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TRANSEXUALITY:

FIVE VIEWPOINTS



**AN STLGF
FORUM**

Copies of the original audio recording of this panel discussion are available on a 90 minute cassette for \$3.00. Included also on the tape is a recording of a show called "Sex Talk" aired on radio station WLT in Chicago on February 16, 1988. The program featured Mariette Pathe Allen and Naomi D.

For a copy of this tape, please send a check or money order for \$3.00 to:

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TRANSSEXUAL PANEL DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPTION

The following is a transcript of a panel discussion of transsexuals presented at the January meeting of the STLGF. All of the participants are members of the STLGF. The discussion lasted approximately one and one half hours, of which approximately one hour is transcribed here.

Roni...from a "Woman to Woman" video that Jana had lent me. I added a couple of my own, not too many, and we will run through these. There is only 17 questions that I've got. I will just ask the questions and let our members field them at will. Then after we get through all that, if there is any questions from you folks, we will try to handle that. Ok?

It is reported that there is between 50 and 80 thousand transsexuals in this country. It is also estimated that between 2 and 8 thousand will also choose surgery. Not all of them will choose the surgical route; that is a matter of personal choice as we will find out.

My first question is "Why do you feel a need for the sex change operation?" Michelle, do you want to field that one? We will put her on the spot right now.

Michelle: I don't know if you have got my name. I'm Michelle. Maybe you should introduce us first.

Roni: Maybe I should have. Let me do that. Everybody knows most of these. This is Kitty, of course. This is Michelle, Jana, Gari, and Denise. It is really needed that we do that introduction because I do not think there are very many people here that remember you coming to a meeting. This is the first meeting Denise has been to and only the second meeting for Jana. So those are the members of our panel.

Now we will go back to the question. "Why do you feel the need for the sex change surgery?"

Michelle: That is a hard question to answer because, you know, I'm a woman. The surgery sometimes almost seems symbolic. I've been living, now, as a woman full time now for something like 7 months. I've got a job as a woman. My life now is fine and the surgery itself, something like I said, seems like it would be just kind of symbolic. But obviously there

are a lot of things I would like to do that depend on the surgery. There is the feeling I still have right now that I'm kind of vulnerable. I still believe there is the possibility that I could still be caught out and someone could prove that I'm still as long as I'm in this in between situation, there is really nothing I could do about that. That is how I feel.

Roni: Ok. So then really, for you the surgery is just the final step that needs to be taken. All the mental attitudes are in place because you are attracted to men and are very much living as a girl right now. Kitty, do you...

Kitty: I'd go along with that vulnerability. I think you are in a difficult spot if you are pre-operative. The psychologists and psychiatrists, I'm sure, have asked all of us the same question why I'm feel you should have the operation, or why are you a transsexual or that type of thing. It is a difficult question to answer. It is something you have been living all of your life. It is not really black and white. It is something that has been going on for years, when most transsexuals of course have been cross dressing for a long time.

When I tell the psychologist I think some of their... According to their measures of how they measure a classical (not classy - a classic) transsexual is a person who has been crossdressing like over two years and a psychologist asks me how long I have been crossdressing and I say 21 years that I remember, that sets them back a little bit.

But it is more than that. I feel a certain harmony. I can't explain it. It is not something I can say. This is the way it is for me.

Roni: That is another question. You are starting to get into some of my next questions. Don't peek. Did you always feel like a woman trapped in a man's body. Kitty?

Kitty: No. I think that's... I even told my psychologist that nearly every transsexual you hear about, they say that. These are my feelings again. They are not something Michelle or anyone else may share exactly. But, I told my psychologist and they still feel (I have some letters, I even brought some documentation that some of you may or may not be interested in.) they still feel I'm more than a candidate. No, I don't think I can say that I have that feeling. If you have read Renee Richards book,

she has many life parallels to me. She has had a lot of experiences as a man that were enjoyable and whether she always felt as though she were a (honestly felt) because I can read between the lines of a book like that. Whether she really felt she was a woman trapped in a man's body I don't know. I don't think so. Basically, if I had to answer yes or no, I would say no. I don't feel like I am a woman trapped in a man's body. There is an absolute certain harmony I'm really comfortable with now.

Roni: Ok, Michelle seems to have a different view on that.

Michelle: Yeah. My experience has been basically that since I was 3 or 4 years old, I knew something was wrong. When kids are that young, sexuality is a very hard thing to understand. I did not know what was wrong. I knew something was wrong and as I got older, it gradually got more and more clear. Now that is my experience. I do want to say I'm not sure that transsexuality is just one thing. I'm really not sure. When I say that is what my experience was that is not to say that someone else like Kitty, who had a different experience, is not a transsexual, too. It is just, you know, if you want to think of it as a disease, as some people do, some people catch it early and some people catch it later. The important thing is that you have caught it.

Kitty: I can go back to 9 years old. That is when I knew something was wrong. I was doing things, I felt differently and I was doing things differently. I have a reason for that in my mind when that happened too but psychologists apparently cannot point a finger to a cause.

Roni: I think that is probably one of the keys to transsexualism and one of the reasons so many psychologists have problems with it. It is not cut and dried definable. Each individual case is just a little bit different than the other ones. Denise, would you care to comment on that question?

Denise: Like they... I've had problems all through life like all the other ones up here. I went through phases trying to prove masculinity and stuff like that. It never did work out. I just felt myself to be female. Throughout my life, I've found out it was not always to my best interest to be that way. The way society treats us, but...

Kitty: I think that is another point, too. Not to interrupt, but there are a lot of social pressures

you just go along with because it seems like the thing to do to go along for years and years. So you do it.

Denise: I had a large conflict with my parents. So it is worth losing them over what I want and what I feel is right: To them, fighting back and forth. I was married and tried working things out that way. I just got to a point in my life where I couldn't handle it no more like that. I just had to do what I had to do and if people accepted it, they accepted it. I just had to move on with my life.

Gerri: I think a big portion of that, too, comes from peer pressure. Especially when you are younger. Because kids can be really cruel. Your beat up so many times you start to get the message, you start to act like a guy instead of a girl. That is one of the hard cases that you learn early.

Jana: Or you go to great lengths to cover it up. You bury it very deeply and try and deny it.

Gerri: And this goes right through the family life later on with me getting married and having children. The whole 9 yards.

Roni: Denise, are you living now completely as a woman?

Denise: No. I'm like Michelle. 90% and 10% male. Recently I've gotten another job because of my name change and everything that's the male role. It's very questionable, the people I work with are kind of wondering about me already so...

Roni: Ok. Michelle, you say you have been living...

Michelle: Yeah. I think I confused you with something I said before. For about a year, I was living almost completely as a female but there were some things that I just couldn't switch. Then finally in June, I went full time.

Roni: Ok. Kitty how long have you been living?

Kitty: The end of August. So about 4 or 5 months.

Roni: Now the next question I really like because I know what some of the answers are going to be already. What has that been like, (I'm going to save you two for last) Denise - well no, you have not been living completely as a woman yet, have you? Ok, let me just go on down to Michelle. Michelle has some

interesting things to say about it.

Michelle: Ok. What is the exact question?

Roni: Ok. What has it been like living completely as a woman, especially for you because you being new to the job market. You have no predetermined skills on the resume per se, not like some people have. Did you find it difficult getting employment?

Michelle: That's a whole story. I basically wasted about a year and a half of my life because I was scared to start. I was afraid I would walk into apply for a job and I'd get laughed out of the office. Somehow it took a lot of help from my family and some friends to get up the confidence to go ahead to try. Then surprise, surprise, when I finally did it, it was no problem at all. I had about a dozen job interviews and never had any problems with them at all. Got a lot of very positive feedback to that kind of thing. Now I'm working and the people I'm working with, they don't know anything about this. To them I'm just Michelle. It is a very nice feeling. It's a very nice feeling. It's like I'm starting a whole new life. The whole process once it starts it really accelerates fast. I've been happier in the last 6 months and in particular in about the last month than I've been in my entire life.

Roni: I can remember about 8 months ago when you were not the most happy person.

Michelle: No. No, 8 months ago, I was still running scared.

Roni: Kitty, what have you found it like. Because I know you have had an interesting event happen with your employment life.

Kitty: Well. I'm working as a school bus operator, which is not my occupation, it just happens to be what I'm doing to pay the rent. But, that's what I've been doing "in the role" (as psychologists or doctors might say) for 4 or 5 months. As soon as I started taking hormones, I said, "That's it. I'm a woman." and I rushed out with my resume on the word processor. I put Kitty on it instead of Kenneth and rushed out to the job scene to get a job in mass communications, which is what I do - media productions. For months before that... I'd been laid off. When I got laid off is when I started all this, really. So I was laid off and had been submitting resumes a year to different places as a male. Then when I started taking hormones, I said I was a woman

and rushed right out applying all over the place. I can say that I had no worse luck applying as a woman or a man. I didn't get a job either way. Finally I just keep taking hormones and needed to get a job. So, I finally found a job as a school bus driver. Continued to take hormones.

Finally at the end of the school year and that summer which had been about 10 months in hormones, I was swelling and filling out my clothes in all the wrong places. I went to my employer (well, I was a psychologist too). I had been dressing 60 to 70 percent of the time, but not working and not with my parents, though they knew. I was not dressing any time with my parents although I told them a long time before. So, I decided, well I decided but actually it was a push from the psychologist who said: Look, you're going to have to do something. They're not going to operate until you worked as a woman especially. So, I decided to tell the employer at the bus company. He was great and the entire bus company and everyone have been wonderful. I know that Geri has quite the opposite story to tell, perhaps if she wants to.

I went to my immediate supervisor and, as I said, I was filling out my clothes in all the wrong places for a man. I had long finger nails, trimmed eyebrows, and hadn't had a hair cut for months. He said, "Don't worry about that. Naw, you're doing a fine job. You are a good bus driver." No, but Rick, I have to tell you something! So, he was great and we went down and had a little conference with management. They gave me some options. The one they wanted me to choose was transfer to another terminal at the bus company, which I did. They changed my name in the files before it was changed legally. It's changed legally now, but they changed my name in the files and went to work as a woman at another terminal at the beginning of the school year. They have been absolutely, positively wonderful about it. I don't even understand myself how good they have been. That's essentially what happened. So, I've been working in the role for those many months. My surgeon wants me to work longer before he will do the operation.

Roni: Geri, you have quite a different story to tell about employment or do you want to?

Geri: They didn't like the idea at all.

Roni: Now did you tell them that you were...

Geri: They found out through someone else I confided in. One of the employees there. Big mistake to trust the wrong person. So, I went back to the boss - he gave me a letter to seek counseling. Dear Abby's version - seek counseling, which I did all summer. Then, here the 3rd of December, they called me into the office and wanted me to resign. I said "For what? I've always done an outstanding job around here." They said we feel you're just different than everybody else and, basically, everybody doesn't want to be around you. I said that's kind of discrimination isn't it? They said you're just different. I said, well why should I resign if I'm doing a good job? This way that I am does not affect my job any. So, they say we feel it does. So, I say I cannot resign in good faith. So, then 4 days later they came in and told me they were going to terminate me. So, that's really going to get hairy.

Michelle: Who did you work for?

Geri: It's a private company in Illinois.

Michelle: When I was applying for jobs (and also, I'm working for Emerson Electric) also I was applying for other science contractors. I did not expect them to be enlightened, but because of certain questions on the questionnaire on the employment application, which if you falsify are grounds for termination, I figured I'd better be up front about this. So, I discussed my situation with people in the personnel office. At all 3 places, including Emerson, they said this is no problem whatsoever. If you see yourself as a woman, fine, we see you as a woman too. This gets me renewed faith in the U.S. government. They said that as far as they could judge, for them not to hire me on the basis of my situation would be sexual discrimination.

Geri: See, my discussion with the ACLU in Chicago was that there was no federal laws against them firing me. Because I checked with them before that. This was part of my therapy.

Kitty: I checked with the ACLU when I was telling you both earlier. I checked with the ACLU before I told my employer and the St. Louis office, here, said that no precedence has been set.

Geri: That's what they said in Chicago, too.

Kitty: But, it really seemed like something they would be eager to sink their teeth into.

Geri: To set an example.

Kitty: Yeah. It seemed as though they would not mind getting involved in the law suit.

Geri: It seems like St. Clair County, across the River, winds up with all of these discrimination suits, any way. So, it seems like a testing ground for the State of Illinois, anyhow.

Roni: One of the biggest differences, is Michelle was talking about Emerson Electric which is a big corporation...

Geri: This was a sizable one, too.

Roni: Is it?

Geri: International company.

Roni: Ok, I didn't think it was that big.

Kitty: My company is actually Harmon-Mavflower, which is all over the United States as well.

Roni: Oh really? I didn't know that either.

Geri: We're talking about some sizable companies here involved.

Roni: You would think that the one you worked for would be afraid of the loss as well as...

Kitty: See, what they did for me was to transfer me to a different location. That's what they should have accommodated Geri with.

Roni: Well, does your company have different locations?

Geri: Oh yeah.

Roni: Do they?

Geri: World wide.

Roni: Ok... (interruption from someone leaving the meeting.)

Geri: This is going to get interesting. Because I'm going to try to find some way to fight it. It's not right. I don't feel it's right. Everybody else I talk to, they feel it's not right. Even people I talked to at the ACLU in Chicago before this said

it's not right. But, there is no law against it. Said if I was strictly termed a homosexual, it would be, but since I'm not, we just drop between the cracks somewhere. Somebody somewhere has to stipulate and put those terms in there. There is nothing at all you can do in the State of Illinois.

Roni: Ok, let's move on, then. Michelle, was sex at all important in your decision for the surgery?

Kitty: Does that say Michelle?

Roni: Well, I thought I would start with her.

Michelle: Well, yeah it's...

Roni: Well, now I didn't mean your sex, but having sex.

Michelle: I know. Yeah, obviously. Even if I was totally uninterested in sex, sexual relationships, romances, etc., I would still want to have the surgery. But, it's something I would like to get going on. I'm 26 years old and do not have an awful lot of experience that way. I'd like that to be a part of my life. I feel like right now... New years eve, I had a guy hitting on me and there's absolutely nothing I could do about it. That is a very frustrating feeling.

Kitty: I've had a couple of guys ask me out from work as well. I wouldn't go because I'm not going out with a poor uneducated bus driver. I'm going out with a rich educated man who could support me in a manner which I would like to become accustomed. Exactly, there is nothing you can do. I mean, you can go out, but things tend to lead to...

Roni: So, in other words, sex was one of the motivating factors leading to your decision, would you say? The reason I'm asking, is because sometimes transsexuals will say that they have chosen surgery and want to go through with it whether or not they can have sex. That's why I am just asking if it is really important for you folks.

Michelle: I guess the way I want to put it, is I'm going to have the surgery sooner or later any way. But, the fact that I cannot get involved in sexual relationships until then certainly puts a lot more urgency on it. It makes it something I definitely want to have happen sooner than later. If I was told that I was one of those rare cases that would never have sexual relations, I would be pretty

disappointed. But, that wouldn't change anything. I'd still go ahead with it.

Roni: You would still go ahead with it?

Michelle: Yeah.

Roni: Jana?

Jana: I feel exactly the same way. The sexual aspect of it, I think, is secondary.

Roni: So, in other words, it's kind of the icing on the cake. But, it's not necessarily the cake itself.

Jana: The cake is, that you have to live with yourself 24 hours a day. And you have to be happy with the way you are and appear to yourself.

Roni: Ok. Now once Michelle... I think you're the closest of anybody on the panel to an operation. Did you not tell me the other day, you were going in in June and this month you will be going in for breast surgery?

Michelle: Right. Do you want me to tell them that or did they hear you?

Roni: Did everybody hear that? Michelle is going in this month for breast surgery and in June for the final surgery.

Michelle: Tentatively in June, assuming I have the money for it, which I think I will.

Roni: Is that at all reversible? When you get past the June operation, can they undo that? I always thought they couldn't, but now I've heard that they can. To some degree.

Michelle: Well, let me put it this way. People come up to me, once in a while... and I have a large family. An older brother who had a vasectomy. So this kind of thing... that kind of hurts him a little bit. He's asked me a couple of times what happens if you change your mind? I don't give a damn. I'm not going to change my mind. I mean, it's not an issue. I don't care if it's reversible or not. The idea that I would change my mind is ridiculous. I've had 5 years of the hardest times of my life getting this far. I haven't changed my mind. So, why should I change my mind once things get easy? So, I don't care about that. As far as it being reversible, I don't know one way or the other. But, it seems like

it's not really an issue. People should get it straight in their mind as to what to do it first. They should not... I think people should go into it with the idea that it is not reversible, even if it is.

Kitty: Reversible as far as making your penis work again as it did when you were a male.

Michelle: Well, no. But, if when you've been on hormones for 3 years like I have, it's not going to work anyway.

Kitty: That's right. That's where sex... and we go back to the last question. I've had homosexual (they weren't homosexual to me) but, I've had homosexual experiences in the past. But, because of the AIDS threat, partly but mostly because of the hormones, I don't even have any desire to do anything. It's the most bizarre thing I've ever come across in my life. I would at least masturbate a couple times a week if I didn't get it from anywhere else. At different times in my life, I got it a lot more frequently than that. But, with these hormones, I don't feel like it but, maybe, once every three months. Which is fine for me. But, (which is good too) with the AIDS threat, which may be another factor that's in there.

Roni: Ok.

Kitty: I hope after the operation, I feel like it. Because I'll still be on hormones.

Roni: Jana, were you very aggressive or are you very aggressive as a man, and are you less aggressive as a woman?

Jana: I tend to think I am the same either way. I don't know as I'm... I think I'm more assertive than aggressive. Just because that is the way I was brought up and in my job function I have to do it that way. But, I think I'm the same in both roles. I wouldn't want it to be any different. Because as you see me now is the way I really am. If I was acting...

End Side 1

Start Side 2

Roni: Ok. Denise what about you? Are you very aggressive as a man? Do you feel you are less aggressive as a woman?

Denise: I never was very aggressive as far as career-wise or anything like that. I like money like everybody else does, but I got like a champagne taste on a beer budget. Which being transsexual, it's bad having a beer budget. I was never aggressive about anything. I could care less about so called macho anything, about winning at sports, all the silly little games and all that. I didn't care for it. I never was aggressive that way. Aggressive sexually - that all depends. You know, I like somebody to come on to me, but if that doesn't work, then I will advance myself.

Roni: Ok. Let me just throw this one up for anybody on the panel to, that wants to, answer it. Did religious issues, at all, enter into your decision? In other words, were you held back any by your Christian upbringing or whatever, or religious problems with transsexuality? Does anybody want to jump on that one?

Kitty: I'm the most un-religious person I know. So, it didn't bother me whatsoever. But, the people that I have spoken with who have had any problem with it, when I've told them, have had problems because of their religion.

Roni: Oh really?

Kitty: It's mostly a religion problem with the people who have problems, believe it or not. Otherwise, I've had good success with telling people at all. Some people think I am playing God, or the doctors are certainly. To me that's absurd.

Michelle: Again, I'm not religious myself. So, it's not a problem for me. What I've found, is that people who are willing to treat me (or anyone) as an individual and as a worthwhile person, they don't have problems. The ones who have problems are basically are fanatics who are so wrapped up in some sort of ideologies or theorems or something, that they place those above an individual. They say you have to fit into their theories and if you don't, well, you are dirt. I've run into people like that.

Kitty: And the problem I've had to... If I've had any problems, it's been with people with religious fanatics or I've had some problems with men with ego problems who feel it wouldn't be fitting any man to recognize this to go along with this.

Jana: I had some real problems with that, because I came from a very strict Catholic upbringing. I don't

know how many of you can relate to that. How many of you went to Catholic grade schools. (show of hands - quite a few) With the nuns - Ok. Well, there was just no thought that anyone could think of doing that to themselves. When I was in grade school, they really put the fear of the Lord in me. It took me a long time to come to grips with that. I finally decided that the Lord wasn't the way they were describing Him. He couldn't be, because he is an all-loving God. So, it took a long time to get over that. I don't know as I'm over it all the way right now.

Denise: I've got a friend who is going through this. She is an ordained minister. I asked her, with her religion and everything, if she had any trouble with this. She said she didn't have no trouble at all. She doesn't practice here ministry no more, mostly because, the pay in her field now is better than what it was. But still goes to church and participates in all the church events. The people at church have accepted her and everything. She has had no trouble with that. She lives in Canada, which might be a little bit different than the southern United States. She has had no trouble with her religion or anything. Myself, I've been to any type of church you can think of. My religion is not with a church, it is within myself. I feel if I think it's right, it should be right with myself.

Geri: I think, you have to determine first when you say religious or religion - are you talking about the Supreme Being, or the social side of religion. For me, I've never really been much on the social side of religion. My beliefs are mostly in the Supreme Being and not really tied down into any one category. So, that's kind of up to the individual, I think.

Roni: Ok. Let me ask one more question, then we will open it up to questions from the audience. We've already covered some of this. What I want to ask is how easy do you feel it is for a transsexual to live in today's society? We've already talked a little bit about that. We've talked about Michelle, who has never been in the job market, entered it and made out fine. Kitty, who entered a given job as a man, then switched to the role of a woman during that job and worked out ok. Then we ran into Geri, who didn't quite get through it there.

Geri: Still working on it.

Roni: But, what about friends and family. Michelle, you still live at home and you have very close knit family ties apparently. Apparently, your family has been very supportive. Were they always very supportive?

Michelle: Family is a strange thing as I'm sure you all know.

Roni: Yeah, mine is.

Michelle: My family has been very supportive just on the basis of the fact that I'm their son, basically. They have been very good about helping me out, keeping me from falling down the hole somewhere and me disappearing. My father in particular, he still kind of... tries to... Well, I guess he has really overtly tried to change my mind in the last year or two. But, he took a long time to convince. He's still not convinced it's right. He's just convinced that, well maybe, I can do it after all. He's not thrilled about it.

Roni: He's supportive although he would prefer you weren't doing it.

Michelle: Yeah. They basically been about as good as I could expect. I've heard of a lot worse.

Roni: Anybody down at that end?

Gerri: I'm kind of the norm too. I'm one of the few who is married. My wife gives me all the support in the world I need. The only other one in my family who knows anything about me is my brother. He's really supportive. So, the rest of my family, like my children, step-father, they don't know anything about it yet. They live not in this area and until that day happens, it's kind of a blank area. It's not because I just don't want to tell them. It's just something they don't have to concern themselves. There probably will be a day, one time, when they have to know.

Roni: Denise?

Denise: My whole family knows. I'm married also. My wife's family seems to take it better than my family does. But, they were a different upbringing again. They were brought up more open towards sex and things like that, than my family was. Like Michelle said, my father is a problem I have. He's to the point where he knows there is no stopping me. He wishes I wouldn't do this and go back the other way. But, if I need help financially with a doctor bill or something and I can't make it, he will give me the money to pay for it. We are to a mutual agreement.

The only one in my family who doesn't know is my Grandfather and I decided not to tell him. He's 91. I figured that in a few more years, I won't have to deal with him, anyway. Everybody in the family

knows. I came from a small town and I would say that half the people in the town know to some extent about it. I haven't rented a billboard and advertised in town or anything, but just through the grapevine word gets around fast.

Roni: Do any of the towns people try to aggravate you at all - hassle you in any way?

Denise: No.

Gerri: They just leave you alone.

Denise: Yeah, because they don't understand it and a lot are afraid to ask because they don't know what is going on.

Gerri: Fear of the unknown.

Denise: Where I work at, I work as Dennis. I don't dress so much like Dennis. People there, when I first started working there didn't know if I was a he or a she. I confided in one of the nurses there and told her about it and everything. I work with the mentally retarded and some of the patients are not too sure, some of them think they know and some think I'm female.

Roni: There was a good phrase from that show that I stole most of these questions from, that describes that. It's that you look like a duck and you walk like a duck, but you're not a duck.

Gerri: You don't quack.

Denise: Sounds something like what Virginia Prince said one time.

Roni: Jana, what about you.

Jana: Well, I don't have much family left. I have a brother, who I haven't told yet. I'm not at the point where I have really come out. I'm still in the first stages of the change. Confiding in my wife was one of the things that led directly to the divorce. So, there was a problem with that; but at the moment she is still very supportive of it. I haven't had too much of a problem with telling anybody, yet.

Roni: Your wife lives in Phoenix?

Jana: In Phoenix.

Roni: Ok. And Kitty, how about you? How does your mom and dad do?

Kitty: Well, I've told just about everybody in the

entire world that my mom was here at the last meeting. She is doing better than my dad. My dad's initial thoughts - we get pretty primitive on some of our discussions - but my dad put his initial thoughts were: you will never, ever, ever, find a job; ever get a job as a woman; ever as long as you live. B) no one will ever understand, even if they say they do, any of your friends, any relatives, even if they say they understand - they won't and you will be the laughing stock of the entire world, and C) Even if you do have the operation, you will only be a 40 year old bag, anyway. So...

Roni: So he's on your side.

Kitty: You've noticed. He has come... Most of those statements were initial statements made about a year ago, over a year ago. He's doing much better. He is a problem. I had to slap him around a little bit. My mom is doing better. She was even at the last meeting, here. My mom says "Kitty" and "she" and "her". My dad, if he lives to 105, it's going to be "Ken" and "him".

Roni: OK. Does anyone in the audience have any questions they would like to ask while we have the group gathered up here?

Audience: Michelle, you already answered one of my questions, but you... about your talking to Emerson specifically. I would like to get some more information from you. I still have some fears about applying to Tiffany or subscribing to some of the cross dressing magazines. I just wondered if any of this has come up in your discussions with Emerson, as far as any of the forms or if you've gotten into security clearances or anything.

Michelle: I thought I had said earlier, I had to confide in a couple of the people in the personnel department at Emerson, since they wanted to see a birth certificate and things like that. I did have to talk to them. They said: "OK, this is fine, we can deal with this." They tried very hard. They did a lot of the paper work themselves to avoid a secretary seeing it. They made special arrangements for me to get a physical, too, without having their normal people doing it. They really went out of their way. They seemed to think that if I need a security clearance later, if I'm up front about my situation and say "Hey it's not a problem, there is a lot of people that know about this," that nobody is going to blackmail me etc. etc. Then it shouldn't be no problem. That should have answered your question.

Audience: I'm not sure to bring that much out in this meeting, but that's more of what I'm asking

because that's the kind of thing I'm looking having to do a few things like that this coming year. I'd like any tid bit or anything on how they view the cross dressing issue. If any comments are needed.

Michelle: What I've basically found is if you're up front with people and assertive and say this is what I am - like it or lump it. If you project yourself as the kind of person they would want to have something to do with. If you are a good eligible employee, if you're going to be a good friend, you have people thinking highly of you. They can overlook things like this. That's the general rule.

Geri: Some not.

Michelle: I can't explain what happened....

Kitty: I have to agree with Michelle. But, then I've had similar experiences. Some of us have not.

Geri: It goes both ways. You never can tell.

Roni: Any other questions?

Audience: Just out of curiosity, how do, I know this is up to the individual, how do transsexuals view transvestites. (Rest of question is inaudible)

Roni: Go ahead, beat up on a TV.

Denise: To each his own is the way I look at it.

Michelle: I see it as basically two completely different things. I can see how someone might be one and wonder if they were the other, or something like that. Obviously, there are a lot of the symptoms are the same. But, it's never crossed my mind for a moment that I might be a transvestite. Because, I learned fairly early what the differences were. I said "OK, I am this one and I'm not this one." No, I can't say I understand what it means to be a transvestite any more than a transvestite can understand what it's like to be a transsexual. But, I'm certainly not going to hold it against anybody.

Denise: I think being transsexual, you have more of an open mind towards gays, lesbians, and cross dressers, then gays do to transsexuals and stuff like that. A lot of places I've been with gays, the gays, transsexuals, and cross dressers do not get along. But, then there is a lot of places where everybody does get along.

Geri: I think it's one of the problems with society though they as a large, they tend to want everybody in the same category and label them as wierd.

Roni: Ok, any other questions?

Audience: Was there ever a point when any of you thought you were transvestites?

Roni: Well, Michelle says no.

Audience: Anybody else?

Kitty: I think I came to a realization somewhere along the line. I think it is a thinner line than Michelle thinks. Obviously, I have different thoughts on the subject. I think it's a thinner line. I don't know. Again, we go back to the initial question which was what was your decision or some such silly thing.

Geri: We are a lot older than Michelle. When we were growing up, there was not that much information available.

Kitty: Yeah and how do you define that? Then you do start to define yourself. The feelings may be there, but... I guess it's a definition you are looking for in your inner self or something lets say. I just went along with being a transvestite and then to me I discovered that's not what I was. I have this harmony, so to speak. Some of these things are over used. They are almost cliches as far as I'm concerned. As far as "the" transsexual should be or should feel. I just kind of drifted into it and then realized where my life was, somewhere along the line.

Roni: There's a question there from Sharon.

Sharon: (question inaudible)

Kitty: Well, they are doing it in a few places in St. Louis. Apparently all my doctors are on staff at Barnes.

Denise: Mine is at St. Louis U.

Geri: They are all over the place.

Sharon: (inaudible)

Kitty: My surgeon said... first of all, when I saw him he wanted to do breast augmentation. I said "why and how much". He said "Well that's \$3000" and Michelle got an estimate a lot lower than that. But, it hardly matters.

Roni: How much was yours...

Michelle: \$1800

Kitty: \$1800 for breast augmentation.

Geri: Get an estimate from 3 body shops.

Kitty: To me, breast augmentation was "udderly" ridiculous. There you are. (groans from the panel) I have so many priorities, surgical and other priorities as far as procedures that need to be done. That breast augmentation was not a factor. So he said "I would like to do that first." I didn't go along with that. But the surgery was \$10,000 to \$15,000 for gender reassignment surgery. \$10,000 to \$15,000. I said that it was entirely out of the question. Those are my exact words.

Roni: Not "udderly" anymore?

Kitty: Not "udderly". I didn't tell him that.

Roni: What kind of prices were you told.

Michelle: First off, as far as the breast surgery, I've got a firm estimate. I have been told I need to come up with \$1,800 by January 7th and I'm going to. That is the number. If anybody is interested, I can give them the name. As far as the genital surgery, I have had 3 different (very different) estimates. There is a doctor here in St. Louis I've been checking with. The figure he gives depends on whether he is talking about doing it as an in-patient surgery or out-patient surgery. He's never done it as out-patient before, but it's done some places that way. So, he's considering it.

Roni: As an out-patient?

Michelle: I'll say more about that in a second. If it's out-patient, we're talking under \$4,000. In-patient, we're probably talking \$10,000. There is another guy in Colorado that some people may have heard of. I got something from him. I think he is talking \$8,000.

Jana: That's Doctor Biber.

Michelle: Right. Ok. Also, I've been in contact with a woman from Massachusetts who went over to Belgium, of all places, to get it done. They have socialized medicine over there. Apparently, that helps to keep the cost down, even if you are not a citizen of the country. What I last hears was that when this person had surgery about a year and a half ago, it cost \$3,000. Now, I have a feeling that was see any way they could make it that cheap otherwise. Unfortunately, all this is tied to the foreign exchange rate. I'll bet it's like \$6,000 now.

Audience: And those... Are all those figures are based upon no complications setting in too? Right?

Michelle: Hev, you've got to be an optimist. If you're not, then this whole thing is impossible.

Gerri: Not counting transportation.

Jana: So you talked to Veronica Brown.

Michelle: Yeah.

Gerri: Of course we've said nothing about Electrolosis here either.

Michelle: Yeah. Electrolosis has cost me about \$11,000 so far and I'm almost done.

Kitty: I can see where it would cost anyone \$5,000 and up for electrolosis. And breast augmentation or any other plastic surgery you might want to consider. I'm looking at \$30,000 or more, certainly no less for every one of the procedures I want or need.

Roni: Are you going to have your throat shaved?

Kitty: That is my most... As far as I'm concerned, that is my biggest priority. Not cartilage the adams apple, but voice surgery. I checked on that already.

Michelle: The guys in California, in Beverly Hills.

Kitty: I don't want to go there. I want to go to Barnes or Jewish.

Michelle: Is it done here?

Kitty: Not that I know of yet. But, I have a doctor checking. It doesn't look like it's done here so far.

Michelle: There is a couple of doctors out in California, who do a combination surgery at the same time they do a tracheal shave which cuts down the size of the adams apple. I'm not sure if it's entirely or if it's just half of it or what. At the same time, they can go in and do surgery on the vocal cords which basically changes the voice. I assume they can do it in either direction. You know which way all of us want to go. I wrote to those people. It's still in the experimental stage. This one guy has done 20 procedures. There have been no complications with any of them. 19 out of the 20 have been very successful. One of them, basically, had no effect. That's not bad odds the way I figure it. I think, yeah, it was \$3,000 for that both

combined.

Kitty: That was something like... that's the figure in that paper you had in that publication. It was like \$3,000.

Michelle: Also, the doctor I'm seeing at St. Louis University hospital who is probably doing the genital surgery, he said he was in contact with a doctor in St. Louis who does that throat surgery would discuss the possibility of also doing the voice surgery. He wanted to have the name of the procedure, which I still don't know. I'd kind of hesitate to be the first one.

Denise: I'm like you. I would say we have probably the same doctor and he also recommended that with me. I'm starting Monday with another doctor at St. Louis I'm with speech therapy. I'm going to give that a try to see if that works or any help. If not, then I'll think about that. At that point, speech therapy would not cost me anything on full medical.

Kitty: I know two very good friends of mine who are speech therapists, a good friend of mine. They said they could probably raise the fundamental frequency of my voice and it should be a little more breathy. I said could I get on a golf course and yell "fore" at the top of my lungs in a feminine voice. No. At the end of the day driving a bus, I can barely talk and if I talk, it is way down, by the end of the day. Speech therapy will never ever help that the way they feel, the speech therapists I know.

Michelle: Personally, I found that just practice is the big thing. I guess my voice is just naturally, probably, a little higher than the average male. But, I've been talking pretty much the way I am talking now for about 2 years now. I don't even think about it any more. This is my natural voice. I'm not sure I could sound the way I used to sound, even if I tried. I'm not saying it's great, now, but it is certainly a big change. Two years ago, if I tried to talk in this level of voice and have myself heard at the end of the room - forget it. There would be no chance. I don't know if that would be called self induced speech therapy or what. But...

Kitty: I agree with all that, but I don't think it would happen with me any more. I even went to a specialist about this operation and he said you have a male patterned larynx. I said "My God, I heard of male...."

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