file: Laub

The Ultimate Sexual Conflict

By Susan Berman

■ Transsexuals are born with their sex (physical characteristics) and gender (state of mind) in conflict. Since most attempts to make their minds fit their bodies through psychotherapy or drug therapy have failed, physicians are now making their bodies fit their minds.

The transsexual problem is a medical one, and the current solution is surgical. The sex change surgery is an arduous, dangerous and expensive journey pursued only by those who feel there is no other answer. These men and women who pray that one day they will wake up as members of the opposite sex, live tormented, fragmented, often suicidal lives.

They are shunned as different by both sexes; they feel isolated and lonely. Their parents are embarrassed, their spouses are angry and their children are confused. In the past, the medical profession ignored them.

But now that cruel pattern is shifting. In the last five years, over six hundred sex change operations have been performed on transsexuals in the nation, ninety of them at the Gender Dysphoria Clinic at Stanford University Medical Center. (Dysphoria means an emotional state characterized by anxiety, depression and restlessness.)

According to the program's director, psychiatrist-gynecologist Dr. Norman Fisk, a transsexual has had a lifelong belief that he or she is a member of the opposite sex, has exhibited imitative behavior from an early age manifested by cross dressing and has been on an incessant search for surgical relief to the problems.

Two Bay Area transsexuals, Scott and Lee, have felt they were men ever since they were very young. They never felt comfortable living as women, and seeing them, no one would suspect that both had lived most of their lives as women. They are now men.

Lee is burly with a heavy five o'clock shadow and wide sideburns. Scott is square built and sports a meticulously trimmed reddish beard. Lee taught his son to shave this morning and is complaining about the constant stream of teenage boys who come to his house to visit his daughters. Scott has to leave early to pick up his wife.

How did it feel to be women physically and men psychologically?

"Not women," Scott admonishes. "Female. We were men trapped in female bodies. I've known I was a boy since I was two years old. I couldn't understand why everyone related to me as a little girl," he said.

Their histories are similar.

As children they refused to wear dresses and were thought "unfeminine." In high school they excelled in sports, dressed in men's clothes and were not asked out by boys. Girls felt they were different and didn't want to be friends with them. They entered into disastrous marriages, hoping their husbands could help them "solve their problems." They bore children they felt they could not mother, had terrible sex lives and were depressed and suicidal more than once. Even when they dressed in women's clothes, they looked like men in women's clothing.

Scott says his mother thought he was "evil." His husband didn't understand and Scott thought his children would be better off if he were dead. Even his church offered him no solace. Lee wondered why he had been born at all.

But that misery is prologue now. Within the last few years, both men have had their sex reassigned by surgery. They are now married to women and have custody of the children they bore as women. Lee and his wife also have a child by artificial insemination.

There are problems when mother becomes father, but Lee and Scott report that their children have taken it very well.

"My daughter says, 'If people can't accept you for what you are, dad, they're the loser,'" Scott says. None of the children (two are now adults and have married) have expressed any confusion over their own sexuality and the men say they don't expect that they ever will.

"My daughters are happy being girls. Doctors keep looking for a hereditary pattern, but there doesn't seem to be one," Scott says.

There is nothing forced or contrived about Scott and Lee. They are comfortable and relaxed in their manhood. Far from being locked into macho stereotypes to prove their masculinity, both help their wives cook and take care of the house.

Neither man says the decision was an easy one, but there was no choice. It was the only path open to them.

"I was reborn the day I had surgery. It was like remodeling your house so at last you could live in it," Scott said.

Lee and Scott refused to be photographed. Even though they are open about their sex change, their teenagers were afraid of their schoolmates' reactions.

"My daughter was worried that someone in her class would clip out the photographs

(Scott has requested that no photograph be used.)

Scott:

"I was reborn the day I had surgery. It was like remodeling your house so at last you could live in it."

12 good reasons to vacation at Pine Mountain Lake.

One great one.

Pine Mountain Lake offers you all sorts of sports and outdoor activities, from archery to afternoon naps.

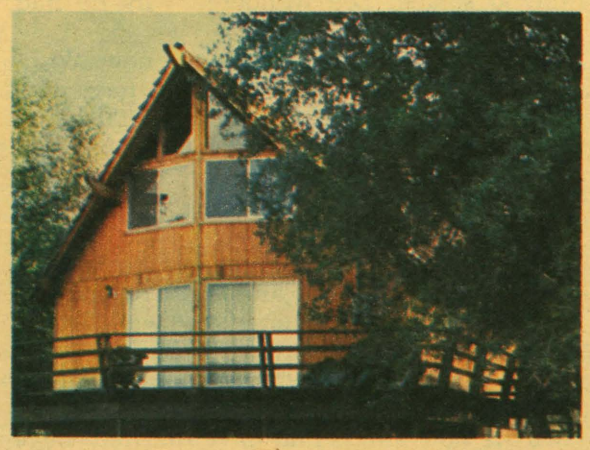
It offers you Yosemite just 26 miles up the road.

Most important, it offers you a comfortable vacation home of your own to stay in. You unpack just once, then settle into a spacious home with all the comforts of home.

You can spread out and relax, and that's what a good vacation is all about.

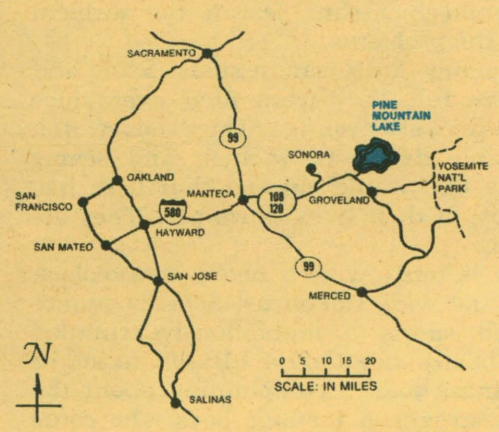
Pine Mountain Lake's just 126 miles away from the S.F./Oakland Bay Bridge, but it's a world away from the pressures you live with every day.

All it takes to rent a home there—for a weekend, a week, a month, a summer, whatever—is a call to (209) 962-7171 (agent).



Pine Mountain Lake.

Plan now to spend your 1974 vacation enjoying the activities and atmosphere of Pine Mountain Lake. It's near your home, yet far from the way you live at home.



(Lee has requested that no photograph be used.)

Paul Glines.

Paul Glines

Lee:

Lee is married to a woman and has custody of the children he bore as a woman.

Shannon O'Hara:

"When I was very small I used to want to wear girls' clothes all the time. My parents didn't know what to do with me."

Kate Marlowe:

She has an air of the grande dame Auntie Mame about her, an ability to laugh at herself and her situation.

and bring it to a current affairs class. Our family and close friends all know our history, but we just don't know if our children's friends would understand. It's not worth taking the chance, we love our kids too much," Scott said.

Now, some twenty-three years after an American named George Jorgensen had a sex change operation in Denmark and took the name Christine, San Francisco has become a center for transsexuals. An estimated two to five hundred transsexuals live in the Bay Area. (An accurate estimate is impossible, as many transsexuals marry and blend into anonymity, following sex change surgery.)

Besides the active medical program at Stanford, there is a Transsexual Counseling Center in The City run by Sergeant Elliott Blackstone of the San Francisco Police Department's Community Relations Unit and two halfway houses in the Bay Area to help transsexuals with pre- and post-operative problems.

Stanford gets many applicants who are not transsexuals, but transvestites or homosexuals. In order to screen out all but true transsexuals, the Stanford program puts applicants through an exhaustive psychological and physiological evaluation. Candidates for sex change receive twelve to eighteen months of hormone shots, cross dressing and psychological counseling before the irrevocable surgery is performed.

When the program first started in 1968, most operations were male to female. Now the ratio is even. All socio-economic classes and ethnic groups are represented.

The whole changeover costs from three to five thousand dollars, usually paid solely by the patient. It's an added strain, since most transsexuals have difficulty finding work and maintaining steady employment before the operation.

A female becoming male is given male hormones to lower her voice and increase facial and body hair. She also undergoes a hysterectomy and a masectomy, and has an artificial penis and testicles created by skin

continued

Don't settle for
a halfway menthol.

Come all the way
up to KOOL.
Pure menthol and
the taste of extra
coolness have
made KOOL America's
#1 selling
menthol.

KINGS LONGS

13 mg. tar,
1.0 mg. nicotine

Now, lowered tar KOOL Milds

Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

© BROWN & WILLIAMSON TOBACCO CORPORATION

Milds, 13 mg. "tar," 1.0 mg. nicotine; Kings, 16 mg. "tar," 1.3 mg. nicotine; Longs, 17 mg. "tar," 1.3 mg. nicotine, av. per cigarette, FTC Report Sept. '73

grafts.

A male becoming a female uses electrolysis to remove unwanted facial hair; he is given female hormones to raise his voice and give his body a soft line; his penis and testicles are removed and an artificial vagina created. He may also desire cosmetic surgery on his eyes, nose, ears and chin, and breast implants.

The surgically created man cannot have an erection, ejaculate or impregnate but he can function sexually satisfactorily with his partners. The surgically created woman cannot bear children.

But most post-operative transsexuals are so pleased that at last they can live in a role they feel they were born into, that they don't worry about the anatomical changes that cannot be made.

"Candidates receive 12 to 18 months of hormone shots, cross dressing and psychological counseling."

Shannon O'Hara is looking forward to that final sex change surgery with great anticipation. It is something she has been trying to obtain for most of her life (she is now thirty-three). When she was in junior high school she read about Christine Jorgensen's operation and decided she wanted one. Her mother was horrified and told her to forget it and adjust.

She has been cross dressing and taking hormone shots for a number of years. Her surgery is scheduled to be performed in a few months.

Shannon is a counselor in the Transsexual Counseling Center. Her walls are covered with pictures of "successful TSers," as she calls them.

She wears makeup and a short skirt. There's no question about it, her legs are good. In the days of sexist adjectives, she would have been described as vivacious and dainty. She laughs a lot and drums her long red fingernails on the desk as she talks.

Shannon spent her life as an anatomical man looking for acceptance as a female.

"When I was very small, I used to want to wear girls'clothes all the time. My parents didn't know what to do with me and wouldn't allow it. They were horrified," she said.

In grade school they called her a sissy. In high school and in college they called her a homosexual. But Shannon saw herself as a woman victimized by some accident of birth.

"When we played house, I was always the mother or a sister, never the father. I liked playing with dolls best of all, and I hated sports."

Her brother always told her she had a problem, but no one knew what it was. She didn't want to go out with girls, and when she dated with gay men they'd say, "You think like a woman. If I wanted a woman, I'd go out and get one."

Finally she moved to Los Angeles and started dressing and living as a woman. There she became active in transsexual counseling and found out about the Stanford program.

"I'm a woman now, except I have a disease known as male genitalia," she says with a light ringing laugh. Her father recently came to visit her and said she looks much better as a woman than she ever did as a man.

"He even got upset with my short skirts. Its all a little confusing to him, but he's taken it well," she said. Shannon doesn't know what direction her future will take after she has the surgery. She speaks wistfully of Maria, a post-operative transsexual who is getting married and moving to the suburbs.

"It's a hard life as a transsexual. Straights don't accept you for the most part because you're different. The gay culture is accepting to a certain point, but regards you as a little sick. Most transsexuals who marry don't tell their partners their history. Maria told her finance that she is infertile and can't have children. He'll never know.

"Maybe I'll get married, too. But I know I'll never stay home with an apron all day, that's just not me."

Besides her counseling work, she has opened a halfway house for transsexuals called Evolving Doors. It's run like a boarding school, with lessons in living in the role of the opposite sex. There are classes in grooming, cross dressing and role expectations of the opposite sex.

"One of the goals is to weed out people who really aren't transsexuals. One man insisted he was and then after three days of acting like a woman, said 'Yecch. This just isn't for me.' He rushed back to his home and family happy to be a man," Shannon said.

The Stanford program prefers to deal with younger transsexuals, but several years ago a matronly woman in her fifties asked for the operation. She had been living as a woman twenty years in the East Bay and had been well-known in her community, active in both church and charity organizations. She wanted the surgery so she could die a woman, and she got her wish.

Those that don't get approval for surgery at Stanford can go elsewhere. There are some private doctors who perform sex change operations. But unfortunately, many transsexuals rush for a desperate cure, quck cheap surgery in Casablanca or Tijuana, and wind up being victimized by quacks.

Kate Marlowe has been determined to get her surgery at Stanford for several years. She has lived as a woman for much of her life, and now that her surgery is scheduled she feels she will be complete.

As a man she was the flamboyant Kenneth Marlowe, author of the book *Mr. Madam* and a hairdresser to the stars. Now she works as a hairdresser on Union Street. In April she staged a benefit to raise money for the sex change operation.

"We were afraid most of the people in the shop would be scared off when they heard about my benefit, but that didn't happen. Everybody I know in San Francisco has been wonderful," Kate says.

She has an air of the grande dame Auntie Mame about her, an ability to laugh at herself and her situation.

She hostessed her benefit at California Hall with confidence and flair, joking about the forthcoming change to anyone who asked. (Her friend, Sally Rand, who performed her fan dance at the benefit, said, "If a girl wants to be a girl, she should be able to be a girl. Ken was always a girl as far as I was concerned.")

Kate refuses to be pigeonholed.

"I wear flats to work, I'm not going to wear spike heels. I'm going to be an anatomical woman soon, but I'll still be me."

Surgery may not be the final answer, but it's the best one now. To those who say it is immoral or unethical, Dr. Fisk replies, "I don't know how anyone can call a process that alleviates human suffering wrong."

Other solutions could be tried if medical science knew more about the causes of transsexualism. Researchers are now seeking its biological and psychological causes. Whatever the causes and new solutions, surgery now seems to be a workable alternative. According to Stanford's five-year followup study on patients who had the sex change operation, all made markedly positive adjustments in social, psychological and sexual areas. None have wanted to reverse their decision. □

City Album

What's more tempting to a child than a body of water, however small? Al Davis surprised this youngster one fine spring day in Golden Gate Park.