I have discovered a good rule of thumb: When in doubt, be direct. Leave no room for error. Tell it like it is. Just dive right in.

For the record: I am a transsexual woman. I share this about myself for the simple reason that it's integral to this story. I am, however, much more than that one simple fact about myself. None of us can be reduced to one single dimension of ourselves. Most people are more complicated than that- I know I am. I daresay that sharing this single fact about myself really doesn't tell you that much. That's what this story about.

There are those who will feel that there is no need to read further, as my admission alone is somehow an indictment of anything else I have to say. I urge you to continue to read because, as odd as this may sound, I suspect that you will be able to identify with much my story. This is not a story about sex or gender so much as it is a simple story of being human. It is a story of facing fears and obstacles. It is a story of becoming authentic despite the missteps and foibles. It is a celebration of the human spirit, and in that context it has relevance to everyone.

Despite outward initial appearances, this is far more than the sensational story of a journey across the gender line. Rather, I have come to realize that this seemingly odd trek is very much a typical human odyssey...only with a unique twist. In fact, it contains all the elements of the most incredible of Hollywood storylines. It deals with ordinary people facing extraordinary circumstances. It deals with the learning to face, and overcome, mind-numbing, excruciating fear. It deals with how we manage the pressures and obligation that each of us feels to live up to the expectations that others in our lives have for us, as well as the expectations we place upon ourselves.

This story depicts a struggle to overcome incredible adversity, and striving for goals that seem almost unattainable. It deals with the most base and dark of human emotions...fear, anger, guilt, frustration, and shame. At the same time, it deals with the highest of emotions...courage, honesty, integrity, and dignity. But after all is said and

done, the ultimate goal is universal and simple...searching for inner-peace thru self-discovery.

Mine is a story about questioning everything, and eventually accepting that many questions have no answers. More than that, though, it is the realization that at some point the question of *why* really becomes unimportant, and acceptance must happen if issues that defy logic, reason, and science are to be addressed. It is a story of learning to trust yourself, and that the things you know about yourself really are true. It is the story of learning to like yourself, accept yourself, and to become yourself despite unimaginably stifling pressures that would tell you and have you be otherwise. It is a story of indescribable loss, but also incredible gain. It is very much a true paradox, in that it is very much a real-life tragedy, but at the same time it is the story of the strength of human character when faced by incredible adversity. Put in such a context, this journey really does have meaning to each of us.

The source for much of my story, and I think the ingredient that provides the greatest impact, is the correspondences and journal entries that document my journey. During this tremendously difficult time, my writing was very much a source of therapy for me and an opportunity for me to share everything from the most mundane events in my life, to my deepest and most personal thoughts and feelings. I think the result is a pretty amazing look at both the events and the feelings of an incredible journey.

I have supplemented my emails and journal entries with commentary in an effort to put them into context, or to explain where necessary. The main goal here is to enhance, and not engulf. In that same vein, I have not substantially edited the emails. They appear hear exactly (with minor spelling fixes) as they did in their original form.

I began to compile all of these writing for my own sake. I found the process of compiling them, and reading them, to very be very much of a catharsis for me. But I also got a feeling reminiscent of "The Diary of Anne Frank", where a young girl invites people into her life to participate in some of the most extraordinary times of the 20th century. Her personal writings carried an impact a thousand fold more effective than any narrative could have hoped to do. And in the story of that little girl was very much a story of being human that touches each reader in a different way.

You may find that you connect with my journey – whether you identify as transgender or not. You may find ingredients at play in my particular journey that are integral to your own life. You may find my experiences painfully familiar, and you may find yourself faced with similar issues or choices that I did- not simply about gender, but about taking control of your life and finding happiness. This story is not meant as a guide, or a "How-To" book. It is simply a story of discovery, of finding happiness, of finding peace. The things you take away from it are limited only by the scope of your own personal journey.

The most important thing that any of us can share of ourselves is our story. This intensely personal, honest, and open document is my own attempt to share. I do not pretend to have all the answers. I do not say that everything I did was right, as I look

back with the benefit of hindsight and cringe at events that transpired or decisions that were made for the wrong reasons. But oftentimes, in difficult times, we do not have a guide to work from. Rather, we can get a sense of comfort in knowing that others have been here, too.

I hope others will be able to read it in the spirit in which it is shared. And, I hope others can lean from it. I know I have.

The Beginning.....

Early Life

Based on birth records, a healthy baby was born at 6:59am on February 22, 1959 at the Cook County Laying In Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. This newborn was the first child for Robert and Patsy Rosen, who had married only a year before. Moments after delivery the attending doctor examined the baby's genitals and indicated that this baby was a boy. Based on this seemingly obvious conclusion, the baby was given a boy's name: David Guy. This baby was me.

By all accounts, my birth and early years were pretty unremarkable. I wasn't abused. I wasn't traumatized as far as I can remember. To my knowledge I wasn't dropped on my head and I don't think I suffered more bumps or bruises than any child does. Although I'm told I could cry like a fire engine, I think I was generally a happy child - I was loved and nurtured, and there is really very little that would provide any hint about what was to come.

My mother had been a nurse in the Army during the Korean war but decided to stay home to be a mom. My father was attending the University of Chicago, studying to get his PhD in mathematical biophysics. For many years I could not even pronounce that, which proved to be challenge when people used to ask what my father did for a living. Other kids would explain that their fathers were dentists or lawyers. Mine was a theoretical biophysicist - whatever that is. He told me he was a scientist but I was always skeptical. Somehow, my expectation of scientists involved test tubes and white lab coats. I never saw any indication of either from him.

My arrival as was followed by a younger sister a year and a half later, and a brother a year and a half after that. We lived in a small apartment in Hyde Park near the university, and my childhood memories are generally happy ones.



My first day of school

Sex and Gender are not one and the same. Certainly, the two are intimately connected. Sex is the physical reality of being a boy or a girl. For most, it is obvious and inescapable. Gender, however, is much more difficult to explain. One definition is that gender is “*the complete set of culturally based roles, expectations, and responsibilities for a person based on their physical sex.*”

There are several key points to consider here. One is that gender is culturally based. Things that we have established to be “masculine” or “feminine” in our culture are not universal. Other cultures have established other standards of gender. Flip through any National Geographic magazine and you’ll see many examples.

Secondly, gender is based on physical sex. That is, someone who is physically identified to be a boy automatically inherits expectations for being male. There is an underlying assumption that the innate sense of ourselves, the deeper inner spark that we call the spirit or the soul, must somehow inherently be aligned with our physical sex. Most seem to assume that someone with the physical characteristics of a boy will automatically somehow *feel* like a boy. In fact, this alignment is so common that very few stop to consider it – much less, to question it. For those for whom this body/spirit incongruence is realized, we can often think of little else.

When you really stop to think about it, you’ll realize that young children are essentially genderless. At a young age, they do not innately understand the differences between being a boy and being a girl. If we accept that gender is at least partly a cultural phenomenon, then indeed these are traits that must be taught and learned. In fact, I’d argue that raising children is as much about training them to be boys and girls in our culture as it is about anything else.

Some of these lessons are subtle ones. Boys are blue; girls are pink. Boys play with trucks; girls play with dolls. Boys wear pants and shirts; girls wear dresses and skirts. It is ok for boys to roughhouse and wrestle; we discourage it in girls. Girls, on the other hand, learn to dance, to be graceful, to be soft, and to be vulnerable. Socialization of our children is very much dictated by the physical sex of the child, although certainly the child, and perhaps even the parent, is often unaware of this gender-directed disposition.

For many of us who are transgendered, the realization that something is not right often begins early in life. Of course, as children, I doubt most of us know exactly what this mysterious feeling is, but things will happen in our life that, in retrospect, will indicate that the seeds of our gender issues have already been planted.

My earliest memories that something was *wrong* were when I was 5 or 6. Admittedly, I had no clue as to what it was, and it certainly was by no means overpowering, but it was there nonetheless. I think part of it is that I expected socialization and rights of passage that we bestow upon girls in our society, only to find that such treatment was not forthcoming to me, and that confused me. But rather than be cause for undue discomfort or alarm, I think it was more a cause of temporary curiosity than anything.

My mom tells me that one of my childhood friends told me that boys do not play with girls, so I stopped playing with my little sister. Apparently, my sister had been my best playmate, and that she was crushed by my newfound independence. I did my best to do what boys were supposed to do, so I ignored her. But this behavior was short lived, and I was playing with my sister again after a short time.

In the middle first grade, we moved to a small suburb just outside of Buffalo, New York, which was to serve as home base for most of my middle years.

Kenmore was a wonderful place to grow up. It is an older neighborhood, full of tidy tree-lined streets with well-kept houses. Kids ride their bikes along its calm streets, and play football in front of Lindberg Elementary School today just as we did in the mid-1960's. Funny thing is, although some have died, and others have moved away, many of the same people who lived on Irving Terrace during my childhood continue to live there 35 years later. They have seen three or four generations of kids come and go, have become grandparents and great-grandparents, but overall very little has changed.

The house we lived in was white, with red shutters and a black door. It has changed colors since then, but to me it always looks that way. I remember how it looks during the summer, with sun poking through the canvas of huge trees that line the street and heat bugs singing loudly and proudly. I remember how it looked in the winter, with gray skies and cold winter air; shoveled piles of snow on each side of the driveway.

My bedroom was the first bedroom at the top of the stairs, on the right. Mom painted three walls a pea green, and the fourth one orange, so finding anything to match such a color scheme was destined to end in failure. I had a balcony directly from my room, but I think I can count the number of times I went out there on one hand.

My mom was not a shy woman. After we moved in, my mom took us up and down the street, ringing doorbells to introduce ourselves, and looking for potential playmates. It was painfully embarrassing, but somehow we survived these all too common excursions. Thankfully, there were several, and my mom made sure we got to know each of them.

One of my friends from down the street was a girl named Rachel. I remember playing house with her, and we both took turns being the "mom". We both used the hand and face creams that she kept in her bedroom. Her mom checked on us one day, and indicated that perhaps we needed to check to see whether my mom felt that this was appropriate. Neither of us understood what we were doing wrong, but socialization based on gender can be a very insidious thing.

I think by most standards, however, I was a pretty typical and unremarkable kid. I was a good student. I enjoyed being athletic. I had my share of friends. And I think I was generally pretty happy.

Rather than feeling that I was “trapped in the wrong body”, I think the best way to describe my thoughts at the time is “confused”. I remember watching a group of girls walk past the house on their way to school one cold winter day, and wondering if their legs got cold as the winter air blew up their skirt. I remember wondering what it felt like to have long, soft hair tied back in a bow. I remember watching cliques of girls talking on the outskirts of the playground during recess, and wishing I could participate. These thoughts certainly did not pervade my mind or cause me undue distress at the time, but they were mere rumblings of the issues that were to come.

My Family

During those early years in Buffalo, my dad's reputation as a biophysicist grew. Universities around the country began to offer him one-year fellowships to work at that school and help to establish a biophysics department there, so we moved quite a bit. At one point I think at one point I attended six different schools in seven years.

I suppose my memories of my dad are not typical "father/son" memories. I mean, once I became a dad I very much wanted to do male-bonding kinds of things with my own son. We went on "guy" trips together... just the two of us. He and I spent every Sunday morning for 5 or 6 years going to breakfast together, and doing the weekly shopping, letting his mom sleep in. We went to monster truck shows. We went to sporting events together. We were "pals".

But that is not how things were with my dad and me. My dad and I were never "pals". I would not even say we were "close" but, to be honest, I don't know if that was due to the fact that very few people were close to him or that he had difficulty showing that. I think both are probably at least partly true.

I never saw my dad in a pair of sneakers. His typical *uniform* consisted of a pair of slacks, an undershirt, a white dress shirt, and a pair of black shoes. That's it. Every day. I don't think he owned a pair of jeans. Ever. No t-shirts. Just the thought of how my dad would have looked in a pair of shorts is difficult for me to envision, as those things are so *NOT* him. I think I can count the number of times I saw him run *anywhere* on one hand, with all the change and everything in his bulging pants pockets jingling with every step.

My dad was not a handy person. I think on a "handiness scale" of one to ten, if he was any more than a two it was a skill he hid well. I don't think I ever saw him with a tool in his hand, and that's probably a good thing as it often becomes dangerous when non-handy people try to actually be handy. This was a man who had difficulty changing a light bulb (come think of it, I never saw him do that, either!). I contrast that, though, with a picture of my dad I found after he died. He looked to be fresh out of college, had some sort of alien looking tool in his hand, and was working on something that looked like an atomic bomb. Go figure.

One thing my dad *was* is brilliant. Some people know a lot about a few things. He knew a lot about *everything*... history, geography, math, science, music, philosophy. He knew five or six languages well enough to get by. Our entire family took much pride in the fact that my dad was our very own walking set of encyclopedias. My siblings and I actively urged him to become a contestant on a game show, as he would undoubtedly have made big money.

He once explained that, while growing up in Brooklyn, he was very much a bookworm. His parents fretted that he should be spending more time outside, and took away all of his books. The only book he had left was a dictionary, so he spent his nights

memorizing that. During high school he won a prestigious MacArthur Foundation Award for science. These awards are affectionately referred to as “genius awards”, and my dad was flown to Washington, D.C. to meet President Truman to celebrate his achievement. My dad was a brain.

Bathroom reading material in our house was not the typical mundane stuff. No fluffy magazines or out-of-date newspapers. You were far more likely to find “Rise and Fall of the Third Reich”, or a book on Einstein, or a Peanuts cartoon book. The loves in my dad’s life were his work, his organ playing, his family, and his traveling...although the order of those priorities at any given time is up for debate.

I think I can remember only two occasions where he and I did any father/son things that did not include the rest of the family. One year he took me to see the movie “2001 – A Space Odyssey”, which totally confused me but was some sort of amazing experience for dad. He “Wow’d”, and “Oooh’d” and “ I tried to act like I understood it all, but to this day my favorite part is the monkeys at the beginning, and when the computer sings near the end. He told me I should have read the book.

Another time, he took me to a Buffalo Bills game in downtown Buffalo and I froze my butt off. It was mid-winter, and the War Memorial in downtown Buffalo was buried under a foot of snow. The Bills won (thank God, because I wouldn’t want to endure all that and loosing, too). My dad had decided to park the family station wagon in a parking lot that had a big sign that read “Vehicles with chains only”. Of course, we got stuck trying to get out, but by that point my hands and toes were so cold it didn’t really matter.

I don’t parenting came naturally to my dad. Interpersonal stuff in general stressed him out. He did the best he could, and I have no complaints. He instilled in all of us an appreciation for intelligence, and a unique sense of humor, and an appreciation for the finer things in life. I never felt neglected, or wished for anything more out of him.

Years later, after I had started college, he actually apologized to me for not being a “better” dad. He explained that his father was very much a meddler in every aspect of his life, and he had decided that he did not want to expose his kids to that. I told him I felt I had turned out pretty well, and that no apology was necessary. It was one of our first “man to man” talks. I actually enjoyed it.

My mom, on the other hand, made the family tick. My mom was our taxi when we needed to be driven somewhere. If something needed to be fixed, she fixed it, or she made the arrangements to have it fixed. She did all of the outside work. She often did the work of both parents, so I suppose I couldn’t begrudge her the weekly “Saturday Afternoon Off”, where she would leave to be on her own for a few hours every Saturday. Of course, the thought that she wouldn’t come back, or would be involved in a terrible accident, crossed my mind more than once and filled me with a tremendous sense of anxiety. But to her credit, she always did come back.

My mom always had a plan. She had lists. She knew what was what, and where to find it. In a very real sense, she kept the family together. She made sure we participated in Cub Scouts. She made sure we went to piano lessons. She made sure we did our homework, and that we didn't take any more than 3 cookies for our bedtime snack. She punished us, and she rewarded us. She taught me how to drive. She taught me how to balance the checkbook. Despite my protests, she made sure I took typing in high school, and to this day it remains the class that has proven most useful of any during those years.

My mom's literary tastes were a stark contrast with my dad's. She became addicted to Harlequin-type romance novels early on, and my most vivid memories are of her sitting on her end of the couch, near the lamp, reading. She had hundreds and hundreds of them, and it seemed that she could read an entire book in an hour or two. She explained that she had favorites, which she read over and over again, and the very thought that she would want to read any of them more than once makes me smile.

Once she got reading her, getting her attention was next to impossible. A blood-curdling shriek would pass unnoticed as she sped through the lines of her book, too engrossed to notice. Or the dozens of times a day we would be standing there saying "Mom. Mom. **MOM!**" in an attempt to get her attention. She sat, unmoving and unnoticed until we physically shook her back to the here and now.

It amazed me, however, that she seemed to have an internal clock that instinctively realized when it was 9 o'clock, as she rounded us all up for bed. We would all be in the basement, watching tv, being as quiet as we could, but she would somehow come out of her trance to appear at the top of the stairs to sing out "David! Judy! Jacob! Time for bed!". Our pleas for 10 more minutes fell on deaf ears, as she tucked all of us in and headed back downstairs to continue her reading.

My sister is 18 months younger than I am. At 6 or 7 years of age, I remember her wanting to grow her hair out, as I was jealous of her for that. I remember a time when my mom decided to give my brother and I a brush-cut. The thought of having all my hair cut off terrified me, and I cried as she sheared off my already short blonde hair, right down to the nubs. I wore a winter hat on my head for days in an attempt to hide it...not wanting to be seen with a head that felt like a tennis ball.

I also remembered how she liked to wear dresses. Any dress she wore was only as good as its ability to "twirl". She would put on the dress, and spin round and round, watching the dress as it spun elegantly with her. If a dress could not "twirl" appropriately, my sister had no interest in it.

But perhaps more than anything, I remember my sister for our inability to connect. On any level whatsoever. We were the personification of Venus and Mars. I felt myself to be a fairly intelligent, and logical person. My sister, on the other hand, seemed to me to be completely and irresponsibly *illogical*, and that frustrated the heck out of me. It was the source of many an argument, and led to a very tenuous love/hate relationship we struggled to maintain during our teen years. Now that I understand, I feel like such

an idiot, but at the time I was firmly in the grip of way too much testosterone to have a clue.

As a child, I started a stamp collection. I especially wanted old stamps, as I felt they would be worth more money and money was a magic word for me. My sister, however, only had interest in stamps with animals on them.... horses in particular. The bigger and gaudier and more colorful, the better. I told her these stamps would NEVER be worth anything, but she didn't care. And that kind of *irrational* thinking was absolutely foreign to me.

Jude and a friend wanted to buy an old shack and live in it. As we traveled around the country, Jude would watch the countryside in search of the perfect "shack". I used to make fun of her for her for this, but my taunting did not diminish her efforts.

The fact that I did not understand her did not taint my feelings of protection for her. More than once I got into a fight with someone for her, although for exactly what escapes me now. Perhaps I felt that I, as her older brother, was the only one with the right to cause her grief!

My brother, on the other hand, was my buddy. We were pals. We played with trucks together. We played army. We played football. We collected sports cards. We did all those brotherly "boy" things. I had no interest in playing with dolls. Oh, no. Not me. Boy toys were much more fun, and having a younger brother to share them with was the best.

I don't remember being all that tough on Jay, but I think if you ask him he will remember otherwise. A younger brother is usually the one that gets hurt, or pushed, or bruised. I remember once I borrowed a dime from him to put into a slot machine on a ferry ride, and won a big jackpot. I gave him back his dime and kept the rest. I used to get him in wrestling holds and asked him if they hurt, knowing by his screaming and yelling that they did.

My sister, however, wanted Jay as a pal, too. So we fought for him. I would get so angry when the two of them would go off and do stuff without me. I was probably afraid that she would contaminate the poor, young, impressionable boy with her illogical ways. But in the end, I knew that he would come back. I knew that he could not resist the "boy" games, and as we grew older, and Jude went off to play with her own friends, an uneasy truce for him took hold.

Teenage Rumbings

It is as I neared puberty that I really remember these questions that had been rumbling around in my head begin to play an active role in my life. This sense of something not being right slowly solidified into something clear and unmistakable. I was 12 years old, and we had moved to Santa Barbara, California for a year as my dad had accepted a one-year fellowship there. It was to prove to be a pivotal year in my life.

Puberty is a time of many changes, even in the best of circumstances. It is a time when a child becomes a young adult, and struggles with their sense of self-identity. It is a time when hormones seize control of the mind and of the body, causing tremendous conflict and confusion. It is the time when secondary sex characteristics kick in. And it is the time when many rights of passage for boys and for girls are realized.

I remember asking my sister when I would be old enough to be able to shave my suddenly hairy legs, and her response that “Boys don’t shave their legs, stupid.” I remember enduring changes to my voice that made my sweet soprano singing tenor suddenly much much deeper. I remember watching the hair begin to grow around my penis, and on my chest, and feeling helpless to stop it. The fact that I was indeed trapped in the wrong world suddenly became a very painful realization.

Perhaps nothing demonstrated this, and the violent reaction that I could expect for getting too close to the gender line, more than Halloween of that year. I decided that I wanted to go trick-or-treating dressed as a girl. I did not feel that there was anything wrong with such a simple request.

My mom thought otherwise. “ABSOLUTELY NOT!”, she said. “IT IS ABSOLUTELY INAPPROPRIATE”.

Her response was loud and firm and final. Maybe it was because I was interrupting her reading and she wanted to get back to it. Maybe she was just in a bad mood and didn’t want to be bothered. Whatever the reason, her response crushed me.

I was shocked both by its intensity, and by its implications in my young mind. And although it might appear to be a trivial event in the scope of my life, it was very much a turning point for me. It was my first attempt to actively explore my gender issue, and an indication of what I could expect if I did. It was one of those milestones in life that you can point to as the start of something major. Today, my mom has no remembrance of this little incident. However, it is indelibly burned into my memory.

After being rebuffed in my original costume idea, I ended up going out that year as a drunken hobo, with a long coat, dirty face, and bottle of booze. I found it difficult to understand why it was ok to dress as a homeless drunk, but not ok to dress as a girl. Oh well. Mom had spoken.

I made several important decisions in the weeks that followed:

First, I decided that I could not afford to let anyone know of my feelings. My mom's reaction showed me that such thoughts and feelings were absolutely unacceptable, and I did not want to face her wrath. I had always felt a very strong need to live up to my parents' expectations of me – to be a good student, to behave, to make them proud. That, in fact, was one of the main motivators for me as a child. This confusion was not firm enough in my mind to discuss with them and run the risk of disappointing them. Rather, I decided that if I had to be a boy, I would try to be the best boy I could be.

At the same time, though, I also decided to start to actively explore this confusion. I realized that I had a feminine side to my personality – I didn't know how or why but it was there nonetheless – so I began to explore just exactly what this meant for me. I used to wake up at 2 or 3 in the morning, and go into the Jack-and-Jill bathroom that separated the bedroom that the three of us kids shared from my parents' bedroom. With a mix of excitement and terror, I would experiment with my mom's makeup....fearful of having someone awake to discover me, but also thrilled at the prospect of having quality time to finally express my feminine self. Thankfully, I became adept at cleaning up and was never caught in any of my early morning "experiments".

When my own son was 12 or 13 years old I used to look at him and imagine how he would react in a similar situation. I couldn't imagine him having to face the difficulty of gender confusion at such a young age...all alone. I couldn't begin to imagine him in front of a mirror in the wee hours of the morning.... clumsily putting on eye shadow and lipstick. But I did those things at that age. My experimentation was innocent. It was not sexually motivated in any sense of the word. And although it caused me intense satisfaction, I also felt an increasing fear and shame both in having done it, and at the thought of being discovered.

At the time I was in 7th grade. I had a very long walk to get to and from school...it took me over an hour to trudge up the hills that line the Santa Barbara coastline to get from the junior high school to our house precariously balanced overlooking the city and the coast. I used to spend much of the time during that walk fantasizing; about a life much different from the one I was apparently destined to live.

I remember thinking about a procedure whereby a doctor could trade the brains between people, and I had volunteered to change brains with a girl. Her brain was put into my body, and mine was put into hers. Of course, the trade was only supposed to be for a short while, but apparently this girl's brain was so happy to be in my male body, that she did not want to trade back, and that was fine by me. These fantasies filled my walks, and had such power that I remember them 30+ years later.

It should also be mentioned that I was not effeminate in any sense of the word. In fact, once I decided to dedicate myself to become a guy, I became much more athletic. In 7th grade I was awkwardly pudgy. I remember going shopping for clothes with my mom, and having to buy "husky" pants. I hated that. I even hated the word.... "husky". Yuck.

At school, our gym class grouped us by athletic ability. All the kids took fitness tests consisting of running, and sit-ups, and push-ups, and were grouped to play with others of approximately the same level. Each level was indicated by specific colors. The best athletes wore gold t-shirts, and blue shorts. The worst wore plain white shirts, with blue shorts. I was one of those. But to be honest, I don't think it really bothered me. I had developed other interests....building models, reading about World War 2, and listening to music, so the fact that I had not yet grown into my body did not cause me undue anxiety. Not surprisingly, most of my friends were in the non-athletic group, as well, so PE turned out to be more of an opportunity to socialize in the misty Santa Barbara morning sea air than anything even close to requiring physical exertion.

The following year my dad moved our family to East Lansing, Michigan for another one-year assignment. That year, for some reason, I decided to join the wrestling team. The fact that I had never even SEEN a wrestling match to that point seemed of little consequence. Perhaps I saw this as the most "manly" sport I could find, so I wanted to participate to prove to myself just how manly I could pretend to be. Whatever the reason, I threw myself totally into the sport, to the point where wrestling and school would monopolize much of my life for the next 9 years. It would sculpt my body, give me a sense of confidence, and provide a sense of discipline that was to become invaluable in later years.

It was also at this time that my interest in girls finally blossomed. Up to that time I used to explain that I was allergic to two things....cats and girls. My cat allergy continues to this day. However, my girl allergy seemed to clear up in my 13th year, and I suddenly noticed just how nice girls really looked, and smelled. I noticed how soft their hands were. And I kissed a girl for the first time. I had my first girlfriend, and felt incredibly relieved to realize that my gender issues had not clouded my sexuality.

My budding heterosexuality, along with my growing masculine presence, confused me. Never having met a transsexual, or even seen one, I believed the common wisdom I heard: that transsexuals were at least somewhat effeminate, and that they were homosexual. I continually asked myself how I could truly be transsexual if these two things were true, and I was neither of them. I struggled with this apparent conflict between what I knew my mind DID feel, and what I expected it SHOULD feel if I was truly transsexual.

One day I learned about a book titled "Second Serve". It was the autobiography of Renee Richards, who was one of the first famous transsexuals. I bought a copy of this book, and hid it from everyone.... sneaking a read at school when I could find the time. Renee had been born Richard Raskind, and had lived a life very similar to my own. She was intelligent. She was articulate. She was athletic to the point of being a professional tennis player as a man, and continuing as such as a woman. She had been married to a woman. And she struggled with this same dilemma that caused me so much confusion. It was a relief to read that others did not conform to that stereotype, and yet they really were true transsexuals. Perhaps most importantly, it gave me my first glimpse of transsexuality from the transsexual's viewpoint.

During those years, my gender issues never really flooded my mind, and never grew to totally occupy my thoughts. Rather, they were constant friends. Sometimes they lay dormant in the background, like a toothache that just won't go away. The pain is certainly not excruciating, but the subtle throb is always there.

From time to time, however, my feminine self would flare up and demand attention. I would need to do something to appease my feminine needs and urges. Often, when this happened, I would sneak up into the attic. My mom had a large footlocker there...full of many of her old clothes. Old dresses. Her army uniform. An old girdle. And I would try them on....struggling to fit this growing male form into them without ripping them....clumsily fumbling with zippers up the back and buttons on the wrong side. I'm sure I made a ludicrous sight, but that was of little consequence to me.

These episodes were fairly far between, however, and my fear of being discovered continued to dissuade any REAL exploration of this feminine "energy" that seemed to reside in me. My cross-dressing adventures were a mixture of exhilaration at finally having the opportunity to do something "feminine", mixed with fear at being caught and lingering shame at having done something so "wrong". I took so much pride in putting on the clothes just right, but once I had done it, I couldn't wait to get them off, put them away, and return to the safety of my bedroom. It was a very confusing time.

What I did know, however, is that my cross-dressing adventures really had very little to do with the clothes, or with the makeup. Some people find significant excitement, or relief, from wearing female clothes. In my case, it was not the clothes, per se, that gave me that sense of relief that I needed. Instead, I found wearing the clothes or putting on the makeup to be simple and innocent opportunities for self-expression for the feminine "half" of my personality. They were symbolic of a feminine world that I could not live in, and my brief "visits" there provided an effective outlet for the pressures that seemed to build in me. However, expressing this feminine side was very much a double-edged sword, as the more I would do it, the more I would want to continue and the guiltier and more ashamed I would feel.

I suppose I should share that these episodes had nothing to do with sex, either. Although there was certainly an element of excitement involved, I hadn't even fully matured at the time I started these adventures. Somehow, I think people envision transgender teens as cross-dressing, masturbating perverts. This stereotype needs to change, as for many of us these explorations are innocent and harmless. Sadly, far too many of us get the crap beaten out of us if we're unfortunate enough to be discovered.

These periodic outlets were very important to me. Like an engine needing to release steam pressure that has built to dangerous levels, attempts to totally cap and control this part of my personality for any length of time inevitably led to an increase in pressure, tension, and frustration. Once vented, the pressure would dissipate and things would go back to "normal".

A Buff Young Man

As I developed through my teen years, my body sculpted into quite the buff young man. My sister's friends ooh'd and aah'd over me, and Judy took much pride in the fact that they lusted after her big brother. I had very little interest in most girls, though, as my life was already full. I did find that I was very passive when it came to relationships, and most of the dates I did have were as a result of being the ask-ee rather than the asker. I did not feel comfortable in the male role as the "pursuer". I found that being put into situations where I felt I was supposed to know what to do made me uncomfortable, and ultimately feeling inadequate and frustrated.

I remember one day with my very first girlfriend, as she looked me deep in the eyes. I could sense that she was waiting for me to make a move. I could tell that she wanted me to take her and kiss her. But taking that initiative made me uncomfortable, and I eventually let the moment pass.

I had no interest in short-term relationships, or multiple relationships at the same time. And, sex scared me as much as it interested me. It's not that I didn't think about it – certainly I did. I defy you to find a teenage boy whose mind is being flooded with testosterone who doesn't. But I couldn't imagine anything that made me feel more masculine, more like a guy in a role that really wasn't comfortable to me, than sex.

I had no interest in my junior prom, as the thought of getting dressed up in a tux and socializing held little allure for me. I must admit that I did attend my senior prom, but only because of a misunderstanding where a girl had been told that I was going to ask her.

I was certainly a good student. I had an A average, and anything less than an A or a high B was a disappointment for me. I was good at math. I found I had a flair for writing, and enjoyed that. I had an amazing memory, and to this day remember the Gettysburg Address that I memorized for history class.

I enjoyed watching football, so I tried out for the team. I survived the brutal late-summer two-a-day practices, and the anxious days leading to final cuts, and was selected to be the second string middle linebacker, calling our defensive plays in the huddle. Although some of the defensive players on the team wore relatively little padding, I had far too much respect for my body to let it get beat up like that. I padded myself from head to toe; shoulder pads, elbow pads, forearm pads, hand pads. Once you tape it all up, it's like playing football while wrapped in a mattress. The highlight of my football career occurred when I turned around in the middle of a play (I was out of position, I think), I saw the ball on the ground, and fell onto a fumble.

During one of our late-season practices I split open and broke my nose. Although it didn't really hurt, it was re-injured every time I hit someone, sending an impressive stream of blood down the front of my face and dripping off my chin strap. The doctor

urged me to stop playing until it healed, so I decided to “retire” from football indefinitely. I was a far better wrestler than I was a football player anyways, so it gave me an opportunity to devote my full athletic attentions to grappling.

As I proceeded through the rest of high school, and especially into college, there came to be two distinct seasons in my life: wrestling season, and getting-ready-for-wrestling season. Wrestling offered the best of both worlds as far as I was concerned: the self-determination freedoms of an individual sport, along with the camaraderie and spirit of a team sport.

Our team really wasn't very good, and in the beginning I probably lost as many matches as I won. That really didn't dampen my enthusiasm or optimism, as the bitterness of my losses pushed me to get better, and the sweetness of my victories pushed me to want more. I spent the off-season honing my skills, building my strength and endurance, and attending summer wrestling camp; all in preparation for my 6 minutes on the mat.

Wrestlers are unique creatures. Anyone who is one, or who even knows one very well will understand what I mean. To casual observers, wrestling is a tough, brutal sport, and I think we take some sort of primal pride in that perception. However, to those who participate, it is as beautiful as a ballet: move, counter move, speed, agility, strength. I like to think of it as a brotherhood based on shared suffering and hardship.

My first coach told me that being a successful wrestler was not about watching what was happening in your match at any point in time. Those who waited to react, or who thought about a match one move at a time, lost. Good wrestlers predict what is going to happen, and think one, two, three, four moves ahead, so that is the skill that I tried to develop in myself.

One of the unique aspects of wrestling is the difficulty that many of us have maintaining our wrestling weight. Wrestlers compete with others in their same weight range, and depending on the lineup of the team a wrestler can compete at 10 or 20 pounds underneath their natural, comfortable weight. I spent many a lunch hour running up and down the stairs of the school, or sitting in the boy's locker room showers in a plastic suit, hot water turning it into a steamy sauna, trying to sweat off excess weight. In college I would spend hours spitting into a cup, trying to lose a few ounces any way that I could.

Although the healthfulness of such a regimen can certainly be debated, what cannot be argued is that being a successful wrestler requires tremendous discipline and dedication. It requires a certain mental toughness, a drive to succeed, and a will to “win”. All of these qualities would be key for me throughout the rest of my life. In fact, I attribute many of the successes I experienced throughout my life directly to the things I developed and learned about myself in wrestling.

In all my high school wrestling years, my family only came to watch me wrestle once. My dad later explained that he hadn't wanted to make me nervous. I watched them as they entered the gym just in time to watch my match. I remember that I pinned my opponent in less than a couple of minutes, and dad gave me a thumbs up before they filed out to go home again.

My family moved to Nova Scotia after my junior year of high school. I did not want to go. I had made friends, and for once I did not want to leave them. I had done very well wrestling that year, and the coach even offered to allow me to stay and live with him and his family to close out my senior year in Kenmore. My mom would hear none of it, though, so she dragged me kicking and screaming to Halifax for my senior year. I hated everything about moving there...and the fact that the high school didn't even have a wrestling team just made matters worse. My only option was to leave school at the end of the day and go to the university to wrestle there. I trained long and hard, and in the end, it all paid off.

During the off-season, I trained. I lifted weights. I ran. I climbed the stairs at the university ice rink with 50-pound bags of cement on my shoulders. As I trained, my muscles grew. I was eventually bench-pressing well over 300 pounds. Men like to measure things, and my biceps measured over 20 inches at their pumped best.

Again, the benefit of hindsight lets me view this time of my life in a different light. My gender issues lay suspiciously dormant over these years....pushed out of my mind by my schoolwork and my sports. In a very real way, I feel that Dave was doing what he felt he needed to do to make the body uninhabitable by the uninvited feminine force that lay sleeping within.



Bulked up

I spent my first year of college in Halifax. Dad was working at Dalhousie University there, so it cost me next to nothing to attend. Although I still very much resented being there, and was bound and determined to dislike everything about it, the thought of grappling with college loans at that point was not one that made sense to me. I figured I could gut it out.

Plus, there was my wrestling. My dormant year of training proved to be a tremendous help once my college career began. I had a very successful year. In fact, I became the college champion of all the Canadian Maritime provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland). As a result, I was chosen to compete in the national collegiate championships at the Olympic Village in Montreal.



At the Canadian Collegiate Championships

Syracuse

After my second year of college, I decided that it was time to get serious. I decided that I needed to choose a “career path”, as my days of taking liberal arts classes were pretty well over. During my high school years, I had planned to become a pilot, but I found that the crazy lifestyle was not one I wanted to pursue. After a childhood of traveling, and of having my dad out of town at meetings and conventions and symposiums, I wanted something that I perceived to be as more stable. Plus, the thought of joining the military held absolutely zero allure for me. I have been accused of not taking direction well, and must admit to being guilty as charged.

Mom wanted me to get into computers, and I had even taken some computer courses in my first years of college, but anyone who was involved in computers at the time will know that things were very different back then. There was no such thing as a Personal Computer, or a workstation. Rather, we had to type our programs onto punch cards and submit the job to the data center to run. I found it hard to believe that putting a single card out of sequence would ruin the program, requiring another hour of waiting, and quickly grew tired of this tedious process.

I had always been interested in television production, and for some reason, decided that this was the path I wanted to follow. I did some research, and found that the closest university to Buffalo with a quality TVR (Television and Radio) program was Syracuse University. I applied there, and was accepted in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. It was a very exciting time.

The year was 1979. I packed up my green Ford Comet with all of my “stuff”, and made the drive down to upstate New York. In a very real sense, this was the beginning of a new chapter or my life, and I was very aware of that. I was very excited to be leaving home and going back to upstate New York. I was very excited about living in a dormitory and finally being able to experience “college life”. And I was excited to be on my own.

I was assigned to a suite in Watson Hall, which turned out to be a desirable location. A suite consists of two bedrooms, separated by a common living room in the middle. I found all of my roommates to be very nice, and we all got along well. I was very happy with the way things seemed to be working out.

Every year for the past several years I had gone out on Halloween as a girl. Anyone who has ever felt the need to cross-dress will appreciate the freedom we feel on that day. This particular year was no different. I made no attempt to actually look feminine, as my muscles and physique would not allow me to get away with that. Rather, I settled with being a caricature of a woman, and drew lots of laughs but little attention to myself, so I enjoyed the best of both worlds.

That next week, my life would change forever. I met Elisabeth.

I doubt either of us had any idea that our lives would become so intertwined the first time we met. We were both waiting in line at a “Get Lei’d” party at Syracuse University, and she took the initiative to start a conversation. Actually, she asked me how much it cost to get in, but that led to oh-so-much-more. Once we got inside, she found me again, and she continued the flirtation. In fact, we ended up talking almost all night long. I drove her to her car, and we sat there just talked and talked and talked. I remember watching the moon glowing in her eyes as she talked. At the end of our chat, I asked her if I could kiss her goodnight. She agreed, and put her hand on my thigh to balance herself as we kissed. I was totally captivated....right then and there.

She called me the next day and invited me to a party.

Over the next weeks and months our relationship blossomed. Elisabeth was the first person that I ever became sexual with, and it was not long before I finally lost my virginity. Elisabeth definitely knew what she wanted and expected out of me and out of life in general, and I very much appreciated that she felt comfortable to take control like that. She made it abundantly clear that she could see spending the rest of her life with me, and I began to think in those terms, as well. I loved her from the word “go”, and we were engaged just 6 months later.

We graduated from college in May 1981. I had a brand new degree in Television/Radio production, but no job. Elisabeth had a social work degree, and was working as a manager in a department store.

We were married 3 months later. I was deeply in love, incredibly happy, and I looked forward to our life together. I had never been happier.

Perhaps not coincidentally, my gender rumblings had remained relatively quiet for several years. I had played a little with makeup from time to time in the solitude of my room, but either the frustration had diminished or I had grown comfortable with my dual self, as I did not feel the overwhelming frustration and need to explore that I had felt in the past. As far as I was concerned, these issues were destined to live in the back of my mind for the rest of my life, never again to see light of day. I saw no need to explain it to Elisabeth, as it was a non-issue to me. In fact, the thought of doing so never even crossed my mind.

Little did I know the inferno that this ember would eventually become, and the devastating consequences it would have.

My Life as a Husband

Many women feel that total and complete sharing is the ultimate form of intimacy. It is a freedom, almost an expectation, for women in our society that does not transcend gender barriers. Whereas women freely share personal thoughts and feelings amongst friends and family, men do not enjoy that freedom. This communication gap, the heart of the Venus/Mars conundrum, is often the largest single issue in a marriage where intimacy does not mean the same thing to both parties involved.

Self-disclosure does not come easily for men. They are taught from an early age to repress feelings and emotions, especially things that could damage their “image”. As a result, most efforts of self-disclosure are usually pretty shallow and superficial when compared to the full and complete disclosure women seem to be able to achieve. Even when a man lets his guard down, the resulting levels of self-exploration cannot match what a woman is capable of doing, and often expects in return. It’s not just that men are trying to hide things nearly so much as they just don’t view sharing and self-disclosure in the same way.

I saw no need to explain all of my bad habits or personal insecurities to Elisabeth prior to our marriage, or even afterwards, for that matter. To be perfectly honest, she would be the last person that I’d want to share them with. I had an image to maintain! I had expectations to live up to! It’s not that I consciously made a decision to hide my gender issues from her. Rather, the thought of needing to confess it never even entered my mind. Does that make me a fraud? Does that make me pathetically shallow? No. It just makes me human.

I had always been successful at handling the issues in my life, and saw no reason why that would not continue. Would I allow a small and seemingly insignificant blemish in an otherwise fine person interfere with the wonderful life that Elisabeth and I were planning? Hardly. In fact, loving Elisabeth made me happier than I had ever been before, and I was more than a little optimistic that our love and our new life together would banish those thoughts completely.

Denial is an easy world to live in. It would be many more years before I would be able to come to any semblance of self-acceptance for my true situation. How can anyone expect somebody to be honest with others when they can’t even be honest with themselves? Self-acceptance can be a very painful and frightening process, and at 21 years old I was far too immature, arrogant, shortsighted, and intoxicated by love to realize that I was building a trap for my own demise. I would learn the hard way that the key ingredient in the struggle for my soul was not courage, or strength. It was patience, and it was a battle that I could not win.

Our first few years of marriage were wonderful. We experienced all the excitement and exhilaration that being newlyweds can bring. We spent hours talking and sharing and planning our future. I had decided that perhaps television production wasn’t for me

after all, and had gotten a job as a computer programmer. That work seemed to come naturally to me, and I seemed to excel immediately.

A year or so afterwards, I became an Information Technology consultant and soon found myself making more money than I had ever imagined. I found that I enjoyed the consultant lifestyle. We bought a 2-story colonial house near Rochester, New York, and immediately embarked upon a “yuppie” type of life: we bought a Volvo, we traveled, we had money in the bank. After 4 years, we took the biggest step of all; we had a child.

Matt was born in December of 1985. Elisabeth and I had wanted to spend a few years alone, getting to know each other and to build the foundation of our life together before we brought children into the picture. We experienced her pregnancy together, from planning the nursery, to looking at the baby book to see what this teeny life was doing inside of her, to attending Lamaze classes to prepare for natural childbirth.

Being a father was an amazing experience for me. I wanted to be one of those “active” fathers. I wanted to change the little guy when he had poo-poo. I wanted to do my share of getting up in the wee hours of the morning when the little bugger was hungry or was crying. I wanted to be all the things to my son that I regretted that my dad could not be to me. Both Elisabeth and I viewed parenting as a role that was designed to bring us closer together, and it very much did that. By 1987, we were on top of the world.

Donna Emergences

Like an old war injury that tends to flare up in inclement weather, my “other” side began to throb again in early 1987, shortly after our son turned a year old. Perhaps she was lonely in her exile to the nether regions of my mind. Perhaps she was jealous by all of the success that Dave seemed to be having in his life. Or perhaps she just needed a sense of relief.

Slowly but surely, though, she began to indicate that she was still there, still waiting, and very unhappy with the way things were going. She intruded into my thoughts. She beckoned for attention, for temporary release, for some sort of acknowledgment of her very existence. And for the first time in my life, I absolutely refused. I hoped that if I ignored the gnawing frustration and curiosity that had lay dormant for so long, perhaps it would go back to sleep.

I also found a reason for concern in the fact that these urges refused to die. I had done every “male” thing that I could do. I had a wife that I loved very much. I was a father, and very much cherished that role. I had an incredibly successful and thriving career as a computer consultant. We owned a very nice home. We had many friends. I was in the process of beginning a video production business. I continued to lift weights and took great pride in my male physique. Why should these needs continue to plague me??

Unfortunately, I found that the more that I fought them, the more unrelenting the need to express them became. I found myself begin to withdraw. I found myself becoming irritable. I found myself becoming confused. And I got scared.

I find that attempts to convert complex emotions or feelings into words to describe them are ultimately futile. Often, the entire spirit of what we are trying to convey gets lost in the translation from feeling to word. What does love feel like? What does fear feel like? Do those things feel the same for each of us? The only way we can describe what they “feel” like is to compare them to something else that, perhaps, we may be able to describe more accurately or that we think others may be able to relate to.

With that in mind, perhaps the best single word I can find to describe this overpowering feeling is “pressure”. There is a steady, unrelenting, unyielding pressure pushing you towards something that you find too scary to even consider. There are certainly elements of fear, anger, frustration, confusion, and even sadness, but the overriding feeling of it all is one of pressure. The harder we try to repress and contain it, the more the pressure builds. As our strategies and efforts to control it fail, one after another, panic begins to set in. Eventually, something will need to give.

Oscar Wilde once wrote, “The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself.”

Although such thinking seems to be counter to everything we are taught, there is a certain common-sense ring of truth to it. I was at that point.

In a culture where we value strength, where we expect our men to be able to handle the difficulties that they face, it can be very humbling to finally be forced to capitulate, to throw in the towel and admit that you've lost. Just ask a man who is obviously lost to stop and ask for driving directions and you'll see just how difficult it is for men to ask for help in even the simplest of circumstances. They don't like to do it, period.

After all options had been depleted, I came to the realization that I needed help. I had a lifetime of questions and frustration to unload and I felt I would find no comfort or peace until I had some answers. More specifically, I needed someone who could tell me whether I really was transsexual, as I felt myself to be, or that I was somehow deluding myself and that my problem lay somewhere else. Either answer would have been fine. At least I would have an answer. It was that need to find something, anything concrete after so many years of wondering and thinking that finally provided the impetus to reach out.

I thought about the implications if I found out that I truly *was* transsexual. The prospect both gave me a sense of relief, but also a sense of panic as it would mean that this torture would continue. It would mean that I was destined to live a painful dual-life, and most of the scenarios I could dream up were not happy ones.

My stomach hurt from doing flip-flops thinking about this. I couldn't sleep. It's one thing to decide to look for help, but another to actually find the strength to make that call. Finally, one day from work, I did it. I dialed the gender clinic at Stanford University. As the phone rang, I considered hanging up. I hoped that nobody would answer. But suddenly, there was a voice on the other end, and it was time for me to say what I needed to say. I explained that I was battling some very perplexing gender issues, and needed to speak with someone in hopes of finding some answers. They indicated that the closest person that specialized in working with transsexuals lived in New Jersey just outside of New York City. So much time has passed, that I cannot even remember the doctor's name, but that one call changed my life.

Life in the late 1980's was very different than it is today. There was no such thing as the internet. There was no email. There was the telephone, and there was the US Postal Service. I talked with the doctor. I got information as to how much it cost to spend a day with him. I secretly rented a post office box and sent for transsexual information that he suggested. And I started to save my money. I saved a couple of dollars a day, as I knew that would not be missed. After a few months, I had saved enough money to visit the doctor.

One day in early October, 1990 I left home for work as I did every other day. But instead of going to Xerox, I drove to the airport where I boarded a plane, flew to New Jersey, hopped in a cab, and went to visit the doctor.

The psychologist was a very old, frail man. He invited me into his office and explained the game plan for the day. He had many questions to ask me. He asked if I believed in past-life regression, and told me that he would be hypnotizing me. He told me that he needed to take a nap during lunch, so I would need to leave for an hour. And he told me that by the end of the day he hoped to be able to tell me something that would either confirm or could deny my feelings that I was really a transsexual.

He was true to his word. The day was a very long, difficult day. We talked about things that caused me much pain. The thought of having dealt with them alone for so long suddenly filled me with a sense of sadness, and the fact that I finally felt so close to something so big helped to mute that pain. The doctor asked me lots of questions. Gender issues. Sexuality issues. Family issues. He asked me about my hopes and dreams and fears. It was a long day.

At the end of the day we sat to discuss his thoughts. He took a long look at me and said “The first thing I need to tell you is that I believe you to be a true transsexual, and I will do everything in my power to help you.” Those words both thrilled me, and chilled me, to my core. To finally have someone confirm my self-diagnosis was an incredible relief for me. But at the same time, it was like having a mysterious lump diagnosed as cancer. It is a relief to finally know what it is, but it is a whole other story to consider what you plan to do about it.

His words became much more somber. He said “The next thing you need to do is decide how you are going to handle this. If you continue treatments with me, we will need to set up a regular schedule. You need to be prepared to lose everything and everyone in your life. That is not to say that you WILL lose them, but the risk is there and you need to know that and face that.”

After our day was finished, I hopped back into the cab and flew back home. My trip out of state went unnoticed, and I felt very comfortable in what had happened. But although I could not give specifics, I knew that my life had changed. I just didn’t know how.

I spent the next few weeks doing much soul searching. His words about being ready to lose everything rang in my head, and I tried to determine whether I was ready for that. I played many scenarios in my mind...things that could happen...and tried to imagine my life 20 years down the road in each of them. I think I gradually made a few decisions.

First, I was not ready to lose everything. I was not ready to leave my one-year-old son fatherless. But at the same time, I felt terribly ashamed at having to sneak around like this behind my wife’s back. So I decided to tell her. I decided she deserved to know, and once she knew, perhaps everything else would become a moot point.

There is no easy way to discuss this with someone. It’s not like you can sneak it into another conversation in hopes it won’t be detected or remembered. I struggled with the how’s of this disclosure for days.

Finally, one night after we had gone to bed and turned out the light, it was right there. In my throat, as big as a beach ball. It was on the tip of my tongue, aching and waiting to come out. I couldn't keep it in any longer.

"Honey," I said. "I have something that I need to tell you."

She asked, "What?"

I thought for a long second and replied, "Well, I'm not quite sure how to say this....how to put it into words. But it is something that I have felt for my entire life, and I need for you to know."

She was quiet.

I spoke slowly and deliberately. "I have a very strong.....".

I paused. Once it was said, it could not be un-said.

"....female side to my personality."

I lay quietly in the dark....waiting for a reaction. I could hear her as she turned to face me.

Elisabeth had known that I was somewhat "odd" when it came to this stuff. She thought it was kinky. One year during college and I was working as a waiter at a restaurant I went to work on Halloween as a ballerina. Another year, while Elisabeth was pregnant with Matt, I went as a pregnant woman. One year, I actually went to a nail salon and had a set of nails applied so that I could go out as a woman. I had asked her to shave my legs. My "quirkiness" was accepted, and no questions had really been asked to this point.

She spoke to me. "Are you telling me that you're gay?" she asked, fearfully.

"No, of course not. I'm saying that part of my mind is very 'feminine' in its thoughts and needs. I don't know how else to describe it."

She turned back over, and said a soft "Oh, God," and started to cry softly. And that was that.

She avoided me for days before finally approaching me to talk about it. She indicated that she needed to process this, and I gave her the time and space to do that. Even then, the conversation was short and she left no room for doubt about what she felt. She indicated that this had no place in our marriage, and that I needed to "suck it up" and be a man. And eventually, things got back to normal. Everything was the same, but at the same time everything was different. Our "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" years had begun.

Over the next ten years, Elisabeth did not mention the incident again. However, it was clear to me that it was never too far from her mind.

Any time there was anything in the newspapers about female impersonators, or about cross dressers, she removed the article before I could read it as if it would suddenly trigger a "relapse". Anything that she considered "feminine" was now

verboden to me, and any protest to the contrary on my part was sure to cause friction between us. No more shaving the legs, no more going out as a girl on Halloween, no more public expression of Donna. I'm sure she was secretly hoping that the situation would get better on its own, just as I was. But it didn't.

Actually, just the opposite was happening. My intense soul searching helped me to slowly come to realize that the main source of my distress had not necessarily been my gender issues so much as my struggle to hold it all back and keep it all in. That was a losing battle, and one I was convinced that I could not win. In order to maintain harmony in my life, I needed to change that tactic. Rather than fear Donna, and what her continued existence could mean to my life, I needed to embrace and accept her as a healthy part of the total person that I was. This was not some disease to be feared and avoided. It was another side to a complex personality that obviously needed freedom and understanding. I needed to find opportunities to not only express this part of me, but I needed to actively explore it as well. Now that I had disclosed my situation, I felt a greater sense of freedom to do that.

I contacted the local chapter of Tri-Ess (a national support group for cross-dressers), and met someone from the group for lunch one day. He brought a recent copy of their newsletter, and we had a very pleasant discussion about transgender support groups and resources in and around Rochester. During our conversation, he told me about Jumelle.

Jumelle is the French word for "twins". It was a make-up studio owned and operated by twin sisters. Apparently, others in the support group had been clients there and had raved about them. I called the salon and scheduled an appointment. In my paranoia about somehow getting caught, when they asked my name my mind seemed to freeze for a second, and the name that came out was David Booth. Now I was making up fake identities for myself!

At my first appointment I met Deborah, one of the twins who operated the salon. I had never met anyone quite like her. She was pretty. She was intelligent. She was articulate. And perhaps the most overpowering thing about her is that she was a very spiritual person. At our first appointment, she explained Yin and Yang to me.

Ancient Chinese scholars developed the concept of Yin and Yang to explain the world. It argues that there are two natural, complementary and contradictory forces in our universe. YIN represents the FEMALE; softness, darkness, moisture, nighttime, negative, even numbers and docile aspects of things. YANG represents the MALE; hardness, dryness, positive, brightness, daytime, odd numbers and dominant aspects. Yin and Yang are the male and female forces that control all changes in the universe, exist in everything, and are continually in the state of flux. The key concept is that they are always looking for the balance point. When one moves, the other always responds.

Chinese martial forms are based on this philosophy of Yin and Yang. It teaches that within strength is found weakness; within hardness softness exists, and where there is activity, non-activity is also present.

Deborah explained that all people contain different aspects of Yin and Yang, or male and female, and she was honored that I chose to confide in her. She accepted both my male and female selves immediately and it is through her handiwork that I got my first true glimpses and tastes of the possibilities down the road.

I found our discussions to be fascinating. They opened my eyes to an entirely new side of my situation. They helped me to view it not as something abnormal and “bad”, but as something natural, and ageless, and spiritual. It was a very refreshing perspective.

Of course, the main reason for my visits to Deborah was to learn about make-up. Every couple of months I would call and schedule an appointment with her. I snuck out of work and went to her studio, where she would work her make-up magic on me. I used to sit on the big stool in front of the mirror, and I’d stare in awe at what she would do. Sometimes I went for a lesson, so that I could learn to do apply the makeup myself. Other times I just let her apply it. I’d sit there, watching as my face was transformed, and I’d feel as though my personality became transformed, too. Sadly, the time to wash it off and return to work always came all too quickly. It was as if the make-up allowed Donna a brief sense of self-expression and freedom, but washing it off closed that dungeon door again until the next time.

At one point, we bought a wig. We spent a session cutting it and styling it. And when she applied the make-up to go with the wig, I sat transfixed at what I saw. The reflection staring back at me was closer to who I really felt myself to be than anything I had ever seen before.

This simple outlet for my feminine self kept things on a very even keel for many years, and I owe Deborah my most heartfelt thanks. I cannot imagine what life is like for others, who do not find a sympathetic “Deborah” in their lives, especially at the beginning.

1996 - Moving West

Life can be cruelly ironic sometimes. By 1996, I had reached the pinnacle of my life in terms of accomplishments. But any sense of achievement or satisfaction or peace was to be undermined by the shifting sands of my gnawing need to explore and express the female presence that continually intruded in my life.

Elisabeth and I had hoped to be able to live “the good life”. The thought of being financially stable to the point of being able to retire early, and enjoy a life of relaxing and traveling appealed to both of us. It was a very realistic goal, as we were already on that “fast track” to a life of leisure. Much of our vacation time over the previous several years had been spent visiting places that we felt would eventually make a good retirement home. One year we visited North Carolina. One year we visited the Gulf Coast of Florida. Another year we visited California. To be sure, we had dual motives for these trips, as besides being very nice places, they all offered a welcome respite from the upstate New York winters!.

In December of 1994 we visited Scottsdale, Arizona. We immediately fell in love. The thing that stuck both of us first was the sky. During the day the blue was brighter and more intense and bluer than the deepest of clear water pools. At nighttime, it teemed with endless meadows of bright stars, and the outlines of distant solar systems were visible against a background so black it seemed to go forever. The weather was the perfect compliment to the skies...warm and inviting and relaxing during the day, and cool and invigorating at night.

Beautiful palm trees were everywhere. Bright, colorful flowers bloomed fragrantly in sunny 80-degree days. Tropical sounding birds filled the morning air with a music unlike any we had ever heard. Except for orange and lemon trees which dropped fresh fruit that had grown too ripe and heavy to bear, everything was perfectly, almost unnaturally, groomed and manicured. At night, it was almost surreal to drive by houses brightly decorated and lit to celebrate a desert Christmas, with huge saguaro cacti covered from top to bottom with colorful Christmas lights. We had expected to find Scottsdale to be the colorless desert that one would expect for a state that routinely hits 110 degrees for weeks as a time during the summer. We were amazed to find the valley of the sun to be more akin to the Garden of Eden. During that week, we decided that we would buy a house there as soon as we could arrange it.

At the end of 1995, life was good. We were at a point where we could do just that. I was working on a very large computer project, so we had the money. Interest rates were lower than they had been for a long time. Plus, I think both Elisabeth and I were ready for a change. We had lived in the same house for 15 years, and had just plain old outgrown it.

So, just before the next Thanksgiving (November 1995) Elisabeth and I left Matt with his grandparents and went to Scottsdale for a week with the specific goal of finding and buying a house. After spending three straight days visiting nearly 50 houses, that mission was accomplished.

Our original intent was that the Arizona house would become our retirement home, as we hoped that retirement would not be all too far off. Winter rental rates for homes north of Scottsdale were very high, so we felt we would be able to furnish it and rent it should we need to do that.

But as we proceeded through that winter, the realization hit us that we were doing things backwards. Here it was.... cold and wintry and nasty in upstate NY, while our home in sunny, warm, beautiful Scottsdale sat empty and unused. And during the summer, when people flee the desert to escape the heat, we would be just arriving there. So, as spring approached, we made a bold decision. We decided to make the move.

By early July, we had sold our house in upstate NY and moved to Scottsdale, leaving behind 15 years of memories and friends and family. I did not have a job upon arriving in Arizona, but the tech industry was alive and well there so I felt confident that I would be able to find one, and that was all I needed. Neither of us felt any regret in what we were doing, and we dove into our new life head first.

Moving across country like that was a very exciting thing. It was almost like a new beginning for us. We spent much time looking for furniture and house "things" for our new home, and although we didn't know a single soul there, we felt very much at home. We spent our days exploring all there was to see and do. We spent our nights sitting in the back by the pool, looking up at the incredible vista of stars and talking about the future. It was a very good time.

The night we found our first scorpion walking up a wall in our house certainly caused a sense of culture shock. The evening we found our first rattle snake coiled up on the patio certainly caused us to wonder whether we were really "desert people", but such shocks were few and far between...muted by the comforting coos of the desert birds strolling through the beauty of the Sonoran desert. All it took was one of those incredible Arizona sunsets to jerk us back to realize how wonderful this place was.

Although I had hoped to take a couple of months off to relax before going back to work, I was approached to work on a fairly long-term project. I accepted a contract position at XYZ in Scottsdale, which made me very happy. XYZ was the largest employer there, had a beautiful campus that was relatively close to home, and I found the people and the work to be interesting and to my liking.

In many ways, this was the apex of my life as Dave. Elisabeth and I were happy. Matt was doing well. We were enjoying our new home, and our new life. We had money, owned nice cars, and didn't worry about the future. Life truly was good.

But, as with the Garden of Eden, it was not to last.

1997

Out of the Garden

Towards the end of 1996, and into 1997, the need to explore Donna began to well up inside of me again. This had happened from time to time throughout my life, and I had been generally successful at putting up my defenses and fighting it off before, although it was admittedly becoming more and more difficult to do that.

I cannot describe to you what that feeling is like, as I do not even understand it myself. It was like a persistent intruder continually and patiently demanding attention, despite my best attempts to ignore and avoid her. I began to realize that, as those feelings grew, and as I tried harder and harder to repress them, many other feelings and emotions forced themselves to the forefront. I became frustrated. My temper became short. I began to withdraw. Those are the outward signs that this was happening. And Elisabeth knew me well enough to know that something was going on and that I wasn't acting like myself. She didn't know why, though.

I had been through this cycle many times before. When Dave had control of the body, he would lift weights and make it as masculine as he could. However, when the "Donna" side of me demanded attention, I would go on a diet, and start running, and do everything I could to undo the work that Dave had done to make the body less inhabitable. I would withdraw, attempting to handle this unwanted flood of new feelings and emotions that tried to intrude into my life. Elisabeth felt my change in moods was tied to my dieting, and dreaded when I started to diet. But the reality is, the dieting stemmed from my urges to explore and to be Donna...and that is the connection she could not logically make.

As we headed into 1997, we appeared to be a typical happy family. However, much turmoil was brewing inside of me, and it continued to grow. For the first time, my attempts to repress them seemed to be unsuccessful.

I have looked for reasons why this happened with such force at that specific point in my life. I see several possibilities....

One of the questions I get asked is whether I think I would have preceded as I did had we not moved to Arizona. Moving there very much marked a new beginning on life for both Elisabeth and me. I think part of the difficulty that many transsexuals face during this mid-life "awakening" is the prospect of disengaging from the "old" life. We have friends, and roles, and responsibilities, and all the "stuff" that goes with the lives that we have built through the years. The thought of shedding free from that, and starting a totally new, fresh life, is a difficult one to consider. But by moving 1,500 miles away from that "old" life, I had, in a very real way, started that process. I often wonder whether moving there in the first place was somehow subliminally the true start of my transition, but as with so many other questions, this one has no answer. So although I doubt that moving to Arizona necessarily caused my turmoil, it certainly provided a sense of freedom that I did not have back home.

Another possible reason has to do with where I was in life. I have read many theories that talk about this as a mid-life awakening. Many of us get to a point in our lives where we seriously consider what we have accomplished, and we consider those things left undone. This analysis can often lead to a mid-life crisis, and in this case that was certainly true. The difference for transsexuals is that the crisis is often about identity. I know gals who fight this for their entire lives, only to begin transition at 40 or 50 or 60 years of age.

I believe that many of us go through a sort of second puberty as we hit 40 years old. Our hormones start to change again. Our bodies change. We're forced to face the fact that our lives are half over, and to realize that our chance to make drastic changes may be fleeting.

My birthday is February 22, and I was going to be 39 years old. Elisabeth had noticed that my birthday always caused a sort of "depression" in me. I could not explain what it was, but I knew it to be true. And every year, my birthday wish as I blew out the candles was the same.... that this would be the last birthday that I would spend as Dave. Needless to say, there was not a time when I actually believed that this wish could come true.

In retrospect, I doubt there was any single event that triggered what was to happen. Rather, I think it was a combination of all these things. But I think the main thing is that I had kept all of this in for so long, without any type of outlet, that something was going to happen regardless of whether I wanted it to or not. I think that anything we keep inside like that is bound to come out, and that the outward symptoms are often only an indication that something is going on and not necessarily the root cause. For example, I know many transsexuals who had become alcoholics, and who used alcohol to "soothe" the frustration and the pain of their gender pain. In my case, I had done my best to live up to the expectations that Elisabeth had for me, and I had fought these needs totally and completely for a long time. At this point, it had all reached critical mass, and was ready to blow. It needed an outlet. And once it was released, it did not come out in a slow, steady trickle. It came out as a violent, massive gush.

Regardless of the reason, this crisis in my mind was real and overwhelming. It came out in anger, and frustration, and irritation with everyone and everything. I did not like the person I became during this time, but felt powerless to do anything to change it. I came to the realization that this was not something I could, or moreover, should, handle alone. This is a milestone event in our lives. It is the time that we realize we need help.

Realizing we need help is one thing. Knowing where to find it is another. It is not as simple as looking in the phone book under "gender specialists" and making a few discreet calls.

The world had changed dramatically since my early days of questioning, of looking for success stories and people with whom I could identify. As I started to look online, I realized to my utter amazement that there was an entire community of us out there. Other people who seemed intelligent, articulate, and normal were there sharing their

lives. It was both exhilarating and terrifying to find that I could relate to many of these stories.

Thanks to the power of the internet, finding a psychologist who had experience working with the transgender community was not difficult. There were three or four of them in the Phoenix area! I was ecstatic.

I decided to call Dr. Sheila (pronounced Shy-la) Dickson, not from reputation or from personal recommendation, but from the fact that her offices were the closest to Scottsdale. One day, I snuck into a conference room at work (so as not to be overheard) to make the call. My heart was racing. I was scared to death. I had no idea as to how to even begin a conversation with her, but when she answered I somehow fumbled something coherent. I indicated that I had found her name as a gender specialist on AOL, and was hoping to be able to talk with her. She knew exactly why I was calling, and she could obviously sense my apprehension. She spoke in a very calming, caring tone, and immediately took the initiative to ask a few questions. After we hung up, I sat in disbelief that I had taken that huge step.

My first appointment with Dr. Dickson was at 10am on March 4, 1997. I drove to her office from work, as I was to do many times over the next couple of years. I had no clue as to what to expect, hoping that she would know what to do. I prayed that I would be able to express and articulate the battle that was raging inside of me, although I had no idea as to where I would find the right words to do that. She shared her office with a couple of other psychologists, and there was a common waiting area outside, so I got there, made myself comfortable, and waited to see her.

I immediately felt at ease with Dr. Dickson. She has a gentle, soothing face, a friendly smile, and a very soothing demeanor. She was fairly tall and thin, and I wondered what she thought about this “man” who entered her office to sit on her couch and tell her about issues that had never dared be exposed to light of day before. She asked me if I had a “femme” name, and once she had that, she used that name totally. She was the first person to refer to me as Donna.

People ask me why I chose the name Donna. Very few of us actually have the opportunity to name ourselves. My son once asked why I didn't choose a “cooler” name, like Jennifer or Megan. The reality of the situation is that I wanted to keep my same initials...DGR. I felt myself to be a strong person, and looked for a “strong” name. I had a cousin named Diane, so that was out. I did not “feel” like a Deborah. For some reason, Donna immediately “felt” right.

The beauty of that first meeting is that she knew how I felt. She knew of the turmoil I was enduring. She had been through this with many others of us, and although each of us thinks it is absolutely and totally unique to ourselves, thankfully there are some common issues that we all share. She knew these things, and that very much comforted a very nervous, scared, soul. Her empathy and gentle smile are things I will never forget. I did not feel mentally ill, as the DSM-IV would lead me to believe. Rather, I felt a sense of calm in having found a friendly island in very stormy seas.

Coming out of that meeting, Sheila had two suggestions. The first was to buy a book titled "True Selves" by Dr. Mildred Brown, and read it. We could discuss it at our next meeting. The second was to make arrangements to take the MMP-IV personality test. The scores on the test would provide some insight into my personality that would prove useful as we moved forward. In the following weeks, I did both of those things.

Reading "True Selves" was an incredible experience for me. It finally provided that "first-person" account that I had been needing. It was a very empowering thing, and at this point I think it safe to say that there are 4 or 5 copies on the bookshelves of various family and friends.

The MMP-IV test is a very innocuous thing. It is a multiple choice psychological survey and contains lots of questions, some of which are almost identical. There is no right or wrong answer, although I sometimes found that none of the answers really answered the question for me, but I tried to choose the one that most closely matched.

At the beginning, I met with Sheila every two weeks. We reviewed the results of MMP-IV, which she said fell well within the typical female range. For some reason, this very much pleased and comforted me. We discussed True Selves, which I found to be an incredible book. I allowed my thoughts, and my frustrations flow. And Sheila listened. This was to mark our entire history together. I would arrive, and would talk for an hour (or more). She would take notes. She would sometimes make a comment, or ask questions... usually very pointed ones that caused thought on my part to answer...but the bulk of our session was me doing a verbal dump for an hour on whatever topics came to mind. My dreams. My fears. My family. My fears. My life. My fears. Much of those early conversations were very much marked by fear. But Sheila was very good at setting those fears aside for the moment....and life is much clearer when not viewed through a veil of fear. She never challenged me. She never rushed me. She was perfect.

I showed up at her office during my lunchtime....appearing totally as Dave as that's all there was at the time. But she was able to see through that, and see Donna in her purest form, and that gave me comfort and confidence. I think that's what allowed more and more of Donna to peek out from behind the locked doors where she had resided for so long. I very much looked forward to my talks with her.

This entire process proceeded under a veil of secrecy. I had decided it best not to tell Elisabeth about it until I had come to some sort of understanding, and had something to actually tell her. But I think much of my reluctance to tell her was out of fear of her reaction, so I embarked on a life of secrecy that was to grow over the next months and years. In retrospect, it is not something of which I am proud, but at the time it was my only way to deal with my issues, so it was easy for me to rationalize.

The Harry Benjamin Standards of Care (SOC) dictate that a patient must meet with a psychologist for 3 months before being allowed to move to the next phase of treatment. That next phase is the approval for the patient to begin hormone replacement therapy treatment. For Male to Female patients, that involves the administration of estrogen,

and a testosterone blocker, and often a progestin. In Female to Male patients, it involves the administration of testosterone.

The effects of the hormones are many. In fact, I cannot even begin to describe how interwoven in our very fabric our hormones have proven to be. This will be described as we proceed. But beginning HRT is a major step, as it introduces a physician into the care plan, and from this point on both the psychologist and the physician work together.

During one of our appointments, Sheila began to discuss the fact that I would soon be eligible to begin HRT. The very thought of that both thrilled me and scared me to death. She indicated that there were 2 doctors in Phoenix that she worked with on a regular basis, and described both to me. One was a General Practitioner, and the other was an endocrinologist. From her descriptions, I felt the GP would be the best fit for me, so I chose this doctor as my primary care physician on my insurance. His name was Dr. Ken Fisher. I made a couple of trips to see his office over those months and never actually met the doctor, and needed to schedule a minor procedure at the end of April.

During my follow-up visit with one of the medical assistants, I started a process that was to be another major milestone in my journey.

My appointment was ending, and I was wondering how to bring up the subject. Finally, I told him there was something I needed for him to know. I explained that I was a patient of Dr. Dickson's and was being treated for Gender Dysphoria. He listened quietly. I told him that we had been discussing beginning HRT, and that Dr. Fisher would soon be receiving a letter of recommendation on my behalf to start that process. I asked if he could tell me the specifics of the treatment, and whether there was any lab work they needed to do in order to prepare for when that did happen.

The MA seemed somewhat surprised by my news, but not nearly so surprised as I was at having shared it. He told me that he was not involved in the specifics, but if I could wait a minute he would go and find out. When he returned, he indicated that the hormone regimen there consisted of both oral medication (Premarin, Spironolactone, Progestin), as well as bi-monthly estrogen injections. The thought that I would need to visit the office every two weeks for a shot scared me, as I did NOT like shots, but I figured that this was just another test of how badly I wanted this.

Different doctors have different hormone regimens for their TS patients. Most include estrogen in one form or another (oral, injection, or patch). They also include a testosterone blocker, such as Spironolactone. Both of these together act to reduce the effect of the male hormone, testosterone, while at same time introduce the female hormone, estrogen, into the body. Some doctors also prescribe a progesterone, which helps in secondary sex characteristic development, as well.

Dr. Dickson wrote my letter to begin HRT at the end of May, and I started hormones immediately after that. My first visit with Dr. Fisher was a difficult one, as he did an "intake" assessment of me. He asked many difficult questions...when did I plan to tell my wife and son...when did I expect to go full-time...how did I think my family would

react...and I answered as best I could. He had a very stern and business-like demeanor, and over the next couple of years I sometimes dreaded our discussions. But in June of 1997, I had my first injection of estrogen, and another chapter was about to unfold.

Taking that shot was a big step in my life. I did lots of weighing the possibilities of the future vs. the risks of not moving forward. But it all came back to one simple equation. I simply could not NOT do this. I needed to see this through. I had decided to begin this journey with very low expectations, in hopes of finding where on the gender spectrum I would feel most comfortable. If that goal was reached short of complete gender reassignment surgery, so much the better. But if not, I needed to know.

The effect of the estrogen shots in those early days was incredible. It would immediately rush to my head. I used to wonder how much of that was real, and how much was my own brain at work, but in the end it really didn't matter. After a few weeks, I could feel blood pulsing thru my breasts, and it was like a magic juice to me. But even still, my anticipation of my bi-monthly visits was tempered by my fear that visible changes would begin to happen, and my total fear of how I would deal with them. I put those thoughts out of my mind as best I could, deciding to deal with them when I had to. It was very much a double-edged sword for me.

I took 2 doses of Premarin every day. I hid all my hormones deep in the back of a drawer in a cabinet I knew Elisabeth would never need to open. Every morning, I went to that drawer, took one pill, and wrapped the second in tin foil to be taken in the late afternoon at work. That was my modus operandi for a long time.

Needless to say, even at this point, I did not disclose any of this to Elisabeth. But as time went on, things became harder and harder to hide. For one thing, these visits, and the hormone regimen, cost money. Lots of money.

Discovery

Being a transsexual is an expensive proposition. At that time, my hormone regimen cost me nearly \$200 a month. My monthly visits with Sheila cost \$100 each. Electrolysis, when that started, would cost over \$100/session. These kinds of expenses are difficult to hide for any period of time, and finding a way to fund all of this without being caught added to my already heightened sense of anxiety. But I found a way. Or so I thought.

In order to create a “slush fund” that I could use for my transition expenses, I wrote written myself a check against a brokerage account that we had. Elisabeth had little interest in the account, and I felt confident it would not be missed. Little did I know that the cancelled check would be returned to us for our records. It arrived at the house one fateful Saturday in mid-July, while Matt and I were out shopping.

When we returned home, Elisabeth was waiting.

The first words out of her mouth sounded ominous. “You’ve got some explaining to do, mister!”

I froze.

“Just what is the idea of writing a check to yourself for \$3,000?” she asked. “What did you spend it on? What’s going on?”

She didn’t sound angry. Yet.

The room suddenly got hot. My face turned pale. My mouth was dry. My mind raced. In a split second, I had decided what I had to do.

“I’m spending it on therapy,” I replied, trying to compose myself for the battle that I knew was coming.

“Therapy?! What kind of therapy?” she asked.

The time had come.

“You know that problem that I told you about ten years ago? The gender problem? It has gotten bad again, so I’ve been talking to a therapist who specializes in gender issues about it.”

Elisabeth was getting angry now. I could see it in her face. She waited for a second, and asked a fateful question.

“You’re getting therapy for it? You’ve got to be kidding!! Therapy to fight it, or to give in to it?”

I didn’t answer. I didn’t know what to say. It wasn’t one of those questions that I could answer in ten words or less.

My hesitation told Elisabeth what she wanted to know.

“God damn you!” she hissed, and she stormed off to the bedroom, slamming the door behind her.

I had thought about this moment for years. I had thought about all the things I wanted to say in my defense, all of the things I wanted to say to help her understand what I had been going through. I had even dared to hope that she would understand, and that now that the secret was out, perhaps we would be able to reach new levels of intimacy and love. Hah! Here I was, standing in the kitchen, all alone, and there hadn’t

been time to do any of it. It had all happened so quickly; lasting just long enough long for my life to be turned upside down. I was numb.

I wish I could say the episode ends there, but it doesn't. She came out to confront me shortly afterwards.

"If you're having therapy to help you become a woman, we might as well get divorced now," she challenged.

I tried to explain that I had no real agenda. At this point I was just trying to understand these needs and deal with them. "She is not helping me to fight them, but at the same time she isn't pushing me to do anything I don't want to do, either."

"Why the hell do you need to talk to some shrink who doesn't even know you? You're married to me, and you don't try to share these things with me."

This was the opening I needed.

"You have shown no interest in even trying to understand. When I told you about my gender situation ten years ago, I opened my soul to you. What did you do? Did you show compassion? Did you show any interest in 'sharing' way back then? NO! You told me that it had no place in our marriage, and you shut the door right back in my face! You expected that it would go away by itself, but it didn't. So I've dealt with it. Alone! And it's gotten to the point in my life where my strength to fight it has run out, and I have no choice but to figure this thing out, wherever it leads!"

I didn't realize it, but by the time I had finished my little tirade I was almost yelling. Now it was me who was getting angry.

Matt came into the kitchen to investigate all the commotion, putting an end to the brewing storm. Neither of us wanted to fight in front of Matt. We could not say the things that needed to be said with his innocent eyes and ears there. We both withdrew, knowing that this discussion was not over.

Life became very "chilly" in our house after that. I moved out of our bedroom into the spare bedroom. Elisabeth became distant and angry. But little else really changed. I was relieved that things were somewhat out in the open, but also a bit disappointed that I had not told her everything while I had the chance. I had not told her about the hormones. I had not told her about the long-term plan.

Over the next several weeks, I think the more that Elisabeth thought about what had happened, the madder she got. She felt deceived. She felt betrayed. She felt used. It was as if news of my gender situation totally and completely undermined our entire relationship. She seemed to feel that if her love for me was based on a lie, then our entire marriage had been based on a lie as well.

I certainly couldn't blame her for the way she felt. I suppose I was fooling myself if I thought that there had been any other possible outcome. Although I secretly hoped that time would soften her feelings, the realist in me told me I was nuts, and if anything things were bound to get worse. At an ever-quickening pace, Elisabeth and I drifted farther and farther apart as our lives headed in different directions.

I had not cried in 30 years. The fact that I seemed unable to cry actually concerned me. I felt as though I was emotionally constipated; some kind of emotional cripple. All those years of not crying caused me to wonder if I actually could cry. In a physical sense, I'm sure everyone can cry. It is an innate response we all share as infants. However, part of actually crying as an adult is letting yourself cry; it's a matter of relinquishing control and allowing the tears to start flowing. That was something I feared I could not do.

Women in our society see no need to prevent themselves from crying. They cry when they're happy. They cry when they're sad. They cry at home, at work, with family, with friends. Crying is just another form of emotional expression that women in our society are allowed to display.

Men are not. Men are taught not to cry. Babies cry. Girls cry. Boys don't cry. Boys are expected to be tough and strong, and in that world crying is considered to be the epitome of weakness. From the time boys are young they actually resist crying for fear of being called a crybaby, or a sissy. Instead of letting happen as a healthy form of emotional expression, boys build defenses to prevent it.

There had been times in my life when I wanted to cry, when I needed to cry, but couldn't. I remember taking our German Shepard, Murphy, to be put down. She had been a member of our family for 12 years until her deteriorating hips made each step a living torture for her. Eventually, she couldn't even get up off the ground, she couldn't control her bowels, she lost her appetite, and she just gave up. We knew what we had to do.

When I got returned home from the vet my wife and son were both sobbing uncontrollably. We huddled together on the couch to comfort each other in our grief. And as much as I wanted to cry, and felt that I should cry, nothing came out. One night, several weeks after the incident with Elisabeth, and several months after beginning my estrogen program, that all changed.

I had gone to the movies alone. Elisabeth had very little interest in going to movies with me, especially at that point, so I had the choice to either go by myself or stay home. This particular movie was Alien Resurrection. In the movie, Ripley kills the queen alien, and all of her baby aliens. It was not considered a sad movie. In fact, I'm sure that nobody else in that theater cried.

After the movie was over, I left the theater and walked to my car. It had been the last show of the day, so it was late and the parking lot was almost deserted as I got into the car and started the 15-mile drive north into the Sonoran desert night towards my house.

About half way home, an intense wave of sorrow came over me. It was like a tidal wave of grief that seemed to well up out of nowhere. It was uncontrollable. It was

incredible. I think it was the culmination of all the anger, frustration, fear, and sorrow that had been welling up inside of me, finally finding its way out. I started to cry. Tears were rolling down my face. My nose was stuffy and I couldn't breathe. I could barely see where I was going.

I pulled off to the side of the road, as years of tears suddenly found their way out of me. I was sobbing uncontrollably; for me, for Elisabeth, and for Matt. I glimpsed at the reflection of my contorted face in the rear view mirror, feeling almost as if I were watching someone else's tears of grief, and that I should look away out of respect for their sorrow.

I don't know how much time passed before the storm blew over and I started to calm down. It could have been ten minutes. It could have been an hour. I had long since run out of tissue, and had been blowing my nose into anything that wasn't already goopy. As I peeked back into the mirror before pulling back into traffic, I saw a stuffy-nosed, puffy-eyed, red-faced mess staring back at me.

The rest of the drive was calm and serene. I felt at peace. I felt comforted to learn that I actually could cry. And I sensed that the estrogen in my system was working its magic. Learning to handle the flood of emotion that lay just around the corner would prove to be a profound learning experience for me.

One of the major effects of estrogen is that it dramatically increased my sensuality in ALL its various aspects. Every single sense was heightened. Colors became brighter for me. My sense of smell became much more acute. Even my sense of taste was brimming with new flavors. It was a pretty incredible awakening.

Fairly soon, physical changes began. And they scared me even more than the emotional ones. First, I found that I would have wet-dreams that would cause me to come uncontrollably....and that my come was a soapy water type of solution rather than the goop that usually came out. One night I lay down on the bed to rest for a few minutes after dinner. The next thing I knew, I felt cum welling up inside of my penis, and then gushing out all over the place. It scared me to death. What if this happened while I was at work? Or sleeping? How could I explain it? Nobody prepared me for this.

And then the boobs started to grow. They had gotten sensitive, which caused no small thrill of excitement thru me. But one day I put on a T-shirt, and I could see little tits poking out. Suddenly, a chill ran thru me. Whereas everything I had done up to that point had no potential long lasting effect, changes that would ultimately make this process visible to all were beginning. And the big question I had to ask myself was, was I ready for that??

The answer that I came up with after much thought was.....I don't know. This was all very overwhelming, and things seemed to be happening very fast when in reality they were moving very slowly. But in my mind, the prospect of facing these changes were

huge, and they caused me pause. They caused me so much pause that, in mid-October, I stopped going for my shots while I took time to sort things out.

The next few weeks brought about much soul searching. It gave me a chance to clear my mind, and decide for myself what was real to me, and what was not. It gave me an opportunity to balance my priorities, and question my dedication to answering the questions that had plagued me for so long. I found that the hormones very much gave me a pleasure and satisfaction in what was happening, and I found that this respite was a good thing for me. In late November, I started going back for my shots, and I didn't miss a week thereafter.

1998

Enemy At The Gates

In mid January, my in-laws arrived to spend a month with us. I had to move back into the master bedroom during their visit, as they occupied our guest bedroom during their stay. But things between Elisabeth and me were not pleasant. On the outside we seemed to be the same close, loving couple that we had always been. When alone, however, we rarely talked, and it was obvious the Elisabeth was deeply troubled and affected by my disclosure to her. We had seemed to resume the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that had pervaded throughout our marriage.

In early February, a second revelation would come to light, and this was one from which our marriage would not recover. Elisabeth learned that I was on estrogen.

People find it incredulous that I had been on estrogen for over a year, and that my wife had not known about it. In her defense, it had nothing to do with a lack of vigilance on her part, as she is a very alert and aware person. Rather, it was that I was very effective in hiding things. But as time wore on, and it became more and more apparent to me that I had to tell her, the question of how to do that caused me much terror. There is no good time to have that conversation. I started to draft a letter to do the dirty work.

I was spared that duty on February 9. A couple of weeks earlier, I had gone for my shot, which usually cost me \$45. Well, as I prepared to leave, the cashier only charged me \$40. I figured that the price had gone down, or it was their error, but I certainly wasn’t going to complain. Well, on February 9 a bill arrived at my house from my physician for an estrogen shot, and the balance due was \$5.

I was at work that afternoon, listening to a jazz guitar CD. I can picture it perfectly. Elisabeth called me. I could tell from the sound of her voice that something had happened, although I had no idea what. She asked me one question. “Are you taking estrogen injections? We just received a bill for estrogen injections.” I felt like I had been hit by a hammer. “Yes”, I answered. “GOD DAMN IT!” she yelled, and she hung up the phone. My world would never be the same.

I have no defense in my weakness at not being able to tell Elisabeth about the hormones before then, and felt terrible that she had to find out like that. Her folks were visiting, and we continued to put on a pretty good show for them. She even bought me a new wedding band for Valentine’s Day, which very much surprised me. But once her parents left, I felt it necessary to finally tell her everything, so I wrote her this letter:

2/10/98 =====
Explain.doc

Following is a letter I wrote to Elisabeth after she found out that I was taking estrogen. It was early February, and her parents were visiting. I wrote this letter as an explanation....

Hon:

I'm so sorry that you had to find out about this in this way. I wanted to talk with you about it directly, but was planning on waiting until all of our guests had finished their stays so we could do it in private. I even started this letter several weeks ago in an effort to work on it. But now that things are out in the open, in a way I'm very relieved.

Here's what you need to know. I told you in July when we talked about this stuff that I had seen a psychologist who specializes in these issues. The initial stages of getting to the bottom of my situation requires talking about it, as well as taking some written psychological testing stuff. After a couple of months, a diagnosis is made. In this case, as I told you, I was diagnosed as having Gender Dysphoria.

This is a medical condition, not a mental one. It is not a form of mental illness, or anything like that. One of the specialists on the Internet describes it like this:

“Of all the afflictions humankind must endure, Gender Dysphoria must certainly be one of the most unusual and distressing, and not because it produces great morbidity or mortality, but because the accompanying emotional conflicts can engender much unhappiness for the patient and his/her family with possible later problems involving social activities and associations with colleagues at work.

The etiology of this condition is obscure but we are quite certain that the problem occurs in utero and is therefore Congenital in nature and not Genetic, that is, it is not something that is passed from generation to generation. Management and treatment are difficult since the mind's gender is immutable. We cannot change a person's gender no matter what we do; historically we know of no case where a mind changed spontaneously from Male to Female or vice versa. Compounding the problem are the varying degrees of severity which, from a practical point of view, simply means that Sex Reassignment Surgery is not for everyone.”

The important points here are that (a) it occurs in-utero and is not something learned, (b) management of it is very difficult and (c) it varies in severity from person to person.

What you need to understand, and I have tried to tell you time and again, is that my personality is made up of two very separate and distinct sides. One is male. It is the one who naturally has charge, because my body is male. But I also have a feminine side, and this part of me is usually kept in the dark, submerged and isolated because of all the shame and embarrassment it can cause. But the struggle to keep this part of the personality down is a very difficult one....you can't even imagine. It even drives some people to suicide.

Another thing you need to understand is that this has nothing to do with sexual orientation. The very first time I told you about this, 10 years ago, the first question that you asked is whether or not I was gay. The answer is no. I never was and never will be. I love only one thing in this life, and that's you and Matt.

The most important thing to remember, though, is that this is a MEDICAL problem. It is not a mental one. So, once the psychologist has made a prognosis of Gender Dysphoria, the next step is to get in touch with a doctor who specializes in this stuff. You can't see the doctor without first being recommended by the psychologist. That is how I got in touch with the doctor.

The first thing the doctor does is to check to see if there is an obvious medical reason for the situation. I told you that they did a blood test, which I fainted at. They check to make sure nothing is out of whack, and there wasn't. The next thing to do is to ease the problems that the conflict is causing in your mind. This is done with estrogen. It's like gender dysphoria is the illness, and estrogen is the cure. It's as simple as that. They have found that doses of estrogen helps the mind of gender dysphoric people feel more comfortable with itself, and eases the conflict within. I have certainly found it to be true.

One of the main sources of conflict comes from the fact that the body does not match the mind. It's almost as simple as that. That's why some people go all the way and have sex reassignment surgery....to make their body match their mind. Another source of conflict is the shame that goes along with this whole thing.

I can show you many, many examples of people who have been through this. Doctors, lawyers, all kinds of people. They all come to terms with their problem in one way or another. Some deal with it from time to time when it causes a problem. Others go all the way to sex reassignment surgery. As it says, there are varying degrees of this condition, so finding where you fit on the spectrum and becoming comfortable with yourself is very important.

I can also show you many examples of couples who have learned to deal with it together. But I can show you just as many who could not, and it caused their relationship to crumble.

The things I do to help myself are minor in comparison. So what if I want to pick a few stray eyebrow hairs? So what if I don't like hair on my legs? In the big scheme of things, what's the harm? I'm still a loving husband, a good father, and a generally good person. Those are the important things in life, and no matter what happens after this, they will still be true.

I needed to try this to see how it would work. It does not work for everyone. I didn't want to tell you that I was taking estrogen, have you freak out, and then find that it didn't help me after all. As far as I was concerned, I was in a lose-lose situation. Frankly, it has helped me more than anything I have ever done, and (until today) has made me happier inside than I've been in a long, long time.

Although I originally spoke with the doctor last summer, I started this in January. I go for an injection every 2 weeks. As I said, the result is to make the mind feel comfortable with itself. There are minimal dangers and side-effects. It makes some people emotional. In some people it can make the boobs grow a little bit (especially right after the injection). A lot depends on how old you are. Younger people are much more susceptible to the side effects. But all of these are reversible up to at least 6 months. After 6 months, we need to stop and assess how things are going.

I don't expect you to understand or sympathize. I can't speak for you, but I know I can speak for myself. My love for you is unconditional. Pure and simple. I love the person that you are, not what you're not. I love the life we've built, and the life I hope we'll build in the future. If you were to come to me with ANY problem.....I might not understand...I might not be able to see why it was important....but my love for you would allow me to see past any prejudices or preconceived notions and I'd do whatever I could to help you out. I'd never insult you, or ridicule you, for anything you could ever do. If you told me that you always felt you were a hamster, and sometimes needed time to crawl around and chew on sawdust, I'd find a way to accept that. Period.

As for my driving you away from me, that was never my intention. You indicated early on that you felt that this situation was only in my head, and that I needed to deal with it myself. You have indicated many times that anything I do to deal with it in my own way (the eyebrows are a good example) will open me up to being insulted and ridiculed. How the heck am I supposed to react to that? I'm trying to work out a problem that is ripping me up inside.... all by myself.... and all I get from you is insults. This whole thing makes me very defensive, and the way you treat me sometimes makes me even more so.

I also never intended to keep anything from you. But several things were evident to me. First, I have a problem that I cannot deal with alone. Second, you are disgusted and revolted by any mention of what I feel. I would have thought that you would have gone and done some research on it after we talked about it before. You did when they said Matt had whatever that disease was with the coffee spots. But not about this. So my only recourse was to do it on my own. I knew a day would come when we would talk about it....but until I gauged how things were working I was willing to handle it by myself.

I'm more than willing to tell you about things if you'll only look at me through your love eyes, not your disgust eyes. If you can learn to do that, I think our relationship can be stronger than ever. If you can't,

then I don't know what we're gonna do. I don't want this thrown into my face every time we ever have an argument ever in the future just because you know it will hurt me.

So here we are. Almost 40 years old. With a 12 year old child. Two people with the best marriage of any couple that I know. Two people who share the load in the family, and are perfect examples that opposites attract. Things that you're good at, I'm not. And things that I'm good at, you're not. We've built a great life and love each other very much. I still have the letter that you wrote in July when this whole thing happened then, and you said you needed time to sort things out for yourself. You said that you loved me and hoped that we could get through it without any harm to the great relationship that we otherwise had. I agree with you that our relationship IS great....in all the important places.

What happens next? I think it's up to you. If you can continue to love me knowing the full truth, we will be ok. If not, it will be you who falls out of love. But don't give up on us. It's easy to make rash decisions when we're mad or frustrated or confused. But you need to keep focused on what's really important in our lives. At this time I think we both need support, and I only hope our love is strong enough to be there for us when we really need it. I know mine is.

You'll never, ever find anyone who loves you like I do. Don't forget that. I may not be perfect, but no one else is, either. At this time I think we both need support, and I only hope our love is strong enough to be there for us when we really need it. I know mine is.

=====

I wanted to talk about this. I wanted to discuss it. No, I *needed* to. But talking to Elisabeth was like talking to a stone wall. She had closed her mind and her heart. She had been hurt terribly, not once but twice, and her natural reaction was to pull away.

One of the effects of having everything in the open now was that it made me feel more able to work towards a possible transition. Now that everything was in the open, I felt I had little left to fear. So I began to take the steps that I felt needed to be made.

Perhaps the biggest news was that I started to take steps to let Donna out of her cage. People seem to think that someone who is transgendered must sneak around the house their entire lives, secretly wearing their sister's or their mom's clothes. Neither of those things is true for me. I had never had any time to be Donna. Little by little, that was about to change.

I felt I had nothing more to lose (silly me), so I started to do things I had wanted to do for a long time. On my 39th birthday (Feb 22), I shaved my legs. And they have been shaved ever since.

I also faced another reality. My breasts had grown to a point where I could no longer wear t-shirts. I needed to wear baggy shirts. I sometimes started to wear an athletic bra under my clothes, which opened a whole new group of concerns. What if you could see it thru my shirt? What if one of the straps is showing? What if someone touches my back and realizes I am wearing it? These things all added to my stress level, but certainly did not stop me from wearing one. I did not tell Elisabeth about them, and carefully washed them by hand before leaving for work in the mornings...leaving them to dry in my car.

Elisabeth had begun to shun me. Worse than that, she began to ridicule me. She told me I walked like a “fag”, and that I was a “freak”. She told me I made her sick to her stomach. It was not fun to be around her, so I avoided her as much as possible. And thankfully, she avoided me. I went into a room, and she left it. I stayed home, and she went out. She was home, and I went out. Weekends were the worst. We became strangers. No more than that – we became antagonists – living in the same house. It was a horrible time for all of us.

I used to take the dogs for walks around the neighborhood in the evenings, thinking about what was to come, worrying that someone would notice and question my shaved legs, worrying that my growing bosoms were bouncing or showing too much. Despite my concerns and my fears, it was actually my quietest time of my day, and I grew to look forward to my hour or so walking with the puppies.

* * *

Easter was on April 12th, shortly before Elisabeth’s birthday. We had a tradition of going to Easter brunch as a family, and this year was to be no different. We had made arrangements for a late morning meal at the Hyatt.

On Easter morning I was getting ready to go, and I could hear Elisabeth in the bathroom. She was crying. I went in to ask her what was wrong. Matt was right behind me. She exploded at me. She told me that she couldn’t go to brunch with me, that it was just too painful to see all the happy families there. She screamed that I was fucked up, and my entire family was fucked up. She said that I had lied to her before we got married, and that our entire relationship was a lie.... that I was never the person she thought I was and that I would go to hell for doing this to her and Matt. She sobbed that the only thing for her to do was to get a divorce. She told me to take Matt and go to brunch without her.

I was stunned. Not quite so much in that this was unexpected as in the fact that Matt witnessed it all. The level of discomfort in our house over the previous several months must have been obvious to him, although he never said anything about it. Now, it was out in the open. And he had questions. What did mom mean? How did I lie to her? Why did she want a divorce? Who would he stay with? He and I still went to brunch, but I did everything I could to deflect his questions, as I was still too stunned myself to think straight.

4/13/98 12:55 pm
Journal Entry

I can’t believe this is really finally happening. After all the times I’ve thought about it, and worried about it, and wondered when and if the pieces would all fall apart, I think it’s happening. And the weird thing is, I don’t know whether to be glad or sad. Inside, I feel like crying, but I also look forward with anticipation (and some fear) to what the future will bring.

As I think back over 18 years with Elisabeth, it really tugs on my heartstrings. And to think that the bond that held us together so tightly has come so completely unwound so fast is really mind-boggling to me. But it seems as though Elisabeth has decided that our whole marriage has been a lie and a sham. That I was never the person that she thought I was, or who I seemed to be. And because of that, all that we've done and been through doesn't really matter. But I also think she's afraid as to where that leaves her. Here she is, almost 40 years old with a house and a very impressionable 12 year old and 2 dogs and no source of income for herself...where does she go from here? The thought that I ruined her life, which she has accused me of doing more than once so far, really hurts, but I can see why she thinks that.

I feel like such an outsider. It's like when you travel to a strange city, and there are people and semi-familiar things everywhere, but it still all feels so foreign. When it's your own city, you feel so at home, so comfortable and familiar. I don't have that feeling anymore. Things that I felt sure were forever, and perhaps took for granted, are now nothing. I cannot see past today, much less than into the future. I fully expect to get a call from a lawyer that Elisabeth is beginning divorce proceedings or go home to an empty house with a short good-bye note.

The hard part is, even if I wanted us to stay together, I don't think that it's possible anymore. The trust is gone. The feelings are gone. The familiarity is gone. In its place are two strangers who thought they knew each other, but really didn't know anything at all. And there's hurt....hurt at being deceived, at ruining a life, at "choosing" this course for my life rather than all we hoped and planned for, at leaving her in a mid-life lifeboat without an anchor or a paddle, or any sign of land.

And knowing that there are things that she STILL doesn't know, that will certainly break this spindly camels back. To know that my boobs are getting bigger and harder to hide....that is a scene that I really cannot bear to even think about.

But the sad thing is, I knew this day was coming. No matter how much I denied it to myself, or tried to pretend that it wouldn't be like this, I think deep inside I knew. Every time I went to the doctor's for my shots, I knew that it was the kiss of death for my marriage if and when she ever found out....and finding out was only a matter of time. So as I weighed what I was doing, I obviously chose the shot and the feeling of moving to my new life, over the marriage. And even if she were to give me an ultimatum that I must stop the shots and all that goes along with them to save the marriage, I know deep inside that I couldn't do that. And with that thought in mind, it's clear that my priorities, however screwed up they may be, lie in the direction of my new life, and not my old one.

As I said, I feel like an outsider. And I think it's going to get worse long before it gets any better.

4/15/98 01:03 am

After the "outburst", Elisabeth wrote me a note. It took me a couple of days to collect my thoughts, and this was my response:

Hon:

I did NOT lie to you since day one. There's a big difference between telling a lie, and not telling something at all. And quite frankly, I didn't feel there was anything to tell in the first place. If you say that I didn't disclose EVERY skeleton in my closet before we got married, then I guess I'll have to plead guilty as charged. But at that time, it was a mere molecule in my soul, a drop in the ocean that was Dave. It was something that cropped up from time to time, like a migraine, and I dealt with it and eventually it went away again. That did not make me a bad person. You seem to have the impression that it's something that I consciously hid from you before we got married, which is not the case at all. It never even crossed my mind that it would become such a big problem, so there was no reason to even consider about it. I married you because I loved you....you were my first love and will be my only love no matter what happens from here on out. Over the years the love has grown as we've built our lives together. If I had known that it would create such heartache for all of us, I certainly would have done something about it way back then. But that's hindsight now.

It really boggles my mind that you seem to have the idea that it somehow tainted our whole marriage. If that's the way you feel, nothing I can say or do will change that. I think back and see 17 years of two happy people building a life together....buying their first home...having a baby....building a successful business as a team. The fact that I had some inner "demons" was just something I dealt with. I dealt with it as best I could, without exposing you to it, because as it grew I KNEW it would only cause pain and unhappiness. I kept it to myself to PREVENT causing you pain. But in the end, I was damned no matter what I did. They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and in this case it looks like that's true.....

And to be honest, I would have gone without telling you for the rest of our lives if I could have because eventually I knew that it was nothing but heartache. But guilt is a terrible thing. I knew there was this deep, dark secret and it really made me unhappy to keep it all in, so I eventually told you about it. That was 10 years ago. It was the hardest thing that I ever had to do in my life. I fully expected you to dump me back then, and was prepared for that. But life went on, and it faded into the background and we went on to be happy again. You certainly didn't accuse me of living a lie back then. And I'm sure you'll say that it was always in the back of your mind and I certainly don't doubt that, but we were able to live wonderful, happy lives over the last ten years. My problem appeared from time to time and I dealt with it. You made it abundantly clear that no expression whatsoever was going to be tolerated, so I did my best to honor that. I tried to keep it all in.....for all our sakes.

But as time goes by, that gets harder and harder to do. Maybe it has something to do with the change of life.....I don't know. It's like a balloon that's getting bigger and bigger. Eventually it's going to pop. And on top of that, frustration builds with the anxiety and makes a very nasty combination. Especially when you feel like you can't share it with anyone (which is how you feel now). And I know you'll take this the wrong way, but I couldn't share it with you even if I wanted to...I was much too ashamed. So, I looked for someone who had experience with these kinds of things who could give me some advice....that's the psychologist I talked with last summer. And getting some of this stuff off my chest was such a relief....I can't tell you. I didn't do it to hurt you, even though I knew that if you found out it would....I did it to help myself cope. And I know you're going to say that's very selfish of me, but it's something that I HAD to do just to keep my sanity.

I guess the bottom line of all of this is that you can't be honest with others until you're honest with yourself, first. And here I am, stripped bare and trying to be honest, and I'm ready to face whatever the world brings. Although I'm certainly not proud of some of the things I've done, they're things I did to cope as best I could. I'm only human, and I'm sure I made mistakes along the way. And as I try to be honest with myself, I'm learning to be able to accept myself as well, rather than be ashamed of myself. That's a big step.

I'm certainly not asking you to lie for me. I don't know where you got that from. Again, I see a big difference between lying and not telling someone something. Just look at the article that I put over on my CD rack. I couldn't agree with her more. Some things are personal and don't need to be shared with the world. Just because you get married and make vows to each other, you don't give up your right to have your own personal "stuff" that you don't share with anyone. I'm sure you disagree. But if you decide that you need to tell someone (although I prefer you didn't), there's certainly nothing I can do to stop you. I never could. It would hurt me very much, but I'd just have to deal with it. And frankly, there are some people who I think would be initially surprised, but would eventually be very accepting (Judy for one) because they really do love me for what I am, not who they think I am.

I have a book that describes this whole process of telling your wife about this "problem", and it says that unfortunately when the husband comes "out of the closet" (so to speak), the wife often goes into it. Whereas the husband has finally told someone and feels a new sense of freedom at having done so, the wife feels ashamed and embarrassed and all those feelings that the husband used to feel, and they feel like they can't share it with anyone. This is not healthy. And no matter what you think, this is not something that I CHOOSE. I don't know how I could explain that to you so you would understand. Who would CHOOSE this over the life that we have built? No one. You, yourself, should think about talking to

a psychologist, as I think it would help the situation. Get some of this stuff off your chest. They offer new insights on things...new things to consider. I found out that it's part of my Motorola benefits, so it would only cost you a \$10 co pay. What could it hurt? But before either of us do anything rash, I think it's something you should consider.

Although I'm sure you'll disagree with me (again), I don't see anyone to blame here....I only see victims. Although I know I hurt you, I certainly didn't do it on purpose. I didn't go out and say "Gee, how can I hurt Elisabeth and Matt today?". I never asked for this "problem" but I deal with it as best I can. I try to be the best husband and father that I can, while at the same time dealing with my "demons". It's when I hold it all in that it really becomes a problem. But I also feel that if you were a little more accepting of my "problem" along the way, I wouldn't have felt such guilt and shame, and it would have been much easier to share it with you. I'm not blaming you in any way.....like I said, I only see victims of circumstance.

If you tell me to promise that I'll never do any of these things again...ever...I can't do that. You told me to be honest, and that's being honest. You told me that my whole life has been a lie, and that would be asking me to continue to live the lie. If that's what you mean by telling me to change my behavior for good, I know it would just be temporary and I'd just end up hiding it from you again. The pressure would just build and build, and something would have to give. People in this situation have an unbelievably high rate of suicide because they feel trapped on one side by people who they love more than anything who will not accept them, and on the other by their own needs and guilt and frustration and fear. I'm not going to end up like that. If you want to accept me as I am, then we'll see where that leads. It's something that will require some compromise if it can be fixed at all (for example, there is a local support group that meets once a month and I'd like to see how other people who have this "problem" handle it). If that's not something that you can do, I don't know where that leaves us. You say that I've ruined all your hopes and dreams for the future, that I've scarred your heart forever. If that's true, it sounds like you've already given up on us anyways.

Matt heard what you said on Sunday morning. He heard you say that I lied to you 17 years ago. He heard you say that I shouldn't be surprised to come home some day and find you gone. He was full of questions all the way there. And I definitely agree that his needs are a top priority. We need to get him through the rest of the school year without getting him involved in all of this. I think both you and I need some time and some space as well, whether it be to distance ourselves or to work back together, so I guess the "roommates" strategy works for now. It really hurts to love someone and have them reject you and make you feel like scum...not being able to eat together or even be in the same room together. Do you really think it's going to get any better? Do you think you'll ever be able to kiss me like we used to kiss again? You keep saying it's up to me, but in a large sense it's up to YOU. Well, let's try to see where things go.....If you need even more space, let me know and like I said, I'll find somewhere to go until this thing works itself through.

=====

But these outbursts of anger usually subsided somewhat to an uneasy calm.

* * * * *

Sandra

I doubt most people stop to consider the fact that much of our lives is spent training to be men and women in our culture. From how we move, to what we do, to how we do it – there are gender specific ways we're taught to do things beginning at our earliest childhood. The issue for many transsexuals is that they're facing a need to not only learn things most people learn as children, but they need to un-learn things that have come naturally to them for a long time. This is a daunting proposition. For many, it is impossible.

In preparation for a possible transition, the fact that I had not spent even a single hour as Donna outside the safe confines of my mind caused me much concern. There is much to know to live as a woman in our society. Women walk a certain way....sit a certain way.....even eat a certain way. How does one learn to walk in heels? How does one learn to get into a car with a dress or a skirt on? How does one learn about clothes and makeup and grooming?

It became apparent to me at the very beginning that I couldn't do this by myself. I needed someone to help me. But who? Where would I find someone who could teach me the mechanics of womanhood? Who could help to socialize me for the role I was hoping to play in society? The answer was only as far away as the phone book.

I found a small modeling agency in Tempe, not all that far away. They held classes on poise, and on make-up, and on all those things I felt I needed to know. I called, and made arrangements to meet with them in hopes that they would help me.

I met with the owner. Her name was Sandra. She was young and bubbly, had short jet black hair, and a big smile. She seemed to be perfect for her job – perky, feminine, stylish, and personable. We immediately connected. I had no idea how to explain any of this. So I lied.

I told her I was a journalist, writing an article on what it was like to live as a woman. I told her I needed her help in training me for this assignment, as I had no clue as to where to start. She was very intrigued by this, and jumped in head first.

She told me to bring a pair of high heels to our weekly sessions, so I ran to the store and grabbed any pair that looked as though they might fit (actually trying them on was wwwwaayyy beyond me at that point). Sandra had some ideas as to how my hair should look, and one of our "field trips" was to a wig store where I tried several and she helped me to purchase one. She even started to shape my eyebrows, which caused me no small sense of alarm, but seemed to go unnoticed by anyone.

I went met with Sandra every week, during my lunch hour. I really looked forward to our sessions. Sandra would often videotape them, and I'm sure that the image was an odd one. Here was Dave, a strapping guy with short hair, wearing high heels, walking down the runway with his hand cocked in a feminine way, turning clumsily at the end of

the stage, turning and walking back. Thinking back on it now, it must have seemed ludicrous to Sandra. But she never let me see that, and for that I am thankful.

I practiced at home. Nobody was awake early in the mornings when I got up to get ready for work, so I'd put on my heels, go out into the garage, and walk. Back and forth, back and forth. One foot directly in front of the other. Shoulders and hips moving the way she showed me. Turning. Over the weeks it actually started to feel more natural in that I had to think about it less, and just let it happen.

In July, Sandra decided that we needed to get some real-life practice out in the world. We went shopping together to buy a dress. So in the last week of July, 1998, the first version of Donna was born. I was absolutely scared to death. In fact, I remember very little of the day. I remember looking straight ahead so as to not see anyone looking at me, and feeling totally and absolutely terrified. I was stumbling in my shoes, trying to walk as we had practiced all those times. I must have been sweating up a storm. But we somehow made it through. And it was an amazing thing.



Practice at Sandra's – April 1998

Shortly after our training excursion I told Sandra the real story of what I was doing. She seemed to be ok with it at first. It didn't take long to realize that she wasn't.

We had planned to do a big shopping in order to begin a wardrobe for when I went full-time. But eventually she would not return my phone calls, and one day her assistant called to say that she felt sorry for my wife and didn't want to participate any more. Not including Elisabeth, that was the first time I've ever faced rejection like that. It took a while to get over it.

Dr. Ousterhout

There is a plastic surgeon who is a legend among transsexuals. He is known affectionately as Dr. O. He is a plastic surgeon who has done much study on feminization of transsexual faces, and is the only one in the world who does much of the bony work he has invented. He can tell you the typical distance between the eye and the hairline for a female. He is an encyclopedia of ratios and measurements. His work is the ultimate. And as such, it is expensive. Ungodly expensive. But incredibly effective. I once read someone who wrote that once you have had surgery by Dr. O, you will never be mistaken for a man again. Such hopes were key to my transition plans, and I decided that I needed to arrange for a consultation with the doctor. I started by contacting his office manager, Mira, and we arranged for me to visit San Fran on July 3.

A consultation with Dr. O consists of several things. First, he requires a specific set of radiographs that show a potential patient's skull from various angles. I had asked Mira if I could have these done in Phoenix, but she indicated that the doctor was very particular about what he needed and strongly urged that I have them done in San Fran. At the consultation the doctor takes measurements, and looks long and hard at the radiographs, and in the end makes his recommendations. I very very very much wanted this.

Mira made all the arrangements. My flight was to arrive in San Fran at 9 something, so she told me to take the Super Shuttle to the radiology office downtown for my appointment there. From there, she said I should take a cab to their office, and that I would meet with the doctor at 1. This would give time to finish there, take a cab back to the airport, and fly back to Phoenix before anyone ever knew I was gone. Needless to say, things did not go as planned.

I did my best to keep this covert operation secret, and in that I succeeded. I had saved enough cash from my lunch money to book a flight to San Fran, and I purchased my tickets. So far so good. On the morning of July 3, I went to Sky Harbor Airport for my 8:20 flight to San Fran. Things were still looking promising. But once at the gate, I learned that the flight had been delayed. And delayed. And delayed. It got to a point where it was obvious that I would not be able to do everything in the timeframes that we had, so the mission was aborted. I was so sad. And to top it off, Elisabeth had learned of the trip somehow, and was not amused. All in all a bad day.

She spent that 4th of July watching fireworks with Matt and some neighbors. I spent it lying on bed contemplating all of this, and wondering if life was really worth all of this. I decided that it was.

So on the following Monday, I tried again.

This time I made it farther. I scheduled the earliest flight to San Fran, which left at 6:20am, just in case. This flight left on time. I caught the Super Shuttle downtown to the radiology office. So far, so good. Since I had taken the early flight, it was still only 7

am, so I waited in the hallway of the old office building for my 9am appointment. 9am came and went. Nobody showed up to open the office. 9:15. 9:30. Eventually, someone in an adjoining office poked their head out and asked if I was waiting for the radiology office. I indicated that I was. He then proceeded to tell me that the office was not open on Mondays. This was not good.

I called Mira, who just then remembered that he was right, and told me that I needed to go to a second radiology lab across town. She gave me directions on leaving this building, running down a few streets, hopping on a BART train, getting off at some station, going down the street for a mile or so, and arriving at this lab. So off I went on my cross-city adventure.

I must admit that everything seemed to fall into place. I found the subway station. I found the particular BART train that she mentioned. I got off at the correct station. I ran down the street, and found the office. But once inside, they told me they could not fit me in as I did not have an appointment. I let Mira take care of that, and I was at Dr. O's office a little over an hour later with radiographs in hand.

Dr O. is a very caring man. He has a calming effect about him, and immediately put me at ease despite my heightened state of frenzy. He took measurements, and wrote down numbers, and looked at my x-rays, and in the end, he gave his prognosis. The pricetag? More than \$32,000. I needed the works. And I was prepared to do anything to get them. I tentatively scheduled a surgery date that November. I had no idea how I'd swing that, but felt the need to do it anyways.

Still, life was pretty much good days followed by bad days, which I suppose is how most people live life.

7/26/98

Journal Entry

I think I'm coming down with something....perhaps a summer cold or something like that. I'm lethargic and have no energy, my throat feels funny, and I just don't feel quite right. It's not something that I need right now....

We spent all of yesterday cleaning, cleaning and cleaning. I rearranged some of the stuff in my office, which I've been wanting to do for a while. The house sure looks good when it's all spruced up like this. Our out-of-town visitors will be here just after noon, and we'll chat here for a while and then take them sightseeing. I don't know how much time they plan to stay here, but we know of a couple of nice places for dins if they're up for it. I guess we'll just play it by ear.

Other than that, not too much going on right now. This must be one of those quiet times in between the nasty, hard times, so I won't complain.

7/27/98

From: Michelle

Re: I had written and told Michelle that I secretly painted my toenails....

Dear Donna,

You did your toes? I think Elisabeth is going to have a cow with that one. Besides, how can you go swimming in your pool with Matt around? But then again, it may be just another part of Donna that he may need to be exposed to at your discretion. It would be a tough call for me.

7/27/98

To: Dr. Becky Allison

Hi Dr. Allison,

I hope you don't mind my touching base with you from time to time. There are so few people who I can actually talk with this stuff about...that having someone here in the Phoenix area is truly a luxury.

Last time I wrote to you I requested the name of an attorney, and things have quieted down for the moment on that front. I have had upheaval in so many other areas that I feel like a firefighter surrounded by wildfires. I worked for 15 years as a computer consultant before accepting a full-time position with a small company here in Scottsdale in hopes of transitioning there. Well, as of a couple of weeks ago the company is no more. I've been offered one position, and am talking with the Mayo Clinic about working there, so there is a bright side to this saga....The frustrating part is that it's back to square one in many ways. I'm very much a "go with the flow" kind of person, so I'll just roll with the punches and we'll see where things lead.

By the way, I noticed in one of the newsgroups that you were discussing Dr. Ousterhout. I visited with him in early July and have tentatively scheduled a surgery date for late November. If you have any thoughts or suggestions on the subject, they would certainly be appreciated. I am looking forward to it very much.

My wife and I just celebrated our 17th wedding anniversary, and it was actually a bittersweet event. We really are perfect for each other in many ways. My sister recently sent an e-mail saying that we were as close to the "perfect couple" as anyone she knows. We still love each other very much, which is what makes this whole situation so difficult. I feel that as long as our lines of communication are open, things are ok. She has actually become more "accepting" lately since this last crisis, and I'm not sure what to make of it. We'll see what happens.

Take Care,

Donna

=====

In some ways, life was very awkward for me. The in-between time of transition is very difficult, and I was living it and dealing with it every day. My breasts had grown to a point where there was no hiding them. So I wore baggy shirts. Or, if I wore something a little tighter fitting, I wore a sports bra. But I was constantly worried that one of the straps might be showing, or that someone would touch my back and feel the fabric. Thankfully, none of these fears was ever realized. If I swam with my son, I needed to wear a t-shirt, and even then there was no denying what was happening. But rather than be mortified by them, I was loving them. I would constantly feel them, or glance at them as I walked by a mirror, or cup them in my hand to feel their weight. I was very proud of my little babies.

I worked out every day at the fitness center, trying to lose the muscle mass I had gained through all of my weight lifting. I ran 3 or 4 miles on the treadmill in order to keep trim, and really was in very good shape. But in order to do so, it was quite the ordeal, as my breasts were at a point where I needed to hide them. I would need to take all my clothes into one of the bathroom stalls to change into my sports bra and my t-shirt and my sweatshirt. That was not difficult. It was getting OUT of the bra, and taking a shower in a man's locker room that was difficult. It was almost comical if it hadn't been so terrifyingly scary. But I somehow managed to do it for months on end.

I had begun to grow my hair out, slicking it back with gel. Elisabeth hated it.

In October, I had the opportunity to take a job at XYZ, where I had originally been a consultant when I had first arrived in Scottsdale. I knew many of the managers there. In fact, the director of the division was a good friend, and had personally called me about this position. I went in for some interviews, and was offered the job. It was a very good fit.

I had a free week at the end of September, between the end of one job and the beginning of the job at XYZ. I decided to fly back to Rochester to spend that week with my dad. He was in his early 60's, and had been suffering from the effects of his diabetes. He seemed to be getting worse and worse. Every time we visited Rochester as a family we had so many people to see and things to do I never got the chance to spend as much time with him as I wanted. So I went back by myself in October just to spend time with dad.

We had a very good time. We sat around his apartment listening to music, or watching TV, or just talking. We went out for dinners. We did some shopping. But being out and about so much was very tiring for him, so he stopped to sit and rest often. At the end of the week, I said goodbye to my dad and headed home to start my job at XYZ. I was very happy to have spent that week with him. Little did I know it was the last time I would see my dad alive.

As a result of the change in employment, I could not keep my appointment with Dr. O in November. In reality, though, I had no way to fund such an operation, even if I COULD go, so I put those plans on hold until I figured out what to do.

One thing that I did know is that the time to take the next step was at hand. The SOC indicate that, in order to be eligible for Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS), a person needs to live full time in their new gender role for at least one full year. That was the next step in this process for me. I had been continuing to see Dr. Dickson every month or so. I had not missed a single appointment for my hormones. All in all, I felt comfortable in taking the next step.

When I started my job at XYZ, I made it a point to get to know my Human Resource representative. Her name was Liz. She was a couple of years younger than I was, and seemed to be a very nice person. Little did she know what was about to happen.

No Looking Back

I started my new job at the beginning of October. As I sat through the seemingly endless new-hire orientation, I kept radar up for hints or clues about the company's feelings on diversity and tolerance. I was acquainted with corporate tongues enough to realize that some companies put on their diversity face because it was the "in" thing to do, while others actually believed some of the rhetoric that they crafted.

Near the end of the long day the Human Resources Manager of the company came to talk to us. He spoke at length about all of the core values of the company. Integrity. Honesty. Blah blah blah. He shared a utopian vision of acceptance and brotherhood, where everyone got along and everyone was productive and everyone was happy. I must admit; it was very inspiring. The more I listened, the more comfortable I got that perhaps this would be the place. I took notes on what he said, just in case I needed to use it later, in case I needed to remind them of what they had said if push came to shove and I found that the words had no substance behind them. As I started my career at XYZ, I was optimistic that perhaps, just perhaps, I could transition here.....

The company had about 2,000 employees, so it was a fairly good sized company. I worked at our headquarters; a beautiful campus in Scottsdale only 15 miles or so from my house. The main business of the company was to manage prescriptions, and at that time we took great pride in being the largest PBM (Pharmacy Benefits Management) company in the world. If your company offers prescription benefits to its employees, when you go to drugstore and pharmacist checks to see who is covered and what your pricing is, he could very well be checking with the data that this company maintains for you.

My title was "Consulting Analyst", which is a fancy way of saying Senior (as in older than everyone else) Programmer/Analyst. I wrote computer programs, and mentored junior team members, and generally took an active leadership role in the projects in my group. It was a role and an environment that fit me well, and I easily made friends and earned respect during my first couple of months on the job. I made particular efforts to get to know our Human Resources representative, Liz, as I knew she would play a pivotal role should I decide to announce my transition there.

Halloween is a time that anyone with gender issues feels free to express their inner selves. It is the one time of the year that we can usually expose our true selves to the harsh light of the real world without fear of reprisal. It is our one day dress up as ourselves.

Halloween was a big deal at XYZ. They had elaborate costume and cube decorating contests, and it seemed like almost everyone participated in one capacity or another. Early that late October morning I was sitting in my cube when I heard some of the guys in the group talking about a third person that was walking up the aisle.

“OH MY GOD!” one of them said.

“Look at you! I can’t believe you!” said the other.

I poked my head up out of my cube to see what the ruckus was about, and there stood this very attractive brunette. It only took me a second or two to realize that this was one of the programmers from the other side of the building. It was a guy.

He was dressed very stylishly. His makeup was perfect. He was a vision of femininity. More and more people began to notice him, and stop over.

“Who did your makeup?” someone asked.

“My wife got up early this morning and did it,” he explained.

“Oh my gosh. You even shaved your legs!” Someone else exclaimed.

It caused quite the commotion.

As he left the little group that had gathered, heading down the aisle towards the other side of the building, some of the guys lingered and talked among themselves.

“I don’t know about you,” someone said, “but that gives me the *creeps*.”

“Yeah. That was a llliiiiitttle too realistic for my tastes.”

“I think I’m going to keep my distance from that,” said a third.

I smiled as I listened to their reactions. I had two thoughts at that point. First, I figured that this person obviously had his own gender issues, as guys don’t dress up that realistically just for the fun of it. And second, I couldn’t help but feel that this might be a glimpse of the reaction I would get if I started there full-time as Donna.

My mom visited us over Thanksgiving that year. Things were still very tense at our house, but we put on a good “show”. I was feeling a bit self-conscious at my ever changing appearance, but she did not mention anything and the visit seemed to go well.



Mom and I – Thanksgiving 1998

11/27/98**Email from a friend**

It sounds as if you're certainly experiencing the reality of transition. There are unfortunately a lot of downsides. I think most TS people experience all this but don't talk much about it. I certainly have, and I'm not afraid to admit it. Still, that need just never goes away. I know several post ops who finally had a breakdown before finally knowing they just had to change. There are others who, seeing the choices, find a way to back out and live as a less than happy male. It's not a contest, it's about finding our own separate peace.

Telling others is very hard. For me, it actually made me physically ill when I told my boss. And I cried a lot when telling my parents and kids. But it's slightly easier each time now that all my immediate family know. And with strangers, it's no big deal. I told the professor teaching my psychology course, and it was no big deal.

Your wife is no different from most people in fearing the social stigma. Very few people really ignore what others think, so there is a real price to pay. Perhaps the most effective thing a couple could do would be to move to a new location as sisters in law or something, but for me that's not the solution.

11/28/98 1:27 pm**From: Dr. Becky Allison**

Dear Donna,

I'm very glad to know you are able to have more productive discussions with your wife. I have a close friend who has proceeded slowly with her transition, beginning hormones and electrolysis over three years prior to announcing her public intentions. This has allowed her spouse time to find acceptance in her heart and to realize that she does want to remain with her partner through transition. This would be wonderful if it could happen in your case.

> *Things here at XYZ are going well, and I'm not sure how our sale*
 > *will affect things, if at all. I'm hoping to talk to HR in the*
 > *next couple of weeks with a February timetable in mind. I'm going to*
 > *have some work done by Dr. Ousterhout at the same time, so it will all*
 > *come together. My birthday is in February, so it's kind of a symbolic*
 > *rebirth, if you will...*

It sounds very well planned, and I hope you will experience good acceptance at HR. Transitions are becoming more common, and many companies are actually formulating official plans to deal with us.

Please stay in touch. I'd love to know of your progress. You have my very best wishes for a wonderful holiday season.

* * * * *

After just a couple of months there, I had come to the conclusion that this was the perfect place and time to take that next step. I got along well with everyone in the group. The boss was a good friend. My HR Rep seemed very nice. The company seemed as though it would be accepting. Everything seemed as right as it would ever be to approach the company about my situation to make plans for a full-time transition. My dad once told me that timing is everything, or nothing, and all of my planets seemed to be aligned to help me do this.

So, at the beginning of December 1998, I wrote an email to Liz indicating that we needed to get together to talk about an important issue. I fully understood that I was going to tell her things about myself that could not be “un-said,” but I felt that I was ready for this. Our meeting was scheduled for December 11th at 8:30 in the morning.

12/9/98

To: *Becky Allison*

Hello Dr. Allison:

Did you get any snow over the weekend? We live up near Cave Creek, and it came down in big, fluffy white flakes! We got pretty near an inch, which stayed on the ground for about an hour or so. I took some pictures just to prove I wasn't dreaming! The McDowell Mountains looked just beautiful all dressed up in white....

I have an appt. with my HR rep on Friday morning. The thought of going and actually talking to them, face-to-face, fills me with just about every emotion in the book...fear, excitement, worry, relief...you name it, I'm feeling it. In the grand scheme of things, I guess it's just a small step, but at the moment it feels like a huge hop. I've thought about this for so so long, and to think that it's just around the corner for me is really amazing to me. I'll let you know how it goes.

The holidays have proven to be a very difficult time for my wife, and Thanksgiving was no different. It fills her with "family" thoughts, and I know she gets pretty down. Every "family" holiday this year has been a disaster, so in a way I'm really dreading the emotional impact of Christmas. Oh well. I guess it comes with the territory.

Take Care, thanks for your support, and wish me luck on Friday....

Donna

In preparation for the meeting with Liz, I drafted a letter that outlined everything that I wanted to say. I worked on it for a couple of weeks; rereading it, fine-tuning it, trying to get it just right. The more I read it, the more I “tweaked” it. Thankfully, the morning of our meeting came to end the guessing and second-guessing; it was a good as it was going to get.

On that morning, I walked over to Liz's office, well aware of the magnitude of what I was about to do. It was a wonderfully sunny, cool Phoenix winter morning, and I remember taking time to notice the warmth of the sun on my face, the songs of the desert birds as they went about their morning chores, and the people who calmly went about their own lives unaware of what was about to happen in mine.

Once in her office, we chit-chatted for a few minutes. About work. About our families. The time to hatch had arrived. I wasn't nervous. I wasn't afraid. I didn't have second thoughts to turn and run.

I gave her the letter. I asked her to read it slowly and carefully.

Hi:

I have worked here at XYZ as an FTE now for almost three months. Prior to that time, I worked here on contract for almost 2 years. I have enjoyed working with the people here at XYZ, and find the work that I am doing to be both challenging and exciting. I look forward to being here and contributing to the success of XYZ for a long, long time.

However, I do have a very personal issue that I need to discuss. It deals with a subject that is the basis for many prejudices and misconceptions. It has caused me many years of anxiety, guilt, and confusion. But the time for hiding from myself has past. I have finally reached a point where I can be honest with myself, and can now finally be honest with others, whatever the consequences may be.

The issue of which I speak is gender. A person's gender identity can be divided into two parts...physical gender and mental gender. A person's physical gender is determined by chromosomes, and there are no questions in that regard. However, their mental gender is assigned based on a complex series chemical processes that react on the developing fetus' brain. People assume that your physical gender naturally matches your mental gender, as it does in most people. But there are people who have the mental identification with one, but the obvious physical characteristics of the other. This affliction causes a lifelong struggle, beginning as soon as a child realizes there is something wrong with the way the world looks at them and the way they perceive themselves and how they fit in. They do their best to cope in a world in which they feel uncomfortable and alone. The term given to people who suffer from this situation is Transgendered. I am one of these people.

Unfortunately, people who suffer from this affliction are often stereotyped. They are often depicted as mentally ill, homosexual, or as having some type of deviant fetish. I am certainly none of these things. I have been married for almost 18 years to a woman that I love very much, and we are trying very hard to work our way through this. I am a very devoted father to a 13-year old son. I have had a very successful career, and will continue to do so in the future. Being transgendered has nothing to do with sex or with illness, it has to do with self-identity, and the two are worlds apart. It is an affliction that I certainly did not choose, but one that has affected me for my entire life, and one that I am working to correct right now.

The pressures on a transgendered person are tremendous. They must live their lives living a role they feel they were not born to play. They must create a persona that is acceptable to the outside world, but may or may not represent their true selves. They must internalize their struggle for self-acceptance, which forces them to live a very uncomfortable existence. All these things lead to a tremendous amount of stress and strain on the transgendered person, and at some point in their lives they reach a point where they cannot keep it in any longer, and must work to correct their situation.

There is an internationally accepted protocol of treatment for people who are clinically diagnosed as being transgendered. Since it has been proven that a person's gender identity cannot be changed, this treatment deals with a person's physical world, which can be changed. It is designed to make the transgendered person feel more comfortable within the confines of their own skin by making their body more closely match their mental gender, and often leads a person to complete gender reassignment surgery. It is called the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care, and it follows the following framework:

- It begins with meeting with a gender specialist who must make a determination on who is a true candidate for continued treatment and who is not.
- After an intensive three-month screening has been completed, people identified as being truly transgendered are allowed to begin a regimen of female hormones. These hormones have numerous effects, both physical and mental. I have been on such a regimen for almost a year.

- The next step in the treatment is known as the RLT, or Real-Life Test. The person is required to live full-time as a member of their mentally identified gender for at least one year prior to becoming a candidate for gender reassignment surgery. This is a very difficult task, involving legally changing your name, modifying all records, and learning to live in a whole new world. This is where I am right now, and that is why I am telling you all this.
- People who successfully complete the RLT are then allowed to seek gender reassignment surgery.

I am planning to begin my RLT in February or March of 1999. I will be taking a couple of weeks off to prepare for my transition prior to that time. I will be legally changing my name to reflect my new gender role, and as a result of my hormone regimen I am currently eligible to be declared a legal female in the state of Arizona by the Superior Court. I will be living and dressing totally as female.

Needless to say, a change of this magnitude needs to be coordinated with many people. I know of many instances where work place transitions have gone very smoothly and without incident. This is typically the result of much planning, forethought and sensitivity for all parties involved. That is why I am coming to you at this early stage.

I ask for your patience and your tolerance during this very difficult time. Besides these very difficult issues here at work, I am going through a very painful time with my wife, family and friends as they struggle to accept my situation. I am feeling every emotion that you can imagine.... excitement, fear, nervousness, wonder...you name it, I'm feeling it. I feel confidence, because I know what I am doing is the right thing for me to do. I feel pride at finally having the courage to confront issues that have perplexed me for my entire life. But most of all, I am feeling relief in the sense that my years of hiding from myself are almost over. Anything you could do to make this process easier would be greatly appreciated.

I was hired at XYZ because of my background and my track record for proven hard work and results. It was deemed to be up to very high standards by which XYZ judges its applicants for positions of this level. In the short time that I have been here, I feel that my work has lived up to this and am very proud of what I have accomplished. Although some things about me will certainly change, the things that make me a hard working, dedicated, loyal employee will not. In fact, I believe that without the extra mental baggage that I have carried for these many years, these qualities will be enhanced.

During my New-Hire Orientation here, a gentleman spoke with us late in the afternoon. He was talking about XYZ, and the values that XYZ promotes and expects from its employees. One of the words we discussed was "Integrity". We discussed that it meant being honest with yourself and others, and with taking pride and ownership in everything you do. It is a word that has tremendous meaning to me, and in my eyes this is a good opportunity for XYZ to demonstrate that to our company, it is more than a word. It is a value that is appreciated and expected in each and every employee, regardless of their unique individual situations. I believe that XYZ is a company that accepts people for who and what they are, across the entire spectrum of humanity. That is why I am proud to be a XYZ employee.

I thank you for your time.

Waiting for her to read it seemed like an eternity. I looked down at my legal pad, pretending to write something to keep myself busy as she read. I studied her out of the corner of my eye, looking for a reaction. I didn't see anything.

Finally, she was finished. She took a deep breath, and looked up at me. Her eyes were wide as though she didn't know quite what to say. She told me she couldn't begin to understand how difficult it must have been to write the letter and she appreciated my honesty.

Ultimately, she told me she did not know whether XYZ had any specific policy regarding this type of situation, so she would need to do some research and get back to me at some point in January. As I walked back to my office I was numb at what I had just done.

Little did I realize it, but my life could never be the same again. The simple act of letting the genie out of the bottle is life-changing. Finding the courage to get to that point, to put it all on the line, to expose your hidden self in the workplace, is inherently empowering. Whether my transition would lead me to SRS or would lead me to somewhere else really wasn't the issue. The fact of the matter is that this was a bell that could not be un-rung. And, in hindsight, I wouldn't have un-rung it even if I could.

12/14/98 10:15am

Journal Entry

Well, It has officially started. In my book, anyway. Friday was the day. I set up a meeting with my HR rep to "come-out", and tell the company of my intention to transition here at work early next year. So Friday was the day I told anyone about my "situation" other than those who are in my immediate support group. The cat is out of the bag, and where it wanders now is anyone's guess.

Life is made up mostly of small steps. The only way we can see our progress sometimes is by setting and reaching milestones. Friday was a milestone. Both in terms of my transition process, and in my own coming to terms with my situation. To tell a stranger, who has control of our livelihood in the palm of their hands, about something as deeply personal as this is a very frightening experience. It's not frightening in the sense you are worried if it's the right thing to do or not. If that's the case, don't do it. But it's frightening in the sense that you no longer have total control. Oddly enough, having the strength to relinquish that sense of power is a very empowering act. I am very proud of handling things the way I did, of being able to do what I did.

* * * * *

The following week, I went to Dallas for work. I was able to spend a little time with mom, which was very nice. I was also able to meet Michelle, who up to this point had been an internet pen pal. Actually, she was much for than that to me. She was a confidant, a supporter, a sounding board, a muse. This would be the first time that we had actually met in person, and I was looking forward to that.

We arranged to meet at a Barnes and Noble. I was wearing my baggy Syracuse University sweatshirt. There was little or no hint of femininity to me. Following is a note from her journal on the event:

12/16/98

From Michelle's journal describing our first meeting:

After getting home I ran and got cleaned up so that I could meet Donna at Barnes and Noble. She's in town to do some work for the computer company she works for. I use the female pronoun because that's

what she wants to be. Anyway, I met her at the book store and we went to dinner and came back to my apartment. It felt so strange to finally meet Donna after almost a year of the two of us pouring our hearts out to one another. I never mentioned it to her, but Donna does not look very feminine yet. I think it's mainly because she's still married and would not be able to "get away" with fully exposing that part of herself yet. We talked for a couple of hours about how we were feeling and it went very well I think. At one point during the end of the evening, Donna offered to let me see the effect that estrogen has had on her breasts, but I declined. I didn't feel it would be comfortable for me.

I also took some additional steps to help to "develop" Donna. I understood and realized just how important Sandra had been for me to help begin the process of actually putting all this together. I was undaunted by the fact that she had ultimately rejected me, and I started to look for someone else to fill that role. I decided, though, that this time I'd be up front from the beginning.

One day I was reading a local magazine called "Arizona Women". There was a story about a woman who was an image consultant. She was a very attractive woman, and the story said all the right things. It told how she worked with each client to understand their individual needs and help to develop the look and the skills that would best feature them. Her name was Julie.

I did not want to call her from my desk, so I snuck into a meeting room to telephone her. She answered the phone. I had no idea as to how to bring this up, so I started by telling her I had read the article and was very impressed. I told her that I realized I was not part of her target demographic, but the way that she had phrased things had given me hope that she would be able to work with me on my own needs. And then I told her about myself. She told me that she needed to do a little research on the topic. She suggested meeting for coffee a couple of days later.

When we met, Julie looked even more spectacular in person than she did in her photograph. She has a very compassionate face, and I immediately felt at ease with her. It was apparent that she had done much homework over the previous couple of days, as she was prepared with specific intelligent questions on the entire transition process. We chatted for an hour, and in the end she said she would be glad to work with me.

* * * * *

Christmas in 1998 was bittersweet. It was hard to celebrate knowing the things that I had set into motion, and that this very well could be the last Christmas that we spent together as a family. Holidays are difficult times for many, and for the first time in my life a cloud of uncertainty dampened the joy of the season.

At that point my son had just turned 13, and Christmas wasn't the same as it was when he was young. The fact that Christmas in Arizona just *felt* different – it's hard to get into the season when it's 80 degrees and sunny outside. Certainly, that's not a

complaint. It's just an observation that the holidays that year were different. I think I knew that they would never be the same again.

Just before the end of the year, I wrote to Dr. O to try to set up another date.

12/28/98 1:27 pm =====
To: *Dr. Ousterhout's Office*

Hi Mira:

I met with HR on Friday to discuss my situation. From what I could tell, things went very well. My HR rep is a very understanding, gentle person, so I didn't feel too, too uncomfortable talking with her. It seems this is the first time they've come across a situation like this, so mapping out a transition plan should be interesting....

She asked what my timetable looked like, and I said I was hoping to begin full-time here at work some time in February of March. She thought that would be ok, but will check to make sure. We have a very large project coming to completion at the end of March, so I'm hoping to schedule with you either just before or after that. I told them that I was trying to work my schedule around when I could get on Dr. Ousterhout's calendar, and would give them an update as soon as I had one.

So this leads me to a couple of questions. First, can you give me a couple or three dates that are currently available so I can pass them along? I'd like to select one and get you your deposit ASAP. Also, if we set a date and you have a cancellation prior to that time, what is the process of moving forward?

I look forward to hearing from you, and am very excited to be moving forward again.

Thanks for your patience.

Donna

The difficult issue for me, that still caused me difficulty, is that I had no conceivable way to fund such an endeavor. These surgeries cost over \$30,000, and I don't know who I thought I was kidding thinking I could find that kind of money. That, however, was about to change in a cruel and tragic way.

* * * * *

All things must come to an end. The last weeks of 1998 marked the end of a golden era in my life...the Fall of the Roman Empire, the end of the Renaissance, the end of the age of innocence.

It was to be the last Holiday Season that my wife, my son, and I would be together as a family. It was to mark the end of my efforts to hide Donna from the prying eyes of the outside world. It was to mark the beginning of my real efforts to help Donna emerge and grow. And a very profound event would rock me to my core, would cause me to

reevaluate everything in my life, and would provide the strength of purpose and of conviction that I would need to proceed through my transition.

On 7:30am on Wednesday December 30, 1998, my mom called me at work to tell me that my dad had died in his sleep. I cried for days.

1999

Life Itself

Everyone in our family has always looked up to me as the oldest and the strongest. It's a facade that I have cultivated very carefully, which is why my "coming-out" will be so surprising when that finally happens. I need to get myself together before going home, as it's an image that I'm not ready to shed just yet.

-- Journal Entry

Losing a parent is a very profound thing. It affects us in ways we can't even begin to imagine or understand, and entire books have been written on that subject alone. Having this happen, at this time in my life, was something that caused me much thought. It changed me.

In his way, my father was a great man. He was certainly not a typical father, and I think being a dad is a role that made him uncomfortable, but he did as best he could and in the end that's all that matters to me. He very much lived life on his own terms, and I very much respected that, especially now that I have the benefit of hindsight. Although he was definitely a "thinker" and an academic, and had more "brain power" than anyone I have ever met, he had a great zest for the sensuality of life. He loved the vistas of snow-covered mountains. He appreciated a good meal, or a bottle of fine wine, or a snifter of the best scotch. He enjoyed a good cigar, saying that it relaxed him because it would not be hurried. I have come to be thankful that he passed along that love of life and all its bounty to me.

I take some solace in knowing that Death was not an unwelcome thing for my dad. He felt, as I do, that the quality of life was far more important than the longevity. He had lost much of what gave him joy in life to the ravages of diabetes. He spent 6 hours, three times a week, attached to a dialysis machine that filtered his blood. He had lost much of the feeling in his fingers and toes, to the point that he would cut himself or stub a toe and would not realize it until he found the blood path to indicate that he was wounded. He could not walk unaided, and his snazzy walker with wheels that Jude and I bought him in Canada was a constant companion. But in all that, my dad's spirit was never broken. In a very real way, he left this world as he would have wanted....on his own terms. I found true comfort in that.

Many people ask me whether my dad's death is what caused this seemingly sudden mid-life awakening. As you can see from events thus far, this awakening was far from sudden, and the wheels had been in motion for some time.

In several very real ways, my dad's death gave Donna life. First, the money that he left me provided the much-needed money to proceed with plans to visit Dr. O and venture out on my own.

But in a more spiritual sense, contemplation of life itself gave me the strength and sense of purpose that is necessary to survive this transition. I wondered what dad was thinking about as he lay in his apartment just before he died. I wondered if he knew

what was happening. I wondered if he knew that he was about to take his last breath. I wondered whether it is true that our entire lives pass before our eyes in an instant, and if so, I wondered what he thought about that. My dad had so many plans to do things that he had put off, and I'm wondering that, after all was said and done, my dad could contemplate for a minute just before moving into heaven, cross his arms, nod his head up and down a few times, and say that he really lived his life without regret.

I have been told that it's not the things we do in life that we regret, it's the things we DON'T do. I very much believe that to be true. Here I was, a 40-year-old man trapped in a body and a role and a life that no longer fit. I had the opportunity to change that. Of course, there were no promises or guarantees on how things would work out, but knowing that I had been granted one life to live on earth, and it was my responsibility to live it to the fullest, gave me great strength and renewed courage.

Some people look at my journey strictly as a gender journey. At that point, in early 1999, I saw it far more as a journey to self-discovery. It felt that the only way to face the issues that had plagued my mind and soul for so long was to take major strides down that path. The next few months were to provide the impetus to do that.

Dad never knew of my turmoil, or of the events in this book, during his lifetime. But I talk with him in heaven on a regular basis, and I know he is pleased.

1/1/99 5:53 pm =====
From: Becky Allison
Re: a note I had sent mentioning my father had died a couple of days before....

Dear Donna,

I'm very sorry for you in your loss. Although, as you say, your father is spared further suffering, it is never easy on the loved ones who remain behind.

>We never played ball together...or went to a movie...or did the "father-son" thing. But he did the
 >best he could. My wife blames much of my current situation on this upbringing, but I don't put
 >much stock in that....

I'd put no stock in it at all. Your condition is biological, not due to any conditioning.

> I've always wondered how I would handle the passing of a parent, and it's a very difficult thing.
 > Especially right now. It leaves an emptiness like I've never felt before. As we grow up we feel
 > that our parents are always there for us if we need them, and now to realize that that isn't true
 > anymore is hard. But I'm learning alot about myself, and I'm coping as best I can....

Robert Penn Warren, in "A Place To Come To," used the analogy of an umbrella. Our parents protect us, even as adults, from many of the world's storms, and we are left unsheltered to face them on our own when our parents are gone. I've always understood the reality of that likeness.

> I have to go back home next week for his memorial service. I'm the >executor of his will,
 > so I'm preparing myself for the responsibilities and headaches that such a duty entails.
 > Everyone in our family has always looked up to me as the oldest and the strongest. It's a

> facade that I have cultivated very carefully, which is why my "coming-out" will be so
 > surprising when that finally happens. I need to get myself together before going home,
 > as it's an image that I'm not ready to shed just yet.

I remember the role. I had no siblings, so when my parents died, my spouse's family was all I had. My spouse was the oldest of three daughters and so I was in a leadership role myself. (The other two sons-in-law had had their failings, so of all the people who might have divorced, we were the least expected. Just shows you how strongly we can conceal our truth.)

Hoping 1999 does bring you some joy and peace,

Becky

=====

During the first week of January I flew back to Rochester to participate in my dad's memorial service and begin the process of documenting and settling his estate. He had asked me to be the executor of his will, so I was about to play that role.

I went to Rochester alone. Elisabeth chose not to accompany me, and at that point that was fine, so I did not push the issue. I did not need that added pressure and stress in the face of the emotional turmoil I was already feeling. It was my chance to bond again with my family, suddenly missing its patriarch.

Dad would not have wanted a morose wake followed by a symbolic burial. Of all of us "kids", my sister is most like my dad, and she felt he would have wanted a party to celebrate his life, rather than an event to lament his passing. So that's what she arranged. It was an inspired idea, and a very special evening.

Many family friends attended the event. It was absolutely beautiful. Outside a terrible storm raged, and temperatures hovered near zero. But friends braved the chill to spend that evening with us and celebrate my dad. We had tables scattered with photo albums, and my dad's books, and some of his paintings, and various things he had enjoyed during his life. People sat around in small groups, eating hors d'oeuvres and sipping drinks, talking about dad and the things that they had done with him. It was a very nice evening.

I was very self-conscious during all of this. My 18 months on estrogen had certainly started to fill out my bust line. But I found that it was changing my overall appearance, as well. Even my face looked different. And this event to celebrate my dad's life was to be the last time Dave would wear a suit, or a tie. In some ways, it was a fitting end to that life, as well.

It's really amazing to think that all these things that we dream about for so long are actually within reach. It truly amazes me. As I prepare, I'm going through some very, very difficult times. But I seem to have found a strength that I did not know I possessed, and I know I'll be ok.

- - Journal Entry

As the new year dawned I struggled to find a sense of normalcy and balance in a world that had suddenly been tossed on its ear. After struggling with all that was happening at an increasingly fast pace, I decided to define that time as a milestone on my journey. I needed to find my bearings. I needed to regain my focus. I needed to gauge just where I was, and where I was headed for fear of spinning out of control.

I had learned early in my adult life that it is often unwise to measure a trip or a task based on how far there still seems to go. To do so only serves as a constant reminder of the battles that may still lay in wait in the horizon, or of traps that lay around the corner. I had concluded that measuring progress by the distance yet to travel from some perceived goal was like trying to gauge distance from some destination that lay shimmering and shining off in the distance, like a heat mirage across miles and miles of endless scorching desert. These efforts all too often end in disappointment.

Instead, I took that opportunity to measure my progress based on what I had already accomplished; on ground already covered. Not just in my transition plan, but in my entire life as a whole. I decided to define some serious milestones, based on accomplishments and on events and on "firsts" in my life, to make navigation easier.

Serious contemplation of life and death can lead to some very profound observations and insights for those who are patient enough to look deeply and keenly. I took the I took a good, hard look at all of the changes I had seen in just those past few months, and I already saw things accelerating. Towards what? That was still to be determined....

=====
Journal entry

Why do things always have to be so hard? My dad lived his whole life, struggling with the terrible affects of diabetes and what they did to his body, and once he died it really hit home. All that suffering and struggling to stay alive and live a quality life, and all that's left is a box full of ashes and alot of paperwork. And I am overwhelmed by the question...."Why?"

Now that things have gotten sticky here at home, I struggle to balance my own needs with those of my wife and son. In a real sense, there is no intersection. There is no common ground. There's no place where my need to be Donna intersects with my wife's need for a husband. And for me to have expected anything else is foolish on my part.

My wife and I have avoided each other like the plague all weekend. I go into a room, and she leaves it. We no longer even feel comfortable around each other. It's just so sad. I'm a very strong person. I will survive. But she is not. And this is just killing her. And that's why my heart hurts. But it is tempered with the knowledge that I cannot go back. I cannot let my sorrow cloud the knowledge of what I need to do. And I am hopeful that time will prove to be a salve to soothe wounds and prove that life goes on.

* * * *

I believe that a person's spiritual sense very often mirrors their conscious one. In the weeks after my dad's death I began to notice that my dreams took on a clarity and a definition that they had never had before. Perhaps it was a result of the heightened sensate effects of the estrogen, but they suddenly seemed to become so much more vivid and intense, to the point that they sometimes even seemed to be in color! In late January I had the first dream that I could remember in which I was female! *Really* female! In the past I had been a guy dressing as female, or afraid that others would detect me. This was HUGE! I couldn't wait to get back together with my psychologist to tell her! She listened to me with a smile on her face, genuinely happy for me.

More of Us

In early January, I decided that I needed to meet more of “us”. To my knowledge, I had never met another transsexual face to face. Although I very much considered myself to be a loner, there was much I needed to know, and the only way to get that information was to get involved with other transsexuals. How does one go about doing a name change? How does one get a new driver’s license? What other details do I need to know? Besides, I had never met another transsexual, so I had no idea what to expect.

Besides, as a man I had been raised to believe that to need help was to admit weakness, so getting to the point of actually seeking help was a significant achievement for me. I had dealt with this – isolated from everyone and everything else – for my entire life. The fact that I had reached a point of realizing I couldn’t do it alone any longer, that I needed others, that support really did have value – was huge for me. I feel incredibly sorry for those who can’t or won’t get to that point.

There was a support group that held meetings at the Gay and Lesbian center on the first Saturday of every month. I decided to attend.

I told Elisabeth that I had to work for the evening. I did not know where to go to change into my “Donna” outfit, so in the end I decided that I would go to a private bathroom in a secluded area at work to change. I expected that nobody would be there at that time on a Saturday night so I would be able to change undisturbed.

Donna had a very small world. She didn’t own much. In fact, it all fit in a plastic bag in my desk drawer at work. I had collected it from here and there, terrified that the cashier would question me or somehow know. Sometimes, I talked on my cell phone as I paid for my purchase, pretending to talk to nobody simply so I wouldn’t have to answer any questions. Alone in the bathroom I put on a blue sweater, and a pair of jeans. I did my makeup. I put on my wig. It was almost surreal to be going out in public like this. The drive to the meeting was pretty intense for me.

There were only a half dozen people at the meeting, but it was wonderful to finally be among “friends”. I was accepted happily and unconditionally, and felt very comfortable and at home. I had many questions, and people there were eager to provide answers. I even brought my camera to capture this event for posterity, as it was a major milestone for me. This was the beginning of my attempts to reach out to others, which I was to find is very important throughout transition. People that I met at that meeting remain friends to this very day.

Some of it was scary, too. A couple of the gals spent ten minutes comparing hand guns that they carried in their purse. “A girl can’t be too careful,” they told me. I rarely

had an opportunity to need a handgun. The dangerous reality of my situation became a constant companion.

Afterwards, I went back to work, changed out of my Donna gear, stashed it in a filing cabinet in my cubicle at work (so it would not be found by accident at home), and went home. I was very pleased with myself.



At my first support group meeting

At the end of January, I got an email from Liz in HR saying that she was ready to meet to discuss my transition. We met shortly afterwards to discuss:

Jan 28, 1999 =====

The HR "chat"

It's 10am, and I'm just back from my chat with Liz in HR. It went very well, just as I had hoped it would.

We started out with some small talk about my dad and stuff. She has been very busy lately, and apologized for having to schedule our meeting for so long after our initial one.

Basically, she said that the company does not have a problem with my situation, and would do anything they could to help in any way I felt best. She said that my job was certainly not in jeopardy, as they have had very favorable feedback concerning my work, and they considered this to be more a "personal" matter than anything. She felt it was their job to simply let people know what was going on....and towards that end she asked me how I wanted to handle that.

I told her I did NOT want to get up in front of a room full of people and tell them....I would not survive such an ordeal. I told her I would prefer to give her something to read, and have her do the dirty work. That would also demonstrate that the company is supportive of this, which I think is very important. She told me that would be fine. I asked her exactly WHO she planned to include in this meeting. My group? The entire floor? The building I work in is fairly self contained. It is a 2 or 3 minute walk across the desert to get to the main building. She said she'd figure that out, and I said fine.

She asked how I wanted to handle telling my management team. That includes Brian-the-director, Charlie-the-tough-ass, Jason, and Dave-the-VP who is Brian's boss. I told her that I had been thinking about that alot, and I wanted to tell Brian myself. As for the rest, I'd rather she do that. She told me that her personal thought was that I should be there to answer any questions, and I told her that perhaps she could tell them and then we could all meet to plan a strategy and I could do it then....She thought that would work ok.

She told me that the company would continue to cover Elisabeth and Matt under our group benefits as long as we were married. She asked what our plans were, and I told her I had no clue as to what was going to happen on that front. She said that Arizona has no laws governing same-sex marriages, but that if we did stay together that absolutely none of our benefits would change. I thought that was generous.

One thing I did have a problem with was the bathroom situation. She said they had discussed that, and that they expected me to use the men's room until surgery. I told her that wouldn't work, and I didn't see what the surgery had to do with it. I told her that prior to starting there as Donna, I will have gone to the state and had my name legally changed. I will also get a decree from the state that, in their view, I am a female (based on letters from my psychologist and doctor). I told her I will get a brand new driver's license, and it will have an "F" in the sex bucket. So, as far as the state of Arizona is concerned, I will be female, and I don't think that I should be forced to use the men's room. She told me that she didn't realize that I would be doing all that, and that it certainly made a difference.

I told her that the washroom here on our floor is very large, but there is one in the annex that I felt would work out great. It is a small building attached to ours, and that's where I go to change on nights that I go to the TG support group. There are one or two stall men's and women's rooms over there, and (in the men's room at least) there is a lock on the door. I told her that I thought it would work out very well, and she made a note of it and told her she would investigate that.

She asked if I would be comfortable to make myself available to people if they have any questions once I begin my transition, and I told her that would be fine. We both felt that the first week or two would be difficult, in that everyone would be curious and would come around to take a look-see, but it would eventually get old and things would calm down a bit. She told me that if I ever felt discriminated against or harassed in any way, to make a bee-line over for her office.

My cube is right on the main walkway, and she asked if I would be more comfortable being moved to someplace with less traffic, and I told her no. I like where I am, and don't think it will make my any more comfortable or uncomfortable either way. I said that I thought it was best that we downplay this whole thing, that the bigger a fuss we make about it, the bigger a deal everyone else will make of it as well. It's like when Matt was younger and would fall and scrape his leg. If he saw that we got all worried that he was bleeding, he would get worried and would scream, whereas if we just shrugged it off, he would too. I felt it would be best to get everyone together in a room and say "There's something you need to know but it really doesn't affect you....", that would be best, and she said she felt the same way.

She asked what my new name was going to be, and I told her. I had printed the picture I sent to you, and showed it to her, as I thought people would have a hard time visualizing it, and she seemed genuinely surprised and said I looked great. Wow! I told her I didn't have much to work with, but at least I wasn't some 6 foot 4 linebacker type with big, broad shoulders and size 14 shoes. We agreed that, as unfair as it is, appearance has alot to do with level of "acceptance", and she thought I'd have no trouble at all as far as that was concerned.

We talked a little bit about tolerance, and how Charlie would deal with this. He is my immediate manager, and has a very poor track record in dealing with women. She said he'd have to tolerate it....it was part of being a manager. I said that in my mind there was a big difference between accepting something because you want to, or because you're forced to. She said that was true, and added that she was supportive of me because she wanted to, not just because she had to as my HR rep. I thanked her for that....

She said all that's left is for me to set a date, and she'd take care of the rest. I told her I would need to get back to her about that as there were several logistical things that I needed to work out. I told her I would tell Brian sometime in the next couple of weeks, and would send him to her if he has any questions.

We talked for 45 minutes, and she said she'd get back to me on the bathroom thing. I'm sure my idea will work just fine. Other than that, everything went very well. All I need now is the date, and everything is ready to roll. I can't believe that....

I actually did sleep pretty well last night. Elisabeth felt terrible this morning, so I had to drive Matt to school and got to work a bit late, which helped to keep my mind off it. As I sit here my stomach is still aflutter....probably because it knows what lies ahead and how close I really am.

A week after this meeting, I told my boss and my friend, Brian. I was working late one night and he came to sit in my cube to chat. I told him I had something to share with him that could affect everything in my life. He was immediately genuinely concerned. I told him I would tell him about it, but wanted to go into a secluded meeting room in case anyone was listening. Once there, I gave him the paper to read.

He was flabbergasted. He had no idea how to react, which I suppose is natural. He had told me I was his best friend in Arizona. We had worked together for over a year, and worked very well as a team. He and his girlfriend had been over to the house to visit with Elisabeth and Matt and I several times, and his heart very much went out to them. But he also understood the difficult path I/we faced at work. Before we parted that night, he asked if there was anything he could do for me. I told him the only thing I would hope that he would do would be to watch my back. I did not want to be blindsided by things at work, so if he learned of things that I should know about, I asked him to please think of me as his friend and tell me.

Although much was happening in the Donna world, life at home remained relatively unchanged. An uneasy truce, marked by brief but sharp outbreaks of anger, had taken hold. Although Elisabeth did not know any of the specifics of what I was doing, I think she felt powerless to stop it. She loved me too much to kick me out, or to leave herself, but at the same time how does one deal with these kinds of issues?? It was very difficult.

How are things?

Michelle:

Things with me are same-same. My in-laws are coming to visit us next week for their annual winter visit. It's amazing how many friends and relatives from the northeast come to visit when they know you're in Arizona. Anyways, I like my in-laws very much. They're actually my godparents as well. They'll be here for 5 weeks, and then my sister will be visiting for another 2 weeks. They don't know about my situation. Changes are starting to pop out all over, so thank God for baggy shirts. I saw my psych yesterday, and she says I am looking much more curvy. I don't know if she actually noticed or was just being nice. Anyways, these next few weeks should be pretty interesting....

My son seems to have gotten over his cold. He just turned 12 years old, and is the cutest little guy you ever saw. One of the girls at his school took a liking to him, and has been on the attack ever since. It makes me realize just how far ahead girls are from boys in this stuff. She's asking him to dances and passing him notes and asking to hold hands and calling a couple of times a day, and he's just clueless. It's actually pretty funny.

Take care and have a great day.

Your friend,

Donna

At the beginning of February, Julie felt Donna was ready to make her public debut. She had introduced me to several of her "resources" at a local beauty salon. I came to affectionately refer to this group as my "Beauty Brigade"; they would handle my hair and my makeup and my nails once things got started.

Julie felt we needed to spend a complete day out and about. She felt this would give me some confidence, and that we could do some shopping. My plan was to go full-time in April, which would obviously mean that I would need to spend some time as Donna prior to that time to make sure I was prepared.

Looking back on it now, I see how flawed this planning really was, but at the time it made sense to me. I find it hard to fathom how I felt I could transition..how I thought I could live full time as a woman...and at that point I had not even spent 6 hours as such??!! Plus, there was so much to do that I did not even know about yet. But such was my game plan at the time, and I felt that it was a good one.

So in early February, I took a day off from work and spent it with Julie. We had decided to go to a local mall. It was a day of many firsts for Donna:

2/2/99 =====
Journal Entry

As I write this, it's a little after 7. Elisabeth took Matt to the dance, and I don't expect her home until after his dance is done, based on the nastygram she left me. She is not pleased with me at all.

I, on the other hand, am very please with me. The Donna Day went very, very well. I was at Julie's house at 9. We spent some time chatting about the things that we were going to shop for...things she considers part of a basic wardrobe. She used some color swatches to decide the best colors. I did my makeup as she watched, and she was very impressed. It did come out very well. She could tell that I've done it before.....

Then it was into the blue dress. She added some accessories, and had bought some shoes to match, and voila....I was ready. The one part about Donna that I don't like so much at the moment is the hair. It's "big" hair, and attracts alot of attention just because it's big. I used to think it was me attracting the attention, but I can see the goofballs who drive past us crane their neck to see me. I'll be so glad when I can use my own hair...

We drove over to Arizona Mills, and then it was time for the moment of truth. We ended up shopping from 11:30 until almost 5. We stopped into lots of stores, and found that Ann Taylor fits me especially well. We spent almost \$500 there, and many of the items were half off! We bought a black dress, a skirt suit, a few pairs of pants, some dressier suits, a camisole, some blouses....lots of stuff. It all really looks good on me (if I do say so myself). I'm a size 10 on the bottom (sometimes a 12), and a size 12 on the top (sometimes a 14), although that may be expanding in the not too distant future. The shoes were a tad big, so we stopped into the women's restroom to get some tissue to put into the toes. That was an experience.....

The funny part is....noone seemed to notice me! Noone seemed to be craning their neck or snickering or staring. I mean, we were going in and out of stores for 5 whole hours, and not a single "incident". I was very, very happy. Julie says I look beautiful, so to just relax and enjoy it, and by the end I was doing that. My feet were getting kinda sore by 4:30, and I didn't want to get home too too late, so we decided to call it a day.

We got out to the parking lot, and realized that in all the excitement of getting to the mall, we failed to remember where she had parked her car! So we wandered around for 5 minutes before we stumbled on it. We got to her house, I cleaned up, got dressed, took care of paying her (she's not cheap...), and headed home. Before I left she made a point of hugging me and telling me how proud she was of me, and that made me feel pretty good.

Of course, that the euphoria of the afternoon was fairly short lived. I called home, as Elisabeth had left a couple of snotty messages on my cell phone. She was not happy, and wanted to know where I'd been all day. I told her I went shopping. She asked why, and I told her because I wanted to. I start full-time two months from today, and need to spend as much time being Donna as I can. She said, "Then maybe you better just move out and let us get on with our lives....".

I got home, and there's a note saying that she's fed up and can't take much more. I am very sorely tempted to pack a bag and head out, but frankly I don't want to face that on my birthday weekend. I may be forced to, but I'll deal with that when the time comes. I'm too happy with the way the day went and too tired to ruin it now.

I think I have a long evening ahead of me, but may go to bed before they all get home. I'm pretty tired, and my eyes are sore from scrubbing off all the makeup.

2/3/99 =====
Transition Date All Set

To: Dr. Ousterhout's office

Hi Mira:

I can't believe this is the beginning of February. Ever since my dad died time seems to be going by so slowly. I've been hard at work trying to straighten around his affairs. I'm the executor of his estate, and I can tell this is going to be a nasty job. Oh well.

My transition plans have suddenly fallen into high gear. I met with HR for a second time last week, and then told my manager over this past weekend about my plans. So far, so good. We all got together today to try to find a date that would work, and the date we chose is April 19. Although it seems so far away, I'm sure it will be here before I know it.

I'm planning to take the week or two weeks before transition off. My question is when could Dr. Ousterhout fit me in? April 19 is certainly not written in stone and I could change my date if I have to, as there are so many variables at work here. Anyway, does the doctor have any time in early April or late March? If not, when would be the first available dates?

2/6/99 1:36 pm =====
Email from Michelle

Hi Donna,

*>My body seems to have gotten very lean over the past few weeks. I
 >don't think I have actually lost any weight, but my thighs seem to have
 >thinned out a bit and my butt seems to have shrunk and my waist has
 >gotten very trim. It's actually pretty impressive. Maybe it's all in
 >my mind. I doubt it. But I have no idea what is causing it....*

It's called stress dear and it's also the normal fluctuations in weight that all women go through. You need to quit worrying about it and looking in the mirror so much :)

I kind of felt that this weekend things might come to a head with you two. I hope that you have an idea of where your apartment is going to be and you might want to go ahead and apply for one of them because I don't think you're going to be living in your house beyond the next couple of weeks if that long considering what you plan to do on Monday by leaving Elisabeth your letter. I think that will be the end of the process of leading up to separating and the beginning of the divorce process. I also think that it will be a long drawn out process as Elisabeth fights you at every turn out of anger and her own sense of betrayal. I think that even though she loves you she is going to want to extract a certain measure from you. I know that you are a go with the flow type of woman, but I think that there are going to be some times when you are going to have to fight for some of the things that are important to you, the most important of which is Matt. I know your love for him and how you wish to be a part of his life. I don't know how the courts will treat you on this issue, but given the fact that the wife usually gets preferential treatment in these matters, I think that you should prepare yourself for the worst fight you can imagine. As far as the physical property, I don't think that you will much care about that except for the things you value. Any way that you look at it, it's not going to be a pretty situation to have to deal with and reality is going to really suck. I'm not saying that you don't have any delusions about reality, I just mean that some things are not going to be the way you would want them to be in your idea of the ideal.

2/11/99 11:32 am =====

This is my first email to Cassie. I saw some of postings online and it seemed as though we had quite a bit in common so I decided to overcome my natural reticence and write to her. She would become a wonderful email friend.

Hi Cassie:

You don't know me, but I saw one of your posts at sst (*soc.support.transsexuals*). Your situation sounds very much like mine. I've finally gotten around to telling my Human Resources rep at work, and they've been fantastic about it (so far). After our second meeting, I had two "action items" on my plate. The first was tell my boss's boss, who is a good friend. In fact, he was the first friend I have told. The second thing I had to do was to set a date. That was actually harder, as my dad passed away just a few weeks ago and I am trying to settle his estate and don't want to rock the boat too much. The date I chose is April 19, which in some ways seems so far away, but in others appears to be just around the corner.

It's really amazing to think that all these things that we dream about for so long are actually within reach. It truly amazes me. As I prepare, I'm going through some very, very difficult times. But I seem to have found a strength that I did not know I possessed, and I know I'll be ok.

2/12/99 1:41pm =====

email to Cassie

Hi Cassie:

I consider myself to be a shy person, although I don't think many people that think they know me would use that word to describe me. I think this whole situation tends to make us introverts in alot of ways, as we're not able to share it with others. I am, however, pretty self-assured. As a male, anyways. As a female, I have a long way to go....

You spoke about the loss of your partner, and I am in the middle of such a situation right now. I'll be 40 years old in a couple of weeks, and have been married for the last 18 of them. I've known my wife longer than I've lived not knowing her. What I'm doing is breaking both our hearts, and only time will tell what the outcome will be. I was told this morning that if I want to proceed, she wants me to move out of our house, as she cannot be a part of my life anymore. I have a 13 year old son, and although he knows that something has been causing considerable turmoil over the past year, he doesn't know the details. All in all, things are very difficult at this moment.

My father died just before New Year's, and I somehow have found a renewed strength from his passing. He suffered from the ill-effects of diabetes for many years, and despite his physical limitations he always had a smile on his face. He faced his situation with dignity and courage, and I find that this is what I must do. I've found that I'm stuck in the middle, and I absolutely cannot and will not go back until I've gone forward (if that makes any sense). Anyways, life is very difficult for me right now, and I'm hoping to get myself together in time for April.

I've been on hormones for 18 months, so physically I'm stuck in the middle as well. It's a difficult place to be, and I'm very much looking forward to finally moving ahead. Everything has seemed to move so slowly for so long, that now that things are happening every week, it's almost overwhelming.

I, too, have found the internet to be a wonderful resource and friend. I do not post at any of the newsgroups because some of the replies are just so pointed and nasty. I'd rather observe from the sidelines. I have one or two regular "penpals" who have been very friendly and helpful, and I'm grateful to them for their advice and support.

I haven't been sleeping well lately, and have spent a few evenings over the past couple of weeks trying to build a web page. My first try is up, and although it's not much at least it's a start. It's at www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Chelsea/2694, in case you ever want to stop by. As I said, it's not much, but if things continue as they have been, I may have many more long nights ahead to work on it.

Anyway, you take care, and thanks for getting back to me. Drop a line when you have a minute, as it truly does sound as though we do have a lot in common.

Cassie's response:

Donna,

I believe shy would describe me except when I'm trying to put up a front to fit in with "the guys". I have hid my femininity for so long that it is sometimes difficult to open up in front of people without getting all dressed up. I am beginning to drop my pretenses at work more and more and becoming much more comfortable as myself even without coming out. There are many times when I look at other women and compare myself to them and start to get really depressed. Waking up in the morning and looking in the mirror is still quite painful because I don't see the person hidden inside and what I do see discourages me! I wonder how I will ever pass.

Your situation with your wife brings memories of pain I have tried to escape for so long. I fought tooth and nail to keep our relationship alive but I have lost all hope. It has been only recently that I have been able to let go of her and to embrace my transition fully. In holding out hope for our relationship, I had compromised myself. First in a little, then in a lot and in the end I was absolutely miserable. I had to let go in order to survive. I want to have a happy life and this is the road to that life. It finally became more important for me to continue without compromise, to give my full efforts to finding myself and my happiness, than it was to keep hold of my hope for a relationship that would always make me feel guilty and ashamed about who I am. Someday, there will be someone who will see me and love me for exactly who I am, not what they want me to be!

I think that because of your problems with sleeping you should see your doctor to tell her or him about it. I'm sure there is something that can be done. In my case, they prescribed a second anti depressant which has a sedative side affect that I could take periodically at night in place of my other medication. It was a lot safer than sleeping pills because they had no habit forming qualities and fit in well with my existing medications.

**2/15/99 11:58 pm =====
Journal Entry**

Why do things always have to be so hard? My dad lived his whole life, struggling with the terrible affects of diabetes and what they did to his body, and once he died it really hit home. All that suffering and struggling to stay alive and live a quality life, and all that's left is a box full of ashes and a lot of paperwork. And I was overwhelmed by the question...."Why?"

Now that things have gotten sticky here at home, I struggle to balance my own needs with those of my wife and son. In a real sense, there is no intersection. There is no common ground. There's no place where my need to be Donna intersects with my wife's need for a husband. And for me to have expected anything else is foolish on my part.

My wife and I have avoided each other like the plague all weekend. I go into a room, and she leaves it. We no longer even feel comfortable around each other. It's just so sad. I'm a very strong person. I will survive. But she is not. And this is just killing her. And that's why my heart hurts. But it is tempered with the knowledge that I cannot go back. I cannot let my sorrow cloud the knowledge of what I need to do.

And I am hopeful that time will prove to be a salve to soothe wounds and prove that life goes on.

I hate to be so introspective, but sometimes we need to look in before we come out. This will be a big week for me. It can prove to be either a tremendous boost, or a devastating setback. I will be spending at least three times as long out in public as Donna as I have over the rest of my life...combined. We're going shopping, and out to lunch, and just generally trying to get out and about. And if all goes well, it will be such a tremendous confidence boost and relief. I can't even tell you. But if it doesn't....I can't even think of what I'll do. I guess we'll just have to see what the week ahead brings.

I have pretty much all the information I need to have to do the name change. I will be stopping by a legal forms store to get the proper forms, which is the first step.

So I guess that's where things are with me at the moment. I'm not too, too down, as I'm looking forward to the week ahead. I'll have to take some digital pics at some point during all of this hullabaloo to put on my web page, as I only have one and would like a few more. Although I'll be 40 years old a week from today, I feel like a teenager inside when it comes to this stuff...The only thing I want for my birthday is to get my ears pierced, and I may finally give in and get it done. I think alot depends on how this week goes.....

2/16/99 4:03 pm =====
Email to Cassie

Hi Cassie:

>There are stages that your wife will go through - shock, denial, anger....

The one I fear most is anger. Things are said and done out of anger that cannot be undone. She shows flashes of it now, and I can imagine that as I get closer to my date and the reality that it actually IS going to happen grows on her, it will grow and fester. Frankly, I don't blame her for being angry one bit. I just hope it doesn't completely take her over...

*> There are times that I go through periods of extreme doubt and regret. What if I'm wrong?
 > What if this is just an obsession or fantasy? I will have lost everything for nothing!*

Doubt, yes. Regret, no. Not yet, anyway. It's natural to wonder those things. I sometimes wonder it myself. But one thing I do know is that this "situation" has had me in its grip ever since I can remember, back to five or six years old, and it needs to be addressed with courage rather than with fear. I need to know if it's real. I need to find out. My wife wants the "old" me back, and my point to her is that she can never have that until I go forward. I'll either soar like an eagle, or fall fat on my face. Either way, I need to answer so many things for myself, and the only way is to go forward. I won't say that I have no idea what the answer is, because I do. But I could be wrong. And I'm willing to risk everything I have and everything I am to find out.

*> Donna, I just want you to know that I am thankful our paths have crossed. We seem to
 > have so much in common, sadly so in some respects. You are never far from my thoughts
 > and I feel quite strongly that "big sister" had a hand in our meeting.*

Ditto. There are very few people in this world who I feel share my wavelength. I think you are one of them. I don't know if that's good or bad, but I suppose it's just our lot in life. I'm a firm believer that things in our life happen for a reason...that life isn't just a bunch of hodgepodge happenstance. I don't necessarily think of it as "divine intervention", but I don't rule that out, either. In any event, every once in a while we meet people with whom we feel an immediate comfort and connection, and you are one of those people. And, in the short while that I have written to you, I am already thankful for your kindness and friendship, and you have been in my prayers.

Something happened at lunch today that was kinda humorous. I had to go to a photographers to have some pictures taken. They needed just head and shoulders shots. The guy said that they usually have the women change into a gown, but if I wanted I could just take off my shirt and that should be ok. Yeah right. I told him that actually, I'd rather do the gown, so that's what I did. Not that it hid too much, but there was absolutely no way I was going to take my shirt off. Anyway, it was kinda funny....

Well, I suppose I need to get some work done. My plate is very full right now, especially with the fact that I'll be off tomorrow afternoon (shopping) and all day Friday (more shopping), and I may need to travel to Dallas for work the following week. Life only gets more fun....

* * * *

2/17/99 =====
Journal Entry describing my day as Donna at the mall with Julie

What an afternoon I had. After getting MAYBE 2 1/2 or 3 hours of sleep on Tuesday night, I was one pooped puppy yesterday morning. One of the managers stopped by saying that they were planning some big meeting, and they needed to have it asap. I told him that I had plans for the afternoon and for Friday, but of course they scheduled it for 11-12:30 yesterday. I sent a nastygram telling them I couldn't make it.

My doctor's appt was at 11:30. I dozed off a couple of times in the waiting room waiting to be called. I was starting to get a nasty headache and asked for some advil, so they gave me a huge handful of samples.

When I finally got called I talked with the doctor for a few minutes, and he dictated a letter for me indicating that I had been under his supervision for quite some time and in his opinion the effects of the hormone therapy were, at this point, irreversible, and that I should be allowed to change my name and gender on all official documents. I can pick that up next week. I had my shot and was on my merry way.

I stopped by my psych's office to pick up a similar letter from her.

I had arranged to meet Julie at 1 at the salon, and we both pulled in at the same time. She took me in and introduced me to everyone...the hair guy and the nail lady and the owner and the make-up girl. All were very nice, and we chit-chatted for a few minutes before getting down to business....

First came the make-up, and we spent a lot of time talking and watching about what she was doing and why. In fact, we had planned for it to take maybe 90 minutes, but we just got gabbing so much it took almost 2 hours! She really did a great job. The make-up seat is the first thing when you come in the door, so as people came into the place to get their hair done, there I was. I really didn't feel all that self-conscious, though, even though I was definitely the center of attention.

After that was done, I spent some time talking with the hair guy. I had cut out some pictures of hairstyles that I liked, and Julie had done the same. All were longer styles, and my hair won't be that long for quite some time. In the meantime, I had 2 options....a hairpiece (wig), or extensions. I watched a video on extensions, and he brought out some of the hair (real human hair), and frankly, I think that's the way to go. I just hate wearing a wig...it makes your head itch if you wear it for too long and it's hot and just feels so unnatural on my head. The total cost for the extensions will be a little less than \$2,000, but they really do look and feel like your own hair. You can curl it, style it, color it....whatever you do to your own hair.

By the time I changed and we were ready to go shopping it was nearly 4pm, and I wanted to be home by 6 or 6:30, so it didn't leave us too much time. Everyone was ooing and aahing at how good it all looked (and I must admit it really did look fine). I could see the make-up girl watching me from across the room so I waved to her, and she said she was just admiring her work....

We headed over the Macy's, as she really likes it there and she said they were having a big sale. We strolled around for a while just so I could get comfortable (yeah right), and then started to look through dresses. We planned on getting something there that I could wear on our larger excursion on Friday. I eventually made my way into a changing room and tried on several outfits, and we settled on a blue dress. We both really liked it. I gave Julie the money and asked if she would take it to the counter and pay for it, and she said she would this one time, but on Friday it was up to me....

So by the time that I got back to the salon, washed up, changed, and got home, it was 6:30. Elisabeth asked where I had been all day, and I told her. That went over real well....

We did actually do some talking, though. She said that our friends Karen and Kevin had called about plans for doing my birthday outing this weekend, and Elisabeth told them that I wasn't really up for it, and she started crying. They asked what was wrong...is everything all right...can we help...but Elisabeth just told them I had some "problems" that I needed to work through. I'm sure I'll be hearing from them today.

We planned to talk more in the evening, after Matt was in bed, but I was just too tired to even move. I was in bed by 8:30. And I was in a near-coma all night. My alarm clock went off at 5:45 this morning, and I overslept it by half an hour.

All in all, things went great and I'm very happy. I just love being able to go out as Donna, although I have a long way to go to actually be comfortable. Julie was just great, and she told me she was very proud of me, and we hugged before she left...



My 40th birthday was February 22, 1999. For a long time, Elisabeth and I had planned big events to celebrate our 40th birthdays. As of the night before, I had no

indication from Elisabeth that we were doing anything, even something simple like going out for dinner. I decided to take myself to the movies, which was a mistake. I watched "Shakespeare In Love", and ended up crying all the way home. I was a mess.

When I got home, everyone was in bed, and the house was dark. There was, however, a note on my bed wishing me a happy birthday, and saying that we could meet out for dinner to celebrate.

We met at a steak restaurant for dinner. She and Matt drove there from home, and I drove there after work to meet them. We made it thru dinner ok, although the conversation was short and things were tense. But as soon as we finished, Elisabeth stood up and said she just couldn't do this anymore, and left. Matt and I finished eating, ate the free dessert for my birthday, and headed home afterwards. He still had no idea as to the specifics of what was going on, and it was all I could do to keep from telling him.

The next day, I decided the timing was right to spill it all. Everything. I was not brave enough to do this face to face, as I feared the emotion would get too overwhelming and I wouldn't be able to get it all out. So I wrote a note, and I left it for her to read after I left for work.

2/24/99??=====

Following is the text of the letter I wrote to Elisabeth to tell her EVERYTHING. The title of the file is "My Life". I left it propped on the pillow in the spare bedroom where I slept...knowing she would find it sometime around mid-morning.

Hon:

You are my everything. I have told you that since day one, and that has not changed through all that has happened, through all the years. It remains as true today as it ever did. And I will love you until the day that I die.

Life is sometimes unfair and cruel, and I think our current "situation" is a perfect example of that. We both know that we were made for each other....that we are better as a team than as individuals...that our love has been strong enough to survive even the biggest bumps. The vows we made about our love...."in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, until death do us part"...really do mean something in our lives. But life has given me a very difficult condition for me to deal with, and perhaps because I loved you too much, my problem has become your problem. Although I certainly apologize from the bottom of my heart for the pain I have inflicted upon you, I too feel very much a victim.

I do know one thing. We cannot go on living like this. We cannot continue to fight, and live different lives. We are drifting apart, and we keep hurting each other. It's not fair to either of us, and especially to Matt, and it's time to make some decisions.

My family has always been good at hiding from things. At putting things off and making small talk. But my situation is one from which I cannot hide. It is one that consumes me totally. I cannot continue to live the lie that is my life. I need to be who and what I really am, or face a fate worth than death in a vain attempt to hold it back. I need answers to questions that have plagued me for my entire life, and I need to

find those answers for myself. And although at this point I do not know what the answers will be, I know that I cannot and will not continue to live my life without finding out.

For a very, very long time I have lived a life of fear. It is a life that no one should be forced to endure. It is a life of self-imposed exile, where refusing to accept what I know to be true in hopes of continuing my façade of a life has always been the top priority. You tell me that I'm trying too hard to be what I'm not, and you're absolutely correct. But our ideas about who and what I am are most certainly not the same..

I have done a lot of thinking lately, especially since my dad died. I have been thinking about life...particularly the quality of life. The saying "life's too short" has never held more meaning for me. If I died right now, at this moment, I would die with the regret that I never got to live the life I feel I was born to live. I would die knowing that I allowed the pressure of others to dictate how I lived my entire life. In short, I would die knowing that I was given one shot at life, and instead of living it, I let it slip away.

I look down the path of our lives to see what lays ahead. We have built hopes and dreams, and made plans for our future together. I would never want any of that to change. But I also see a life that cannot continue in its present condition. I see my situation eating away at us both, and never, ever relenting or retreating. I see it causing a lifetime of unhappiness and hurt for us both, when we both deserve so much more. I see that fear is driving our decisions, and as long as that happens we will both continue to struggle and fight and drift apart. These issues need to be addressed with honesty and courage and conviction rather than fear and shame in order to come to some sort of closure so we can all move on with our lives and live them as we were meant to.

My life is made up of many roles. There is Dave-the-Husband, and Dave-the-father, and Dave-the-XYZ-employee. And underlying all of that is Dave-the-person. If Dave-the-person can't function, then he sure can't do any of the other roles. And that's not fair to you, or Matt, or me. In this case, Dave-the-person is going to change. But that doesn't mean that any of the other roles will be lost in the shuffle. That all depends on you.

My father was a very brave man. He faced his situation with courage and dignity and a smile on his face. He had his shortcomings, as we all do, but he did the best he could to live a good life. I am very proud to have had him as my father. I find the decisions that I have made, and am about to make, to be amongst the most important and difficult in my life. They require a bravery that I did not feel I could ever muster, but have somehow found. And although my emotions are very much in flutter, my soul is at peace with what I have decided to do.

You know about my situation. I do not need to detail it for you here. I truly feel that I have been mis-cast in this life....mis-packaged if you will. The causes of this situation are immaterial now. Whether it is all in my mind, as you feel, or is of biological origin, as I feel, it is a condition that has plagued me for my entire life, and one that continues to eat at me and gnaw at me from the inside each and every hour of every day. Fighting this has taken an unbelievable amount of energy and willpower on my part, but the time for fighting is over. The time to face it and deal with it is here, and I will do so with the same courage and strength that my father did until his last day on this earth. I refuse to be its victim any longer.

So here's what I have decided to do.

I am going to begin a transition to see if my feelings are true, or somehow misguided and confused. I am going to assume a female role in life for an extended period of time. I am going to learn for myself if I have truly been born in the wrong skin, or if things I have believed about myself for my entire life have been misguided. Towards this end, I have already made several arrangements.

I've already talked with Human Resources at XYZ about my situation. We have had 3 long meetings. They know all about me, and we've met several times to develop a plan to implement my transition there at work. They are very supportive and sympathetic and accepting, and have actually made me feel more comfortable than I am when I'm around you. They have assured me of several things. My job is certainly not in jeopardy, as they are very happy with my performance to date. No matter what happens, as long

as you and I are married none of our benefits will change. They vow to protect me from any harassment or discrimination of any kind. The bottom line is that they value diversity in people, and they see this as a personal situation, and they have offered to do anything they can to help.

I've already had a long discussion with Brian Hester about it. Needless to say, he was very surprised. But he knows the type of person that I am, and he can see how much pain I am in, and he told me that he'll always be here for me if I need him. He says that true friends are people who are there when things are hardest, not just when they're easiest, and he has proven to be a true friend. He has offered to protect and support me in any way he can, and has earned my gratitude and trust with the gracious way that he has handled things.

They are in the process of disclosing the situation to the rest of the management team. We have picked a target date of Monday, April 19 for me to begin work at XYZ as a female. I will take the prior week off, and HR will disclose it and explain it to the rest of the group. In the meantime, there are legal things that need to do. For example, I will legally be changing my name, and all documents and accounts where it appears.

You will need to decide how you are going to handle this. It's one thing for you to know about it, and you have tried very hard to keep it in the closet. It will not remain in the closet for very much longer. You need to be very careful in what you do now, and not let your emotions make you do something that we'll all regret. Do not react out of fear or anger or hurt, as there has been more than enough of that around us lately.

If you want me to leave, I will do that. For a week, a month...whatever you tell me. I will find someplace to go. That's totally up to you.

I have no idea how it will all work out. I may find out that it is the life I should have led all along, and that would make me very happy. I may fall flat on my face and find that I can't live that life, and will revert to the old Dave. But at least I'll know that I tried my best and had the courage to face it, and I can live with that. I'm not afraid to admit that I was wrong, especially in a situation as deadly serious as this.

You have threatened me in the past, saying that if this becomes public knowledge I will lose everyone and everything that means anything to me. I am working to prove that you are 100% wrong. As long as I try to live a lie, I risk losing everything, as living this life has very little meaning. I need to be honest and strong and brave, not deceitful and weak and fearful. I have determined that I will handle a bad situation as best I can, and others will have to decide for themselves how they want to deal with it. I have told several people over the past weeks, and every, single one has reacted with care and compassion. It has truly touched my heart, and given me renewed strength to do what must be done.

Not too long ago you told me that Matt had become the number one priority in your life. You have vowed that he never know. In that case, you had better pack him up and move away as fast as you can, and never let us speak again, because otherwise, he WILL know. I think you're being unrealistic and unfair to all of us with that attitude. He needs BOTH of us, and can adapt to pretty much anything. I think it's your own fear and embarrassment that is the problem here. As with most things, the feared result is usually much worse than the actual result. By taking him away, you automatically deny him any say in the matter, and you yourself are the problem.....not me. We need to work together to help him adjust and understand, and he'll be just fine.

You have said a few things to me over the past year which really stick in my mind. Once, you told me that you rather that I had cancer than this. You said I was better off dead than in this situation. You told me that you could NEVER accept it. I cannot make you accept it, and after comments like that I doubt you will. I just hope you give it time. Time is a great healer, and you may find that it's not as bad as you fear. At least give me a chance. If you want some time apart, that's one thing. But to end the marriage now, without giving me time to work out my situation, would show me that our love is not nearly as strong as I had thought it was.

But I am not going to sugar coat things. I am going to give this test 100%. I will not allow you, or anyone, to make me feel as though I am some sort of deviate or criminal. If you want to be with me and continue to share our lives, that's one thing. If you want to help me, I think our relationship could be stronger than ever. Underneath, I'm the same person that you have always loved. But if you can't see past the exterior, and can only accept me as the old Dave, then it's best we be apart. If you continue to harass me or call me names, I will leave. I'd rather be alone than live with you like that.

I'm planning to do several things in the next couple of months. I'm going to have some cosmetic surgery on my nose (and probably my chin) to make it less conspicuous. I'll use some of the money that I get from my dad if I have to, or I'll get a loan, but I will do it. I'm going to buy a complete new wardrobe, and will live full-time as female. I'm going to be the type of person that I want to be, not than anyone tells me to be. These things are not open for discussion.

I have told you before that the main reason that I have fought this so hard and for so long is for you and Matt. That has been the ONLY reason. My refusal to fight it any longer is in no way saying that you and Matt have become less important in my life. You remain the things that I value most. But there are some things that a person needs to do to continue living, and this is one of those things. My dad's death demonstrated just how important the people we love are. We need each other for love and support, especially when we are hurt and weak and vulnerable, and I have never needed you more. You can turn your back and walk away or you can stay and see what happens. It's up to you. I deserve your sensitivity and caring and love, not your hate and spite.

I have prayed and prayed, asking him what to do. And the answer comes back loud and clear. He tells me to follow my heart. And my heart tells me that this is a time of healing and inner peace, and this is what I need to do. And I feel very comfortable with that.

There is some time before these things happen, so there's no need to do anything right now, unless you decide you want to. The next step is yours. I'm being open and honest with you, and expect you to be the same with me. Either this will end up bringing us closer together in a loving, caring, sharing relationship, or it will break us apart. I suppose only time will tell.

I love you.

Dave

2/24/99 12:06 pm =====
Journal Entry titled: The phone call....

My wife just called. She's a mess. She told me she needs answers, because she can't live like this. I told her I'd give her answers if I could, but I don't have them right now. That's what this is all about....finding answers to questions that have plagued me for my entire life.

That's not good enough. She's sure that I'm in the grip of some evil force that is making me do these things. She thinks my psych and my doctor are pushing me into doing this, and that I can't break out of their grip. She thinks I should be seeing a psych to help me FIGHT this evil force, not give in to it. And she thinks that if I choose to continue on my current path, it is basically saying that following this "compulsion" is more important than my wife and family. She says she needs me to be strong because she needs the old "me" back. She accused me of bringing her out here to Arizona on purpose so she would be far away from all her family and friends and would be alone.

I told her that she was just so wrong. But here and now is not the time to discuss it.

She said that she absolutely does not want it a part of her life. If I come to work like that, she says there's no way I'm dressing there and that I better clean up before I come home. I told her I will not agree to that. I will get dressed in the morning just like everyone else does. Then, she said, I had better make

arrangements to leave because it will screw up Matt for the rest of his life. She said she'll tell Matt I took a job out of state or something, but she absolutely refuses to let it touch his life. I told her that she was acting out of confusion and anger, and THAT'S what would hurt Matt, not necessarily what I was doing, which made her even angrier. I said that I will not be one person at work, and another at home, so if that's the way she feels, then I'll find someplace else to live while I work this out.

She hung up and that was that.

It's so hard to be here knowing what I'm putting her through. There is absolutely nothing I can say or do to make it better, short of backing out completely, which I cannot do. In some ways I feel guilty for looking forward to my new life, while my wife looks forward and dreads hers. I feel, in a very real sense, that I am shedding many of the roles and responsibilities that I have carried for these many years, and she will take it upon herself to pick up that burden. Why does life have to be so difficult?

=====

There were some humorous incidents, as well. Julie wanted to take me to lunch for my birthday, and decided it would provide another opportunity for Donna to practice and become comfortable. She decided we'd go to a very fancy local resort as that would involve contact with valets, waiters, and others as part of making this happen. Going to the mall really didn't require me to interact with anyone other than a couple of sales people later in the day, so this entire plan made me a little nervous.

That's the way it happened. I went to her house, got ready, she drove us to the resort, I somehow survived the experience of the valet opening my door and helping me out, and before too long we were in our seats. At some point I got comfortable enough to start looking around and, as at the mall, was shocked to realize that nobody was giving us a second glance. That was a relief.

Julie spent time talking about table etiquette – and by the end of the meal I was actually very relaxed. That didn't last long, however. Just when it looked as though we'd get through this experience without incident Julie reached across the table for something and accidentally knocked over a glass of water. Restaurant staff flocked over to the table to help contain it. Any attempt to blend into the woodwork was long gone, and I just wanted to shrink and slide under the table. Later, I'd playfully accuse her of doing that on purpose.

In preparation for going full-time, I started searching for an apartment during my lunch hour. It didn't take long for me to find one that would work, and I rented it. Then, I set about the process of buying the basics to furnish it. I wasn't ready to move into it yet, but I wanted to get it ready knowing that the time was near.

I was having difficulty arranging a date with Dr. O that would meet the timelines that I was hoping for. This was causing me no small measure of anxiety, as I felt my features were too male looking for me to pass. I discussed this with Julie, and I developed a plan.

I felt the most male feature on my face was my nose. I had always felt that I had a big nose, although others told me that it "fit" my face. Whatever. I decided that I could go to a plastic surgeon locally to have the nose done (a nose job is a nose job, I presumed), and then go to see Dr. O for the rest of the work when he had the time. For some reason it seemed like a good idea. It wasn't.

But even crazier was the notion that I could get breast implants at the same time! Wow!

Again, as I look back on this misguided thinking, I see the errors. But at the time, the mere chance of having a full set of breasts during my transition almost took my breath away, so that any time I tried to reason with myself as to why it was a bad idea, I almost always shoved that logic aside.

Julie knew a plastic surgeon in Phoenix, so I made an appointment to see him.

2/26/99 =====
Journal Entry

What a day I had!

I got a call from Julie this afternoon. She was at Dillards, and had found several outfits that she thought would look great on me. She sounded very enthused. I told her to pick up whatever she wanted, and we could get together next week for a fitting party. Whatever looks good, I'll pay her for, and whatever doesn't goes back.

Matt has always wanted to see a Phoenix Suns game, and his favorite team (the Lakers) is coming to town on Monday for their only visit this season, so I decided to call a few ticket agencies to see if I could get some tickets. I don't know how many of these father-son things we'll be doing soon.....Anyway, prices were outrageous, but I really didn't care. I ended up with 2 tickets in the 22nd row near the foul line for \$150 apiece. If I weren't in my present situation, I wouldn't have done it, but I may as well do something he'll remember for a long time.

After work, I headed over to the plastic surgeon's office. I got there just after 4:30, and filled out the question sheet and everything. The doctor is a serious kinda guy...He's retiring in mid-May and is taking me on as a favor to Julie's fiancée, who knows him. When I finally got in to see him, I could tell he was a little nervous (although I wasn't).

He mentioned that he had worked with a few other transsexuals in his many years. He started asking me questions, I think to try to get a gauge of me and my situation. I gave him the nickel tour of my life. He told me he'd need several things prior to the surgery. First, he's going to check with his insurance carrier to see if I need to sign anything special. Second, he wants to talk with my doctor and my psych just to cover his behind. Third, he wants me to take a blood test for HIV. He asked if I had been intimate with my wife lately, and I told him it had been well over a year. I have no problem with any of those things. He's even going to check with Julie to get her thoughts on me. Frankly, I don't blame him. He's at the

end of his career and the last thing he needs is some crazy transsexual suing him for some reason. Better to not do me than to risk that, but he seemed to loosen up as the chat went along.

We talked about the nose. He measured this and that, and told me what he could and couldn't do. He drew used some tracing paper over one of the pictures that I had taken to show me how things will probably look. Frankly, if that's true, I'll be ecstatic.

Next, we talked about the boobs. I took off the shirt and he checked them out, taking all kinds of measurements and drawing little black dots that I think are still there. He mentioned that for most women, he puts the sac behind the muscle, but in my case the muscle was thicker than for most women, and he didn't think it would work right. He said that it would probably be much more satisfactory to separate the skin from the muscle, and put it under the skin and over the muscle. I told him I respected whatever he felt would be best. He suggested that I'd need a fairly large implant in order to keep in proportion with my shoulders and torso. I asked him how big is big...and he said it would be 15mm in diameter (nipple goes in the middle), and filled with probably 350-400cc of fluid. I asked how big that would be, so he went into the other room and grabbed a fairly large bra and 2 implants and brought them over.

He helped me put the bra on, and then stuffed one of the implants into it, and I thought it looked pretty big. I thought he was going to stuff the other implant in the other side, but instead, he stuck it into that same side! He said each of those had about 200cc in them, so by putting the 2 together I could get an idea of what to expect. I was HUGE! Wow. I asked him cup-wise, what that was, and he said I'd be a big B or a C. I felt as if I'd died and gone to heaven....I had better start strengthening my back muscles!

At this point, it was well after 6. I was supposed to pick up Matt from tkd at 6, but had called Elisabeth and left a message to have her get him. The only ones in the office were the doctor, me, his wife (who I think is his office manager or something), and their golden retriever. I told them about my time crunch situation...as they had scheduled me for April 13 and I was supposed to start work on April 19. They looked over the calendar, and found a spot for me on March 23. I grabbed it. That's less than a month from now! I have my pre-op visit on March 11, and need to pay them then. The whole thing will come to \$8,000+.

As for recovery, I'll need to stay overnight one night. He said there will be a splint on my nose for a week, and I can't wash my face or get it wet in any way. He said most of the bruising and swelling will be down in 10 days, although it takes up to a year for everything to finally heal. As for the boobs, he's going to give me some kind of zippered "jacket" to keep everything in place, and I hope it does it's job.

Here's the kicker....He said that most transgendered patients that he has dealt with were already living in their new role. He asked if I would be Donna for this, and I said sure I would. So, that morning when I check into the hospital, it will be as Donna....and I'll be Donna through the whole thing, even though I'm sure they'll know what's up. He assured me that the people there will be sensitive to me, but that it would be more appropriate to make these modifications to Donna than to Dave, and I agreed. That makes me very happy.

To finish up, they took pictures of our boobs. She promised that no heads were in the shots, but they had me turn a few different ways and they took some pics. If you don't see these little babies soon, you're going to see a BIG difference next time we get together....

I got home after 7, and Elisabeth and I said absolutely NOTHING to each other all night. She knew where I was (although she didn't know that I talked with him about the boobs). I cooked myself some of my world famous eggs for dinner, and am kinda basking in the afterglow of my visit. I still can't believe it.

As Elisabeth was going to bed, I was lying in the living room watching Alien Resurrection. She poked her head thru the door to tell me, in her most disgusted voice, "I can't even stand to look at what you're becoming. You're not even a man anymore. You're some kind of freakish creature." Then she went to bed. I'd be surprised if I last here through the end of next week....

So that's my night. Pretty unbelievable. Things seem to be just roaring along. A new apartment. An appointment with the surgeon is less than a month. So much to do, and so little time! Once the boobs are there, it'll be hard, if not impossible, to live as Dave for long. Especially as summer approaches. Rather than making me nervous, it makes me just that much more eager to proceed. I've been thinking about these things for my entire life. And I know the saying, "Be careful what you wish for because it just might come true." In this case, I sure hope so!

**3/17/99 =====
From Michelle's journal:**

Dave soon to be Donna came to town last night and came by my apartment for dinner and talk. Before we left she showed me her breast development that she has gotten from hormone therapy. It was surreal and felt very strange to see them on a "male". Next week she will be having a nose job and breast augmentation surgery. I doubt that there will be any "going home" in any sense of that phrase after the implants and nose job. We went to eat at the "BallPark at Arlington" and ate a late dinner of fish and chips. After we got back to my place, I let Donna try on one of my bras with my breast forms to see what her bust would look like after her surgery. She just stared in amazement at the mirror for several minutes. Donna and I talked a LOT while we were at dinner and we discussed a lot of different issues. Overall it was actually a very relaxing evening.

**3/21/99 =====
Journal Entry**

Our weekends around here just get worse and worse. I can't wait to leave. In fact, tonight may be my last night here. Matt is on vacation all week, so I don't need to play this little ruse about getting him up and pretending to go to the airport. Elisabeth has told him, and her folks, that I am going to Dallas to assist on this big implementation. That's all I know. I doubt that she'll even say goodbye at this point.

We have a Visa bill that has a few things that I have charged, and Elisabeth wrote a note on it and put it on my desk saying, in effect, it's all mine. I'll take it, without fighting too much, and will give her a big lump sum to pay the bills that come next month (which will be extensive). I'm going to change the name on that card, and tell her not to use it, and that will be that.

I have a meeting with the attorney tomorrow am. The main thing I want to talk about is the name change. I looked at the form, and it requires Elisabeth to sign it, and get it notarized. No friggin chance in hell on that. So.....either I don't need it signed, or they'll have to send her a summons. But the name WILL be changed, even if I have to come over here as Donna with her folks around to fight about it. I will not lose that fight. I'm also going to get some general information of legal separation, and those types of things.

I spent the entire day today with Brian. We went to school, did our final exam (very tough) and spent the rest of the afternoon out and about. He is closing on his new house later this week, so we stopped by to see how construction was coming. He likes to talk and ask questions about Donna, and I'm more than happy to answer. He is proving to be a very good friend. He tells me that I'm his best friend in Arizona, and he won't desert me over something as minor as a sex-change....

After all my running around yesterday, I didn't get to bed until after midnight, and was up at 5 to get ready for school. I woke up with the worst headache, and it has lasted for most of the day. Of course, coming home to this asylum that I call a home doesn't help.

3/22/99 11:24 pm =====
Journal Entry

My weekend has been terrible. That's par for the course these days. Not one thing in particular....just everything. Tonight or tomorrow night will be my last nights here, and I'm so looking forward to getting away. My impending surgeries will actually be a relief after all the stress I've been enduring here at home....

Last night in particular was very difficult. My wife basically told me that she had wasted the last 20 years of her life, and that I was to blame. I went out and did a grocery shopping for my apartment, and as I was strolling the aisles I was overcome with a very real sense of sorrow. It was all I could do to keep it together....No matter how strong we are, or we think we are, these moments of reflection and introspection can sometimes catch us off guard and be very difficult. I am thankful for people like you who can help to overcome these times, and move forward....

Someone must have posted my homepage address (I think at Susana Marques TG directory) because I'm suddenly getting all kinds of email from people that I don't know. I'm the low profile type, so all this attention, especially with my upcoming changes right around the corner, is a little odd for me.

As of tomorrow: Nose and boob surgery....1 day
 Begin Transition at work....4 weeks

I can't believe that....

* * * * *

The day had arrived. It was time for surgery. Over the weeks leading up to this day I had spent my spare time getting my apartment ready. I put the few pieces of furniture I had together. I made sure I had all the basics in terms of food, toiletries, and household goods. And, I made sure I had enough linens and towels.

As the day arrived I really wasn't all that nervous. The thing that gave me the most trouble was leaving my family behind to face this alone. But that wasn't my choice – that was my wife's and I was doing my best to respect it. That didn't make it any easier, though. As with so many things I had been experiencing, there were equal parts excitement and sadness. I hoped that time would heal the sadness.

I told my wife I was going – that I was having some facial surgery. I didn't mention anything about the breast aug because frankly I was iffy about it up until the last minute. I think I knew all along that I'd get it done, but I didn't come to a sense of peace with that until right before the surgery. The fact that I hadn't mentioned it to anyone from work was to turn into a big deal, but at the time I didn't see that coming.

The night before my surgery was my first night in my apartment. It seemed to zoom by, and before I knew it the sun was up and the time was getting near. I documented the experience so I wouldn't forget it....

3/23/99 =====

I had surgery on my nose and breasts....

My Surgery Experience

I'll begin this story on the morning planned of March 23, 1999. That was the day I had scheduled for surgery. I planned to have a rhinoplasty in order to feminize my overly large nose (in my opinion, anyways), as well as breast implants to help my overly little boobs (my opinion, again). I had thought long and hard about having the two done together, and feel very comfortable with that decision. I will be living full-time beginning in less than a month, and feel that these two procedures will be very important in giving me the confidence to pass the way I feel I can.

I didn't get very much sleep the night prior to surgery. It wasn't so much a matter of nerves, but a matter of my mind racing with all the things I need to do before being out of action for a week. In fact I was up shortly after 2am, and I don't think I got back to sleep after that. I got up very early, finished my last minute packing, and decided to go to work to finish up on some last minute details that I wasn't able to finish on Monday. We are having a huge implementation this weekend, and I need to ensure that my piece works flawlessly. I wanted to get in, do my thing, and then leave before too many people arrived. I was there at 5:30, and gone shortly before 7, and felt good about the things I was able to accomplish. On the way to the apartment I stopped at the store to get some last minute supplies, and then came to my place to get it straightened up. I still haven't spent a night there, but I think it has everything I'll need.

Karen was supposed to stop by to pick me up at about 10:45. Julie was going to stop by as well with some clothes and support at around the same time. I set about cleaning up around the apartment, and running out to Target for extra shelf covering when it became apparent I would run out. I talked with Karen briefly and gave her instructions on how to get here, and we chatted about her vacation to Napa Valley from which they had just returned. She asked how I was feeling, and I really wasn't all that nervous, which was good.

I took my first shower in the apartment, and began to put on Donna's makeup. I was running a little later than planned, but got calls from both Julie and Karen saying they would be a touch late, so that was fine. Julie got here first, and had a skirt and sweater that she felt I'd be comfortable in. Karen arrived a couple of minutes later, and she had never seen Donna, so I was interested to see her reaction. She couldn't believe how I looked...especially my physique. She said that with my male clothes on there was no way she would have know that my body looked so feminine. They felt that with bigger boobs, the body would be a "knockout". I'd settle for average, but I'll take whatever I can get...

Julie helped me with my new wig, which actually really looked good. It is much more similar to the hair that I will actually be getting as far as color and length go. All in all, I looked really good (we all thought). We took a digital pic before leaving, and headed out the door. I knew we'd be a tad late at that point, but I didn't think it would matter much.

Karen was very supportive on the way to the hospital, and was just great through the whole thing. I was supposed to be at the SurgiCenter at noon, and we got there at about 12:15. We went to the main desk and said I was there, and she told us to take a seat. Shortly thereafter, a nurse called me and asked me to come back, and we went into a small room to fill out the papers. Karen was there, too, and we kept things pretty light. They told her she could stay up until the time I actually went into surgery. I answered all kinds of questions regarding allergies, my medical history, etc.

After a while, the nurse told me I'd need to change, and brought me back to a bathroom. I took off all my clothes and put on a gown that tied in the back, and some little booties. I also had an outer nightgown for warmth. I didn't take off any of my makeup, figuring that they'd tell me to do it when they wanted me to. Once I changed, they took me to a staging area, that had a recliner chair and a couple of other chairs, and was surrounded by a big curtain. The nurse was pretty funny, and brought me a blanket, and

eventually took some blood to check my hemoglobin count (14.0). Karen and I chit-chatted a while until the anesthesiologist stopped by. He explained what he was going to do, and asked me all kinds of questions. He checked my veins and decided to put the iv on the upper part of my right wrist.

Shortly thereafter, Dr. D popped in to say hi. I introduced him to Karen. He asked how I was feeling and if I had any questions, and I told him I was all ready to go. He said he had a couple of things to attend to, but they would be taking me back to the OR in just a minute and he'd see me there. I said my goodbye's to Karen, and followed the nurse back to the OR. She introduced me to everyone in there. I was unusually calm and relaxed, which made me feel very good. I got onto the operating table, and they covered me with warm blankets. They made sure the back of my gown was undone so they could get at it. The anesthesiologist began playing with my left arm, saying I'd feel a sting and a brief warm feeling, and I did. He started the drugs, and said I should be getting very relaxed, and that was that.....

I don't remember all that much about waking up. That whole evening is a blur. I remember that they had put a big, hard thing around the breasts to keep everything in place, and it was HUGE. I remember that I had to Pee so so bad. My nose throbbed a bit, but my face had all kinds of splints and things taped on it. I didn't feel nauseous or anything. After a while, some people came to take me out of recovery and over to the recovery center where I would spend the night. My eyes were closed during this whole process, but they wheeled me into a van, drove me over to the center, took my to my room, and had me skootch over onto my bed. The moving showed me just how sensitive the boobs were. Ouch.

I had to pee so bad I thought I'd explode, so the nurse helped me over to the washroom. It was quite a struggle, as I was very wobbly, and still attached to the IV. But I felt so much better after peeing. My mouth had this terrible case of cottonmouth....there was gunk all over the place in there and I just couldn't get it moist. It was pretty nasty. The nurse eventually brought me some ice chips, which was a godsend.

That night was one I thought would never end. I couldn't sleep, but I was so tired. I didn't hurt too badly, but had to go to pee every half hour or so. At one point, the IV ripped me and I started bleeding pretty badly. I was in the bathroom, sitting on the toilet peeing, and I couldn't see because I had an ice bag over my eyes. I could feel liquid running down my arm and dripping off my finger, and couldn't figure out what it was. I lifted the ice bag to peek at it, and saw that it was blood. It was coming from where they had put the IV into my hand. I was actually pretty calm about it. I didn't know how to get a nurse at that time of night so I wandered down the hall dragging my IV thing on wheels, dripping blood in the hallway, until I found the nurse station. They fixed me up.

I was in a private room, but shared a bathroom with the person next door. He was up several times puking, so he had a worse night than I did.

I was running a fever for most of the night, and couldn't get comfortable. I couldn't turn on either side or my stomach, so I tossed and turned, going from hot to cold, all night long. I finally started dozing off near morning. A nurse came in to take my vitals and said they would have breakfast for me shortly, and that Dr. D would be by to see me. He showed up about a half hour later, and said that everything had gone great. He took the packing out of my nose, which was quite the experience. He cut off the big bandages holding the boobs in place, and had me put on a vest that zips up the front. I asked him how much fluid he used to fill the implants, and he said 450 cc's. Wow. He said they look great, but I haven't had a chance to look at them yet. They feel like two big water balloons in my chest. He gave me instructions on what to do over these next few days...no shower, no getting face stuff wet, lots of rest, ice on face...and told me to be at his office at 9:45 on Saturday. The entire little meeting took 15 minutes, and away he went.

They brought me breakfast shortly afterwards. It was very large. Scrambled eggs, hot oatmeal with brown sugar, a muffin, orange juice, coffee...I was starving. I called Karen to see how she was doing, and she was on her way to get me, so I started to gather up my things and change to get going.

Karen thought I looked like Darth Vader, as my face was all covered in bandages and my eyes were swollen and a bit purple. She drove me home, and I went straight to bed. I was so tired. Throughout the

entire day I couldn't stay asleep for much more than an hour, so I slept for an hour, and got up for an hour. My eyes continue to turn a deep, deep shade of purple and to swell, and at the moment they look far worse than they feel.



Healing from surgery

I called Brian at work to make sure all was going well. He says he will stop out to see me later today. That should be interesting.....

My first night back I made myself a sandwich, and had a pint of Ben and Jerry's frozen yogurt. I've been watching some of this bombing stuff, but as soon as I feel tired, I go lie down. I called Elisabeth twice yesterday, the first time to let her know I was ok, and the second time I left my phone number in case she wants to call, but I haven't heard back so far. I'm wondering how she's doing with her folks there. I'll call again later today to see what happens.

Last night I actually slept pretty well. I was up for an hour at 4, but got at least 8 hours for a change. So here it is, early on Thursday, and I'm feeling better than I thought I would. I hope it's a good sign.

3/24/99 =====
Journal Entry

What a couple of days. I'm a mess. My face is all bruised and covered with tape and gauze, and I look like some kind of space creature. All went very well, though. Face looks worse than it feels, boobs hurt like crazy. I'll be sending a complete description of how things went, but I don't have the strength right now. I can only stay up for an hour at a time, and then I need to and lie down with an ice pack, and it's almost that time...

3/26/99 =====
Journal Entry

Another day of recuperation, and I think I'm just getting past the worst of it. The boobs are not nearly as sore as they were for the first couple of days. The bruising around the eyes is really spectacular, but the swelling has gone down quite a bit. The nose still hurts and throbs, though. I've even had the energy to get some work done around this place today.

Still no word from Elisabeth. I called there this morning and talked to Matt, who said they Elisabeth and her folks had gone out shopping. I told him to let them know that I had called to say hi. I think I'm going to send some 'Welcome to Arizona' flowers tomorrow.

I'll be getting out myself tomorrow. I need to go to my doctor's for my shot. That should be interesting. Also, I'm going to stop by the salon and have them wash my hair. I can't take a shower, and the hair hasn't been washed in three days, so I called to ask if I could stop by and they said sure.

I talked with Karen on the phone for half an hour. She was just calling to make sure I was doing ok. I also talked with the specialist from San Fran. I asked if I needed to prepare anything for her visit, such as type up a message to the group or something. She said it was not necessary. She reiterated that a photograph would be helpful, and I promised to have one for her. I called to talk with Brian, but he was in the middle of something and told me he would call me back tonight.

I'm getting tired as I sit and write this, so I think I'm going to lie down for an hour before dins....At least I'm not having too much trouble getting sleep....

* * * *

Electrolysis is the bane of our existence for every male-to-female transsexual who attempts to transition. It involves permanently killing hair with needles and electricity, neither of which have any business being near a human face. You haven't lived until you've felt and heard the liquid in a hair follicle boil to the point where the root of the hair dies.

To kill facial hair, the electrologist must insert a needle into each follicle. Then, electric current in the form of heat is applied for several seconds causing a chemical reaction to permanently kill the follicle. Then, the dead hair is then pulled out by the root with a pair of tweezers. This happens – follicle after follicle, hair after hair, hour after hour.

The typical male face has upwards of 65,000 hair follicles on it, so to follow this process through to completion is a long, painful, expensive process. But, there's nothing more disconcerting than spending a day trying to be feminine and finding yourself dealing with a 5 o'clock shadow by dinner time. No matter how closely you shave a beard, if it's dark there will be telltale signs that it's there.

Many people wear thick pancake foundation in an effort to hide the beard. That often attracts as much attention as the facial hair so the only satisfactory way of handling this is to kill the beard. How many of us fantasize about a completely smooth hair-free face, never having to shave again? I daresay, most of us. However, getting

there takes time, money, patience, dedication, and a high tolerance for pain. A masochistic streak sometimes helps, too.

There was a time later in my transition when a typical day often consisted of getting up at 3:30am to drive across town to the electrologist's office...having electrolysis between 5am-8am, driving to work where I would stay until 5:30 in the afternoon, then driving back to the electrolysis clinic for 3 more hours from 6 until 9. By the time I would get home, have dinner, and get to bed, it was usually after 11...only to get up at 3:30 to do it all again. Sometimes upwards of 30 hours a week. It was an incredibly difficult schedule.

By the way, did I mention that this HURTS???! Different parts of the face hurt more than others. I found the closer to the lips...the more it hurt. And when she began working on the upper lip, we are talking pure torture! Under the nose is excruciating. My electrologist worked in three hour blocks, so that's how I measured time and progress - three hours at a time.

Often, transsexuals use a topical anesthetic such as Emla to reduce the pain. I found it to be more of a bother than it was worth. The directions indicate to put in on an hour before the treatment, and to put a piece of Saran Wrap over the treated area to keep in the heat. Plus, it didn't seem to make all that much of a difference to me. So, I learned to grit my teeth and bear it. More than once the irony of how tough you need to be to become a woman made me almost smile thru the pain.

By the time a 3-hour session is over, the skin is often red and swollen. Think of what raw hamburger looks like, or corned beef hash, and you'll have a good idea what a tender face often looks like immediately after this kind of abuse. Depending on the type of electrical current used, it can scab up for 3 or 4 days. I quickly learned to apply pure aloe to the area immediately after a treatment. I took a leaf, split it open, and wiped it all over. It was cool, and wet, and felt very good. Stay away from your lips, though, because it tastes horrible!

Maria was an electrologist in Phoenix who had worked with the TS community there for over 15 years. She advertised her services in the TS support group newsletter, so one day during my convalescence from surgery I called her to get information. I asked questions about rates, types of treatments, etc. She asked me straight away if I was a transsexual, which took me a little by surprise, and I told her I was.

She asked if I had a date for going full-time. I told her it was to be in mid-April, only a few short weeks away. She explained that we'd have to get very busy very fast if we had any chance of be getting my face anywhere near being cleared by then. She emptied her schedule for me and booked up each and every day, for the following two weeks, with day-long sessions.

This turned out to be both good and bad, and would actually have some far reaching implications. The good news is that I got a good headstart on getting my face clear. The

bad news is that time I originally allotted to being Donna was now to be spent growing whiskers and getting them pulled out.

Maria's office was a half-hour from my apartment. The first time I met her, I remember that she did not fit the mental image I had formed in my head after talking to her on the phone. She was in her early 30's (although she seems to be much younger), a little over five feet tall, and had reams and reams of jet black, curly hair. She had glowing olive skin, very pretty, sympathetic eyes, and a warm, friendly, infectious smile. She always seemed to move in fast motion, whether it was walking, working, or talking. Her energy level seemed to be endless.



Maria is perhaps the single most important person who I met during my transition. She has an uncommon understanding and empathy of what it is that we, as transsexuals, face and endure. She has worked with many TS clients through the years, and readily offers valuable advice and feedback. During the countless hours that I lay on her table I we talked and talked; about my past life; about my family situation; about my hopes and fears; about my transition. Besides having the hair on my face removed, our sessions turned out to be a very effective form of therapy for me. She eventually became an informal therapist, den-mother, advocate, advisor, and dear friend.

Maria really cares about transsexuals and what we endure to be ourselves. She was married, had three kids, worked at her husband's restaurant, had a house to run, but was somehow still able to meet me at 5:00 a.m. for my sunrise sessions, and sometimes all day on Saturdays or Sundays.

Sometimes, she sang to me as she worked. Other times, she'd turn on the early morning news in the background. Sometimes we talked. And sometimes, I dozed. Whisker after whisker. Pore after pore. Hour after hour.

Maria introduced me to other TS gals, who were to become my unofficial support group. All in all, Maria saved my life more than once. I cannot imagine anyone surviving a transition without at least one "Maria."

3/29/99 =====
Journal Entry

One of the things that bothers me most about this convalescence is my inability to do ANYTHING physical. No sit-ups. No running. Not even any walking. At least until the end of the week.

As I write this, I just finished eating (Salmon stuffed with crabmeat and shrimp...yum yum), and eating some frozen yogurt for desert, and watching the NCAA championship game. I picked UConn before the tournament even started, so I'm hoping the Huskies can beat the odds...

It has been a long long long long day. I have a feeling they're all going to be like this for a while. I was up before 4, and couldn't get back to sleep. I only got maybe 4 hours worth of sleep. I had to be at Maria's for electrolysis at 6, so I finally took a shower (careful to avoid the splint on the face) and was there on time. Maria has quite the business. She caters to TG's who come in from all over the world for her services. She advertises in Tapestry and stuff, and has done quite the job in finding this niche. She's only 34 years old, but has been doing this for 17 years. We're going to be seeing alot of each other over these next few weeks. I was there for 5 hours today. It wasn't too too bad, but it was not picnic. She suggested getting some medicines to help with the "discomfort", so as soon as I was done I went over to my doctor's and had them call in the scripts.

I made it home after noon, and made lunch. I had several messages. One was from my attorney saying he was still waiting for our court date for the name change, and would let me know as soon as he had it. One was from my new manager Bill calling to touch base and say 'hi', and make sure everything was ok. There was also one from Elisabeth, who said that I should call today, as she told her folks I would, and she also told them I might be back on Friday.

My head was spinning, and I was really tired, so I tried to lay down for a while, but it was a no-go. I had an appt. with the surgeon to have my nose cast and sutures removed at 5:15, so decided to head across town for that. It went very well, and looks very fine (if I do say so myself). It is still partly numb, but I'm told the feeling should come back slowly but surely.

I called home tonight and talked with Matt and Elisabeth's dad for half an hour. Elisabeth was out for a walk, so I'll try back in a little while. Then I'm going to bed. I'm getting really tired as I sit here, and won't last through the second half.....I can tell.

I think I'm gonna call it a day. I have 8 hours of electrolysis tomorrow, and need to be back there at 6, so I need some rest. At least now I have some meds to help, as some of those little suckers are really painful.

=====

Sometimes you get to choose who you come out to, how it happens, and when. Sometimes, those decisions get made *for* you. That’s not necessarily a bad thing.

My sister learned about my “situation” by accident. One day I got home from work and Elisabeth was talking on the phone...crying hysterically. I had no idea what had happened. Had someone died? Was someone injured? Elisabeth said that she couldn’t talk anymore, and handed me the phone, and ran sobbing into the bedroom. I said “Hello” to inquire as to who could be the cause of such an upset, and was surprised to learn that it was my sister.

She had called to ask a question regarding my dad’s estate, totally unaware of what was happening in my life at the time. Apparently she and Elisabeth chatted for a little while before Elisabeth started crying, saying that I was about to do something terrible. And that’s where I walked in...

My sister was full of questions, but I couldn’t answer them. I told her much was going on, but that I didn’t really want to talk about it right there and then. She asked if I was ok health-wise, and I told her that I was, and would call her later in the week to discuss.

She called a couple of days later. She ran thru a list of possibilities. It was a list I was to hear several times as others guessed as to my “condition”. Was I an alcoholic? Was I gay? Was I cheating on my wife? Was I sick? Was my job in danger? Of course the answer was no to all of these. And when I did indicated what the REAL issue was, there was shock. But there was also support, and that is what was most important to me.....

**3/29/99 6:29 am =====
Email to my sister**

Hi Jude:

Here's the pic, as promised. I look a bit stressed, but otherwise I guess it's ok. I want to thank you again for your understanding and support, and especially for not going into labor over shock of this.

If you ever want to go to a good website about this stuff, let me know, as I know of many.....

There. That didn't hurt too too much. Give me a call later just to know you got the pic and you still love me, and I'll be happy.

Love,

D

Her response:

Hey, D!

The picture is kind of small, but I agree with Karen: you're better than average. Always were.

I admit I've been thinking about this a lot since yesterday. I do understand Elisabeth's feelings much better now, and plan to email her. She has a right to be upset because this means her marriage is over and she's lost a husband. There is no way for a heterosexual woman to stay married to a woman. She will have to finish doing an awful lot of stuff on her own, which is a scary thought for a woman about to turn 40. But you're the one I love the most, and you have my support regardless of whether you're a brother or a sister.

I'm worried about you. You've chosen such a hard road for yourself! It's going to have so many difficult moments. Moments at work, with your family, with friends... Again, I have to admire your guts and determination to put yourself through it just to straighten out something you feel got hopelessly tangled up so long ago. I suppose you have explored the idea of waiting until Matt is out of high school before finishing all this? It would be a five year postponement of the surgical aspects of what you plan to do. Please talk to professional people about what the impact on your son will be if you haven't already and consider waiting if they tell you it will be best for him? If you've already done all that and I'm way behind you in thinking of it, forgive me. It's just the way my mind works.

If you want my help with Mom or anything else, I'm here for you. I can't say how she's going to react to all this. I haven't a clue. But eventually, even if she reacts badly at first, I think she'll come around. I'll work on her if need be. I do think Dad would have understood and been supportive. Elisabeth is wrong in her assessment of what his reaction would have been. But she never really knew or understood our family to begin with.

So, what are the next steps? What are your plans? What are the legalities (will your name change be legal and permanent, for one)? I didn't think to ask you if your gender identity means you plan on living your life completely as a woman, with hopes of romance and all that... like, are men at all attractive to you? Or is this more of a lifestyle thing? I would be interested in having some web addresses, definitely. Thanks. Let me know when it's all right to tell the girls. Rachel will be supportive too, by the way. She feels very strongly about things like gay rights and freedom of choice, etc. Rhiannon should be ok as well. I'm not worried. I did tell Ralph what has been going on but he is sworn to secrecy. He is slightly baffled but open minded and not judgmental. So you have a port in the storm here with us, all right? Call on us if you need us. And of course I still love you!!!

Keep in touch.

Love,
Jude

4/2/99 =====
Journal Entry

I had two interesting new experiences today – two more firsts:

I did stop by Victoria's Secret to get some bras. I got 4 different ones, ranging from 38 to 40, and C to D, depending on style. The sales lady was very nice about everything....

I decided to go for a run on the treadmill. It has been a few weeks, so I put on the sports bra and a t-shirt and a sweatshirt, and up the hair went into a pony tail, and I went for a jog. HOW THE HECK DO YOU HANDLE THESE BOOBS DURING A RUN???? It was a lost cause. Rather than running my usual pace, I ran real, real slow. I figure I'll have to work my way back, but learning how to handle the "bounce" will be difficult....

4/3/99 =====
Journal Entry

Observation: Taking makeup off is more difficult and time consuming than putting in on...

I went to the salon today and they took a few pictures. Nothing too great, but that's me....



I finally shaved today. I was hesitant to put makeup over the skin that got plucked last night, but decided I had to. I'm breaking out a bit now, so I'll have to let it heal up again....

I went to the doctor today for my injection. I've lost almost 10 lbs since my surgery. I'm starting to eat more, as I don't want to get myself sick.

4/9/99 11:17 pm =====
Email from my wife

If you want all of these things you wish for, then you had better stop throwing them all away. I am shut off from you until you "figure things out". I live for today, and I am NOT making ANY plans for our future until I have the answers I need. I will NOT do anything that involves US until I know there will be an US. I am handling everything I need to handle right now ALL BY MYSELF.

You don't seem to get it....I WILL NEVER call you at the place you are staying! NEVER! And I can't stand to see you or talk to you PERIOD! What you are doing is a SIN in my eyes and I will NEVER think any differently. I am so hurt and disappointed. I just want you out of my life until you "figure things out".....I don't mean to sound mean, but that's the way it has to be. I can't believe you haven't already had enough time to figure this out.....is the life you've led the past few weeks the way you want to spend the rest of your life?

=====

Brian stopped by my apartment a couple of days after my surgery to see how I was doing. The second he noticed that I had breasts he got very serious, called our HR rep to see how we would handle this, and told me NOT to come to work or disclose what I had done to anyone. I wasn't to talk to anyone at work, I wasn't to dial in to do work, I wasn't to do anything at all under penalty of immediate termination (that's being fired, not being killed). I agreed.

I didn't see what the big deal was, but apparently to him and to the company it WAS a big deal. He was angry that I hadn't mentioned this prior to having it done, but I couldn't understand what that had to do with anything. The entire thing certainly put me on notice that the company was very uncomfortable with things so keeping surprises to a minimum was probably a good idea. It also stretched my time away from the office from two weeks to three, which was fine with me.

Over the next two weeks I slowly healed, both physically and mentally. My face throbbed for a week until they took off the cast that had been taped onto my nose. I put as much ice on it as I could, but taking pain killers and not having anything to do or anywhere to go makes days stretch on forever.

My boobs seemed absolutely huge, and they ached and throbbed for quite a while. I was tremendously self-conscious about them. It's a big deal for someone who has had teeny little A cups to suddenly have a set of D's. Aside from any physical impact, the psychological impact was actually pretty substantial, and more profound than I expected.

The thing I remember most about those days, though, is electrolysis. Early in the morning thru late in the afternoon. When Maria had other patients she'd give me a break, or she'd have someone else from her office work on me. Sometimes they'd use a single needle to work. Other times they'd pull a contraption that looked more like a torture device than a medical tool over – it had a rack with 16 needles on it, each connected to a central “brain” by a wire. Once those babies warmed up in your face it certainly caught your attentions.

They started up near my ears on both sides, where a sideburn would be. They worked downwards from there towards the chin. Every day we'd make visible progress, although it was certainly very tedious, slow work. It was so amazing, though, to run my fingers over these expanding areas of totally smooth facial skin. There were no whiskers there. No stubble. No telltale shadow. It was totally smooth, and the knowledge that the entire face would be that way helped me get through many of those sessions.

The most excruciating session was the day Maria planned to clear my upper lip the first time. She strongly encouraged me to go to a dentist and get a Novocain shot to deaden it, but I couldn't do it. The doctor had given me some pills to help me sleep so I took two of them in hopes they'd help to get me through the session. They did, to a point. However, I can say without any hesitation that this one experience was the single most painful event of my life. I just wanted to cry. Instead, I lay there moaning and

groaning – trying to retreat in my mind to a place where I disconnected with the physical discomfort I was feeling. I was only partially successful.

By the time it was over I looked like Marge Simpson, with a huge, swollen upper lip. The rest of the afternoon was spent in my apartment with ice on my face, trying to sleep, and meeting a small group of Maria's friends for dinner. These experiences are certainly not for the faint of heart. However, they certainly do test your dedication and resolve. I don't know how anyone who isn't totally focused on the end goal gets through it.

Part of the problem I was facing, though, was the fact that I was in constant pain. There was physical pain from the surgery, and the ongoing electrolysis. There was emotional pain from the separation from my family and my all-consuming loneliness. There was fear – I had never been vulnerable like this before, and all of what was happening scared me to death. I had trouble sleeping. I stopped eating. By the time 10 days had passed I was a wreck.

* * * * *

Easter Sunday had always been a significant holiday for our family. Perhaps not so much because we were particularly religious, or that we were celebrating the religious significance of the day, as for the spiritual rebirth that it represented.

When Matt was young, we'd spend the night before Easter hiding candy and eggs around the house. Once he woke up we'd follow him around the house, sharing in his excitement as he searched high and low for the candy and small presents that the Easter Bunny had carelessly hidden so he could easily find them.

Most years the three of us would go to church, and then out for a nice Easter brunch. It had been just one Easter ago when Elisabeth exploded at me in front of Matt, which marked a huge turning point in our relationship and my struggle.

This year, it was Easter, and I was alone. It was dreary and cold outside... so cold, in fact, that some areas around Scottsdale actually saw snow. I was mentally and physically in pain. I was lonely; I was confused; and I spent the morning crying...feeling sorry for myself in my self-inflicted predicament.

Around noontime, Brian called. "Hey, whatchya doing?" he asked.

"Surviving," I replied, trying to sound as cheery as possible.

"You don't sound so good. Are you doing ok?"

"To tell you the truth, it has been a rough morning. But I think the worst is over and I'm feeling a little better."

"Do you have any plans for Easter dinner?" he asked.

"Nope. Just whatever I have in the fridge."

He paused for a moment. "Hey. How about if I pick up some barbecued chicken, salad and desert, and head over there for Easter lunch. I have plans later for Easter dinner, but I'd love to stop by for a little while if you want."

It only took a second to think about it. "Yes," I replied. "I think I'd like that."

He was at my apartment, bearing food and beer before the hour was over. Over the previous few weeks, as I prepared for going full-time, Brian had done his best to understand. We had had some deep conversations, but in the end I'm not sure he was any closer to comprehending the power of the forces that were driving me. Despite my best attempts to help him understand, I still think he thought it was about the clothes.

That afternoon, as we snacked on chicken and drank beer, we had an in-depth, emotional chat. I did my best to verbalize my fears and my discomfort. I explained my loneliness, and my despair. I explained how difficult it was to go from a role in which I felt so secure and natural, but empty, to one in which I felt so insecure, vulnerable, clumsy and unprepared. For the first time, he seemed to get it, at least some of it. Perhaps it was because I looked and felt so pathetic. Perhaps he had had a sudden moment of clarity. I don't know. What I do know is that I will never forget the kindness that Brian showed to me that day, as his efforts rescued me from one of the lowest points in my life.

I had very little time to recover from my Easter doldrums. I knew that I needed to go out and spend some time getting comfortable as Donna, alone. I had planned to spend these entire two weeks doing this, but between recuperation and electrolysis, it was something I still hadn't been able to fit into my schedule. I felt it was critical to overcome this hurdle, both for my shaken confidence and my maturity. I understood that a bad experience could have a negative, potentially devastating effect, but I tried not to let my mind dwell on what could go wrong.

One morning I decided I wanted to spend a few hours walking through the mall. I took the day off from electrolysis so that my face would not be so chopped up for this important excursion. It may sound trivial, but I challenge any man reading this to dress up as a woman, and go to the mall to see the reaction. Be prepared to be taunted. Be prepared to have people point, look and stare. Be prepared to be the target of ridicule, and perhaps even outright hostility.

I planned it out. I carefully got ready, trying to look as plain as possible in desperate hopes of blending in. This seemed improbable, however, as I continued to grapple with my large breasts and the feeling that they automatically drew attention wherever I went. I planned to arrive at the mall shortly before it opened. I thought that this was the time when the fewest people would be there, so I had the least chance of getting harassed. I got to the mall and parked near the door. I gathered my things together to go in for a short walk. I got ready to go in.....

I couldn't do it. I could not get out of my car. I could not get my mind off of what could happen. I promised myself that I'd count to four, like a swimmer preparing to jump into icy water, and then just go. But when I got to four, there was no going.

After what seemed like an eternity, but was actually probably only ten minutes, I knew it was over. I knew I had been defeated by my fears. As I sat there, contemplating

my defeat, I started shaking and crying. All the fear and frustration and disappointment welled up in me, and my crying became sobbing.

I started the car and drove home, absolutely devastated with my inability to do something so seemingly simple and harmless as walk through the mall. How could I ever hope to exist in the world as my true self if I couldn't do something so basic as show my face in public? I refused to consider a life hiding at home, shopping late at night to avoid the crowds, ordering pizza for fear of going to a restaurant. Such a life would be trading one prison for another, and neither was worth living for.

That evening, Karen and Kevin wanted to take me out for something to eat in hopes of helping to shake my ever-growing feelings of despondence and despair. I accepted, more out of not wanting to be alone than for the opportunity to go out. At that point I had lost nearly fifteen pounds since the surgery, and my face was gaunt, gray and hollow.

Although nothing *bad* happened at dinner, my overall discomfort and inability to find solace is all that I remember. I begged them to meet me in the parking lot, as I didn't want to go into the restaurant alone. As we stood in the bar, waiting for a table, I was absolutely positive that everyone in the place was mocking me. All through dinner, I tried to express my feelings of hopelessness that I would ever be able to live the kind of life that I felt was my destiny. Somehow, death almost seemed to be a better alternative than the living hell I had crafted for myself.

The devastation of the day sent me into a tailspin from which I could not recover.

**4/11/99 =====
Journal Entry**

I sit here tonight more confused than I have ever been before. I've had a weekend which has made me question everything in my entire life, and nothing seems real right now.

I don't even know where to begin. I think I told you some of this before, but just bear with me....

Yesterday morning (Saturday) I had a doctor's appointment, and then stopped by Maria's office so that she (and her patient, another T*) could meet Donna in all her glory. Maria has seen Donna before, but I've always either been swollen or scruffy. Her patient was an actual HR manager, and seemed genuinely happy to meet Donna. I stayed and chatted for a half hour before heading off to the salon.

At the salon they did another hair lesson, and a make-up application (a little too tarty for my liking, actually). I needed some pictures of Donna to give to the lady from San Fran, and they took a bunch (I sent you one). I really wanted to go shopping, and pulled into the parking lot, but I was scared to death to go in by myself. I just sat there. Ten minutes. The longer I sat, the more scared I got. I realized that Donna had NEVER been out by herself....alone. And the thought of doing it petrified me. I dunno why. Eventually, I just drove away and came home.

The fact that I couldn't even go out of the car by myself really bothered me. I called Brian, and he suggested I wear a business suit for the pics, so I told him he'd have to come over to take one if that's what he wanted. I tried on every suit I have, and felt they all made me look goofy. Probably all in my mind. Maybe the hormone shot. But real, nonetheless. I finally put on blue dress.

Brian got here, and looked really surprised when he finally saw Donna. I think this was the first time. He took some pics, too (I haven't looked at them yet, but will send you one if they came out ok). We talked a bit, and the stress of this upcoming week is beginning to show on him, too.

Karen called to see if I wanted to meet out for dinner so Kevin could meet Donna. She felt it had to be sooner or later, so I told them I'd meet them at Chili's.

Driving there, I suddenly got a panic attack so I called and asked them to meet me in the parking lot so I wouldn't have to go in alone. They did. It was so busy that we had to wait 20 minutes for a table, so we went into the bar and I tried to hide in the back amid all the people there. I was SURE everyone was staring at me, but Kevin said no, and he was probably right. Eventually, we got a booth way in the back, and had a nice talk.

The bottom line is that I probably LOOKED ok, but I felt more uncomfortable than ever. And I don't know if I'll EVER be comfortable....It really has me perplexed.

And today, Brian had some real eye-openers. He is feeling pressure being in the middle....my boss AND my friend. He feels that there will be rumors that he know about this when he hired me. He wants to set up a lunch with my friend (and new manager) Bill on Thursday. He said he hopes that Bill doesn't leave over his "discomfort" with the situation. All in all, I was feeling pretty low when I was done with him.

I talked to Elisabeth tonight. Her birthday is on Tuesday, and I wrote her a card and a poem. I miss her so much. And Matt. And the fear and pressure and doubt is pressing at me harder than ever before. Elisabeth wants me back. Only as Dave (of course). And in some ways I want to go back. We had a good cry together. I feel like calling up a surgeon, having the boobs taken out, and running home. But I'm not ready to do that.

We'll see if tomorrow brings a new frame of mind. Tonight I am a wreck, and can't wait to take a pill and get some sleep....



One of the pictures Brian took

There is no way that anyone who has not endured an impending “transition” can know the pressures involved. It could be argued, “If you are feeling pressure, then you’re not ready”. Or, “You asked for it, now live with it.” I would agree that both certainly apply.

In my case, the pressures were incredible.

First and foremost, there was the separation from my family. I had not been alone in nearly 20 years, and suddenly finding myself totally alone and isolated was incredibly difficult for me. I think people adopt many roles during their lives...parent, spouse, lover. I also think that many people come to define themselves by the roles they play, not by what they really feel, or who they truly feel themselves to be. To suddenly remove these roles from our lives is a traumatic experience, and that alone can cause tremendous difficulty in adjusting. It was as though they had been ripped right out of my life, still tantalizingly close but just out of reach. I can't even begin to describe the horrible loneliness, especially knowing the pain that I was inflicting on the person I continued to love most in the world.

Second, I found that I was trying to keep one foot in my old life, while at the same time trying to take the step into my new one. I had done my best to hedge my bets in case it didn't work out. I hadn't told the people that I cared about most, especially my son, about my situation. In fact, during these difficult weeks that I was away preparing for transition, my son thought I was in Dallas for work! I used to call him and tell him I was in Dallas, when in reality I was less than 10 miles away. In reality, the people I had "spared" from my news were the people I cared about most, who I was most afraid to lose, and whose support I needed most. Not being completely honest before transition was a big mistake.

Third, I had already found transition life to be incredibly difficult, and I had not spent even a single day as Donna! I had anticipated taking these few weeks to get comfortable in my new role in preparation of going full-time. Instead, I found myself on the electrologist's table upwards of 6 or 8 hours a day. My face was little more than hamburger, and I couldn't put makeup over it even if I wanted to. I had originally intended on a gradual transition to Donna, but the recommendation of the specialist from San Fran was the "big bang" approach, and I was doing my best to accommodate that.

Fourth, I had overwhelmed myself. Long hair for someone who has never had long hair is a difficult challenge. Drying it. Styling it. Wearing it. The same is true for a very impressive set of breasts. I had miscalculated that these things would make it easier for me to transition, when in reality they were adding to an already stressed mind to push me over the edge.

In retrospect, it was a very dangerous time for me. My days were spent in pain, and fear, and frustration, and discomfort. And each day the feelings got stronger and stronger. By mid week, I was only a day away from the specialist from San Fran arriving to announce my situation to the world.

As the week spiraled out of control, I started to panic. I saw my life heading for a brick wall, and I didn't have a seat belt to save me. I was scared, and lonely, and

uncomfortable, and desperate – all of which put me on the brink of some very bad things.

So, a day before we were scheduled to introduce Donna at work, I did the only thing I could do. I pulled the plug.

I CAVED!!

It only took 3 phone calls to kill my transition, and my hopes for being Donna. First, I called Brian and told him to cancel the session with the management – that I had decided to stop. Then, I called my wife and left her a message telling her that I wanted to come home. Then, I called the doctor to make arrangements to have my breast implants removed.

I was incredibly relieved, but I was also overcome by sadness and disappointment. I had failed.

**4/14/99 =====
Journal Entry titled I Caved!!**

I put a stop to everything. I called Brian and told him to cancel all the meetings for Thursday. I suggested they cancel the lady from San Fran. I went and had all the extensions taken out of the hair, and had it colored back to near its original color. I have the nails taken off today, and the boobs come out tomorrow (no fee). I just can't do it. I'm done.

The pressure and the awkwardness and the discomfort and the unhappiness are not things that I will deal with for the rest of my life. I have learned a lot about myself in these past two weeks, and am just glad I had some time and space (and money) to be able to do some serious soul searching. I'm not regretting any of this for a single minute...

I have the de-boobectomy tomorrow. Elisabeth is driving me to surgery. The surgeon is doing it for free. I think I'll be back in my house by the weekend, but we'll see how things go. No hurry.

By the way, my sister had the baby over the weekend, and the poor thing is in neonatal intensive care and they think it has some physical and neurological problems, and may never live a normal life. It's just heart breaking. They're doing tests now, and my sister is doing her best to cope. It really makes my own problems look so insignificant in comparison....

I think jumping in feet first into deep waters and trying to swim has shown me things I could not have learned any other way. I'm just glad to get out of the pool before drowning.

**4/14/99 11:21pm =====
From: Elisabeth
Subject: THERE IS A GOD! (in response to my phone call saying I am coming home)**

I have been carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders for what seems like forever, and after our talk tonight, I feel like that weight has been removed. I sure hope you feel the same relief, comfort and joy that I do! I will just hang in there a few more days to see if it's too good to be true, or if it is a reality! I just hope you have given yourself enough time to satisfy the questions in your head, and to come full circle with complete peace of mind so you won't EVER have to deal with this again!!!! You deserve to live a completely HAPPY life! (IS there such a thing?!?!?) You NEED to be SURE it is DONE, and your questions are over! I don't want you to ever have ANY doubts. You NEED to be sure NOW that it will be gone....FOREVER, never to haunt us again!

I told Matt tonight that you have worked through your problems and that you are coming home for

GOOD! He was soooo, soooo happy, and jumped up and down and said "Yaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhh"! He loves you and needs you as much as I do, and I know you need us in your life to make your life complete! I told Matt the three of us belong together and we deserve to be HAPPY!

4/15/99 =====
From Michelle's journal:

I did, however, have a couple of personal matters come up in the last 24 hours that are interesting...at least to me. The first is that Donna, my transsexual friend from Phoenix has done a 180 and changed her mind about the sex reassignment. She wrote me a letter yesterday evening telling me that she had taken her hair extensions out, is getting her nails removed, and today is having her breast implants removed for no fee TODAY. I am stunned at this turn of events. Donna had everything set to go and was going to go to work next week in her new gender and suddenly lost her nerve or whatever it was that was driving her to change her sex. I am totally floored by this and I wrote her back begging her to see her therapist before she did anything else rash. Right now, I'm very worried about her mental state.

* * * *

Much happened in the next couple of weeks.

The day after my decision, I went and had my hair extensions removed, and my beautiful long hair all cut off. I had been growing it for well over a year, and it was gone. I had my nails soaked off. And I made arrangements to move back home once my breasts were gone.

XYZ decided that they wanted to specialist from San Fran to visit anyways. They asked me to come to dinner on Thursday night, along with Brian, Liz, and the specialist. I must have made an interesting site as I walked through the restaurant.

At the dinner, the specialist made some fairly astute observations. She found it interesting that I had not told the people in my family about my situation, and indicated that the people at work were usually the LAST to be told. She made arrangements to meet with HR, and some of the management, the next day, to discuss what had happened, and what may happen in the future. The way that Brian explained it to me later, she indicated that this chapter might be complete, but the book is far from over. How right she was.

As she described other transitions that she had helped to facilitate, I became convinced that this was not a "one-size-fits-all" process. There was not one, single, way to manage a transition. I would agree that there are lots and lots of WRONG ways, but I became convinced that there were also lots of right ways, and the method that she had recommended for me was NOT one of them....

The next day was Friday. Elisabeth drove me to the clinic to have my breasts removed. It was an incredibly difficult ordeal. The doctor did not knock me out, preferring instead to use a local anesthetic. So I heard, and remember, much of the

ordeal. At the time it was a huge relief. But in the weeks that followed, the sorrow at losing my “babies” ...after feeling so much pride in them for so long, would consume me. When the operation was over, they put drains in each breast that were connected to little, clear plastic containers that were pinned to an ace bandage. Elisabeth was crying when she arrived to take me home...part of it in relief...part of it in anger...and part for the pain that we had all endured. I was on the verge of crying, too, but for totally different reasons.

The following Monday was to have been Donna’s first day at work. Instead, Dave returned after 3 weeks off. I was very much still recovering from my ordeal, with the breast drains still connected under my baggy shirt, and zigzag scars that would be lifelong reminders of what had happened. But on the outside, I looked clean-cut, and fit, and somehow different. There were no comments that my hair was suddenly short, and appeared much darker. Or that my nose was different. Rather, people welcomed me back, oblivious to the incredible odyssey that had just occurred.

In the weeks that followed, I distanced myself from EVERYTHING that was somehow connected to Donna. This included Michelle, and Maria, and my many friends in Phoenix and around the country. I needed some down time to recover. Elisabeth, in turn, took immediate steps to rid us of Donna’s household. She started to return everything as I moved back into our house.

In a subsequent conversation with Maria, she indicated that she had seen this before. She indicated that Elisabeth and I were facing a “honey moon” period. She predicted that it would last for six months...tops. The reality is, it didn’t even last for six weeks....

4/28/99 3:14 pm =====

Journal Entry

I had lunch with my manager, Bill. It's like the 3rd or 4th time this in the last couple of weeks. I used to go and work out during lunch, but my incisions haven't all healed completely, so I'm spending the time eating. Bill has lots of questions about the three weeks that I was gone, but answers are not forthcoming right now.....

I had another "spat" with the wife. She's going through all of Donna's things at the apartment and wanting to return everything. There are some things I don't want her to return. This was not what she wanted to hear right now. She figures if I have ANY of it around, it's like giving an open beer to an alcoholic. I just can't win. I can tell that this is going to turn into a big, open wound and is going to be a source of constant nastiness. Just what I need....

5/3/99 10:41pm =====

Email from Cassie (responding to a note I had sent her)

>Hi Cassie:

>I'm very disappointed at having gotten so close to my transition, and not being able
>to follow it through.

I know it is hard for you. You have made great strides and now you feel you failed. But don't let that failure live, it is only a setback along your journey!. We all take steps backward, not wanting to let go of what is familiar for something we are sometimes not sure of. We constantly question because the price is so high. If we have to lose so much, we want it to be absolutely certain!

*>I see my wife's tactics (then and now) as basically
>emotional blackmail, and it makes me angry more than anything else.*

She is fighting tooth and nail for what she finds familiar and comforting! Sometimes the fight does not seem fair. We feel the burden this puts on our loved ones and we want to cause as little pain as possible while they feel that we are doing "this" TO them and they are fighting with both resentment and love in their hearts. I don't suppose they feel the need to be as careful of our feelings as we try to be with theirs! This is just speculation on my part but I think it has a lot of truth in it.

*>I dunno what's going to happen, but I'm sure not giving up my apartment, I
>can assure you that....*

It sounds as if you could use a little time away. Far away! Take a week and go somewhere that you don't have to do anything and you can just be lazy and have no responsibilities. Close out everything! Just be by yourself, go shopping, sit on the beach walk through the park and swing on a swing. Feel the warm sunshine on your back and listen to the breeze blowing through the leaves. Listen to the birds and crickets. NO TV....although movies are all right. No newspapers or related magazines.

Don't think about your transition or anything like that. JUST BE DONNA. You don't have to get all made up and go out, although you can. Just be Donna inside. My bet is that away from everything you know and that is familiar, you will be lost in Donna and when all the frustrations of your family and job and such are gone, you will be at peace, real peace.

*>Sometimes it is hard to see the anxiety that lays below the surface because
>we are so used to it. The agitation, the stress the resentment the guilt.
>All of that comes from trying to force ourselves to be something we are not
>for someone else. True love accepts unconditionally!*

Although we have never met, I know that our hearts share many of the same burdens and joys and we long for the same freedom and acceptance. It is and will continue to be difficult to fight the attacks of those we both care about and work with but they are battles which are far preferable to fighting the torment we feel in our hearts! Your path is ultimately yours to choose, but I am and always shall be your sister. And you, mine! No matter as male or female, you will always be Donna to me.

* * * * *

I had moved back into the house, and even back into our bedroom. As odd as this might sound, very little of what had happened was discussed. It was almost as if any discussion of it might cause one or both of us to reconsider things. Perhaps it was all better left alone for the moment.

Elisabeth wasted no time in reclaiming her husband. She took immediate steps to rid us of Donna's household, as if retaining any part of Donna's life provided a continued

threat of re-infection. She began ransacking my apartment to return all the items that I had bought.

At first I watched helplessly as Donna’s belongings were returned or given away, one by one. It only took a short time for me to become defensive, and then angry about what was happening. These were not her belongings! She was returning things that weren’t hers! I started to argue about what was happening, which suddenly raised suspicions in Elisabeth’s mind about whether this was really over yet or not.

I had tried to explain to her that being transsexual is something that doesn’t go away. It doesn’t heal. There is no cure. It is part of who I am. I tried to explain that part of the reason things had gotten so desperate was because I had had no outlet for expression of Donna, and going forward we needed to discuss and address that. Things could not go back to the way they were, because this could not be an all or nothing situation. Donna needed some space in this world, and I would do what I had to do to make sure she got it. The fact that I had returned from the brink of a full-time life as Donna did not mean that I could live a life without her in it at all.

The most significant source of contention was my apartment. Elisabeth wanted me to cancel the lease. Because of all the penalties that would be involved if I broke the lease, the money was lost whether I cancelled it or not. I could not see the need to hurry, or perhaps I just didn’t want to give it up.

In an odd way, the apartment came to symbolize Donna. Elisabeth wanted it gone completely, while I wouldn’t and couldn’t let it go. Before long this issue became a splinter in our joyous honeymoon period. Perhaps I still felt I had issues to resolve, and wanted to keep it handy as a safe haven, just in case it was needed. I quickly got the sinking feeling that this splinter would soon become an infected, open wound.

**5/3/99 =====
Journal Entry**

If the last couple of days are any indication, my days as being half of Elisabeth and Dave are just about over. She told me to get out tonight, and I told her it was SHE who could get out.

I had class all day long. I left the house at 6:30 and didn't get back home until after 6. The house was empty. No note. No dinner. No nothing. Elisabeth got home with the dogs (she had been taking them for a walk), and apparently someone else was walking their dog, and it pulled away from their owner and attacked Buster. Buster is a lover, not a fighter, and ended up with a nasty cut on his back from being bitten. Elisabeth was kinda upset.

But rather than just forgetting about it, she got mad over it. She decided that she was going to call animal services and report the people. She told me that this morning, and I told her she was vindictive and not a very nice person. She didn't like that. When I got home, I saw all kinds of notes that she took tracking down the owner of the dog....

I got home at 6, and Matt was lying down (he has a nasty cold). Any dinner? No. In fact, dishes were piling up in the sink because Elisabeth didn't unload the dishwasher from last night. But I don't say anything. I made myself some spaghetti and ate by myself while Elisabeth read in the TV room. The distance separating us seemed like a thousand miles. Eventually, she decided to take a little nap, and she went into her bedroom and closed the door. I decided that the dogs needed a little walk, so I took them. Matt eventually got up and I made him some dinner.

Here's where the fun starts. Elisabeth gets up, goes into the kitchen, and proceeds to tell me that it needs to be cleaned up. I told her that if she had emptied the dishwasher, I would have put the dishes in there, but apparently she was too busy tracking down the dog to do anything today. She told me to do it myself. I told her that frankly, I've been doing MY job and I didn't feel that she was doing hers. I told her that I had been so accepting for so long, that she just figured I'd do everything, and that's not the case anymore. I'm sick and tired of keeping this stuff in. So she gets all defensive and tells me how wrong I am, so I asked her what she did today while I was at work all day. And what did she do yesterday after sleeping in until almost 11 while I was at school all day. If she figured I was going to do it all, she was nuts. So she tells me that if I'm going to be like this, I can just leave. Oy. Not this again.

5/4/99 6:57 pm =====
From: Dr. Sheila Dickson
Re: Fallout

Hi, Donna,

I do not see you as having chickened out. I see you as having gone as far as YOU could go. You had to stop at the point where it was necessary for others to come with you. Brian stepped aside and it doesn't sound like Carol Ann was able to help the situation. Keep the trapeze in mind: you can't fly from one to another if there's no team to catch and throw for you. Think of this as a valuable lesson for your son: there is strength, intelligence and consideration for others in not committing suicide, and that is metaphorically speaking what it would have been - your trying to do it all by yourself, especially in a physically weakened condition.

Maybe this picture will help: you climbed up to the high dive, walked to the end of the board, bounced, lifted your arms, bent your knees and on looking down at your target, saw there was no water in the pool. So you stepped back, climbed down, and will practice until the time that there is sufficient water.

Be gentle with yourself. S

5/5/99 =====
Responding to an email from Michelle

>Speaking of changes, you sound angry and depressed about what happened during your transition.

In some ways, I am. Actually, I think disappointed is a better word. My psych sent me an email asking how I'm doing, and I told her about my disappointment. She wrote back and made an analogy to a high diver. The diver climbs up the ladder...it's a long and difficult climb. At the top, he/she prepares to dive. He/she goes to the end, and just before jumping, they notice that no one filled the big pool at the bottom with water. The support and the help were just not there. So.....they climb back down to make sure it gets filled this time, and will start the climb back up again soon.

>When you first told me of the reversal of fortune I was very surprised. This however, does not >surprise me. I expected some depression and emotional repercussions wondered why I hadn't > seen anything in the mail from you and now I understand why with Elisabeth running around

>returning all of your things. How can you allow this without your consent and how can she
 >even return them anyway. I would think that the stores would not take
 >them back. Anyway, you need to take it easy and go with the flow like
 >I know you can. Take care girlfriend.
 >
 >Michelle
 >

=====

It had been a month since I had returned home from the brink of my transition. The joy and relief of those first few days at home had long since faded. In fact, we were back to where we started – living separate lives in the same home. I realized, to my sadness, that I was just as lonely living at home as I was living by myself.

The thing that I learned was that any of us can always choose to stop our transitions and go back home. That is always an option. The issue that I don't think I realized at the time is that the life we left behind is gone. It's not there for us anymore. The moment we share our news with the world we're often changed in how they perceive us, how they act towards us, how they feel about us.

So, although we can certainly choose to go back the fact of the matter is that I had returned to a life that no longer fit. Certainly, I had made that decision for good reasons. However, it gradually became apparent to me that the issue at hand wasn't that I had figured anything out. It was that I had approached things wrong. And, slowly but surely the prospect of doing it again became more and more real in my mind.

First and foremost, I needed support. I needed the people in my life to know, and to be there for me. I hadn't realized how important that was the first time around, and I wasn't about to make that mistake a second time. I decided that I needed to tell people, and the first person who needed to know was my mom. Deciding to tell her was the easy part. The how, and the when, was much more difficult for me.

5/18/99 3:06 pm =====
Journal entry

I'm off to Dallas today for the rest of the week. Work stuff. I'm going to be spending some time with my mom while I'm there. I'm planning to tell her about my "situation", and hope for the best. I was thinking about doing via a letter, but decided it would be more appropriate to do in person (although the thought of it has me scared to death right now).....

My mental state lately has been pretty low, although on the outside all is going fairly smoothly. Oh well....I guess that's how it goes.

**5/21/99 5:23:pm =====
email to Michelle**

Hi Michelle:

I've been thinking alot about your advice about talking to my mom about my "situation". This morning I sent an email to Karen and another friend about it, and here are their responses:

=====

>It is a difficult choice deciding what to do about your mom. I do not consider you selfish wanting to tell her, I just think you prefer to be honest whenever possible. Telling her does not serve much purpose though unless you are going to try to break out again in the very near future or unless you feel telling her is going to bring you two closer some how. It could backfire though. You must weight the risk with the gains. I do not feel you should take any more risks that would cause you any more feelings of loss or disappointment in your life right now. I would probably recommend that you get more securely balanced in your own life first.. You have so much to work out with Elisabeth and yourself.

=====

My advice is to not tell your mother unless you see her often and you are going full time. If it is going to be a long time before you see her again you can wait for a while longer. If not, and you are going to be "full time" then that is another story all together. If you are not full time you can always be in male role when you visit.

Slow is Good!

If in doubt... Don't!

**5/25/99 =====
Following is a letter I wrote to my manager, Brian.**

Brian:

I've been thinking a lot about my aborted transition attempt lately, and realized that I never really had an opportunity to thank you for all your efforts on my behalf. Once all the pressure was off, everything kind of slipped back into the groove, and we never had a chance to talk about it. Sometimes life's currents tend to sweep you along, and it's just something I need to do before the current picks me up again.

Your friendship and humanity towards me during my most difficult of times have, in a very real way, renewed my faith in humankind. You are the first "friend" that I told about my situation, and that experience in and of itself was one of the most difficult things I have ever done. But your reaction, and your continued support and friendship, were truly forces that helped me to survive.

Your gestures helped me more than you will ever know, and there is no way on earth I could thank you enough. I will never forget them.

My life continues to reel with turmoil and confusion. Make no mistake...the things that drove me to the brink of my transition have not gone away. They have not magically disappeared. I would have gone through with it if I could, but in the end I just wasn't ready. My inability to follow through fills me with deep disappointment and I constantly think back to things I could have done differently. Everything was in place, and everything seemed perfect. You were supportive. HR was supportive. Our group is full of fantastic people. I had been able to move out of my house. I couldn't have asked for anything more.

But no one will ever be able to comprehend the pressures I had placed upon myself, and in the end I could not handle them all. I was overwhelmed by the demands of my change in lifestyle, by the isolation of being alone, by the terrible sadness of leaving my home and my family and everything I had known, by my inability to work, by the immobilizing fear of how my friends and family and co-workers will react to me. I didn't do what I did because I wanted to, as it is a path I think no one would choose unless it was a last recourse. I did it because I felt compelled to do it in order to live the rest of my life in peace. Inner peace is something I have not known for a long, long time, and I fear I will die before ever knowing it again. And that thought fills me with sadness.

If and when I attempt this again, I will not make the same mistakes.

In many ways, I am a different person now than I was before this experience. My life will never be the same. Relationships with those who have been closest to me (i.e. Elisabeth) have been strained to a point where I fear they will break. Relationships with others who know about my situation (i.e. you, my sister, Karen) have been strengthened. I have no idea what to expect in the future, but I see change in the wind....

Do not think I have given up on Donna. Her spirit is as alive and as active inside of me as it ever has been. And in some way, shape or form, it will come out. The struggle to bottle it up for so many years has taken too much out of me, and I have neither the strength nor the willpower to try to do it any longer. It's finding a way to do it that fits in the parameters of my life that is difficult, but what will be will be. Donna is me. I am Donna. And in a perfect world, that would be enough. To be accepted for who and what you are without judgement and without question. But this world is far from perfect, as am I, so I'll just have to accept that and do the best I can.

I have no idea why I'm telling you all this, except to say thank you. I truly appreciate you and your friendship and your advice, and hope it will continue in the future. In a world where we too often get caught up in the mundane things of our daily lives, dealing and talking about deeply personal issues is a much more important thing to me, and I hope you will continue to be as open and honest with me as you have always been. In a world where I feel I have very few real friends, I consider you to be one of the best, and I just wanted you to know that.

5/26/99 1:38 pm =====
From: Cassie (Responding to a note I sent her)

>Hi Cassie:

>

>Last night, my wife called me "mentally deranged".

Oh, I forgot to tell you about that, significant others don't really like what we are doing.

>She said this "obsession" was going to ruin my life, and I needed help.

It is an obsession. But is different as well... more like instinct.

> I told her she has no idea what she is talking about, and every time I suggest
 > that we both go together to talk to a counsellor, she poo-poops the idea. She says that
 > the problem is not with HER, it's with ME.

Even if the problem is with us, others need to learn how to deal with us in light of that. It can't be the

same old, same old.

- > I told her that the problem is that she can't deal with my situation, not my situation itself.
- > She doesn't see it that way. She has made herself a martyr in her own mind, and sees me
- > as totally guilty for anything and everything that happens. I told her that it was amazing
- > to me how she sees herself, as opposed to how EVERYONE ELSE sees her. Anyway, it all
- > didn't get me too upset.

The life we have before us can be traveled by so few. The cost is enormous, in every sense of the word, that few can stand the pressures involved. I constantly fear that I will not be able to persevere but I have a few wonderful friends who hold my hand when the road gets rough. You are at the top of that list dear!

- > The sad thing is....I don't think I still want to be her husband anymore. I want to be a dad
- > for my son. I want to live in my house. I want to be Donna. I want to be together with her
- > SOMETIMES. I want to follow-through with some of the plans we've built for the future.
- > But I don't want to be a husband anymore.

Do you ever get the sense that when you receive an email from me it is something you wrote and sent to yourself by mistake?

5/30/99 =====
Journal Entry: The enormity of it all....

I started crying this afternoon. I couldn't help it. For some reason, the enormity of what I had done kinda snuck up on me, and all of the sudden it felt like an elephant on my heart.

A father and son bond is a special thing. Man to man. A father is a role model, a friend, someone to aspire to be like. And here I was, admitting my deepest, darkest secret to my son. He has no idea the depth of my feeling....it rolls off him like water off a duck. But I can't imagine what I would think if my father made the same

The tragedy of our situation is the feeling that we can never allow anyone near us. We need love and compassion and companionship more than anyone could know, but we're trapped with secrets of a second life that will haunt us until we die. We are condemned to a lonely life, and it really makes me sad. It all seems so useless sometimes.

6/1/99 =====
email to Michelle

Hi Michelle:

- >It saddens me that you went and had the breast augmentation and hair
- >and nails done, and then had to retreat for a while.

Me too. I think about it all the time. But I had doomed myself to fail. I just didn't see that. But I will have it all back. And this time I will die rather than turn back again. So I had better do it right.

- >But truth of the matter is that you are going to get a divorce (a
- >nasty one) and you will make the final journey to Donna soon. I think one of the

*>greatest things you have going for you is that you have such good
>and decent people for friends. They will be a source of great strength for you.*

I hope you're right. The thought of my divorce causes my insides to tighten up. I hope I have the strength to get through it. I wish I could just curl up in a ball and go to sleep, and in a couple of years I could wake up and it would all be over. But I fear that escape is not an option, and I feel like the Titanic just before it hit the ice.

*>I was wondering...has the skin around "our" breasts had any bagginess
>since the implants were removed? Has the doctor said anything about
>any potential difficulties that may be involved redoing the
>augmentation after having the first set removed?*

Nope. No bagginess. Everything is "squashed" out a bit, in that it's not nearly so "pointy" as before, but the skin is all tight and firm. The nipples hardly even show through my shirts anymore, which is actually a relief. But Maria has felt them since the be-boobectomy and she thinks they feel more like female breasts now than before. I don't know about that. The spot on the underside of each breast is still mostly numb, and I doubt all the feeling will come back. That concerned me at first, but not any more. I'm sending an e-mail to see whether Dr. O would put them back in. I've read on the internet of several women who have had them taken out and put back in. If this turns out to be a problem, I'll be devastated more than I could ever let you know.

**6/3/99 =====
Responding to an email from a friend about my transition.**

*>The family part is so hard. If your wife is dead set against it all, and
>there is no sign of mellowing, it could get really bad.*

It is already really bad. But it will get worse. Much worse. It is heartbreaking, all the way around, and makes me sick to my stomach to think about. My son is fine with me and my situation. My wife is ready to kill me, and I mean that only half in jest. I have reevaluated the roles in my life, and have determined that I'd like some to stay (father), and there are others that I cannot play anymore (husband). They do not fit into the life that I need to live. I would like to be my wife's partner, friend, confidant...but not her husband (in the traditional sense). And she will not accept me as anything else but. She tells me that I did not tell her about any of this before our marriage, and I made a choice to be a husband and a father. She feels that I owe it to her and my son to continue in that capacity, but I cannot. This has caused a rift in our relationship that I fear will never heal, and things are about to get very nasty very shortly. Hurting the person that you have loved more than anything is a difficult thing, especially when that person sees you as a stranger and a liar.

The key to surviving this is the support that we get, and everyone has been just fantastic so far. I have met many who have traveled this path before me, and have lived through the pain and the misery. Today, they have emerged as happy and healthy and complete, and that is a hope and a vision that keeps me going.

* * * * *

By early June, my path had become apparent to me. The realization that my transition attempt itself wasn't wrong, but the way that I had approached it was flawed provided some sense of relief. My life at home was as uncomfortable as it ever was, and hard decisions needed to be made again.

My 6 weeks at home helped me to recharge my mental and physical batteries, provided a clearer perspective, and gave me time to think. It also helped me to realize that my life with Elisabeth was almost over – that we would never be on the same page about my feminine self and that there was no middle ground.

Somehow, she couldn't (or wouldn't) grasp the fact that the things that had pushed me to the brink of my transition hadn't gone away – that they would always be a part of me. The fact that I had come home – that I had decided not to live as Donna full-time did NOT mean that she still didn't exist. The pressures were still there, and if I had learned anything at all from my first assault towards transition I had learned to accept them rather than to fight them.

Slowly but surely I started to plan again. I started to consider a transition much different from the one I found myself living last time. I had learned the hard way how NOT to transition, so I was determined to approach this new opportunity in a new and honest way. Perhaps most importantly, I wasn't afraid any more. The terror that seemed to have gripped me had melted away, replaced with a resolve and a sense of hopeful anticipation.

Six short weeks after calling off my transition, I scheduled a meeting with Liz in HR to discuss this new plan. I sensed that she expected that this day would come.

6/4/99

Journal Entry: Meeting with HR

I had my meeting with Liz in HR at 10:30. The gist of our conversation is that this "drive" doesn't go away, and although I am very disappointed that things didn't work last time, in the end I just wasn't ready, but it will happen again. I talked about the things that I felt went wrong last time, and all the things I've done, and plan to do, to ensure that doesn't happen again. She said she expected that we'd have this talk eventually, and it was fine by her. She just wanted to make sure I was getting the support I need, and I told her actually, except for at home, I was.

One of the things I told her I plan to do was become Donna as much as possible. I will be going to my apartment, and spending time getting comfortable with myself. We talked about how being Donna just doesn't fit into the lifestyle that I have lived for my entire life....I've always had to be Dave the breadwinner or Dave the husband or Dave the father or Dave the playmate or Dave the whatever....but no time or space was ever made for Donna. And I think that's why it has all built up to the point it has.

I told her that I felt more comfortable with people knowing what was going on well in advance, rather than be blindsided by it 4 days ahead of time. I told her she could tell them now...next week...whenever. I had no problem with that. I told her that as I spend more time as Donna, there will be visible changes that will be difficult and awkward to conceal, and I think I'd prefer if people just knew the truth. I also think that people might be more willing to approach me to talk about it while I still looked like Dave, rather than this

other, different person that was still me. She said she would talk with Brian and Bill and the lady from San Fran to get their ideas on it...

Our meeting was scheduled to be an hour, but it lasted more than twice that...

When I got back, there was a note on my computer saying that the group had gone out for lunch and to stop by. So I did. After lunch, Bill and I talked in the parking lot for 45 minutes about my conversation with Liz. He made some interesting observations. He said that anyone who seemed "accepting" would seem tainted by those who were un-accepting. For example, he often stops by and asks if I want to go out for some "air", so he can have someone to chat with while he smokes. He said that when that happens AFTER transition, people who are un-accepting will think "What the heck is wrong with Bill. He must be one of them too.", or something of that nature. We talked about the fact that those who are least accepting are usually those who are least secure in their own sexuality, and it should be interesting to see how it all plays out. It was a good chat. He has a meeting with Liz next week, and this is sure to come up.

I had a long chat with Karen. We talked about relationships, and how she and Kevin like me so much more now that they really know me. They said that the old Dave was almost untouchable, while "D" is a real person...caring and open and honest and vulnerable...things that they never believed I would ever become. It was another interesting chat.

* * * * *

How does a father tell his son that he is really a woman? What kind of a reaction should he expect? Why should it be so hard? Those questions had paralyzed me during my previous attempt to transition. This time, I had no hesitation in telling him. The only question was how.

I had discussed it with my psychologist, who felt that kids are far more aware and accepting than we give them credit for. She said that I needed to have faith in our relationship, in our bond, and in our love. I told her that's how I tried to approach this when I first told Elisabeth, and look where that got me.

I had hoped that Elisabeth and I could tell him together, but that was obviously my own fantasy. I had come to the conclusion that he could either learn the truth from me, with compassion and love, or, he could learn from Elisabeth, out of anger and bitterness. Either way, it wouldn't change the plans I was making, or the decisions that needed to be made.

At the time, Matt was taking Tae Kwan Do lessons. The drive from our house to his studio usually took about a half hour. It was during these drives that I started, little by little, to set the stage.

One day, as we drove, I asked if he wanted to know why things had been so unhappy in our house lately? Why mom and I couldn't stand to be in the same room, why mom had wanted to divorce me? What she meant when she said that my family was all fucked up? I asked him if he wanted to know the big secret that we had been hiding.

"Yes, of course," he said, suddenly interested.

I told him that before I could actually tell him, I needed to explain a few things.

He was curious, and eager to listen.

I asked him whether he felt that people who were born with birth defects really wanted to be that way. If someone was born blind or deaf, or had a hole in their heart, or was mentally retarded....was that their fault?

He said, "No. Of course not."

I explained that the things that caused those birth defects happened while the baby was developing inside the mommy.

"There are many things that can go wrong while a baby is being made," I explained, "some of which you can see as soon as the baby is born, and some that you can't see until the child gets older. "

On a subsequent drive, we talked about boys and girls, and what actually makes a boy a boy, and a girl a girl. Are you a boy because you have a penis, or because you feel like a boy? Did you ever think that maybe it was both? What happens if a person has a birth defect where they have a penis, but they don't feel like a boy? Is that their fault?

He said, "Of course not."

Just because a person wears a dress, or has long hair, or likes the color pink, does that make them a girl?

"Of course not."

I explained that being a boy or a girl was partly based on your body, but also based on your brain. Some girls like boy things, and some boys like girl things. That doesn't mean that they want to be the other sex, it's just the way they are. But, there was a birth defect where a person's body could develop into a boy, but their brain felt that it should be a girl.

Here we were. We were on the brink. It was time to push us over the edge.

I told him that that was my problem. I had been born with that birth defect. I was born with the body of a boy, but I didn't feel like a boy. I had tried my best to be a boy, but it just wasn't working for me. I needed to figure out if I could be a girl, and the only way to do that was to talk try to live like a girl and see how that feels.

He thought about it for a few seconds, and said words that I will never forget as long as I live. "Does this mean that you're going to have your schlong cut off?" he asked.

I told him I really didn't know.

I told him that his mom did not think it was a birth defect. I told him that she felt it was sick, and wrong. I told him that she felt I was choosing to do this, and would try to make him think that I was selfish. I told him that, no matter what, I loved him and wanted to be with him and hoped he could understand.

"Are you going to get divorced?" he asked.

I told him I didn't know. I told her that I still loved his mother, and that she still loved me, but that it was a possibility. I told him that she wanted me to fight the birth defect, but that I couldn't fight it any longer. I told him that she would say things about me that might or might not be true because she was angry, so if he had any question to feel free to ask me anything.

We talked about treatment for people who have this birth defect, and some of the things I was planning to do. I asked him if he thought he would have a problem with any of it.

"I don't really care," he said.

We drove silently for a few minutes. I could tell Matt was thinking.

“I think you’ll make an ugly girl,” he tells me.

I smiled. I had a picture, and asked if he wanted to see it. I watched his eyes as he studied it, looking for some reaction. He really didn’t have one. Then he asked another historic question.

“Where did you get those boobs?” he asked.

I couldn’t help but smile. Kids somehow seem to get to focus on the most interesting things.....

When we got home that evening, Elisabeth was absolutely furious that I had disobeyed her order that Matt not know about my problem. At that point, there was nothing she could really do about it.

After yelling at me for a while, she immediately went to quiz him....

6/7/1999 =====

Journal Entry: I get so proud sometimes

Sometimes things happen in this whole mess that really catch me by surprise. They are truly defining moments, and today was one of those times.

Apparently, after Elisabeth and I had our little "chat", she ran right off to interrogate Matt. Based on what I've heard so far, the conversation went something like this....

Wife: So, I understand dad told you all about his "problem".

Matt: Yep.

Wife: It's really sick, don't you think?

Matt: No, not really.

Wife: What do you mean no? It's really pretty sick.

Matt: No it's not. It's not his fault. It's the way he was born. Kinda like when I talk too fast. I was just born that way. I don't want to do it, but I can't help it, and he can't help it either.

Wife: I heard he showed you a picture.

Matt: Yep.

Wife: I'll bet he looked ridiculous.

Matt: No, not really.

6/9/99 =====

From Michelle’s Journal:

Tonight I got a call from Donna. She is starting to go through again with her transition period. She backed out of it last time and everything is a mess in her marriage. I feel so sorry for her wife and for Donna too. I know what it feels like.

6/23/99 =====
A string of emails between Liz at XYZ in response to my checking if there have been any updates.

Hi Liz:

It's turning into a real life soap opera around the mail group, isn't it? Sheesh.

Anyways, I'm just writing to see if you had a chance to talk to Carol Ann (the specialist from UBH). I assume not. It's just that I'm getting a little concerned about timing. I am going to San Fran on July 21 for surgery on this poor face, and when I come back, the changes will be noticeable and may be fairly substantial. As a result, I think it would be very wise to tell the group what is going on at some point before I get back on 8/2. That only leaves a few weeks to do it, and with people on vacation and whatnot over the summer, I know how making plans can sometimes be difficult.

Things in my life are actually going very well. My wife and I are at least talking right now, which was not the case a few weeks ago. I am going home to NT next week, and will tell my mom while I'm there. At that point, everyone important in my life will know. I am meeting others in this little community, and have found the friendship and support to be very helpful. Work is quite busy, with a major implementation on the horizon for me.

If you hear anything, please let me know....

Thanks.

Dave R.

Her response:

I'm still working on things here but I am making progress.

In the meantime, I have some more questions for you:

- Will you be out 8 days for surgery? Is that enough recovery time?? Since you were out for an extended period of time in March/April, I'm assuming you must be running a little short on vacation since none of that time was counted as short-term disability. I realize that part of the time (2 weeks I believe) was us asking you not to come in. You don't need to account for that time out of the office. Nevertheless, I'm wondering how you plan to cover your time out of work in July/August?
- Can you tell me the name of the therapist you've been seeing? We may need to contact him/her for some documentation. If we do, I'll have you sign a medical release before hand.

I'm meeting with our legal counsel today so I should have more info. soon. Obviously, I am concerned about the best way to handle things for you and for your team. I'd rather be too conservative than not conservative enough. I'll give you a call and we'll get together in the next couple of days.

My response to her response:

Liz:

Thanks for getting back to me.

In response to your questions, I do still have 3 weeks of vacation left. I had several comp days coming as a result of providing implementation support, and used that for some of the time I was out in April. I don't know how you accounted for the rest of the time, but Brian mentioned something to the effect that it got buried somewhere. I'll take it all as vacation if I have to. Whatever you want me to do is fine.

I share your concern regarding finding the best way to handle it for all concerned. I am actually less apprehensive at the moment that I was last time. Although I think that it is difficult to avoid the "surprise factor", I think that if we can minimize that as much as possible it would be wise.

FYI: There is a well-respected specialist in San Fran named Dr. Anne Vitale. I wrote to her regarding her opinion on the "all-at-once" approach that we were discussing last time, as opposed to a more gradual transition. This is her reply:

>Dear Donna

>

>A rule of thumb is to never surprise anyone about your transition no matter who it is. I don't know how many people your company's advisor has worked with but I think her all-of-a-sudden approach will make her job easier but be counter productive in the long run.

>

6/25/99

A New Date

Hi Cassie:

On the way over to visit my friendly HR rep, Liz, I stopped at the deli for bagels and cream cheese. I figured we could eat and chat. I know how much she likes the "everything" bagels, and it was just what the doctor ordered.

Our chat was a good one. As far as I could tell, anyways. I sometimes come away feeling like they're all happy-happy to your face, but other things are happening behind your back. The gist of our conversation was my desire to tell everyone in the group before I come back from Dr. O, and then to begin full-time in the fall when I had had a chance to heal and to get farther along in electrolysis. She wanted to make sure we keep the disruption to a minimum, and felt that the longer a time between "disclosure" and actual full-time, the more chance there is for disruption. So it came down to us finding a date that we both felt comfortable with.

I suggested October 4. She wanted to move it up a bit, but most of her September is already booked, so it looks like October 4 it is. They're going to tell everyone in the group while I'm in San Fran, and they're going to do it themselves this time....without bringing in the San Fran "specialist". She still needs to run all this by Brian and Bill and whoever, but that's the plan.

She asked me just how "visible" my transition would be over those 2 months. I told her that I didn't plan on painting my nails or wearing makeup to work or anything like that, but I'd be piercing my ears and whatnot....Nothing flamboyant.

6/28/99 9:08 am =====
Email to my HR generalist, Liz

Hi Liz:

After thinking about our discussion for a couple of days, there is something else that I think would be helpful. We briefly mentioned the possibility of having my psychologist attend the meeting with our group. The more I think about that, the more I feel it is a good idea. She has done that with other companies around Phoenix, and I'm confident that her attendance to answer questions, etc. would be beneficial. I would pay for her services myself, if necessary.

Let me know what you think.

Liz's response (07/01/99):

Hi Dave,

I've been thinking about your idea. While she may be able to provide some helpful insight, I think it would be awkward to have her here for the announcements. We wouldn't have any other employee's physician come speak to a workgroup so I don't think I'd like to do so in this case.

I did talk with Brian and Bill. They are fine with the plan you and I discussed. We will make the announcement to management and your work group while you are in San Francisco. I will read a letter from you (let me know when you have a final draft) and I would like to have a picture for the meeting as well. And then we'll shoot for October 4 as the beginning of your real life test at work.

I think this will meet our objective to keep things going as smooth as possible for the business and for you during this transition.

Liz

* * * *

Our family had made arrangements to go back to upstate NY over the Fourth of July holiday. I was a little nervous for a lot of reasons. First, I knew that I "looked" different. My hair was getting long. The effects of the hormones on my face and on my body had been pretty amazing. Plus, I knew that I was going to tell my mom about this, and had no idea as to what to expect. To top it off, things were tense again with Elisabeth, so the thought of going back home under these circumstances scared me a bit.

The afternoon before we planned to leave I stopped by the bank to get some money for our trip. I wanted to withdraw a couple of hundred dollars from our saving account. Imagine my surprise when the teller told me that I could not withdraw the money, as the account had been closed! Our joint savings account had been closed! The account that held ALL of our money...including the money that my dad left to me and in only 3 weeks would be paying for my new face...was gone. I asked the teller for the date that the account had been closed, and she indicated the signatures indicated the date of closure to be in April. I asked how Elisabeth could close a joint account without my signature, but eventually realized that she had forged it.

Needless to say, I was livid. I was madder than I can remember being at any time before or since. And I did not mince words once I got home. I told Elisabeth that I knew what she had done. But she denied doing it. She argued that there was some type of account that offered higher interest, and she had moved the money there. I asked her how she could do it without my signature. I asked her why this new account was NOT a joint account, as she had not come and asked me to sign a signature card. AT this point, I was yelling, and she was crying. I accused her of stealing my dad's money from me when she had no right to it.

She offered to write me a check for that entire amount, and I made her do it right then and there.

Needless to say, this did not bode well for the rest of our trip.

* * * * *

I must say that we put on a pretty good face for our friends and family. Nobody would know that we were absolutely devastated, and that our marriage and our lives were hanging by a thread. We had gotten far too good at giving the outward appearance of peace and harmony despite the inner upheaval.

But we took every opportunity to avoid each other. On July 4th, she did not go to the fireworks with my family as "she had a headache". I, in turn, arranged to spend as little time as possible around her family in Syracuse.

There were two big events on this trip.

First, I finally told my mom about my situation....

I had arranged for us to go out to breakfast on Saturday morning. It was a beautiful, sunny summer day and we went to a restaurant right along the Erie Canal. It was very picturesque. I had practiced for this moment over and over in my mind, but needless to say it did not go exactly as I had envisioned. At that time, I had difficulty even uttering the word "transsexual", so trying to explain it without that word was difficult. I spent a half hour doing my best to explain, and my mom listened carefully. Once I had finished, I asked her if she understood what I was trying to say.

She replied. "Are you telling me that you're gay?"

So I tried again. I explained that this had NOTHING to do with sexuality. I had no clue as to what my sexuality would be once everything was complete. I tried to make it clearer. When I was done, I asked her if she understood.

She replied..."So are you telling me that you are bisexual?"

With that, I knew that I could not give her all the information she would need. I had brought a copy of "True Selves" by Mildred Brown with me, and I gave it to her. I asked her to read it, and perhaps THEN she would understand. I told her to ask me any questions.

And I knew then, that despite the awkward attempts to explain, that she would understand. I knew that we would be ok. And I felt good about how things went.

The second big event of the trip is when Elisabeth and I spent an afternoon hiking in Green Lakes State Park. We had gone there 20 years earlier...soon after meeting in college. We had both found it to be a very peaceful, restful, spiritual place. So we went there together on this July afternoon to walk around the lake and talk. It was the first time we had talked "TO" each other and not "AT" each other in a long time. I could sense her fear and frustration, and her feeling of helplessness to "save" me or stop me. I could see barriers up and armed where not too long ago there was comfort and intimacy. We even held hands for a short while, and I think that this was the last time we shared any physical level of intimacy at all. And despite it's being as difficult as it was, it was good.

**7/12/99 3:33 pm =====
Email to my HR contact, Liz**

Last Minute Details...

Hi Liz:

I'mj baaaaack. The trip home was a very difficult one, but it was good to see everyone.

I am in the process of taking care of all the details this week before heading to Dallas this coming weekend for our implementation, and then on to San Fran next week. Towards that end, is there a time that we can meet so that I can get you a letter and have you select a photo?

I heard that you met with my managers about this, and that a date for the meeting has been tentatively set. Everyone seems to think it will be Monday, July 26, but no one seems sure. Is that what you have on your calendar?

Thanks for all your help.

Dave

7/17/99 12:07 pm =====

Hi Cassie:

I'm so sorry I haven't called you. My days are not my own lately. It seems that I'm caught up in a storm that has been brewing for a long time, and it sometimes even feels difficult to breathe....

The timing of all the crap that's happening in my life right now couldn't be worse. Our pharmacy there recently changed from one type of production line to another, and everything is futzed up. So people

around here have been working in crazy mode to think of a way to build a manual system in a short period of time to get old orders out the door. That's what I was working on until 4am the other morning. I went home, got 2 hours of sleep, and was back here.

So here it is. Saturday morning. I was in here at 6. And it looks like we're finally making good progress. Of course, it doesn't give alot of time to get my affairs in order before leaving for SF (for FFS). But it also keeps my mind busy, so I don't have too much time to dwell on things....

On Wednesday morning, Maria waxed me. All of me. I can tell you that there are parts of your body that hurt like mad when they get waxed (bikini like is a killer...back of knees, too...armpits not too bad). But it sure is smooth.

So last night I finally get out of here and go home so we can have a "family dinner". Elisabeth decides that she's in bad mood, so it turns pretty sour. Later in the evening, she was going through some receipts from my buying gas for her truck (since mine is STILL broken in the driveway). She notices that I bought gas on two separate days and starts accusing me of driving here and there....it's totally asinine. But from this little eruption, a huge eruption sprouted. I told her that it was totally innocent and that I resented her accusing me, and one thing led to another, and the next thing you know, she's crying and she told me to file for divorce and to take Matt and Buster and get out of the house and that I am going straight to Hell for this.

Matt has born the brunt of her unhappiness lately, and has been trying his hardest to avoid her. He heard all this, so he and I grabbed some stuff and left. We had a very good conversation as we drove to the apartment, and he said he feels that my "problem" has brought us closer together. I was dumbfounded to hear him say that. He wants out, and thinks that the two of us would be good together no matter how I want to live.

To make a long story short, I didn't have the key to my apartment, was dead tired (2 hrs of sleep in the past 2 days), so I decided to take us BACK home for at least the evening, and then we can decide what to do today. I'll be heading there soon, so we'll see what happens.

Every day lately brings something new. Not just new, but BIG. And I'm wondering what BIG changes (besides our boobs) are just over the horizon. I'm much strong with Matt there, and if I can arrange that over the long I will be relieved more than I could say.

**7/19/99 4:12 pm =====
email from Michelle**

Hi Donna:

*>Mentally, I think I'm hanging in there ok. I get a bit nervous sometimes, but
>everything has been so busy in my life I haven't had time to dwell on it. I
>expected to have to take something to help me sleep last night, but actually
>slept ok. So far, so good.*

You really so amaze me sometimes with your strength of resolve and character. The things that you are going through make my own little travails seem so mild when looked at in comparison. I am very proud of you and take courage from you.

*>So that's the scoop fer now. I have to go and get ready for work. These will be a
>busy couple of days on that front as well. When I leave work tomorrow, it will be the
>last time that people will see me as the me they think they know. When I return they
>will know.*

I think that those people that you work with are really going to be surprised how nice you look as Donna. I

also think that there will be a lot of polarizing among them into Pro-Donna and Anti-Donna people. There will be those who will accept you and understand and take it in stride and of course there will be those that shun you for various reasons like religious beliefs, peer pressure, and just fear of the unknown. I think you already know this though. But you do have your civil rights and the backing of the company (if weak and clumsy at times) and your friends. I know you will prevail in the weeks to come.

7/21/99 11:12 am =====
Journal Entry

It's about 10am out here, and I just checked into my guest room. So far, so good.

The last 24 hours have been a blur in alot of ways. I was busting my hump until 6 yesterday trying to get everything done at work that needed to be done. I hadn't heard hide nor hair from Elisabeth all day, so I didn't know what Matt's taekwondo schedule was. Usually, he has class from 7-8, and Elisabeth calls me to pick him up.

I stopped by my apartment to change, and then decided to head home. I didn't know if anyone would be there, and there wasn't. I had made a nail appointment for myself at 8:30, and no one was home by 8, so I left a note for Elisabeth telling her that I was going to San Fran today and that I loved her very much and that I would be spending the night at the apartment, as my flight left very early.

From there, it was off to get nails. I was there for 2 hours. People kept stopping by to say "good luck"....Steph stopped in and asked if I had eaten, and said she would have something for us when I got home....Julie (the coach) stopped by with a gift. All in all, a good way to pass the evening and keep my mind off things.

But by the time I got home, ate, chatted with Steph (actually, I did the chatting as she can't talk until at least Saturday), packed, and did my sit-ups, it was 1:30 am, and we had the alarm set for 4:30! I was pooped, and actually slept very well. It's so much easier to handle being in that apartment with someone else there. When I was alone it sometimes felt like solitary confinement.

This morning it was up and at-em, and we made it to the airport by a bit after 6. The flight was fine, and I slept for part of it. I'm sure my nails (pretty long....polish is clear) fits in just fine for this being San Fran. I grabbed a Super Shuttle, the guy took the side roads to avoid all the rush-hour traffic, and here I am.

When I got here, I went to admissions. The guy went to make sure the room was clean, and gave me my room key. I am registered as Donna.

The room is a typical hospital room. Two hospital beds. A tray stand. A bedside table with wheels. An old tv mounted on the wall. A little bathroom with a toilet and shower. The connector for the phone chord into the phone is broken, so it was taped in with medical tape. The Hyatt, it ain't. The view from the window isn't terrible if you block out the other wing of this building just across the way. Nothing fancy. Just functional.

The sheet in admissions says that Dr. Becky Allison is supposed to be in room 323....4 down from here. I popped my head in to say 'hi', but it is someone else. Perhaps she is checking in later today. I'll find out.

The schedule for the rest of the day is pretty casual. I'm supposed to meet with Dr. O at 3. I'll probably eat dinner right after that, as I want to give myself at least 12 hours to digest before being under anesthesia for so long. I'm going to head out and explore a little, and perhaps stop in to ask Mira if I'm supposed to go and have lab work done or something.

Tomorrow, I have to check out of this guest room at 6am. I'll give them the key, and my stuff to lock up, and they'll give me my wristband, and away we go.

I'm not thinking about what's going on in Phoenix right now. I know Elisabeth is very upset, but if I hear it it will just make it worse. I have alot to deal with right now, so I can't let anything interfere with that. I'll call home later to say hi to Matt, and leave it at that.....

* * * * *

The day before the surgery, I had a meeting with Dr. Ousterhout to review all that was to happen. Dr. Ousterhout offers many different surgeries designed to help feminize the face, and I was having just about all of them. At the same time. I know others who have had the upper portion of the face done on the first visit, and the lower part done on a second visit. But I had the money, and the thought of having to return to finish did not sit well with me. I was willing to take the short term pain for the long term gain.

Mira explained to me that I was not going to be feeling well for a few days. I told her I knew that, but certainly did not know what to expect. She told me she would come to visit me the day after surgery to see how I was doing....

When Dr. O was ready for me, we began a process known as "informed consent". It is where he describes exactly what he is going to do, and all the possible complications that could result.

He started at the top. He indicated that he would slice across my entire forehead and bring the skin down to work on the forehead. They were going to smooth my entire brow bossing, which was so pronounced that it would cause them to go into my sinus cavities. He told me how he would shorten my forehead, and advance my hairline to a more feminine level. He described how he would do my nose. He described that he would do my chin and jaw from inside my mouth by making an incision all along my lower gums. He explained that he would shave my trachea by making an incision just under my chin. And he explained how he would put my breast enlargement under my chest muscles. He described all the possible complications...from short and long-term numbness, to the possibility of cutting muscles and nerves. He explained that, following surgery, I would have staples and sutures and drains and gauze covering most of my face, and much of it needed to stay in place for most of the week....

I certainly had no intentions of changing my mind at this point, but I was more content in my ignorance of all this.....

When all was done, Mira gave me a pen (I affectionately refer to it as my \$34,000 pen) to sign the check and pay for it all. We hugged...she wished me luck...and I was off to contemplate what was about to happen.

* * * *

The surgery itself lasted 13 hours. I awoke in my hospital room, and all was dark. I was a mess. There was not real pain from all the work (or at least the drugs did a good job of masking that) so much as an incredibly intense headache. It lasted all night long. At one point, I sat up and swung around so my legs hung down over the side of the bed. I held my bandaged head in my hands, and bemoaned my sorry situation. Here I was...all alone...in pain...about to face incredible change in my life. I cried.

It was the longest night of my entire life. I counted the minutes until daylight arrived.

I spent the day following surgery in the hospital. The day following that I was cleared to go to the "guest" quarters, which is another floor in the hospital but has no nursing care. Becky had chosen to go off-site to recuperate, but Sally and Nancy were already there.

**7/24/99 =====
Journal Entry**

I'm up and about for a few minutes, so I figured I'd try to write for a few minutes. I'm certainly not at my best, but I'm feeling the littlest bit better every day. I have lots of healing to do. I have staples in my head, sutures all throughout my mouth, packing up my nose, drains in our boobs...various tapes and bandages hiding some pretty dramatic looking bruises...all in all pretty spectacular. It's hard to believe it's me behind all that construction.

The healing life is a boring one. Sleep. Pain pills. tv. Walking around. I met with some of the other girls on the floor for an hour last night. They were just great. I'm in pain, but it's a dull overall ache rather than any particular place. The first day felt like my head had been hit with a sledgehammer, so this ache is far more acceptable.

I think I'm going to take one of my little pills, lie my poor abused butt back down in bed, and see if I can't get a couple hours more sleep. It's 4am as I write this, so breakfast (gloppy slop that it is) won't be here for 4 more hours. Yum.

**7/24/99 =====
email to a friend**

Hi:

I'm actually feeling almost human again today. I don't look so hot, but at least I can move around a bit rather than just lie in the bed in a stupor.

The surgery really took alot out of me. I sat through some of these nights wondering if I'd even make it through them...I was just so miserable and time seemed to creep so slowly. But now I'm able to walk around, and I spent some time visiting with some of the other girls on the floor, and I'm not in so much

pain, so there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Today is Sunday, and there's not much happening around here. They discharged me from my hospital room yesterday to my "guest" room on the third floor. They have me on a "pureed" diet due to all the sutures inside my mouth, and I must say it's pretty nasty. For lunch they sent pureed chicken and mashed potatoes and pureed beans....basically it was baby food. I haven't seen Dr. O since yesterday morning, and I don't think I'll see much improvement in my situation until Tuesday. That's when I think they unpack all this stuff out of my nose, and take out the staples in my head, and hopefully I can take a shower. My eyes are still very swollen and get tired pretty easy, so I can't really concentrate on anything requiring my eyes (like reading) for too long. There is a nice view of the bay from the back of the hospital, so I've gone down there just to sit and enjoy the wind in my face a couple of times. I has helped to deal with the monotony.....

The other gals who are here are just great. Two of them have their spouses with them. One of them works in Belgium, but they are in the process of moving to Washington DC to do some Defense Department stuff. If I end up looking half as good as any of them I'll be more than happy. One of my friends from Wisconsin is coming down to visit me tomorrow, but I have a feeling I won't be at my best for a while, yet. Also, my friends from back home have called to check on me, so I haven't felt quite so alone.

I thank you so much for your concern. I'm doing ok...far better than yesterday and hopefully not as good as tomorrow. I'll keep you posted on how things are going. I can't wait to get better and come home....

**7/25/99 =====
Journal Entry**

I'm actually feeling almost human again today. I don't look so hot, but at least I can move around a bit rather than just lie in the bed in a stupor. It was really bad for a while there.

The surgery really took alot out of me. I sat through some of these nights wondering if I'd even make it through them...I was just so miserable and time seemed to creep so slowly. But now I'm able to walk around, and I spent some time visiting with some of the other girls on the floor, and I'm not in so much pain, so there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Today is Sunday, and there's not much happening around here. They discharged me from my hospital room yesterday to my "guest" room on the third floor. They have me on a "pureed" diet due to all the sutures inside my mouth, and I must say it's pretty nasty. For lunch they sent pureed chicken and mashed potatoes and pureed beans....basically it was baby food. I haven't seen Dr. O since yesterday morning, and I don't think I'll see much improvement in my situation until Tuesday. That's when I think they unpack all this stuff out of my nose, and take out the staples in my head, and hopefully I can take a shower. My eyes are still very swollen and get tired pretty easy, so I can't really concentrate on anything requiring my eyes (like reading) for too long. There is a nice view of the bay from the back of the hospital, so I've gone down there just to sit and enjoy the wind in my face a couple of times. It has helped to deal with the monotony.....

The other gals who are here are just great. We all ended up chatting and looking at pictures for a couple of hours yesterday evening before going to bed. Two of them have their spouses with them. One of them works in Belgium, but they are in the process of moving to Washington DC to do some Defense Department stuff. If I end up looking half as good as any of them I'll be more than happy. One of my friends from Wisconsin is coming down to visit me tomorrow, but I have a feeling I won't be at my best for a while, yet. Also, my friends from back home have called to check on me, so I haven't felt quite so alone.

Well, I think I'm gonna lie down for an hour before dinner. I measure my day by the meals....breakfast at 8, lunch at noon, dinner at 6. I bought myself some sorbet, so I'll treat myself to something special tonight.

**7/26/99 =====
email to Michelle**

Hi Michelle:

I'm feeling a bit better every day. My friend from Wisconsin arrived yesterday after a long day of traveling. She's all settled in and ready for some R & R. I don't think I scared her off by looking so raggedy....

I got a call from a gal who wrote to me a few days ago and lives in Sacramento. We have a lot in common, and talked for quite a while. She's taking us out to dinner tomorrow...

The gal here from Belgium is Sally. Her wife offered to wash my hair for me this morning, and I quickly accepted. I have a bunch of stuff out this afternoon, but someone to carefully wash my hair at this point would be a penny from heaven.

I talked to my mom for half an hour yesterday. I didn't tell her I was coming before I did it, and my sister told her. But she seemed fine and we had a nice talk...

- >> *I meant to ask you what you've done about your hair. Are you*
- >> *going to go with a wig for a few days and then get your extensions put back on?*

I don't think I'm going to do extensions this time. They're hot, they're expensive, they need lots of care...I can always do them at any point. But I think for now, it's a wig for a few months until my hair grows out...

- >> What about your ears? Have you pierced them too?

I was going to do it just before I got here. But I figured I had enough healing to do, and I can do that anytime, so I got my nails done instead.

I gotta go and change my gauze, and Cassie needs to check her email, so I'm gonna go. I'll try to call you later after I get "unpacked" this afternoon....

**7/28/99 =====
Journal Entry**

By the time yesterday night rolled around, I was wiped out. Just plain pooped. We probably did a little too much a little too soon, but that's what happens when you feel so crummy and so cooped up for so long.

Sally's wife is the most interesting gal.....she's studying to be a classical painter. I was looking at her portfolio book yesterday and talking to her....just fascinating. She left in mid-morning to go to some art museum, and Sally and I had meetings with Mira so we all headed down there. Sally had her "unmasking", where they take off the big plastic thing keeping the shape of your nose just so, and had her staples out. No big deal, and she looked really good (swelling...yes, bruising ...yes, but still really good).

I had my packing taken out, and stitches out, and drains out of the boobs, and tape off the chin....it was a long experience.



Mira taking off bandages

We had to meet with Dr. O in mid-afternoon, so we went down Castro street to a diner for some lunch. I'm still on mushy diet, as the stitches inside my mouth are pretty extensive and still sore....I still haven't explored too much around there with my tongue...

Dr. O says all looks wonderful. It's so hard to begin to think how it will eventually look once the nose is done and the swelling goes down. The boobs are good. He gave me some exercises to keep them limber, and they really hurt. He said they would for a while.

We went to a restaurant for dins, and I had some wine, and at some point it just hit me that I was dead tired. The walk back up the hill to the hospital didn't help. I don't even remember falling asleep....

As for the extent of what my wife knows right now, I haven't a clue. I'll deal with that when I get home. Being here is like a whole other world, and it's easy to forget that the world that is really mine is just there waiting for me. I called Brian last night just to touch base..he says I sound alot better and they're just waiting for me....

**7/29/99 =====
Journal Entry**

I don't feel nearly as well today as I did yesterday. Perhaps I overdid it. I talked with Dr. Allison, and found that she was finding her recuperation to be similar. Not every day is better than the one before.

We did go back downtown for a while. I stopped at Victoria's secret and got fitted for some bras. 36C. Our boobs are very impressive, even if they are a bit smaller. They used 390 cc's of saline, and placed them under the muscle. They still look pretty darn big. I like them better than the last ones...

I called work today to give them the green light for the meetings tomorrow. Hold on, because this ride is about to get very turbulent very fast.

**7/29/00 =====
Following is the letter that I wrote, and that was read, to my entire group at XYZ. It was Friday afternoon. As it was read, I was on a plane returning from San Fran, and I knew what was happening. I was peaceful with it. Once this letter was read, nothing could ever be the same.**

Dear Mail Team:

I am writing to you today to discuss a very personal issue. It is one that has plagued me for my entire life, and one that I have been attempting to avoid and suppress for as long as I can remember. If I had any way to spare you, or myself, this disclosure, I would certainly do that. But there comes a time when a person accesses their life, and they find it's time to face their situation with honesty and courage and integrity, rather than fear and shame and guilt. I have reached that point.

My particular situation deals with gender. Although I am physically male, I feel that I have been "mis-cast" in life. Although the body says "male", the heart and the mind and the soul say "female". And although this may sound stupid and incomprehensible to some, it has been the source of so much confusion and pain in my life that I cannot even begin to describe it. The clinical name for this condition is "Gender Identity Disorder", and it has taken me many years to finally accept the fact that it is me.

There is a stringent internationally accepted protocol to guide doctors and psychologists in helping patients deal with this condition. It has been proven that there is no "cure".....no way to make a person feel more male or more female on the inside. Once a person's gender identity has been developed, it is there to stay. Rather, the focus is on helping the person come to terms with this incongruity, and to helping them to feel comfortable in their own body by modifying it to more closely match their inner spirit.

The first step in this process is to meet and talk with a psychologist who specializes in gender issues. I have been doing so for well over 2 years. Patients are carefully screened, and those who are clinically diagnosed are referred to a medical doctor for administration of female hormones. These hormones have a variety of mental and physical effects, and help a person determine if this is the path on which they feel they should continue. I have been on such a regimen for two years.

Once a person feels comfortable enough with themselves, they are allowed to begin a phase called the "Real Life Test". This requires a patient to live full-time in their new gender role. It requires them to change all legal documentation to reflect their new name and new gender, and to try to exist in society in that new role. This is a very difficult and terrifying task, and it is the point at which I find myself now.

My father had a saying ..."For those who understand, no explanation is necessary. For those who don't, none will suffice". There is no way I can explain this problem to you in hopes that you will understand. Rather, I am hoping that your compassion and your professionalism and your humanity will help you overcome the stereotypes and the prejudices that society has created, and will help you to see that underneath it all is a person who is still trying to find their path in life, hoping that it will lead to eventual happiness.

Writing this letter to you has been very difficult, but not as difficult as some of what I have already done. I doubt that any of you will know what it's like to try to explain this to a 13-year old son to whom you are the ultimate role model and friend. I doubt you'll know what it's like to try to explain it to your mom, when she has already faced the death of her husband only 6 months before. I doubt that you'll know the pain of trying to explain this to your wife of 18 years, who feels betrayed in a way that I cannot even describe. If there were ANY way for me to continue as I am and avoid having to face this, I would do it. But there is not. I thank God for the strength He has given me, and the friends that I have, as everyone who has learned of my situation has provided me with strength and support.

Over the next few weeks, I will be preparing for my Real-Life test. I am telling you this so that you will know what is happening, and so that the outward signs are not taken out of context. I am planning to

begin my transition here at XYZ on October 4. My name will be legally changed to Donna, the gender on my driver's license indicate that I am Female, and I plan to live and work full time in that role. Please treat this with the sensitivity that it requires.

The coming months will bring many challenges to the Mail team. Second site looms just on the horizon. We have a tremendous team with tremendous people. It remains imperative that we keep our focus on the tasks at hand, and not become sidetracked along the way. We all have a job to do, and I am confident that this team can continue its work without missing a beat.

I am entering a world that is totally foreign to me, and I have much learning to do. I plan to take things slowly, but I feel confident that I am finally on the right path. I finally feel a peace within myself that has been absent for a long, long time. As I begin this process, all I ask is for your patience and your tolerance. Anything else will be icing on the cake..

Sincerely,
Donna

**7/31/99 =====
Journal Entry**

Time has tremendous way of doing things. Many things. Healing. Teaching about what is important. Providing opportunity for thinking. Don't assume that things will be the same in two weeks as you feel they are now. That would be a mistake. Let me give you an example. You'll never guess who stopped over this afternoon. Karen and Kevin. Two weeks ago, they couldn't even talk directly with each other....only through email. But things have progressed to the point where today was the first time they have actually done anything together, and that thing was to come and see me. I'm sure it was part support, part curiosity, part being in a position where they weren't the only ones who were hurting. Whatever. But they've come a long way from the hurt and pain that they BOTH felt two weeks ago, and the main ingredient has been time.

The sh*t has hit the fan with my wife. Big Time. But some odd things have happened - things have that make all this seem almost surreal....

Yesterday, I finally got some calls from Elisabeth. Voice messages on my cell phone. They dealt with the land we are buying up north, and neither of us want to back out on. We both love that land, and don't want to do something stupid today that we'll regret tomorrow. So we're going to buy the land. It may not make sense to others, but it does to us. So she called to leave messages that I needed to come and sign some papers and do some stuff by Saturday morning. I called her from the airport, and we actually talked, and told her I'd call her once I got back into town and she could tell me what I needed to do. As we chatted, I could feel the calm of being far removed from my situation slipping away, being replaced with the knowledge that at that very time the meeting with my group was happening and my world was about to get very messy. During our chat I briefly talked with Matt to say 'hi' and to tell him I got him something, so he was pretty excited.

So I got home, and Steph picked me up at the airport, and took me to Maria's restaurant for something to eat. There was another T there who I have never met but have heard of, and who was really great. Anyway, I got a call from Matt and told him I was real real tired, and planned to go to my apartment to bed, and would stop by the house first thing in the morning to do what I needed to do for the land and to give him his things and to take him out for breakfast. He seemed ok with that.

But shortly afterwards I get this call from Elisabeth yelling me saying I am a bastard and that I have broken both their hearts again and this and that, so I told her I am coming up to the house despite my weakened state. So that's where I went. To my house.

I got there at 10, and Elisabeth had barricaded herself in the bedroom. Matt was there. He say me. We talked for half an hour. He told me I look different. He saw my nails. He didn't see the boobs. But it was a good talk. And he wasn't mad or upset or anything, and I told him I would be by again in the morning. I told Elisabeth through the door that I loved her, and left.

I came home to sleep and actually had to get up early for my doctor's visit. I wasn't scheduled to see the doctor, just to get my shot, but he saw me and actually spent half an hour with me gushing and talking about my situation and my discussions with others who were on my floor and their doctors. It was pretty interesting, actually.

To make a long, long story short, I did all the stuff I had to do for the land and picked up Matt. I left Elisabeth a note telling her what I had done, and put some pretty heart-felt deep stuff in there that I wanted to tell her before the sh*t really hit hard. Too late. As soon as we left, she called me on the cell all crying and sobbing. We talked for an hour. Some pretty emotional stuff. It was one of the best talks we've ever had, in my opinion, as far as talking about deep, emotional issues without fear of retribution.

A few weeks ago I sent my sister an email. It was written deep from the heart about Donna and Dave and Elisabeth and who I was and how I felt and what I wanted out of life. I also sent a picture. Well, it turns out that my sister (for some reason) forwarded that to Elisabeth. In that letter were things that I feel, and that I do not regret saying, but could not have said to Elisabeth myself. Stuff about me not wanting to be a "husband" anymore and about how the photo of Donna was the closest to the real me she had ever seen and that kind of stuff. And Elisabeth had read it all, and fueled some pretty intense conversation. Matt was sitting there listening to my half of this entire thing. It was grueling.

Anyway, I'll have to continue this story in my next installment. I need to go and pick up some things to bring to Matt and then come home to bed.

8/2/99 =====
Journal Entry (My first day back at work following FFS)

OMIGOD...OMIGOD...OMIGOD.....

I can't believe that today ever happened. Not that it was terrible. As far as I could tell, anyways.

I'll start with last night.....

Elisabeth and Karen went to see a concert, so I went home to have pizza with Matt. When I got there there was a list of things that she wanted me to do....my usual chores which had obviously been neglected for a couple of weeks. Chemicals in the pool. Trim this. Clean that. I actually did some of it. Brian wanted us to stop by so he could actually "see" me before work, and we got into a bit of a "chat" over the boobs. It was the first he had heard about my getting them back. He asked if HR knew, and I told him no, but that if they did a good job of explaining what transition was and how I was approaching it, it shouldn't be a big deal. Visible changes ARE and WILL BE happening, which is the entire reason for telling everyone so soon. It turned out to be a non-issue. Brian asked that I be at work at 7:30 so we could plan on a definite time for the first day, so I told him I'd be here.

I'm still puffy and sore. In the not too distant past, Dr. O would have kept me in San Fran for nearly 2 weeks, and I would have still been there convalescing. When we got back to my house, it was 8:30, and I was wiped. Matt was very considerate and caring, and told me to lie down and take a nap. We didn't expect Elisabeth until late, so that's what I did. I don't know if I slept, but I got some rest and that helped.

Elisabeth called at 11:00 to say that the concert was over and that she and Karen were having ice cream and she'd be home a little later. I knew that I had to be up at 3:45 to be at my electrolysis appt. by 5, so I went home and went to bed. I actually slept ok, which is an indication of how tired I was considering all that was about to happen....

So the alarm went off, and I got ready. My regular work clothes. Pants. Sports Shirt. Sports bra. And off I go to electrolysis. Maria was just GUSHING. She said I would make an interesting sight, as my face (in her opinion) now had a mostly feminine flavor, but the swollen jaw will take time to go down. I'll have to send out some pics....

I was at work at 7:30. Work clothes. Strapped down boobs. Long polished (clear) nails. Puffy, bruised face. A very interesting sight. The last thing I did before getting out of the car was to say a prayer.....And then I just went.

On my way in I ran into one of the younger guys in the group. He was very nice, and we actually walked in together. It made it a little easier. I made it to my cube, and have actually been here most of the day. I feel like a turtle, and my head will eventually pop out, but right now this shell is my safe haven. I have had maybe a dozen people or so come by to chat and offer support. I also got a very nice voice mail from someone that I barely know who doesn't even work in our group anymore. He's all the way on the other side of the building, so word traveled fast.

I've just spent the day doing my work. I turned off my cell phone so I can concentrate without interruptions. Liz from HR stopped by to see how the day was going, and I thanked her for her efforts. At this point, I'm supposed to use the Men's room over in the other building until they get me a key to the Ladies room. Whatever....

I had voice mails from Steph and Maria and Julie checking up on me. That was nice. Right now it's 5, so I'm about to pack up and head home. It has been a long, grueling day. But I also have a sense of satisfaction for having faced this day, and for having dealt with it. There will be rough days, but today was a milestone, and I'm actually kinda proud of the way it went.

So that's it for now. I'll keep ya posted. Thanks for all the support, as I really think every little bit helped. If tomorrow goes nearly as well, I'll be thrilled....

8/2/99 =====
Journal Entry

It's noontime. I have a couple of things to go and do, but frankly don't feel much like doing them so I think I'll work through lunch and leave at 4ish. I bought some clothes at Costco over the weekend, and tried it all on last night. From the neck down, this body is pretty hot stuff! I'll need to be careful, because even ugly women with big boobs and a trim tummy can get into trouble that they don't want. I tried on some fairly clingy 3/4-length sleeve tops and Liz Claiborne pants that I bought. I had originally gotten a size 12 in the pants, but I think I'll get a size 10 as well because the 12's are a tad loose. I'll head over there after work. I have nails at 8:30 as well....

I'd send you some pictures, but the chord to attach the camera to the computer is up at the house, and I haven't been up there lately to get it. I'll head up there some evening later in the week when Matt is at tkd.

Work has been quiet. I'm determined to talk to a couple or three people each day to kinda "break the ice", and have done that this morning. Nothing earth shattering, but it's a start.

I'm starting to settle into this groove a little bit. It's much easier to deal with than last time. I don't know why. When Karen stopped over on Saturday she said something that intrigued me. I was talking about the fact that I'm still searching for where I fit in life, and she said that she thinks that I'll eventually find peace before this is all over, and that my place is as a female, and that I'll be a good one. It was an odd statement, so I called her yesterday to ask what she meant. She said that the first time, I just didn't seem "at peace". I seemed to be doing things in such a way that it gave her an uneasy feeling, and caused her

to worry about me. She says that this time I have a peace and calm about me, and that the difference is like night and day, and now she's comfortable for me, too.

Elisabeth called on my way home from meeting with Steph and her daughter at the restaurant last night. She asked what I was doing, so I told her, which caused an angry reaction. She said that she thinks I'm spending too much time with "those freaks" and that they're sucking me in blah blah blah.... I told her that those people are not freaks, and that I am one of them, and as long as she can't understand that then she'll never be able to move forward. We are all trying to help each other get through this. She got a bit more perturbed, and I ended up hanging up on her, because I don't need that right now.

I'll hope the afternoon follows suit with this morning, and I'll be happy. Little steps.....

8/4/99 =====
Journal Entry – Day 3

Here I am again. At work. Day three. Word has spread through the company now. Actually, it had already spread by Monday. It's just that I confirmed the "rumors" yesterday, I guess. The guy that I worked with on the contract thing over there called to ask me a question, and I asked if he had heard anything about me. He said that his boss came to him with something that she had gotten from a "credible source", and I told him that I didn't know exactly what the rumor was, as rumors tend to have a life of their own, but that I'm sure that at least part of it was true. As far as I know, the rumor could be that I went to San Fran for SRS or something, but we made arrangements for me to head over there tomorrow during lunch so we can "chat". He's a good guy.....

Last night was such a busy night. I dunno where to begin. I went to have my nails done, and was there or a couple of hours. In the meantime, Elisabeth stopped over at the apartment and left a card under the door. She must have looked through a window somewhere and saw some of my or Steph's female stuff, and she ended up calling leaving a message saying that she saw all this female stuff, and she can't live thinking that I'll ever come back to her as Dave knowing what I'm doing, so that it was obvious to her that I have chosen my life path and in that case, she didn't want to be married to me anymore. I left her a message in return saying that I was still searching for my lifepath, and if she were in a hurry to proceed with her life, perhaps she was right.

Cassie (the girl who came down to visit with me in SF) called to say that her grandmother had died earlier in the evening, and she was pretty broken up.....

I talked with my sister. Her daughter has pneumonia again. Oy. I asked if she had forwarded that note that I wrote to her on to Elisabeth for some reason, and she said absolutely not! I think what happened is that I sent it from my AT&T account on the other computer, which puts things into a "Sent" folder and keeps them there once they've been mailed, and Elisabeth went into there snooping around and that's where she found it. Oh well.

My sister said my mom has been trying to reach me, but didn't have any idea where I would be this week. I called her. She thought that if I was taking this week off, I could come to Dallas and she could do a color analysis for me and she could help me with a wardrobe. Imagine that. I told her I thought it would be quite the bonding experience, but that I was working. I told her I would make arrangements to be there at one point or another before the end of September....

By the time I took care of all this, got home, had a quick snack, talked with Steph for a little while, and then got to bed, it was almost midnight. And I had to get up at 3:45 for my electrolysis. I'm certainly no perky flower this morning, but so far so good.

8/4/99 =====
email to my wife

Honey:

You left me a voice mail today. It was heart wrenching to listen to you. I am going to philosophize for a moment to tell you what helps ME through each day in hopes that it will help you, as well.

My "situation" is something that I must deal with. For years and years and years I have fought it and tried to pretend that it didn't exist. I was afraid of what would happen once it became known, as I was comfortable in my own little world. I was able to walk through life with my eyes half closed, always keeping up a stiff guard to keep out the pain I knew was inevitable. As I fought and fought against it, I became to dislike the person who I was, and that affected everything about me. It affected how I felt about myself, how I related to you and Matt...everything about me. I became unhappy. I began to lost hope.

The turning point for me, and you have a long way to go to get there (if ever) is acceptance. To finally realize the truth for what is IS, and not what you WANT it to be is a major threshold, and has been a key moment in my life. To finally accept that there IS something that has been a burden to my soul, and that it needs to be addressed and dealt with in order for me to proceed as a person, was a very difficult thing for me to do. But I have done it, and although I am scared and lonely right now, I am at peace with myself for what I am doing. I am working through my situation as best I can. I am trying to maintain my integrity and my dignity and my humanity and my love in the face of tremendous hardships. I know that your heart has been broken, as has my own, but I refuse to ever lose faith.

I have done everything I can to spare you and Matt from participating in my journey. You have said that you cannot accept this part of me in any way, shape or form in your life. But the reality of the situation is, it IS a part of MY life. And if you are involved in MY life right now, it will be part of YOUR life. So in the sane fashion as I have accepted myself, and can move forward to whatever awaits me, you are facing choices of your own. But the reality of the situation is that you don't have to make ANY decisions right now. You are not going to make this go away no matter how hard you wish it, or how hard we both cry. I have no desire to lose you, or to lose our love or the lives we hoped to build and live together. But I accept me for me right now, and if you want timetables and you want decisions right now, I cannot give them to you, and if you are in that much of a hurry to move on with your life then so be it. In the sane way that it took time to get where I am now, it will take time to work it outand I will do that.

Time is the key ingredient here. If you cannot accept that, then that in and of itself will be the barrier that we cannot overcome. Time. And love. And support. And acceptance. And the understanding that Matt is BOTH our responsibilities in order to make sure he grows up to be a good, loving person. I will end up wherever I end up whether you call me every day to tell me you love me, or if you curse me. It just makes our journeys that much easier or more difficult. I stopped last time for the wrong reasons. I will not this time. It is not fair to you, or me, or Matt.

If you are looking for timeframes, or assurances that I will be back totally as "Dave"...I cannot offer you those now. I would be lying to both of us.

In your voice mail you said something about money, and about how I'm going to have to get a second job. You need to see reality for what it is. If anything, YOU will have to go out and get a job. If you decide to leave me, and do whatever, then your life will change as much as mine has. I strongly strongly urge you not to go down that path right now. Give us both some time. I love you. I do not want to lose you. I want to work together to deal with this. But I will not turn back now.

I will continue to talk to you in hopes that you will talk to me. I am through arguing. I am through fighting. I have a difficult enough time getting through each day. I am trusting my path to God, and He will lead me where He wants me to be. I urge you to do the same...

Stay strong. Know that I love you. You have not lost me. And I pray that I have not lost you. You once said that love was not enough, but I think it is. Have faith in that and see where it leads.

Later that day:

A couple more things.....

Until recently, I never, ever knew or even imagined how important support is in getting through difficult times. I always felt that looking for support was an admission of weakness myself, and was unable to bring myself to do that. But tough tough times are impossible to get through by ourselves. We sometimes need help and support. It took me a long time to be able to admit that, and to look for it, and to accept it, but it has made the difference through some very tough times for me. And it will continue to help me as I work through this. If I cannot find support in you, who I love most, I take some solace in being able to find it in my son and in my family. Matt makes me prouder than I have ever been in anything, and we need to make sure he knows that. He needs to know that people in this world have difficult times, and make mistakes, and are able to face their travails with the help of those that love them. And we both do love him. And he needs u s both. I will always be here for him and for you. All you need to do is ask. But you need to accept me for what I am right now. And you don't want to do that.

Turn to others. Turn to Sally. Turn to *[your brother]*. Talk to a priest. Or even your parents (although they'll worry the most about you). You don't have to give them specifics if you don't want to. Just tell them I am working through a problem and you need help to wait it out, and it's very difficult for you. You will not be able to do it all by yourself. I never could. I am strong, but when the weight of the world is sitting on your soul and on your chest, it's a struggle to take each and every breath. God has blessed you with good friends who love you because you are beautiful. They will be there for you because I cannot. Turn to them.

I love you . You know that. You love me. I know that. You cannot accept what I am doing. I cannot accept not doing it. As a result, there is a huge gulf between us right now. It will not always be there. But until things work themselves out however they do, talk to someone. Ask for guidance. Find strength in other people's strength.

Every day, I have a dozen people come through my life checking on me. This morning I was sitting here in my cube working and listening to my headset, and an overwhelming sense of sadness swept over me so I started crying. I'm not embarrassed or ashamed to do that anymore. People stopped by to offer comfort and strength and support, and I made it through that battle ok. All you need to do is ask. That's sometimes not an easy thing (it wasn't for me), but it makes all the difference in the world.

You seem to think that my hanging around with other people who are dealing with the same issues as I am will somehow suck me into something against my will. That is so far from true. To look at these "freaks" (as you call them) and their pain and hurt and confusion, and want any part of that...you gotta be crazy. But they understand what I'm going through in a way no one else can. And I understand them. I offer any one of them any comfort that I can, and I get it in return. No strings attached. Just because. And it's not like there is one answer for everyone. Everyone is looking for their own place in a very scary world, and it's comforting to know that there are places we can go for a simple smile or to rest, and that people do care no matter where we end up. I will find my way. I will end up where I'm supposed to be. I'm still looking for where that is, but no one and nothing will force me there. It all comes down to that word again. Faith.

8/5/99

A friend wrote and asked how my wife was handling things. My response:

Hi:

She (Elisabeth) is VERY upset. She wanted/needed timeframes, reassurances, etc. from me, and I couldn't offer her any of that. I don't have those answers, and I won't lie to her. I am very focused on working this out now, and won't let anyone or anything intervene now. I sent her an email telling her that she needs to stop fighting this, and to accept that it is happening, and that is not necessarily a bad thing. Far easier said than done, though. She's a mess. And, short of abandoning myself, there is nothing that I can do. It's just heartbreaking.

Work is going ok, as far as I can tell. I keep my head pretty low these days. One of the people on our team took me to lunch yesterday and we had a very nice talk. He is very active in his church, and told me to keep my trust in God, and not in people, and He will not lead me astray. He mentioned something that I already knew, in that people will polarize....those that can support Donna and those that absolutely cannot. There is no middle ground. I haven't run into open hostility or anything like that so far, but this is only day 4 and there's a long way to go. I have to go over to the main building today, and word has already made its way over there, so it should be interesting.

I picked up Matt from tkd last night and it was so great to see him. It would be great to see Elisabeth as well, but she'll judge me right off the bat again, and I won't have that. Especially not now. I have so much to focus on that distractions (although inevitable) are bad for me.

I was going to call you and ask you to call to check on Elisabeth, because I know how poorly she's doing. I wrote her an email almost begging her to look for support. Talk to SOMEBODY other than me, because all this has got to come out.

I tried to explain to her that once you accept things rather than fight them, and decide to let things fall as they may, it provides a tremendous sense of internal peace. Even when all else is going nuts around you. Again...far easier said than done. But I have reached that point right now.

I do have my moments. I was listening to a CD yesterday here at work which just got me crying. No real reason. But I was here in my cube sniffing and blowing my nose, and eventually pulled it together. I've never done that before....

Physically, I'm healing. Slowly but surely. I'll get there eventually. Donna has a support group meeting on Saturday evening, and then the group is heading out for something to eat, so that will be the big unveiling. Actually....it's no big deal. Just another step on the path.

On the family front, I talked with mom last night for an hour. She offered for me to go to Dallas so she could help me with shopping/fitting. I was dying. My sister's baby has pneumonia again, and they're at the doctor's today to get the latest. It's just so sad....

**8/6/99 5:13pm =====
Elisabeth must have taken my advice on looking for support. She told her brother that I had moved out, but not the exact reason why. I loved him like a brother – he was my Best Man at our wedding. We started emailing.**

Yo:

You mention that this is some serious shit. It is. No news to you at this point, I'm sure.

I do trust in God. I do believe that things happen for reasons, even if we as puny humans cannot understand or see the bigger picture of things. Compared with some of the tragedies that you have been

witness to in your life, and the one my sister lives with every day in her baby, these things pale in comparison. In many situations in life, there are just victims. No bad guys. Just people doing the best they can in a difficult situation, and everyone gets hurt. That's the case here. I know of many couples who go through this. It is a test. Actually, most fail. Others, though, do not. It is a testament to the people involved, and who they are, and to the bond that they have formed. It remains to be seen how this will work itself out. If people lose faith and home, though, then things are doomed to fail. I have not, and hope that Elisabeth has not, and until that happens, the ember of us and our tomorrows remains.

It is late. I need to go and rest. The toll that this emotional shit takes on a person is far greater than any physical labor. I thank you again for your support for your sister and for my wife, She is stronger than she knows. She needs to learn that. No matter what happens, she will emerge from this as a stronger person. There will be positives to emerge yet, although as I say, as puny humans and in our own painful worlds right now, that is hard to see. Elisabeth has said that things will never be the same for us. She is right. It has already changed us both. And people tend to fear change. But I refuse to think that the best years of my life are behind me. Or behind her. Even if that is indeed the case. Because if people really DID believe that, then what's the point of dragging it out?

8/6/99 =====

Journal Entry

Well.....it's over. The week is over. Oy.

Several things have happened. Now that Elisabeth has written to her brother, he is getting involved. It is only a matter of time, and I think that time is very short, before her folks get involved. I have urged her to go up there for a while before Matt begins school, but she has refused to go. I think it would be good to get away from here. Her anger is brewing to a dangerous level. She feels that I have lied to her forever, and that eats and eats at her. And she sees everything that I do now as compounding that. It is only a matter of time before she lashes out at me for it.

Her brother doesn't know the specifics of the situation, but no matter what, he will side with his sister. He continually espouses the "be your own person" line, but in this instance, I will be lower than whale shit. We have emailed several times. He was my best man at my wedding. I love him like a brother. But I think that as time goes on he will forget all that and he will become hardened, just like Elisabeth.

I picked up Matt from tkd last night and we went to dinner at McDonald's. He mentioned that Elisabeth applied for a job in the school district. That is a good thing. We'll see what happens from it.

I went over to the main building today to meet with some of the people over there. I think our talks went pretty well. It's tough to say.

I went to my wax lady at the spa across the street. I told her last time about what was going to happen. I wanted her to do the brows. We spent most of the time talking, and she said she never would have recognized me in the waiting room. I had only a vague resemblance to my old face, and she was amazed.

8/8/99 =====

Journal Entry

Every day nowadays is just chock full. Totally full. I dunno if I like it like that, but that's the way it is, and it looks like that's how things will be for some time to come.

I went home yesterday morning after electrolysis. I wanted to take Matt out for breakfast. I snuck into his room and woke him up, and off we went. Elisabeth was not amused. She called to say she can't

continue to live like this, and that if I couldn't take action then she would have to do it. I get some pretty interesting looks nowadays. Feminine kinda face. Waxed eyebrows. Long nails. Boobs. Shaved legs. Looks really weird, I'm sure....Matt is very interested in playing drums, so we went to the Music Center to get some information. He had fun. When I dropped him off, Elisabeth had him bring out a couple of things to me. One was a card. It starts off "We've come to the end of a long and beautiful relationship and right now, I just want you to know that the fact that it's ending takes nothing away from its beauty and its very special meaning to me." I couldn't bring myself to read the rest.....

Last night was the local support group meeting. My psych was the featured presented, and she has LOTS of patients in the area, so a big turnout was expected. Maria even invited Julie and her fiancé (who is a psychiatrist). Everyone wanted to see the results of my facial re-sculpting....

I originally planned to wear one of my wigs. The one I word to the hospital originally. After getting dressed and doing my makeup, I stopped by the beauty brigade, and Rob styled it a bit as it hasn't had much care in the past few weeks/months. Although my hair is pretty short, I kinda liked the way I looked without it better....

As the evening progressed, it gave me a headache like you wouldn't believe, so I eventually took the darn thing off and went "au natural" for the rest of the night. The turnout was good....35 people. It was really good to see Sheila (my psych), as it has been 10 weeks easy since last time we got together. After the meeting we went to Maria's restaurant for dinner. I even got hit on a couple of times by other TS's. Sheesh. All in all, a good night.

I had class all day today. I got my ears pierced on the way home. I stopped home to do my pool chores and some of that kinda stuff. Elisabeth was purposely away with the dogs....

I talked with mom. She's doing well. She complained about the weather you're scheduled to have this week. I don't think I told you, but there is a chance (a very good one) that I'll be there next week...mid-week. I'll keep ya posted.

She called a few minutes ago. She started out all nice, but soon it was the same old bullshit argument. I hung up on her. I just can't do that anymore.

I'm pooped. I have to get up at 3:45 tomorrow morning for electrolysis, so I'm going to wash up and get to bed. I'll write more tomorrow. My brain is too fried to write more today...

8/11/99 =====

Journal Entry

I can't believe my surgery was not even 3 weeks ago. I'll be healing for a long time to come. The feeling is pretty much back in my forehead, and it doesn't feel quite so tight. Also, my left eye had a tendency to dry out continually for a week or ten days after surgery, but that seems to have cleared up. I have feeling, albeit a bit muted, all thru the nose, which I did not have last time. My main spots of numbness are the top of my head and my chin (and lower front teeth). It feels like I 'm constantly wearing a helmet, and the incision all along my lower gums makes it feel very tight. There is no pain, though, which I guess is good....

I have a busy social calendar this week. Pedicure last night. Electrolysis tonight from 6-9. I'm supposed to have dins with Rob, the guy who does my hair, tomorrow. Friday it's dinner and a show with the "girls". Saturday morning I meet with the psych. Sunday is my final at school. All in all pretty busy. I know that on top of all Elisabeth's other peeves will be the fact that here she is, sitting at home with Matt trying to manage her grief and keep our house and affairs going all be herself, while I'm out and about. It's hard to believe that Donna has a busier social life than Elisabeth does right now, but I really do need to make time to pick up Matt from Tae Kwan Do and to do some things around my house.

At that point, the only person in the family that I hadn't come out to was my brother. I'm not sure why I was delaying – I really didn't have any conscious reason for keeping it from him. However, perhaps there was some deeper difficulty in letting go – in forfeiting my role as the oldest brother in the family.

I was scheduled to travel back to Rochester at the end of August. It was my mom's 70th birthday, and the entire family would be there to celebrate. It had already been a long year for our family, so having everyone together in the same place at the same time was a big deal. Not to be lost in the shuffle was the fact that I looked significantly different and this would be the first time the family would meet Donna.

I didn't want to overshadow mom's birthday but stuff like this is hard to top. As the time got closer my mom really wanted me to tell my brother so it wouldn't come as such a surprise. So, I took a couple of days to compose an email – and off it went.

8/13/99 3:29pm =====
Note to my brother telling him about myself.

Bro:

I have some important things to talk to you about. I would have a hard time doing it face to face right now, or even on the phone, so this seems to be the medium of choice. I hope you don't mind. Our family has never been really good at talking about much "personal" stuff, and this is very personal, so this is hard for me. But I'll do my best. I've already shared this with Jude (she found out by accident) and with Mom. Both seem to be handling it ok.

First, some current info. I ask that you keep all this info to yourself. Of course, I expect that you'll share it with Melissa (which is fine), but it is so personal and so potentially hurtful (depending on who finds out) that I beg of you to keep it to yourselves. You can chat with mom, or Jude, or me about it, but I'd appreciate keeping the circle at that for now. The news is of such magnitude, and has shaken my life so much that I am no longer living in my house. I have moved into an apartment for the moment, until I can work this out. Elisabeth is a wreck, and I do not know what our future holds. Matt seems to be ok. But that's what they all say until the normal middle class kid turns up at high school with an Uzi....

I tell you this now for two reasons. First, mom's 70th birthday is in a few weeks, and she has asked me to make every effort to be there. I am trying to make the arrangements. However, I do not want to become the center of attention. It's mom's day, and she deserves it. I am hoping that you can take this and put it into your back pocket, and we can just continue with life for now. Second, I feel that it is important that you know. I have slowly been telling those I love most (in no particular order, mind you), and how it's your turn....I assure you that no matter how strange it all sounds, it is all true and this is not some elaborate joke or hoax. This is real....

I don't know of any way to do this easily. But I need to at least try to set the stage for this.

I have dealt with a very serious issue since I was very young. I remember dealing with it at 5 or 6 years of age, when it began as a feeling that something just wasn't right. I doubt that anyone really noticed it. Jude didn't. Mom didn't. But it was there. And although it is not my fault, the very thought of ever having to face it has caused me a tremendous amount of fear, and shame and guilt. And through the years I have dealt with it in my own way.

Unfortunately, at 40 years of age our lives are pretty far along. People are expected to know who and what they are. They are expected to have found their place in the world. The people in our lives have expectations/dependencies of us, and we have adopted many roles throughout the years. In my case, there is Dave the husband, and Dave the father, and Dave the Brother, and Dave the son....and underlying all of these things is Dave the person. And if Dave the person is struggling, and having difficulty in life, then he can't do any of the other roles well. I reached this point a couple of years ago, and felt compelled to relieve the terrible pressure that I was feeling.

My "situation" has filled me with such a sense of horror, at the thought of just what might or could happen should it ever become known, that I have struggled to keep it in. I knew that Elisabeth could never deal with it. I know of other people who have had to disclose this situation to those they love most, and who have lost their entire family, their jobs....everything they own. As a result, a pressure had built that has finally reached a point where I could control it no longer. It had, and continues, to come to the surface. And it's not just a little spurt. It's a big gush.

I have come a long way in the past couple of years. I have reached a point of acceptance. I have gone from denying it, and refusing to deal with it because I feared how others might perceive it, to a point of accepting it and hoping that others will be able to accept me for who and what I am. So far, I have found that to be true. The people who I love most (excluding Elisabeth) have been able to step up to the plate, and have renewed my faith in a lot of things. I have finally learned to be honest with myself, and how I can be honest to others. I have found a peace that I have not known for a long long time.

Everyone has at least one skeleton in their closet. One thing that remains a secret to others. One thing that fills them with fear. This is my skeleton. I cannot tell you how to react to it. I cannot tell you things will not be awkward. All I can do is to rely on others for strength and support, and time will do its job. As far as our family, there are only four of us left, so how things proceed between you and I in the future is up to you.

So here it is....

There is an issue that affects everything about us as people. It is something that is the basis for many prejudices and misconceptions.

The issue of which I speak is gender. A person's gender identity can be divided into two parts: physical gender and mental gender. A person's physical gender is determined by chromosomes, and there are no questions in that regard. However, their mental gender is assigned based on a complex series of chemical processes that react on the developing fetus' brain. People assume that your physical gender naturally matches your mental gender, as it does in most people. But there are people who have the mental identification with one, but the obvious physical characteristics of the other. This affliction causes a lifelong struggle, beginning as soon as a child realizes there is something wrong with the way the world looks at them and the way they perceive themselves and how they fit in. They do their best to cope in a world in which they feel uncomfortable and alone. The term given to people who suffer from this situation is Transgendered. I am one of these people.

Unfortunately, people who suffer from this affliction are often stereotyped. They are often depicted as mentally ill, or homosexual, or as having some type of deviant fetish. I am certainly none of those things. The people who know me know this. I have been married for almost 18 years to a woman that I love very much. I am a very devoted father to a 13-year old son. I had had a very successful career, and will continue to do so in the future. Being transgendered has nothing to do with sex or illness, it has to do with self-identity, and the two are worlds apart. It is an affliction that I certainly did not choose, but one that has affected me for my entire life, and one that I am working to correct right now.

The pressures on a transgendered person are tremendous. They must live their lives living a role they feel they were not born to play. They must create a persona that is acceptable to the outside world, but may or may not represent their true selves. They must internalize their struggle for self-acceptance, which forces them to live a very uncomfortable existence. All these things lead to a tremendous amount of

stress and strain on the transgendered person, and at some point in their lives they reach a point where they cannot keep it in any longer, and must work to correct their situation. I am at that point now.

There is an internationally accepted protocol of treatment for people who are clinically diagnosed as being transgendered. Since it has been proven that a person's gender identity cannot be changed, this treatment deals with a person's physical world, which can be changed. It is designed to make the transgendered person feel more comfortable within the confines of their own skin by making their body more closely match their mental gender. It is called the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care, and it follows the following framework:

- After an intensive three-month screening has been completed, people identified as being truly transgendered are allowed to begin a regimen of female hormones. These hormones have numerous effects, both physical and mental. I have been on such a regimen for over 2 years.
- The next step in the treatment is known as the RLT, or Real-Life Test. The person is required to live full-time as a member of their mentally identified gender for at least one year. This is a very difficult task, involving legally changing our name, modifying all records, and learning to live in a whole new world. This is where I am right now.
- People who successfully complete the RLT are then allowed to seek gender reassignment surgery, should that be their desire.

Unfortunately, people in my situation are lumped into one big bucket. Transvestites. Cross-Dressers. Drag Queens. All are synonymous with seedy sex and deviate behavior. However, I refuse to let the ignorance of others tell me how to live my life. This is not about dressing in any particular clothes. It is not about sex. It is about who you are and where you feel you fit in the world. And to try to explain it to someone who is comfortable in their own gender is like trying to explain how a rose smells. You have to experience it to understand it. So I don't expect your understanding. I am hoping for your support as your brother and as a compassionate human being.

I have done several things to prepare for this little "adventure". I was very self-conscious of the "maleness" of many of my facial features. I went to a surgeon in San Francisco to have some plastic surgery to soften them a bit. My situation was announced to my peers at work. They know what I am going through, as I will begin there full-time as female in a few weeks. For the most part, they have really been supportive and considerate. Men have a harder time dealing with this than women. I have filed paperwork to have my name legally changed, as is required in Arizona to live full-time as female. The new name will be Donna Gail Rosen (DGR), but you can call me whatever you feel comfortable with (no swearing though). Mom picked the middle name....

Some things about me have changed (besides the name). The entire experience of self-discovery will change a person. Physically, the changes are impossible to hide. Other things have not. My cube is still decorated with enough Bills stuff to open a small store. People like Karen and Kevin who have known me through this say they like the new "me" so much better than the old one. I guess that Dave was just a schmuck or something. All I can ask of people is to give me a chance and make up their minds based on me, and not based on the bullshit that society has created regarding my situation.

I do not know what will happen in the future. I take things day to day. Mom asked me if I was going to have my "wee-wee" (those are my words, not hers...) cut off. I told her that I don't even consider those things at the moment. However, whereas most men can say they would NEVER allow that to happen, I cannot. I do not know what my future holds, but I guess that's true of us all. If you want, I can send you a digitized pic. Jude and mom and Matt have seen an older one. It's up to you. Perhaps it will help to see it rather than let your imagination run wild. It's up to you.

You can talk to mom or Jude about this. Or you can call me. Or have Melissa call me if you can't or don't want to. I can give you more details if you want. If you have questions, just ask. If I don't hear from you, I'll figure you either had a heart attack reading this or perhaps it got lost in cyberspace somewhere (God

forbid), or perhaps you're just not handling it well. Please don't call my house or try to talk with Elisabeth right now. She is very very angry/hurt/confused/angry /angry/ANGRY. It would not be a good thing.

I ask you again to please keep this private. Elisabeth is determined to prevent her family from knowing the specifics of what I am going through. I cannot tell her how to manage her relations with her family. We both have lots of friends there in Rochester, and once things like this get out, they spread very quickly.

So that's the scoop. This letter probably rambles way too much, but at least I got out what I needed to say. Sorry for all the extra words. Normally, I'd go back and proof read this, but if I do I'll probably erase it all. I feel like the guy in the E*Trade commercial who is afraid to press the "Send" key. So I'll end this now, and I hope to hear from you soon...

Take Care. Bro.
Dave

* * * * *

After I sent it I waited to hear back. One day. Two days. Three days. I eventually called my mom and my sister to see if they had heard anything from him, but nobody had. It would be almost a week before he would get back to me. Apparently, he had been out of town for a few days. He called me, and told me he loved me and all he really wanted was for me to be happy. I was incredibly happy, and relieved.

**8/17/99 2:27 pm =====
Email to my brother**

Hi bro:

I just want to thank you for calling last night. Our chat was the high point of my day....

You asked that I send a pic. I'm in the process of trying to get a current one, and should have that along to you all in the next couple of days. If you want to see some old ones (for comparative purposes, I suppose), I have posed some on the web for your amusement. I don't think that mom or Jude have seen them yet.

As you can see, this will not be easy. I have a long way to go.....

His response:

D

We'll have to talk when you get here about how you'd like to be addressed, etc.

I did go out to the web page. You look good, but a little too much lipstick for my taste ;-) You do look happy, and I think that's the most important thing.

8/15/99 =====

Journal Entry

Why does this have to be so hard?

It was hard to tell my family. It was hard to tell my work. It was hard to show up last Monday. I can, and am, handling those things. But knowing the pain I am causing Elisabeth is killing me.

She called me this afternoon while I was in class. She was hysterical. She was sobbing and trying to talk and was just inconsolable. I asked her if anything had happened and she said no, that she had just lost faith that things will ever, ever get better. I told her she needed to keep faith. Not in me, because I can't guarantee her anything right now except that I love her. She needs to keep her faith in life. She said she had lost her faith, and hung up. It was horrible.

She could blow her brains out for all I know. But I absolutely cannot go back now. I cannot. I cannot. I will not. I have done things to forever change me and my life. And whereas Elisabeth feels I am playing into the hand of the devil by succumbing to temptation, I feel that I am following God's plan. I don't know why this has happened to me, but to think that it is all for naught would be more than I can handle right now.

My mind races at times like these. I just want to run away. I don't want to face her, or her wrath, or her family. Those thoughts fill me with pain. I can deal with my own world, but as I once mentioned, having to carry hers as well is just too much for me to manage.

I was very upset after her call. I called my mom. We talked for a while. It helped a little bit. It looks as though the plan here at work calls for me to fly out there on 8/24, and mom leaves for Rochester on that day so I'll miss her. I'm going to see if I can't move it up so she'll have a chance to see the changes prior to my seeing her on her birthday....

8/16/99 =====

Journal Entry

I have no choice about "exposing" Matt to TG stuff. It is my life. And I will not relinquish being with him....I will fight for him.

Last night for dinner, Matt and I met a friend out for some Prime Rib. We all had a very nice time. Late in the evening, Elisabeth called to yell at me that she didn't want me to expose HER son to those "freak types". I AM ONE OF THOSE TYPES. And as the days go by, I will be more and more Donna on the outside. I can't help but get him "exposed". He needs to see that these are good people just like me, and not mentally ill deranged lunatics as Elisabeth would have him believe. Should that become an issue as far as some court is concerned at some point in the future, so be it. I have done nothing wrong, and I refuse to live in fear of it.

This morning Elisabeth and I actually talked. Not "at" each other, but "to" each other. She told me she couldn't continue living in limbo like this, and I told her if she really wanted me to do it, I would go and file the paperwork for a divorce. I told her that I felt we could handle it our own way for right now without a court or lawyers stepping in to tell us what was whose and all that stuff. I told her that I was doing what I could to take care of her and prevent us from losing our house and all the other things we've built together. If it would help her to move on with her life I would go and do that. Not because I want to, but because it's what she needs, and she can't do it herself. I told her I didn't want to give her any false hope in anything, but that in my own mind there was no hurry. Time is not my enemy right now. Perhaps it is inevitable, but it is better to act with reason after considering everything that is to follow than based on the shock of the moment.

Still now word from brother. Not to me, or sis, or mom.... We feel he may be out of town back in New Jersey or something. Whatever.

I'll probably arrive there some time fairly early on Sunday. Mom is flying home to Dallas some time in early afternoon, and I'll be spending some time with her later on Sunday, and on Monday. I have no idea how she will react to these changes.

**8/17/99 11:32am =====
Email to my HR rep at work**

Hi Liz:

FYI: The hearing at State Superior Court for my name change petition is scheduled for Monday Sept. 13. Once I have the appropriate documentation, I will get it to you.

Thanks.

D Rosen

**8/17/99 =====
Journal Entry**

I'm at work. I'm in no mood to be here. I have a headache. I'm tired. I'm just plain pooped. I think I'll try to head out a little early to go home and get some rest. This schedule of mine, plus the weight of my world, can become a heavy burden sometimes.

I got a call from my brother last night. I had sent him a very in-depth explanation of what I was doing and why, and noone in the family had heard from him since. It turns out he was out of town until yesterday. Basically, he said it was no problem. He could accept it, and his wife could, and he would do whatever he could to be supportive. It was very, very nice. I truly am blessed in alot of ways.

Elisabeth called today. She had interviewed for a job with the school district last week. She has a degree in Social Work, and has always wanted to follow her father's footsteps in working with school kids (he was a teacher and high school guidance counselor for 25+ years), and so she applied. They called and offered her a job today. She'll be working with emotionally and physically "challenged" second graders. I think it will do her a world of good. The pay isn't what she would like, but she gets full benefits and weekends and summers off and all that, and will be working near Matt, so all those things are pluses.

I made my travel plans to head home next weekend. I fly out of Dallas at 5:30 next Thursday, and then fly back home here late on Sunday. That means I'll have 3 full days at home. Donna will make her first appearance to the family, and that will be a big thing....

I also got my court date for the name change. Monday, Sept. 13 at 2:30. I was disappointed that it is so far off, but I suppose it doesn't really matter.

Tonight I go to see the beauty brigade. I need fills on the nails. Also, Rob wants to highlight the hair, but I need to feel comfortable with that before I let him do it. I'm getting the hang of styling it in the morning, and will do it every day as it grows out. By the time it grows out, I should be pretty experienced with it. I'm going to have them take a couple of pics (provided I don't forget my digital camera) and will distribute the best of them tomorrow.

Weeks ago, one of the guys at work asked if I would participate in the fantasy football league. I had never done that before, but it sounded fun so I said ok. This past week I got an email addressed to everyone asking if they were going to participate. I also got a private one addressed just to me. I sent back a reply saying that it didn't really matter to me....that if they needed players I was certainly willing to be in, but that if I would make people feel awkward I was certainly willing to pass. He stopped over this morning and we chatted, and I elected to pass.....No real pressure. Just a wish to keep my life fairly simple right now in preparation for the fun to come.



Rob took these after styling my short hair

**8/18/99 =====
*Email from my sister-in-law***

Hi. I wanted to drop you a quick email. As Jay said, he's not a details person, but I am and so I do have lots of questions, thoughts, etc. that have been going through my mind. I don't think email is the appropriate forum to discuss, especially at work, so when you're up here, I'm sure we'll discuss.

I know this is going to be somewhat weird for us. My main thought, though, is the personal turmoil and angst you have felt for so long and have been unable to share. As Jay said, as long as you're happy, we're happy for you. And we'll work all the other stuff out.

Take care and have a safe flight. We'll see you when you get here next week.

8/18/99 =====

Journal Entry

It's 7am. No electrolysis this morning. What a treat! My chin still feels like hamburger from yesterday's session. :(

Yesterday was just another day. I come in. I keep to myself (pretty much). I do my work. There's one girl here who I helped to train when she was originally hired earlier this year who has kinda taken me under her wing. She's always sending me emails to stay happy and coming to talk with me and stuff...

Last night I went for a new hairstyle. There's only so much we can do with it because it's still short and we want it to grow out, but he did a good job.

Today I go to meet Steph at lunch, and we're going to file our paperwork for the name change at the Superior Court. They will have to set up a court date and whatnot, so we'll have to go back, but it's another big step.....

I didn't talk with Elisabeth yesterday. Matt told me she didn't want to talk to me until I had decided to come home. I'm so far from home right now that it's not even funny. As I sit here at my desk I'm wearing a pair of Ladies jeans (size 10), a baggy shirt (that's not fooling anyone about anything), a Victoria's secret bra (38C), I have acrylic nails, pierced ears, a unisex hairstyle, and a face that is gender-questionable at best.....she would NOT be amused. Although I desperately WANT to see her, I don't (if that makes any sense). I want to see her in the sense that I miss her terribly, but I don't because I paid alot of money for this face and she will come at me with a hammer.

I have been disclosing my situation to friends lately. I met my friend, Beth, out for dinner at Black Eyed Pea the other night and had chicken fried chicken. It's the first time that I had chicken fried anything....I need some meat on these scrawny bones, and it was good. She seemed to take it ok.

Yesterday I had planned to go home at lunch as I was pooped and had a terrible headache, but I went to see another friend. She runs a consulting company, and we have always "connected" in an odd way. I could sense an interest in me, and even yesterday after we had talked about it she asked questions, and one of them was about sexuality. She was shocked.

Well, I gotta get my stuff and run off to class. It'll be done by noon, as the instructor needs to catch a flight home. I am definitely coming to Dallas, and it may be a fairly extended stay. I was supposed to be there only for 8/24-8/26. But my mom is flying up to Rochester on 8/24, and was very disappointed that she didn't have a chance to meet Donna before leaving. I talked with one of the managers to see if we could move it up, and he suggested going up on Saturday and staying there through the following Thursday. That would mean I would have 3 days of basically nothing to do, which would be good.

8/18/99 =====

Journal Entry

I am getting ready to write Elisabeth the email that will end it all.

I had told Matt that I could not pick him up from tkd last night at 8. I had some things to do for Donna, and knew I would not be finished by 8. So as I was heading over to see the beauty brigade, Matt calls to see if I am going to pick him up. I reminded him that I couldn't. Elisabeth told him to ask "why not?". I told him I had some things that I needed to do, and wouldn't be done in time. Elisabeth eventually got on the phone, because she wanted to know exactly WHAT I was doing. I told her that Donna had some things to do. And she hung up on me.

She called and left a message late last night basically saying that originally seeing me do this was too much for her. Now, knowing what I was doing was too much for her, so I either come home and stop it or leave for good....According to her, it's my call.

Matt called this morning, and I got him to say that mom is trying to tell him that my own Donna needs are more important than he is in my life. I will not allow her to poison him against me....

So I'm going to write to her. I have not wavered for one second in my feelings that the things I am doing are right for ME. Donna is beginning to spread her little wings, and will continue to do so. And if that is too much for her, then it will indeed be over. Frankly, I think it was over a long time ago....

I did have some pictures taken last night. I even like a couple of them. But overall, Donna still needs lots of work. But at least it's a start...

8/19/99 =====

Hi Michelle:

I am scheduled for 9 hours of electrolysis on Saturday! Nine friggin' hours. My face is going to be hamburger by the time that's done. I need to do it, because I'm going to be gone all next week, and Oct. 4 is looming around my corner. We're going to do mostly single needle, as opposed to multi-needle, because it's easier on the skin and I won't swell quite so much. We're also going to spread it all over the face, as opposed to a single area, in order to keep from getting too irritated. I'm SUPPOSED to be taking Matt for the day on Saturday, but we'll see what happens.

>> *I really liked the picture you sent me. Our breasts look very nice and the work on your face was well done.*

Thanks. Quite a difference, huh?

>> *You look a few years younger. I don't know if it's the surgery or the much more laid back approach you are taking to transition, but it shows in your face.*

Perhaps a little of both. I also "feel" much more natural. Last time, everything seemed so foreign. The long "fake" hair, the extra big boobs...all of it. This time it feels so much more comfortable. I'm making due with my own hair. The boobs already feel as though they have been part of me for my entire life. It's nice to know that it shows in my face....

>> *I'm sure that you will look even better after things aren't swollen, sore and hectic around you and once your hair grows longer. It looks pretty feminine as it is.*

Trying to pass as a "male" is becoming harder and harder. I never, ever, ever thought I would be able to say that. But I need to heal, to grow out my whiskers, to build my wardrobe, and build some confidence, so I'll have to endure this twilight zone between genders for a little while longer. But no matter how you slice it, there is no way to make this look totally male.

>> *I'm also very pleased that your brother is being so supportive. Families can be very surprising in their reactions.*

I sent a copy of the pic to my bro, my mom, and my sister. The reaction I got from bro was "Wow!". I also got a very nice, sympathetic email from his wife (my sister-in-law). She mentioned that she has some

questions, and I replied that, at this point, I have nothing to hide, so I'll answer whatever she has. And I will.

My mom was also pretty amazed. She has already started going through all of her magazines to cut out pictures of hairstyles she thinks would be good for me, and clothes that she thinks would "flatter" me. I haven't heard from sis yet....

>> *I love your new look.*

The new look is an evolving one. I'll keep you up to date as it changes...

Well, I gotta go. I have electrolysis from 5:30 to 8:30, which gives me an hour to get home, get changed, and get all the way over there in rush hour traffic. You take care, and thanks for all the flattery. It really does make me blush....

* * * * *

Over the next month or so, Elisabeth and I had a VERY intense string of emails. We were not talking at that point. If she needed to tell me something, she would leave me a message wherever she knew I wasn't. During the day, while I was at work, she would leave it at home. On the weekends, she would leave it at work.

Her messages were sometimes heart wrenching. In one, she just sobbed into the phone for 5 minutes and hung up. Others were very angry.

**8/19/99 =====
Email to Elisabeth**

I got your message the other night about not being able to accept any part of this. That's nothing new. This is a huge part of my life right now, and I will make room in my life for it. Evenings. Weekends. I will be learning and preparing and doing. That's the entire reason that we are apart right now. You can't accept it in my life. I can't accept my life without it in it.

At first, you couldn't deal with seeing it. Now, it seems as though you can't deal with even the knowledge it is happening. But it is. And that reality both scares me to death, and fills me with joy. I will shortly be coming to work like that every day. I will have a new driver's license with a new picture and name on it. My paychecks will no longer be made out to "Dave". These will be realities in the very near future.

I don't know when we'll talk again. You hurt me when we talk. I'm sure talking to me hurts you. It's not because I don't want to talk to you. It's just that I can't deal with the words coming out of your mouth, on top of my own fear and suffering. I'd love to talk just to say hi and talk about my day and tell you I love you. But it always turns into name-calling and the same old bullshit.... I think I'll call later just to say 'hi'. If you answer, you answer. If you don't, you don't.

I need to get back to work. I can't take dealing with this here. I want to work this out WITH you. Not AGAINST you. I will not get into a name-calling match. After the best 20 years of our lives, that is no way to handle things. And most importantly, there is Matt to consider. I would never try to turn him against

you. And I will not allow you to turn him against me. I am now, and always will be, his father. And there is nothing you can do to change that.

I do love you. I don't know if I'll write those words to you again,. You have stopped writing them to me. But I do. And I always will.

Love,

Dave

8/20/99 =====
Journal Entry

I'm not having a good day. Some days I seem to be able to handle things pretty well. Others....not so well.

Alot of little stuff.

I had my upper lip cleared again at electrolysis last night. We couldn't quite get it all. I'll have to have it finished tomorrow. It hurt. And it's swollen.

Because of all the busy-ness in the schedule, I haven't been able to study as much as I would have liked. I did not pass my Microsoft test. It'll be another \$100 to take it again.

Elisabeth left a NASTY message on my cell phone. She told me basically that I was scum and worthless and never did anything to help in our family and she did everything. She said that as far as she is concerned, we are separated, so she feels free to see other people. And she is going "out" on Saturday evening, so I have Matt all day. I wrote her a reply. I do not blame her, and told her to be careful.

My responsibilities at work are just crushing me right now. I just don't want to deal with alot of this stuff. And this trip will either make me or break me. I have considered asking for a leave of absence, and staying in Rochester for the entire week of the 30th, but just can't do that.

Living in this gender-bender zone is tough as well. I can't wait to get through this part. It's harder than being all "male". Sister called today to rave about the pic. She never thought her brother would look so good. She said she had originally been really worried about me, but after seeing this pic, she feels alot better. I told her that this is just a work in progress, but I think the same is true of us all....

Well, I gotta go. I should stay here and do some work, but I just don't have the strength. I'm gonna go to the apartment, have a good cry, try to get myself together to go for a run, take a shower, have some dins, pick up Matt at 8, and then call it a night.

8/21/98 =====
email to Michelle

Hi Michelle:

>> *You can't be letting the little things get you down.*

Some days are good days, and some are bad. For some reason, today is bad. I think it was a mixture of alot of things. And although I am a little down, I won't let it KEEP me down.

- >> *I don't know that she REALLY has a "date" or not or if she is just saying that to hurt you.*
- >> *Personally I think even if she does actually have a date, it's superficial and*
- >> *meant to make you hurt and jealous and draw you back to her.*

To be honest with you, it doesn't really matter one way or the other. I cannot be her husband. I have not been her husband for a long, long time. She has her own needs. I want her to be happy.

- >> *Go home, have your cry and then pick your butt (curves and all) and do something nice for*
- >> *yourself.*

I did. I went out to Ulta3 and bought a curling iron and some perfume.

I'm tired again (still) so I think I'm gonna wash up and get ready for bed. Thanks for the kind words. On the "crappy" days, every beam of sun is truly appreciated...

8/22/99 =====
Journal Entry

I don't have time to write very much right now. My son is here at my apartment waiting for us to go out for some dinner. I just need to collect my thoughts on what happened yesterday while they're still fresh in my mind....

To make a long, complicated story short and simple, I went home yesterday morning to take Matt out to breakfast. Elisabeth decided that she wanted to see me. It took one look...maybe 10 seconds...before heaven and hell collided. It was awful.

She told me I had disfigured myself, and I had killed her, and she could never recover from this, and how could I do this....on and on. I stayed to wash the dogs, and Matt and I left for the day.

I haven't spoken with her since. She left a message saying she wanted me to take Matt for all of next weekend. That causes a problem. I'm planning to fly there to Dallas on Saturday or Sunday, stay there until Thursday, fly directly to Rochester to see the family, and then fly back on Sunday. So....if I take him next weekend, he's stuck on the road with me. I dunno how that's gonna fly, but I guess we'll see....

I sent my brother an email on Friday telling him about me. I gave him this phone number, but haven't heard from him. We'll see how this settles....

Steph and I went to the Superior Court on Friday and filed for our name changes. We have to call back early this week to get a court date....

Donna was out and about on Friday night, and then to the doctor's on Saturday. People at the doctor's office were just amazed....they all kept coming by to look and hug. It was pretty funny, actually...I have 100% decided to go with my own hair. Whatever I have, I have. It just feels so much more natural....

I went for a run today. Twenty minutes on the treadmill. Not too fast. Just a beginning, as it has been a while, and I didn't want to hurt myself. The boobs did just great, and I wasn't too too winded. There is a fitness center here at the apartment complex so I can get started slowly.

I had my final exam today for tcp/ip. I got 100. I have no idea where I found the time to study amidst all this craziness, but I'm a good student, and I guess I found a way.

After our blow-up yesterday, I took Matt for the day. He came to electrolysis with me and talked with Maria while I got plucked. We all ended up going to Applebee's for some appetizers. I had a good, stiff drink as well....

8/23/99 =====
Journal Entry

After electrolysis this morning, I broke down. I just started crying and shaking, and Maria was all concerned and Amanda was there to hug me. It was awful. I have never, ever, ever done anything like that. But I was physically hurt and emotionally hurt and tired and it all kinda came out. I called Bill and told him that I was in the middle of trying to get myself together, so I went home, washed up, and ended up being an hour late.

8/27/99 =====
Journal Entry

It's 12:40am, and we're all just settling in for bed. I'm at my sister's house and hope the cats don't make my allergies go haywire. All the flights were on time, so the trip was actually pretty painless once it got going.

My neices waited up for me, and asked if I wanted them to call me Donna, and I said that would be fine. I know it will take some getting used to, but they seem very gung-ho about the whole thing so we'll see what happens. I feel ridiculous running around in my "Dave" suit, and will not be seen in any of that while I'm here....

8/28/00 =====
Responding to an email from Michelle (we had visited briefly during a work trip to Dallas)

Hi Michelle:

>> *I have to tell you in all honesty that I think that you no longer pass very well for a male*

That's the feeling I get. It's really odd.... It's an odd revelation for someone who has always struggled to NOT appear too male (and had a tough time), and suddenly not be accepted AS male. I dunno it I'd be accepted as female at this point, either, but I think I'd fit in better...

>> *I watched the people at the airport when you were there and a lot of the ones I saw were looking at you trying to figure you out.*

See??! That's what happens pretty near everywhere I go. I almost felt sorry for the people who sat next to me on the plane. They seemed pretty uncomfortable, and I suppose I don't blame them. As I said...it's pretty awkward. I'm going to spend all me time here in Donna-mode, so I'll let you know how things go....

I didn't sleep so well, so I need a cup of coffee to get this day going. I have this computer in the bedroom where I am staying, so I'll write again later...

8/28/99 =====
Journal Entry (I had arrived in Rochester the day before)

Today was a good good good good day. An almost unreal day, in some ways. I felt accepted. Totally and completely and without reservation...

I took my 8 year old niece to go and pick up my mom this morning. She is staying at my brother's apartment, as my brother is out of town until tomorrow so she's sleeping in their guest bedroom. There is a doorman in the lobby, and I told him we were there to pick up Mrs. Rosen in 309. So the guy gets on the intercom and says "Mrs. Rosen, there is a young lady waiting for you here in the front lobby". And he was talking about me. Just like on the bus, I was wearing no makeup, a t-shirt, and some shorts. It was very nice...

I had an appt. with my makeup friend (Deborah from Jumelle) at 2. It was great to see her. She did a very nice job (as usual). When I came home, it was the first time any of them had seen me with makeup, and they were all wonderful. We took a bunch of digital pics, which I should have downloaded tomorrow...

My 14 year old niece and I decided to go to the mall. We strolled and shopped for almost 3 hours. Noone batted an eyelash. I bought a purse. Rachel bought some pants for school. We had a great time.

Later in the evening, my sister-in-law stopped by. We had a very nice talk. She offered to give me a bunch of her stuff that she doesn't use anymore. Mom had brought some more dresses for me, so I tried them on and everyone agreed on one I should wear tomorrow night out to my mom's birthday dinner...

I did get a call from work, and they asked me to fly direct from here back to Dallas on Sunday night, so I can be at the facility first thing on Monday. I'll make the arrangements tomorrow...

It's late, and I need some zzzzz's. I'm not sure what all is planned for tomorrow, but it will have a hard time topping today...



Rachel and I after shopping!

8/29/99 =====
Journal Entry

So much seems to happen every day that I can't even begin to sit down and type it all out.

I went to the outlet mall with my neice today. The place is huge. We spent almost 4 hrs. there and probably only covered 1/3 of the stores. I bought a few things, but have been really holding back because I just have no room left in my suitcases. It's a hassle using credit cards with "David Rosen" on them, and I can't wait to change those over...

Tonight we went out to dinner for my mom's birthday. We went to the same restaurant that I took my dad to the last time I saw him, which was last September. I wore a dress that mom had given me, and it was the first time that ny brother has seen me since I got here. Dinner was very relaxed and comfortable, and I couldn't have imagined it going any better. Afterwards, bro invited me over to watch the Bills game, so I changed into shorts and a t-shirt and went over to talk and watch the game. It was very nice...

Well, I gotta get to bed. Another busy day over. I did talk to Matt today, which was a good thing...



Mom's 70th Birthday (she picked out the dress...It is hers)

8/30/99 =====
Journal Entry

It's 4 pm and I'm starting to pack to leave. I am finding it a very emotional thing, as I have felt so accepted and comforted and loved here that the thought of leaving upsets me.

I was out as Donna all day today....no makeup or anything. Just me. And Rachel. I always have someone to be with me here, to do things that I have always dreamed of doing but have been afraid to do alone. That is not true so far away. I mentioned to you about Steph moving out, and I am going to have to do something to replace her in my life. I have learned that this is not something that I want to attempt alone, and the thought of being alone again reminds me of the difficulty I had during my LAST attempt to go full-time. I am going to have to make some decisions for myself pretty soon here...

I guess I better get packing. There is alot left to do. There is absolutely no way I'm going to fit all this stuff in the luggage that I brought. I think I'll try to borrow some from Jude. These people and this place are good for me, and I will make sure to be back to return it to them before too long...

8/30/99 =====
Email to Elisabeth

Hon:

I know you are angry. I am angry. You are angry at me. I am angry that this had to happen to me, and that is has affected you. You mention in your note that I am not the father that Matt deserves, or the husband that you deserve. You are right. I am not. You deserve nothing but the best, and I have always tried to be that for you. And it hurts me not to be able to be that for you now.

If this were as simple as "dressing up", that would be one thing. I only wish it were. This problem goes to my very core. Right now I absolutely cannot be the good "husband" that you expect. I can be your friend. I can be your partner. I can be someone to love. I can be someone there to share the events of your life with. I can be someone to stroke your hair until you fall asleep. I can be someone you can cry to, and who can cry to you.

But you do not want, and will not accept, me as anything but the "husband". I suppose I can understand that. But in a world where real love is so scare, to reject me because I cannot live up to your expectations of me right now is a shame, because I have so much more to offer. I am scared. I am alone. I am missing those I love most. You are feeling the same way. It's a terrible, deep, constant ache that does not go away. I can't believe there isn't a middle ground somewhere so that two people who love each other and belong with each other can at least talk to each other.

This is a situation of victims. Pure and simple. I have handled this for my entire life as best I can. I am not equipped to do more. I don't know how anyone could do more. And despite your feelings to the contrary, I do not know where life will lead me. Too many people get caught up on the destination, and they forget about the journey. Some things in life need to be learned. Others can give advice, or give opinions, but you can only learn for yourself by doing for yourself. I am on that pat h now. So, for right or for wrong, I will come to my own conclusions. And perhaps I will end up torn and broken and miserable. I can only pray that my path does not lead me there...But be careful that you do not end up there, as well.

We traded some very angry and emotional emails over the following days. I choose not to share them here.

9/1/99 =====
After thinking about the string of nasty emails for a day, I wrote to Elisabeth to apologize:

Elisabeth:

I am sorry for some of the things in the email yesterday. Our perceptions of things are so totally different, and there is so much anger right now, that it just comes out. You said your email was venting. Find. It certainly didn't come across that way. It was hateful. I don't know what you expect from me in return. I suppose I should have let it go. But I didn't.

I try to be gentle with you. I try to let the love that I feel do my talking, not my own anger or fear. I try to say nice things, and all I get is name-calling and insults and accusations back in my face. I can only take so much of that. I deal with my pain and my fear and my loneliness as best I can, and I don't let them spill out all over the page in nastiness. You tried to hurt me in any way you could think of...through my son, through my family, through my friends, through God. And I responded in anger. I suppose I need to develop some thicker skin. We need to be helping each other, not hurting each other. There is more than enough of that to go around.

* * * * *

Our emails over the next month continued in the same vein. Anger. Confusion. Pain. It was a very difficult time. I had expected to take Matt for that weekend, but did not hear from either of them. Little did I know but I would not see him again for nearly 7 months. I was sure that Elisabeth was trying to poison Matt's mind. In any event, the hurting continued for well over another month before an uneasy calm settled in....

9/2/99 =====
Journal Entry

I'm back home. The trip back was fairly uneventful. I had almost an hour to wait at the airport before my flight, so I had a chance to unwind from the trip a little bit before boarding. I had a whole row to myself, so I got a chance to stretch out a bit and just chill....

Steph picked me up at the airport. She is in a difficult situation, as her car was repossessed a couple of days ago. She has been using my car, and has a very busy life between going to work, and going to electrolysis, and working at the restaurant, and all the other various things we all need our cars for. After she picked me up, she took me to the restaurant, as she was working, and I had to stay there until after 9 when she got off. I was dead tired. I also had to get up extra early this morning (3:15 instead of 3:45) so I could drop her off at work before I went to electrolysis. I'd do anything to help her, but I just physically won't be able to do this for her for very long. She needs to make arrangements to get a vehicle, and as far as Maria knows, she hasn't done anything yet. Last I heard, she was planning to move out on the 14th, and then she's on her own....

I was so pooped when I finally got to the apartment, I didn't really unpack much yet. I remember going to bed, and my head hitting the pillow, and that's it.

9/3/99 =====

Journal Entry

It's Friday morning. A long weekend ahead. I don't know what that means to me right now, but I think I'm looking forward to it.

These last 2 days have been jam-packed. I can only take so much of that. I didn't even have a chance to eat dinner until nearly 11:30 last night. Just to give a synopsis...up yesterday at 3:13am, drop Steph off at work, electrolysis from 5-7, work from 7:30-4:30, electrolysis again from 5-8:30pm, picked up Matt from tkd and drove him home, from there drove down to the restaurant to get Steph (probably 30 miles...), had to wait for her to finish, finally got home just after 11. In bed at midnight. And it started all over again this morning....I'm all puffy now, as they did my upper lip again, so I don't want to be seen by anyone. Just below the lip is tomorrow, which should puff that up, so at least I'll have a matching pair of puffy lips....

My weekend plans with Matt are pretty much in the air. Steph is house sitting over the weekend, so she won't be around. Matt may be sleeping over at a friends place tonight, so I may not have to pick him up, either. He says he has a drum lesson tomorrow afternoon. One of his friends is in a play, so they want to go and see that tomorrow night. If that's true, I may take that opportunity to go over to my house for a little while and get some things....

So as of now, I think I'm free until Sunday morning. I do have 6 hours of electrolysis on Saturday, but I'm very motivated to get this face cleared by 10/4, so I'll just deal with that.

I think I'll take a nap this evening. And study for my Microsoft exam. And pay some bills.....There are several movies that I want to see, so I'm going to try to fit one in, as well. I may call Ysenia (the MA at the doctor's office) to see if she wants to get out and go, but we'll see...)

9/5/99 =====

Journal Entry

My day yesterday was tough. I was at electrolysis from 5am until 3pm. Ten hours. My entire chin is cleared now. And red and swollen and sore. But that will pass. I took my last pain pill left over from surgery, which helped to take the nip off of it, but it's still tough.

I actually got 8 hrs. of sleep last night! And no plans for this morning. I'm supposed to pick up Matt at 11:30, so I have some time to clean and pay bills and unpack from my trip. I got a call from Amanda asking if I would consider becoming roommates, but the main sticking point is the fact that she has cats, and I'm allergic.

Friday evening I was working late and one of the girls (Tracy) stopped by to see if I had plans for dinner. I didn't, so we went out. The host at the restaurant said "Good evening, ladies.", even though I was coming straight from work, and that was supposed to be "Dave" mode. It just doesn't work anymore.

Tracy and I started chatting, and she explained that she was gay and lived with another gal, and that her family had disowned her when she told them. We had a very nice time, and exchanged phone numbers. She is a contractor, and is leaving to begin another contract, but we'll stay in touch.

9/6/99 =====

(Note: This was to be the last time I would see Matt for almost 6 months.)

It was a restless night for some reason. But at least I'm not tired. These last couple of days are just what the doctor ordered right now....

My hopes for a day with Matt yesterday were blown to pieces, thanks to my loving wife. I was supposed to pick him up at 11:30 so we could go out to breakfast and spend the day together. Elisabeth called at 11 and said he was still sleeping, so I decided to get out and do a shopping and wait for his call. Well, he called at 11:45, and asked what time he could be back home, as he had made plans to play with one of his friends later in the day. I told him I was not going to be his taxi service, and that if he wanted to do that I would do my thing, as I had plenty to do for the day, and he could stay home and play. It was up to him, but he had to make up his mind. He said that since this was the last 2 days of his vacation, he thought he wanted to stay home and play, so that was that.....

I was a little hurt by that, but I kinda knew what was going on in the background. I did a bunch of my chores, and at 3 he called back saying none of his friends could play and mom was taking a nap and could I please come and get him. So I did. I told him that I had made plans to go and see a movie in the evening ("The Sixth Sense"), and he could come if he wanted as I have free passes. He said that Elisabeth had suggested he stay home and play with his friends....She is planting all kinds of things in his little head. What happens if any of your friends see you out with "that"? Won't you be embarrassed? How would you explain it? I knew this would happen....

We had dinner, and were getting ready to go to the movies, when he decided he really didn't want to go to the movies. So I took him home, and went by myself.

I told him that I wasn't going to make plans with him for today. If he wanted to be with me, he could call and we'd see what we could work out. But I have all kinds of errands to run and Labor Day Sales to go to and studying to do for my exam tomorrow, and I wasn't going to count on hearing from him.

Speaking of errands, I better get trucking. I have a bunch more to do this morning, and I still haven't taken a shower. I stopped by the grocery store a little earlier and they asked "Would you like help with this out to your car, ma'am?" I told them I could manage....

9/9/99 =====

Journal Entry

Lots continues to happen, and I'm not sure where to begin....

I have been calling home every day this week. Not to talk with Elisabeth so much as to talk to Matt. He started school on Tuesday and I want to know how he's doing. How things are going. She has the ringers turned off on all the phones. I leave messages to have Matt call me. I send him emails. I haven't heard a thing. Last night, Elisabeth sent a snotty message saying that until I decide to come home as Dave they don't want to talk to me. I responded by telling her that I have rights as a parent, and I will have the courts enforce those rights if we can't come to a compromise. I called my attorney yesterday.....

I called one of my credit cards to see what's involved in getting the name changed. The lady I spoke with said she needs to send me a form and I need to sign it and send it back and include a copy of the court order. She said I'd probably have the form in 7 days. I asked her if she could just fax it to me, but they can't so I'll just have to take the slow route.

I took Steph to the clinic this morning at 6:30. She's having some surgical hair replacement done, which is basically taking strips of her hair from the back of her head and moving them to the top. I've heard it is

pretty painful, but then again, we're well accustomed to pain at this point. She'll need the weekend to recuperate.

Maria was supposed to go and pick up Steph at 11. Just before 11 she called and said she was on the highway, and had hit a piece of debris, and it had blown out her tire, and she had a car full of kids, so she called 911. I told her there was no way I could leave just then, and the police ended up coming pretty quickly and putting on her spare for her, so she was off again before too long.

By the time I got done with electrolysis last night at 9, and got Steph, we didn't get home until after 10. She brought a pizza from the restaurant, and I hadn't eaten anything but a yogurt (lunch) and a banana (breakfast), so I was pretty hungry. It was delicious....

There's one guy at work who is having a real tough time with this. We used to talk quite a bit. Now, I can walk past him in the aisleway, and say hi, and he'll just walk past looking straight ahead. He showed up with his wife at the restaurant Friday evening while I was there with Tracy, and he stopped briefly to say hi to Tracy, and it was as if she were the only one at the table. Not that I care. It's just interesting to see....

I talked with Cassie last night and she asked if I was wearing a sports bra to work to keep the boobs down. I told her that I was wearing regular, C-Cup bras. She was amazed that I would wear boy's clothes, and not attempt to hide Ben and Jerry (my pet name for our boobs). I am far too proud of them to hide them, and at this point, what's the point in hiding anything anyways?

There's more happening right now, but I just can't think of it all. Work continues to be a pressure-cooker, but I am feeling a little relief to day. I don't know if it's real or perception. I guess I don't really care. I'm feeling a little better, and that's a good thing.

**9/10/99 =====
Journal Entry**

No word back from Elisabeth on my note to her yesterday. I think the next words I see from her will be from her attorney. She has ridden this out in hopes that I would come back, but now the reality of working full time and taking care of Matt and trying to take care of the house and me changing my name and my paycheck not being deposited into our account anymore....it has all got to be difficult for her to handle. I WANT to help with as much of that as I can, but she doesn't want my help, so there's not much I can do.

**9/11/99 =====
Journal Entry**

I was at electrolysis yesterday afternoon and got a call from Elisabeth. I had sent several emails to Matt, and had called several times, and have not gotten a reply all week. I sent her a nastygram telling her that I resented her trying to come between Matt and I. She called to say that it was not her that was the reason for not calling. She supposedly passed along all my messages. She said that Matt didn't want anything to do with "this", and had chosen by himself not to return the calls. She went on to say that he cannot and will not see or deal with me as Donna, and that when she asked him about who he wanted to be with in case anything happened to her, he picked her brother first, her parents second, and me third. She tried to put him on the phone to tell me himself, but he didn't want to talk. She was very upset about me taking some of my paycheck and giving her "whatever was left over" (her words). I didn't feel like arguing about it, and told her so, and that was that.

I'm really tired, and think I'm going to go to the apartment for a nap before heading up to my house. My day tomorrow consists of electrolysis (from 9-12), watching NFL football, and putzing around the apartment. No early electrolysis. Thank God for small favors....

* * * * *

The “rules” for name changes, and for changing the gender “marker” on your driver’s license, vary from state to state. Often, the second of these two tasks is the far more difficult one....sometimes requiring the intervention of an attorney.

In preparation for this, I obtained a letter letters of support.

From my physician (addressed specifically to the DMV):

February 17, 1999

RE: DAVID ROSEN aka DONNA ROSEN

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Donna Rosen has been treated for transgender through our office and has been receiving appropriate counseling and hormonal therapy and is at this time deemed irreversible in her gender reassignment.

At this time we are requesting that her gender be switched on all appropriate documents including Social Security and driver's license.

Thank you very much for your kind assistance.

**

From my psychologist:

February 14, 1999

To Whom It May Concern:

David Rosen aka Donna Rose, DOB 02/22/59, is in treatment with me for Gender Identity Disorder (302.85). The patient is undergoing standard medical treatment for the condition.

As part of treatment, the patient is required to present and live at all times in the female gender role. Treatment has progressed to the point that changes are now irreversible, and it is appropriate for her legal documents to reflect the new status.

**

In Phoenix, there is a special court just for name changes. A large group of us were scheduled to appear before the judge, one at a time, for our name change. I had made arrangements to go and get my hair done in preparation for this big event.

I was a little nervous over this. But once things got started, I realized that it was not a big deal. When I heard that the person in front of me was legally changing her name to “Lady Midnight Sunshine”, I knew I had nothing to be nervous about! It was all over in a little less than an hour.

I had a certified copy of the court order made, as this is the document that I would need to send to have my name changed on all my legal records...credit cards, school transcripts, frequent flyer accounts...Wherever the old name was used, it had to be changed.

Once that was done, I went directly across the street to the DMV. Once the driver's license is changed, everything else becomes easy. I gave all my paperwork to the clerk, who had to go into the back to ask a question, but there were no hitches, and all the documentation was changed. I got my picture taken, and received my new driver's license right then and there! I was absolutely thrilled to death!

**9/13/99 =====
Journal Entry: Name Change Day!!**

I have absolutely no idea where to start talking about the day. It seems almost surreal. I got home before noon and got ready, and went to see my hair guy for a quick style before heading out for all the excitement.

Mondays are name-change days. There were about 20 of us there. It all happened so fast, that before you knew it, the judge had issued the order and the name was changed.

My middle name is Gail. Mom likes it....Donna Gail Rosen.

Afterwards, we had to go down and pay another \$18 for a certified copy, and then it was off to the motor vehicle bureau. It's usually pretty busy there, but I was in and out in 20 minutes. No problem at all. The pic is ok, and the gender is "F", so I'm more than happy. I haven't been able to stop looking at it all night! Then it was off to the bank to change the name. Then off to Costco. Then to the mall to use my Victoria's Secret coupons. Then off to Outback for a celebration dinner. All in all, a very full day. Tomorrow I'll go to the Social Security Admin., and will file the necessary paperwork at work.

Brian is a real trip. Ever since he saw me yesterday has gone out of his way to call me Donna. He stopped in my cube with a big "Hi Donna" this morning.

Things on the home front are same same. No word.

All in all, a big day. Or should I say, another big day. They all seem to be pretty big these days....

* * * * *

The next few weeks were spent calling every place that I could think where the old name needed to be changed. All my credit cards. My school transcripts. My frequent flyer accounts. IRA's. And it all went very well. Most required me to send or fax a copy of the court order, but there were no difficulties.

I did learn that the United States government would change the name on both my Social Security card and my passport, but they would not change the gender until after the gender reassignment surgery. Although I know people who have been an exception to this rule, I did not have a problem with that.

9/14/99 =====
Journal Entry

I had to wait for 90 minutes at Social Security today. I was forewarned that they have a fairly strict policy whereby they will change the name, but they will not change the gender until you actually have the surgery. That was true in my case.

I got a phone call from Elisabeth this afternoon. She is angry, and started in on me again. She wanted to know if the Dave that she thought she knew, and the dad that Matt thought he had, would ever come home. I told her no. This person is different in many, many of ways. But that's not acceptable to her in any way, shape or form. She wants our old life back, and I can't believe she can't see that it's already gone forever. I told her I did not want to discuss this here at work. She knows I can't reply here and kept pushing and pushing. I ended up hanging up on her. It hurts me more than I can say to know the pain I have caused her. And Matt. And although I can sometimes move that out of the front of my brain because of the joy I am finding in things I have dreamt about for my entire life, the realization that she can find no joy tends to jolt me back to my reality.

9/15/99 =====
Journal Entry

The guy-mode thing is definitely getting old. At the same time, the Donna thing is getting more and more comfortable. I'm very happy with how it's working out....

Something is up with Steph. She has been very quiet and withdrawn all week. Especially these last couple of days. I think it has something to do with work, where she got a "reprimand" a couple of weeks ago. I figure she knows that I'm there if she needs to talk. Otherwise, I won't bother her or badger to find out what's up. She sent an email this morning apologizing for her mood as of late, and I told her not to worry about it. There are lots of things we go through that we need to work out for ourselves, in our own minds, but it's important to know that we have support when we need it.

I spent the afternoon over at the main building meeting the with people who I did the consulting stuff for last year. I had to stop over there to turn in my name change stuff, and ended up making a social call that ended up lasting a couple of hours. They are very good about this whole thing....I enjoyed the visit.

I don't know what is up with Matt. He knows my phone numbers. I made sure before this all began that he knew them. He knows how to reach me. Even if it's when Elisabeth is still in bed. I'm sure she had used fear to manipulate him somehow, but right now I don't want to push back too hard. I send him emails to say I love him. Otherwise, I'll let things sit for now....

I didn't have electrolysis this morning for a change. I slept in until after 6:30! But I'm still tired now. I went out with Tracy for a big lunch. Maybe that has something to do with it. Oh well....

9/16/99 =====
Journal Entry

The day has been an interesting one. Again.

As I mentioned, something is up with Steph. From the time she picked me up at electrolysis last night at 9, to the time I dropped her off on my way TO electrolysis at 5 this morning, she said maybe 30 words. All through driving home, and eating dinner, and getting ready for bed and all morning....At one point I got

to think that maybe I had said or done something to upset her, but I have gone out of my way to avoid doing that, and Maria confirmed that it has something to do with work. She's supposed to move into her new place on Saturday, and frankly, a few days by myself will not be a bad thing.

She sent another email appologizing for her moodiness. I responded to the one yesterday. I didn't respond to this one.

I took my next Microsoft MCSE exam at noontime. It was tough. But I passed. One more to go. My last class is on Sunday. It's hard to believe I've been going to those things pretty much nonstop since the end of January.

I made a bunch of phone calls for the name change. My Victoria's Secret charge. A visa. The phone company. The power company. I still have more to go. What a pain.

I've had a headache this afternoon. I dunno why. I even had breakfast this morning. Maybe its fatigue. When I get extra tired now, or stressed, or a headache, there are two nerves that go from the forehead to the back of the head, and I can feel it get all tight there. From the surgery. It's hard to explain.

I talked with Kevin over this past weekend. He hasn't been unfriendly to me or anything, but he was always saying how we should get together for dinner or happy hour blah blah blah, but when I bring it up, he always finds a reason to extend it into the future. I called him on Sunday, and he wasn't doing anything, but he said maybe on Thursday. Today is Thursday. I sent an email to Karen saying I felt that Kevin was uncomfortable with me, as he still hasn't come over by himself, and I doubted I would hear from him. He did end up calling (I think Karen told him about the email), but had another reason why we couldn't get together. Whatever.

**9/17/99 =====
Journal Entry**

Another weekend on the horizon. I remember a time while I was still at home when I almost feared weekends. It was too much of an opportunity for confrontation. Now I actually kinda look forward to them. Although my weekends seem to be just as busy as my weeks are.

I was supposed to meet Kevin last night for happy hour. He cancelled on me. Again. I can tell that he is uneasy about meeting with me without Karen there, and sent an email to Karen telling her that. She confirmed that it was true, and said he just needed some time (which I am more than happy to give). He called again today, and we're scheduled to meet tonight at 6:30. I won't have an opportunity to get into full "Donna-mode" as Brian puts it, as I have electrolysis from 3-6, but I'll do the best I can.

Maria called and invited me to dinner last night at the restaurant. It was nice. I wore a denim dress that my mom gave me, and it was the first time Maria had seen me in anything like that. She was oohing and aahing all evening, and I'm sure she'll talk about it during our session this afternoon. Steph continues to be a pisspot, and I think she moves out tomorrow. Her sourness has made it uncomfortable to even be around her lately....

I'm half expecting Elisabeth to call and leave a message like she did last week telling me that she and Matt will not be home on Saturday afternoon and I can stop by to do some "chores". My Saturday is already pretty packed, and I won't have time to do that. Maybe on Sunday. But the fact that I'm not there at all, and can't make time in my schedule to go there and work when she wants me to, will not go over real big. Oh well. I may not even hear from her, which I suppose is just as well.

**9/18/99 =====
Journal Entry**

As usual, my day has been an interesting one. I got to bed at a reasonable time last night (10:30) and actually got a regular night's rest. Maria was lending her car to Steph so she could use it today to move stuff to her apartment, so I didn't need to go and pick her up.

I have two sessions of electrolysis today. Actually, I'm there now. Maria scheduled an "emergency" patient for a half hour in the middle of my marathon, so I'm typing away on her computer.

I was here originally from 7-9. I had an appointment to go and get a shot at 9:30, and threw on some makeup before heading over there. I get a lot of attention there when I go now. Everyone is very happy for me. They've seen Dave come and go for over 2 years, and to see how things have progressed in that time is pretty amazing. Both physically and mentally. So everyone wants to stop into the room and chat and see how things are going. I was there chatting today for almost 45 minutes! The doctor said something to the effect that Sheila (my pshch) must be very proud of me, and I asked him why he said that. He said because I was one a tremendous success story. I told him that I thought things were going pretty well right now, but this story hasn't even really started yet, so whether it was a "success" story or not is still a question, in my book.

After I was done there, I had 90 minutes to kill before my next appointment with Maria. I called Amanda to see if she wanted to meet for a cup of coffee, and she was starving, so we arranged to meet for breakfast. On the way there, I got a call from one of the guys in my Sunday class, who had a copy of the software that I need to study for my final exam, and he said we could meet and he could get it to me. So we arranged to meet near Marias. Now you have to picture this. I am wearing a blouse, a denim 3/4 length skirt, sandals, am wearing a faceful of makeup, and I was wondering whether I should warn him or not. I decide not.

So I met with Amanda, and we had a quick breakfast. The restaurant was packed, and the only thing I felt uncomfortable about was the patch of whiskers under my chin. But I dealt with it. And no one seemed to notice.

And then it was off to meet up with Mark. The first words out of his mouth were "Wow". Brian had mentioned something to the class about the fact that I was going through a "sex-change" during one of the classes where I wasn't there. So I didn't really have to explain it. But we sat and chatted for 15 minutes (mostly about class stuff) before I had to go. I didn't feel uncomfortable in the least, and not very long ago I would never even have made arrangements to meet him, and he didn't behave as though it were all that awkward, so I was happy.

Maria asked me to stop and pick up some lunch on my way back here, so I did. That restaurant was packed, too....

All in all, I think back to the things that have happened today. I feel I have progressed so far lately. I remember a time (even when I was there a few weeks ago) when the thought of going into a busy restaurant alone would have nearly paralyzed me. When the thought of meeting someone who didn't know about this in full "Donna-mode" would have been out of the question. When the prospect of sitting in the doctor's waiting room with a dozen other people would have scared me to death. And all those things are just part of everyday life....things that most people do and take for granted. And to see my progress in just being able to do simple things gives me hope. And courage. And strength. You'd be proud of me....

Kevin called. He still wants to meet when I am done here at 6. Fine by me. It'll be the first time he has seen this version of Donna. The last time he saw me as anything other than "Dave" was a very bad day....the day I was unable to go shopping by myself. I hope he's ready for this....I figure that after a couple of drinks, he should be fine. If we're going to be friends, he has to get comfortable with it sooner or later....

9/19/99 =====

Journal Entry

Kevin ended up dissing me again last night. Which is fine. I planned to cancel him if we talked. After 8 hrs. of electrolysis, I didn't feel so hot, and just wanted to go home, have something to eat, and relax. Steph decided to spend the night here, as her new apartment doesn't have a mattress in it yet, so I picked her up, we grabbed some Chinese, and ate ourselves into a stupor.

To be honest, Confusion is a constant companion. Am I doing the right thing? Is this really the path for my life? Am I succumbing to a temptation of some kind? What about my life 10 years from now? Will I have friends? Will I be loved by anyone except my family? Questions. All valid ones. But in the end, there is no one to answer them. You have to go by your feelings. You have to go by your own instincts. If you know them to be true, than those first tentative steps along this path become more determined and more deliberate. To the point where it becomes a comfortable jog...

The way I'm generally accepted surprises me. It is one thing to feel like a female, or look like one. But to be accepted as one is another story. It is true. I have dreamed about that for most of my life. And the fact that it is happening continues to be surreal sometimes. It continues to surprise me. It continues to make me happy. And I hope that feeling of being thrilled with who I am in the world never goes away.

Elisabeth called last night and we actually talked TO each OTHER rather than AT each other. She got a utility bill in the mail that had Donna on it, and she was PISSED. But I have to get ready for class, so this story will have to wait until later...

9/20/99 =====

Journal Entry

I'm soooo tired today. I could just lay my head down on my desk and snooze. ZZZZZzzzzzzz.....

We had some wild storms come blowing through here yesterday afternoon. It knocked a small tree outside my apartment completely over and against the bathroom window! Sheesh. A little south of here, it took the roof off of stores and homes and knocked over an 18-wheeler....

I finally arranged to hook up with Kevin. Anytime I am outside of work these days I am in full "Donna" mode, and I actually think I looked pretty good last night. We had lasagna and watched the Bills game and chatted. It was very nice. Karen eventually stopped by, as she has not seen this latest version of Donna, and she was very complimentary....

I didn't stay late, as I knew I had to get up early for electrolysis this morning. Steph had called from her apartment early in the evening, and I asked her if she needed anything, or if she wanted me to pick her up and take her back to my place, or anything, and she said no. She's the type of person who says "no" when they mean "yes", but that stuff won't fly with me. If she needs something she needs to speak up. She wrote me an email this morning saying that she didn't have any dinner and she had a tough night....but frankly I don't have much sympathy.

My brother-in-law and I have been exchanging emails throughout the day. Nothing earth shattering. He knows that Elisabeth and I are having trouble, but he doesn't know the specifics. Yet.

* * * * *

In my previous email, I mention that I had started emailing with my brother-in-law.

I loved my in-laws. All of them. I felt as though they were a second family, and sometimes actually closer than my “real” family. My mother and father in-law were my God parents, and I truly truly loved them, and know without hesitation that they felt the same way about me. They treated me as a son, and I could not have asked to be connected with better people.

The same is true of my brother-in-law. Hi is Elisabeth’s older brother, and was actually a couple of years older than we were. But he and I “connected”. We both felt it early on, and our bond grew tighter over the years. In some ways, we even looked alike, and were mistaken for brothers on several occasions. It was my brother-in-law, and not my own brother, who was the best man at my wedding.

On the 19th of September Elisabeth told her brother that I had moved out. She told him that I was dealing with some serious issues that threatened our marriage. She did not give him specifics, and I felt that she would do that when she felt appropriate. He and I exchanged a few fairly explosive emails the next day. Despite the fact that we did not speak in specifics, we philosophized about concepts that very much applied to what was really going on.

9/20/99 =====
Responding to an email from my brother-in-law.

You talk about getting things to the way they were. Things will never be the same. Things will never be “the way it was”. To go through what we’ve all gone through, and think everyone will just settle back to things that caused this in the first place would be foolish. It has changed us all. But different doesn’t have to mean worse. It can mean better. In some cases, different t is just different. Unfortunately, people are afraid of change. Some people cannot accept change. Even when it’s good for them. People get into the rut that is middle age and coast until they die.

As for acceptance from you, of anyone else for that matter....that is not my ultimate goal. My life will continue with or without it. My ultimate goal is acceptance within myself. If others can accept that.....I’m happy. If not, then in my mind it is more a reflection on them than it is on me. If you do end up “writing me off”, then in my mind you become as big a hypocrite as I feel most people are. Full of rosy words and wonderful concepts about being yourself and spirituality and freedom. But when push comes to shove, the true colors come out, and it becomes “conform or else....”. “Be what I want you to be”. And the realization will be right there...plain as day...that instead of being a Neil Young, you’re a Backstreet Boy.

I don’t know how all this will shake out. I love Elisabeth. I love Matt. Those remain constants in my life. I miss you. I miss your folks. I miss the life that Elisabeth and I had. But I don’t know which is a worse fate....To hold on to your comfortable life with our fingernails and hate the person you are, or to be comfortable in yourself and risk losing everything you know and love. Or to die. Some choice....

I am not fighting this thing. That’s the problem, in Elisabeth’s eyes. As I mentioned in one of our previous philosophical chats, there comes a time when you just don’t fight things anymore. You accept them. And deal with them. That’s what I’m doing. I have rejected fear and denial and anger in search of truth. It’s a very spiritually uplifting experience. And in the end, there will be resolution. I don’t know when that will

be. Or what that will be. Or who will be with me at the end (except God). That part is for others to decide for themselves.

I gotta get back to work. I tend to dislike email, because things that are meant in a quiet tone can come across as angry. I hope this note does not come across that way. I think about you often as well, and you are all in my prayers.

Note: This exchange was the last time we would speak.

9/21/99 =====

Hi Michelle:

Did I tell you about the bill from the power company (APS)? I can't remember if I did or not. I called them to change my name on Friday. I have two accounts with them. One for my house, and one for my apartment. The lady changed my name on both accounts. I told her I DID NOT want my name on my house account at all, as my wife would be very cranky to get a bill for Elisabeth and Donna Rosen. She eventually said she took my name off the house account, and I was satisfied. Well, Elisabeth called on Saturday night, and she was PISSED! She had gotten a bill from APS, and it was made out to Elisabeth and Donna! Oy. We ended up talking for a while, which was actually a good thing.

Donna

9/22/99 =====

Journal Entry

It's almost funny....

I got a call from Matt a little while ago. He was all frantic because somehow the password got changed/erased from the internet account, and he couldn't dial in to play his games online. There was no hint of the fact that we haven't spoken for two weeks....He told me he's been so so busy with homework and everything. It was nice to hear from him. I solved his problem.

I haven't really accomplished much at work today. I'm studying for my last exam....I have to take the exam for my class (tomorrow at 5), and then cram like crazy for the Microsoft version. I hope to be ready to give it a shot next week.

I called my Apartment complex to inquire about my options. My lease runs out on 10/31. When I first signed the lease, I met with a gal named Gina, and it was her first day of work there. She's a cutie, and she kinda even flirted with me (she liked the picture of Dave on my ID badge...). I talked with her today. I can extend the least for 6 months, or 12 months. I get \$100 off the first month if I sign. I can upgrade to a 2 bedroom, which is 200 more square feet, for \$100 more a month. I'm considering that. Part of it depends on where the unit is. I told her I'll call her in the next few days to set up a time for her to show me the 2-bedroom unit. Is she going to be in for a surprise....

I slept wonderfully last night. I fell asleep on the couch during the football game, and ended up dragging myself to bed some time around 11. No electrolysis this morning (I have the day off), so I think I got a full 8 hours of sleep out of the deal! Wow. I needed it.

I think I'm gonna go back to Rochester over Thanksgiving. I don't think I have much/any vacation left, but I'll take unpaid time off if I have to. I really don't want to be stuck here alone during T-day. It is my most

favorite of holidays, and has the most memories of family and togetherness of all of them for me. Plus, it will be the first one without my dad, and I have a feeling that will hit me.

**9/23/99 =====
Journal Entry**

I have a meeting with HR tomorrow. I'm not sure what to expect. I'm planning to discuss how this will actually be implemented come 10/4. As Maria says, I won't "get my panties all in a bunch" about it. They have been good so far, so I'm not expecting major problems right now. We'll see.

People have been writing/calling asking if I am nervous about 10/4. It is so close. Funny thing is, I have been closer before. When I pulled the plug last time, it was the Tuesday before. Things are so different this time around...When I think about 10/4, I don't really think about what it will be like. I think more of the things I have to do to get ready. I have to finish electrolysis. I have to seriously expand my wardrobe for work. I am going to have my hair done next Saturday. I don't really have time to dwell on it. But I'm sure I'll think about it as it gets closer....

I like to minimize things by saying that the hard part is over. Showing up the Monday after everyone was told, and having all the changes out there for everyone to see, was a major hurdle. And in one breath, I figure that showing up here as Donna on 10/4 will be anticlimactic after that. Almost a yawner. But in another (and more realistic), I think that (just like divorce) knowing about it is one thing, and actually seeing it is another. For me to show up here in woman's clothes and a new name and a faceful of makeup will be a major thing. People who may have gotten fairly "comfortable" to the idea of Dave/Donna will now have to get comfortable again. It will be that Monday all over again. No matter how hard I try, there's really no way around that. I survived it the first time, and will do so again....

The night I told Brian about this....way back in February...he asked what he could do to help. I told him the best thing he could do was to keep me from getting blindsided. I didn't want something to happen from out of the blue that I was totally unprepared for. And for a long time, I felt that he would protect me from that. Not any more. We have distanced ourselves from each other to the point where he is hardly even a friend anymore.....

I don't have anything planned for tonight. It's wonderful. I need to do a little shopping, and want to look at entertainment units for my tv and my stereo, but plan to be home by the time Friends comes on. I have some left over Chinese to eat, and am actually looking forward to that. My tummy has been unhappy for these last couple of days. Once all is done, though, I'll be in bed early.

I got my new Bank Card in the mail yesterday. It says Donna Rose on it. I haven't gotten any credit cards yet, but I go running home at the end of the day (however late that may be) to check my mail. It reminds me of when I was a kid and was expecting something in the mail, and I couldn't wait to get home from school to see. I remember one time when I got the addresses for all the NFL football teams. I wrote to letters to every one of them. I rushed home everyday to see if they sent me anything. And I did get lots of good stuff. Photos. Stickers. Media Guides. It's almost like being a kid again....

**9/24/99 =====
Journal Entry**

I had my meeting with HR this morning. It seemed to go well. Everything is set. She is putting together an email to send out to the group reminding them of what is happening and what is expected come 10/4. She is going to send it to me to review before sending it out at the end of next week. That's fine with me. She asked how things were going, and said that things seemed to be going well in the group. She said

she did have a couple of people who had stopped to see her about this, but it was more to ask questions than to complain or having anything to do with me in particular.

I am starting to rethink my job here. I have been told that people in my position are expected to take a more active role as "project leaders" and managers. I don't want to be a project leader. Especially not right now. I don't enjoy it. I don't like it. I don't want to do it. I'll try to let some time go by before addressing this head on, but it will become an issue. One of the reasons that I enjoyed being a consultant was because I was always above that in that role. I'll give it some time and see what happens...

9/25/99 =====

Journal Entry

Maria invited a bunch of people over to the restaurant for cake for her husband's birthday. She insisted I come. I met her mom and dad and cousins, and her sister was there too. I didn't stay too long, as it had been a long day.

I stopped at work on my way home. It was after 11. I decided to check my email, and there was a letter from Brian. In it he reiterated some things we discussed in a brief meeting earlier in the day, and I did not like the way it came across. There was another from him which changed some of the things we had chatted about. I was really angry. I wrote an email that was not particularly nasty, but was very to the point. I accused the top management of this group (him) for the low morale around here because noone knows what is expected of them. The rules keep changing. Nothing can every be accomplished, as we have allowed ourselves into a situation where everything is always in frenzy. I told him that it required commitment and direction from the top in order to achieve that, and we did not have that. I said that it was obvious from these past few weeks, and especially the email, that his interpretation of my role and mine are totally different, and that if I cannot fulfill what is required (in his mind) from a consulting analyst in this group, then changes will be made. I said that as I wrote it, I felt like Jerry McGuire, who wrote a document containing the feelings of everyone in his organization, but that noone had the courage to say it or stand up for it. He was fired two days later.

I sent copies to the other managers. I want them to know what Brian said, and to see my reply. As I said, my days here may be numbered....I will not allow them to treat me like some chump right out of college. If they expect me to sneak off and hide because of my situation, they are sadly sadly mistaken. And if it is their intent to drive me out of here, then I will not go quietly.

9/26/99 =====

Responding to an email from Michelle

Hi Michelle:

>> *I'm really concerned about your status at work.*

Me too.

>> *don't you think that maybe you might want to wait a few more months and
>> get into your transition before you really start to rock the boat?*

Yes. I would very much like that. I have enough pressure on me right now that I don't need more added to the mix. But events right now don't let me do that. I can only bite my tongue so long before it starts to bleed. I have been accused of things that are absolutely wrong, and I will defend myself. And if it comes to a serious confrontation, then we can all go to HR and see what THEY have to say.

>> *I know that you haven't given sexual orientation too much attention in your letters to me,
 >> so I am really at a loss for what you think about the possibility of a lesbian
 >> relationship. Yes a LESBIAN relationship. Once you're Donna, that's the way it's going to
 >> be seen as. Or are you just not putting labels on any sexual urges?*

I am at a loss as to how to reply to this. I don't really think about sex all that much. I don't know if it's the hormones, or the feeling that my sex life is pretty much in limbo, or what. This may sound odd, but I haven't had sex in so long that I think the prospect of it happening frightens me a little bit. I don't know how I would react. I have not ruled out the possibility of "exploring" at some point. But I have serious questions as to who would be the partner? What interest would they have in me?

My lack of intimacy hurts me more right now than anything. I have been very alone for a long, long time. And I suppose like anything else, you get used to it. But the thought of needing and having someone and sharing intimacy is something that I try to avoid thinking about too much because it makes me feel very lonely and empty.

My day yesterday was pretty wild. I don't have the time here at work to go into all the details, so I'll give a Reader's Digest version. I got up early and did some cleaning. I couldn't get the thought of a stack of pancakes out of my head, so I called Steph to see if she wanted to have breakfast with me, and headed over there to get her. At noontime, I called Gina in the apartment office to show me a 2-bedroom apartment. I told her I would meet her at the model, and I warned her that the reason that I was apart from my wife would be obvious to her. When she realized who I was (which wasn't until I opened my mouth), she put her hands up over her mouth and let out a few "Oh my God's". We ended up going back to her office and chatting about it before I headed out.

I met one of the other gals for a day of clothes shopping. This gal is someone that I just met last week, but Maria has talked about her forever. She still lives with her wife, and now only goes in for electrolysis for an hour every 6 weeks. She is an older lady (50+), but a real sparkplug. We went to a consignment store that I have been wanting to visit, and she kept throwing clothes into the changing room as she found them. Prices were very reasonable, and I bought LOTS of stuff and paid a little over \$300. Next, she suggested we go over to the Thrift store. My mom suggested that as well as a good way to get started on a wardrobe without spending too much \$\$\$\$\$. Well, the clothes were great (I got a Liz Claiborn dress for less than \$3.00) and the prices were unbelievable, so I bought a ton. Most regular prices were only 3 or 4 or 5 dollars, and they mark everything down an extra 25% on Sundays, and clothes with a green or blue tag were an extra 50% off, so it was just wonderful. I increased my wardrobe 1000 fold.

9/27/99 =====
Journal Entry

I'm thrilled. My face is almost completely clear. The schedule over the rest of the week should take care of it:

Tomorrow: 5-7am electrolysis 7:30-5 work (MCSE exam at lunch), 6-7 nails, 7-9 electrolysis.

Wed: no electrolysis in am. Work 7-4. Electrolysis 4:30-9.

Thu: 5-7am electro., 7:30-5 work, 5:30 meet Tracy (my lesbian friend) for dins.

Friday: 6:30-3:30 work. 4-6 electro (if needed).

That's it. My poor face needs a few weeks of R&R to get over all of this. Thankfully they don't work on the same area on consecutive days, but the skin has still taken a beating. We're down to a 1 by 3 inch

patch under my chin. Plus the regrowth. Once this week is done, I'll do 6 hrs a week for a little while (2 visits), and then cut it down from there.

Although I don't think about next week all that much, I know it is affecting me. I can feel myself getting easily irritated and edgy. I always seem to be in motion. I'm gonna need a sedative by the time the weekend rolls around....

I got one of my Visa cards in the mail today. Finally. It's the first credit card with Donna's name on it. I need to be somewhat careful about the spending considering my situation both at work and with Elisabeth, but there are still things I need to buy before next week.

Speaking of Elisabeth, I called her on Saturday evening. She answered. Matt was having a friend sleep over. She read something to me that she had been saving, and we chatted for a while, but it deteriorated into name-calling again so I had to hang up. Matt is in his second year of drum lessons, and Elisabeth let him buy a used drum set. She asked him if he wanted to talk with me, but he didn't. Oh well.

Brian sent back a reply to my email from the other night. It was very cold and impersonal and businesslike. Anything we had as friends is gone. Just as well. He helped me through things last time around, and I supposed I'm indebted to him for that, but this time around he is nothing but a casual observer. Oh well. He is in DFW until Thursday. I also got a reply from my manager. His was a little more personal than Brian's, but not much. I want to get into this transition a couple or three months and then see what my options are. I hope I have that chance.

I sure don't need this right now....

**9/28/99 1:00 pm =====
Email from my HR rep to my manager, Brian
Subject: Mail Team Announcement**

Brian,

Would you be willing to send the following message out to the Mail team by the end of this week? I'd like to make sure that employees in your department are aware that Donna's name change will be effective very soon at work. Please call me if you have questions. Donna and Jim - Please send any comments or changes to Brian or me by Thursday morning so Brian can get this sent out Thursday afternoon or Friday.

Thanks - Liz

ITD Mail Team,

I wanted to give all of you an update regarding the next major step in David Rosen's transition. David has legally changed her name to Donna Rosen. Beginning next Monday, October 4th, Donna will take another step in her transition by presenting herself as a woman at work. You will soon see her name change effective in e-mail and voice mail as well. Don't forget to update any mailing lists you have at that time.

Thank you -

Brian

9/28/99 =====

Journal Entry

Things happen so fast lately, and time seems to run into itself, that I forget what I've told you about and what I haven't....

More electrolysis yesterday. From 5am-7 with Maria, and then from 7-9pm with Angie. The size of my "whisker area" is down to a 1 by 1 inch square under my chin. It will be gone tonight. After all this time. And it's not like I don't anticipate the regrowth. We have been doing that all along. But to finally have it all off, and to never ever have to shave again, is amazing.

I went to take my Microsoft exam at lunch. I felt unprepared, as my morning was busy and I didn't have a chance to do some studying. But I passed! I have now earned the certification. Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer. It's quite a relief...

I found a copy of my resume and will update it today.

9/30/99 =====

Journal Entry

Brian stopped by my office near the end of the day. He was on his way to the airport. Apparently he'll be out of town next week so he won't be here for my first day as Donna on Monday. He wished me "good luck". I asked him what I needed the luck for. He said he hopes everything goes smoothly for me, and I told him I did too. Then he left. Jerk.

10/1/99 =====

Journal Entry

I talked with Elisabeth last night. She called and was sobbing sobbing sobbing. I thought something happened with Matt or her folks or something. She told our neighbors, Sally and Ray, that I wasn't living there anymore. She didn't say exactly why. Sally called me today and we talked.

I've got more to write, but I took an Ambien to help get to sleep, and am getting pretty loopy right now. I have an appt. with the doctor tomorrow at 7, shopping at Macy's, nails at noon, shopping, and hair at 4:30.

10/2/99 =====

Journal Entry

I had a doctor's appointment for my shot at 7. I am officially full-time as Donna now, and of course it took me longer to get ready than expected and I was 15 minutes late. No probs, though, as I didn't get called in until after 8. Something that I have mentioned before happened again. The doctor saw I was there, and came in to chat with me for a while. He was so happy for me.

10/3/99 =====
email to Michelle the evening before my first day at work as Donna

Hi Michelle:

I won't keep you long tonight. I have alot to do, and want to get to bed fairly early. Not that I will sleep too too much, but I need my beauty rest now more than ever ;)

I spent most of the day out with Kathleen. First to breakfast, then shopping. We have a lot to talk about, and always seem to have fun together. She's considerably older than I am, but she's a spunky thing who loves talking and loves shopping and she did a great job keeping my mind from worrying today. Our last stop was at an outlet Mall called Arizona Mills. It is the mall that Julie took me to during my first time out back in February. At that point, I was scared to death. Today, I was confident and in control. I walk with my head up and a smile on my face. I am not the same person. The magnitude of the change in such a small period of time is really amazing.

I have had several calls to wish me luck tomorrow. My mom called. Maria called. Steph called. She is having a hard weekend. But frankly, I don't know if I would have brought her shopping with us even if she had wanted. I need to go into the week on an upbeat note, and seeing Steph be so sad and so upset would have gotten me upset. I needed to avoid that. Especially today.

I need to pick out something to wear. I need to shave my legs. There are still things left to do this evening. So I'll say thanks for all your support, and I'll let you know how the day goes....No matter how you look at it, it's gonna be a big day.

Luv,

Donna