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Lonnie and Kate Barnes—a love story

Transsexual Bride

Kate Arrives Late For Nuptial Date

Special to The Bee

VACAVILLE — The bride was late for the wedding.

Thirty-five minutes past the appointed hour Wednesday, Katherine Anne Marlowe Bies stepped out of a powder blue Lincoln Continental that stopped at the gate of the California Medical Facility in Vacaville.

Immediately, photographers began taking her picture as she posed in her ivory-colored, floor-length gown.

Her laughter was deep and throaty. "I'm never late for anything except weddings and funerals," she said.

Before her operation four years ago, Kate lived as a woman in a man's body.

Wednesday, the 50-year-old Kate, who is believed to be the first transsexual to marry a prisoner in California — and possibly the nation — became

the bride of convicted murderer Robert Lonnie Barnes, 29.

Admittedly flabbergasted by the unusual arrangement, authorities at the Vacaville facility approved the marriage after completing a flurry of phone calls to the State Department of Corrections and Stanford Medical Center. It was at Stanford, in 1973, that Kate began the sex reorientation she says was a highlight of her life story.

State law allows any unmarried persons of 18 or over to get a marriage license, but the corrections department bans marriages between inmates and persons of the same sex.

Kate and Barnes believe it's quite natural for them to seek each other's company. They met in November 1975 while Kate was lecturing on "The Rites of Passage to Transsexualism" at San Quentin Prison before Barnes' transfer to Vacaville.

"I had never been in a prison

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Transsexual Weds

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before," Kate said. "Naturally, I was very nervous. Well, I stood up and started talking. Then 15 minutes into the lecture I realized something. They (prisoners) are there because they went against society. In a way, so did I."

Barnes, whose parole hearing is scheduled for October, says defiance is a characteristic they share. "I guess there's always a bond between two groups of people who have something in common."

It was not love at first sight. Barnes recalls he was surprised by Kate's appearance and husky voice, which she calls her only "dead giveaway." They corresponded for 18 months before Barnes proposed.

"The more I wrote him about me, the more he liked me," Kate said.

Asked why he chose to marry before receiving a parole date, Barnes said quickly, "Love and loneliness. I have met quite a few women before Kate. But who knows when love strikes?"

The fact that Kate is a transsexual has no impact on their romance. Barnes said he was attracted to her by her intelligence and not her anatomy.

He answered with a resounding "no" when asked if he is a homosexual, adding, "You kind of get used to homosexuals when you're in prison, though."

Kate's reason for tying the knot is more impassioned. "Lonnie's been in prison for nine years. He knew long, lonely, dark nights. So did I."

What about the age difference?

"We don't dwell on the age difference. Men my age are boring and set in their ways anyway. I don't want to slave in the kitchen while my husband sits and watches TV," Kate said.

Barnes' three sisters were bridesmaids at the wedding, and Kate said she gets along famously with her mother-in-law, a Sacramento resident.

Having known rejection all her life, Kate said she cherishes this type of acceptance.

Born Kenneth Bies in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1926, Kate realized at a very early age that she was different from other boys.

"I was branded frail and feminine from the start," she said. "By the time I reached 10, I was knitting and embroidering tablecloths beautifully. I couldn't compete with the boys at all."

Kate hinted that her father, a state auditor, did little to help Kenneth develop masculine traits, but she does not blame him for the hurt and confusion eventually brought on by homosexuality.

To avoid embarrassment to the family, Kenneth was paid to stay away from home. At 20, he won a costume contest in Chicago, landed a job as a stripper in Calumet City, Ill., and later served as a hairdresser in a New Orleans brothel.

Lacking the courage to divulge sex preference, Kenneth

was drafted into the Army and "lo and behold, I was classified 1-A. They tried to make a man out of me. But, of course, they didn't succeed."

Kenneth received a dishonorable discharge from the service in 1952 and traveled to Hollywood where he wrote several books.

Still restless and unhappy, Kenneth sought psychiatric help at Stanford Medical Center. "Through evaluation, I discovered that I would be happier as a woman."

The \$10,000 operation that required five months convalescence drastically changed both appearance and lifestyle. The only flaw in the three-part surgery that gave Kate a 36-inch chest and high cheekbones is modern science's inability to feminize her voice.

Kate suspects that the removal of the Adam's apple lowered her vocal chord by several octaves.

"And now, I have women's problems. People have asked me 'Are you going to adopt?'" Kate said, noting she can perform any female function except bear children.

The surgery also brought about a different outlook on her life.

"I used to be very promiscuous. After the operation, sex has become secondary. I started searching deeper into the heart and soul of the people I deal with," she said.

That search, apparently, ended in the chapel of the Vacaville facility.