

Polare Edition 49

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Editorial

by Katherine Cummings, Polare Editor

As you may have noticed from the cover of this issue, we are commemorating 50 year anniversary of the first widely publicised transsexual in modern times, Christine Jorgensen, who was outed by the press in December 1952. It is said that for a time she was the most recognised woman in the world. The effect she had on those of us who thought we had no hope of ever living our dream is impossible to describe. I usually say it was like being hit between the eyes with a hammer. All the wishes became hopes, for Christine showed us that with the right circumstances we could achieve what she had achieved and become the people we knew we were. In the last issue of *Polare* I asked for contributions on what Christine Jorgensen meant to our community but response has been minimal, which may be a healthy sign. Gender reassignment is no longer a "gee-whiz" wonder to cover every headline for days on end, and the woman who was seen as unique and a lonely pioneer is now one among thousands who have followed her path to self-fulfilment.

If Christine Jorgensen had never existed, maybe we would still be approximately where we are now, but she did exist and she was the first to be widely recognised as having gone through a successful surgical intervention designed to allow a human to cross the gender barrier. Unlike Lili Elbe, who died a year after her reassignment in 1930, Christine lived for 32 years after her operation (or operations, to be precise) and died when she was 62. I am not ignoring the fact that there were other gender reassignments in the early-nineteen-fifties. There was Roberta Cowell, ex-Spitfire pilot and racing driver and there was Ewan (formerly Elizabeth) Forbes-Sempill who successfully defended his male gender in the courts to secure succession to a baronetcy. There were probably others whose stories have never been made public.

Elsewhere in this issue I have written an account of my own meeting with Christine Jorgensen, after she had decided there was little chance she would be left alone by the media to pursue her chosen profession as a photographer, and was performing in night clubs as a "curiosity" attraction.

The transgender community is like a pyramid standing on its point. 50 years ago there was only a few of us [visible, anyway] whereas today there are many thousands. The general public still confuses us with other sex and gender diverse communities but there is a growing awareness of our separate identity and a resultant development of medical and social services tailored to our needs. There is also a growing recognition of our human and legal rights.

We will continue to rely heavily on those prepared, like Christine Goodwin in Britain and Kevin and Jennifer here in Australia, to sacrifice their privacy and take on the legal system to advance the rights of the community as a whole.

Feature Articles



Jorgensen's story became a lightning rod for many post-World War II anxieties about gender and sexuality, and called dramatic attention to issues that would drive the feminist and gay-rights movements in the decades ahead.

Tribute to Christine Jorgensen

On 1st December 1952, *New York Daily News* readers were greeted with the astonishing headline "ex-G.I. becomes blonde beauty". Days later, *American Weekly* paid \$20,000 for an exclusive interview with Jorgensen that brought her story into millions of American homes.

A Kiwi Takes Flight

Juliet, who's transition began at the end of January 2002, describes the increased self-confidence that she is experiencing as a result of taking charge of her gender transition and that people's attitudes towards her seem friendlier, perhaps because she is happier now.

Middlesex

Jeffrey Eugenides has done his intersex homework which is put to good effect in this fictional story. A decade in the making, *Middlesex* is the story of Lefty and Desdemona who flee Asia-Minor, Greek culture, a lifetime of guilt, and the 5-A.R.D. gene in their baggage.

Sublime Mutations

Sublime Mutations is a book of photographs by Del La Grace Volcano, one of the world's most controversial and exploratory photographers. As a book to live on your shelves it is a beautiful piece of art that explores the body and its pretence to sex and gender affiliation.

Lovegonwrong

When gender becomes fluid, the path to true love becomes slippery. There is an assumption that love will go wrong if or when the gender-identity or expression of one partner challenges the expectations that the other partner has of themselves and their partner.

Kevin & Jennifer Revisited

We should, in return, respond with every kind of support we can for these brave pioneers, including financial support when it is requested.

Nothing significant will be achieved without effort, cohesion and sacrifice.

News in Brief

From the pages of Polare Number Forty-Nine

H.R.C. Expresses Deep Sorrow Over Murder of Gwen Araujo

United States: The Human Rights Campaign expressed profound sadness today for the death of a seventeen year-old transgender Californian, who was murdered last week in what appears to be a hate crime. "We would like to convey our tremendous grief to the family and friends of Gwen Araujo, who are dealing with this unspeakable and senseless act of violence. said Seth Kilbourn, H.R.C.'s national field director. "We are glad police have apprehended the subjects in what looks to be a hate crime of the most heinous magnitude. At H.R.C., we abhor the ignorance and hate that leads all too often to violence against transgender Americans". Araujo had been missing since October 3rd reportedly after getting attacked at a party when it was revealed that she was transgender. Media reports say that Araujo was found Wednesday in a shallow grave near a campground in Placerville, 150 miles north-east of Newark, California, where the fatal assault occurred. Police officials have yet to determine the motive for the murder but believe that it could be a hate crime. Three men have been arrested and charged with murder by "special circumstance", which can carry the death penalty under California law. The men charged are: Michael Magidson, 22; Jose Merel, 22; and Jaron Nabors, 19. A fourth suspect, Merel's brother Paul, 25, was released without being charged according to *U.S.A. Today*. "I'm going to bury her in the prettiest dress I can find" Sylvia Guerrero, Araujo's mother told *U.S.A. Today*, "With make-up. Her tombstone will say "Gwen".

ACON Releases Australia's First Gay & Lesbian Drug Policy

Sydney, Australia: ACON (AIDS Council of N.S.W.) has released a drug strategy for 2002-2005 outlining how it will work to improve the health of gay and lesbian communities by reducing the harms associated with the use of licit and illicit drugs. ACON's Drug Strategy was launched at the closing plenary of Health in Difference 4, the fourth national conference on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender health, where a number of papers were presented on issues around alcohol and other drug use in the gay and lesbian communities. "We understand this may in fact be the world's first drug strategy to be developed specifically for gay and lesbian communities," said ACON President Adrian Loveney, "It is certainly the first such strategy in the Australian experience. This strategy importantly addresses all forms of drug use including prescription drugs, alcohol and tobacco. ACON has a long history of working to reduce the harm associated with drug use through fifteen years of running a needle and syringe campaign, providing safe equipment at dance parties, supporting the medically supervised injecting room and participating in the New South Wales Government Drug Summit. We have received enormous positive feedback from our stakeholders on the development of this strategy with our key objectives to:

- » increase the gay and lesbian communities' understanding of drugs and the contexts of drug use.
- » reduce the risks associated with drug use by leading discussion and providing education on the harms and subjective experiences associated with drug use as well as the means of safer drug use.
- » support community in taking responsibility for drug use
- » strengthen existing partnerships and build new partnerships to reduce drug related harm and promote safer drug use.
- » advocate for law reform in the area of illicit drugs in order to reduce the harms associated with criminal sanction.
- » promote the use of evidence-based practice in the development of policy, the delivery of our services and the partnerships we develop."

The implementation of ACON's Drug Strategy 2002-2005 will see the expansion of a number of our current programs and the development of new and innovative projects" Mr. Loveney said.

Transsexual Wins Right to Join West Yorkshire Police Force

United Kingdom: A transsexual has won her case against the West Yorkshire Police which rejected her application to join the force in 1998. She alleged she had been discriminated against on the grounds of sex but the police said they were discriminating against her because she was a transsexual, and that discrimination was not unlawful. The Court of Appeal has ruled that for employment purposes she is a woman and the police cannot refuse her application to join the force.

Andrew Sharpe, Senior Lecturer in Law at Macquarie University explores the legal recognition given to vaginoplasty/phalloplasty and how it may have influenced and severely impacted upon the struggles of transgender people for legal recognition of their sex.

Transgender Positive

What happens when a transgender person becomes H.I.V. positive and stigma is placed on top of stigma? Many oppressed transgender people have difficulty with self-acceptance, yet one of the keys for transgender people to take better care of themselves is empowerment.

The Gender Centre advise that this edition of Polare is not current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.

under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.

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Tribute to Christine Jorgensen

A Heroine for Many Transgendered People Today

Copyright © Susan Stryker, written as the Introduction to the 2000 re-issue of the book *Christine Jorgensen; A Personal Autobiography*.
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Jorgensen's story became a lightning rod for many post-World War II anxieties about gender and sexuality, and called dramatic attention to issues that would drive the feminist and gay-rights movements in the decades ahead.

Christine Jorgensen was arguably the most famous person in the world for a few short years nearly half a century ago, although her name is not widely remembered today. The journalism trade publication *Editor and Publisher* announced in the spring of 1954 that more newsprint had been generated about Jorgensen during the previous year than about any other individual - over a million and a half words, the rough equivalent of fifteen full-length books. That Jorgensen now requires any introduction at all underscores the truth of that old adage about how fleeting fame can be. At the beginning of the twenty-first Century it seems almost quaint that Jorgensen should have provoked such widespread attention simply by having the shape of her genitals surgically altered one late-November morning in Copenhagen in 1952. But she did, and as a consequence of doing so she helped introduce the word "transsexual" into the American vocabulary.

When she returned to the United States in 1953, an unprecedented three hundred reporters were on hand to meet her plane at New York International Airport.

As Jorgensen herself recounts, her celebrity began 1st December 1952 when a banner headline screaming "EX-G.I. BECOMES BLONDE BEAUTY: OPERATIONS TRANSFORM BRONX YOUTH" greeted readers of the *New York Daily News*. Hearst Publications' popular Sunday newspaper supplement, *American Weekly*, subsequently paid \$20,000 for an exclusive interview with Jorgensen that brought her story into millions of American homes, and whetted the appetite of the world press. When she returned to the United States in 1953, an unprecedented three hundred reporters were on hand to meet her plane at New York International Airport. She was inundated with offers to appear in nightclubs, strip joints,

wrestling arenas, and other sensationalistic settings. Such mundane activities as walking her dog were reported in obsessive detail to an avid worldwide readership. If reporters couldn't find a legitimate story, however trivial, they simply made one up. Jorgensen received letters by the thousands, many reaching her addressed only "Christine Jorgensen, U.S.". Some were from other transsexuals who wanted to do what she had done; most of her correspondents sought nothing other than an autograph or photo; only a few sent hate mail, and the vast majority simply wished her well. Still others, however, spoke of Jorgensen's physical transformation as an event of profound religious significance. Her "sex-change" was viewed by many as a miracle of God in which not Christ, but Christine - Man reborn as Woman - heralded a new dispensation of human history.

In spite of beginning life as the son of a carpenter, Christine Jorgensen hardly seemed destined to become anyone's messiah. Born in 1926 to Danish-American parents and raised in unremarkable working-class circumstances, she had been a delicate, painfully shy child who always felt more feminine than masculine. By adolescence she was attracted to boys and terrified at the thought she might be "homosexual", a word she'd learned by furtively reading books in the locked "medical" case at the public library where she worked after school. Upon graduation from high school she studied commercial photography, held a low-level job in the film-stock archives at R.K.O. Studios, and reported for military service when drafted in 1945, months after World War II had ended. Jorgensen served a brief enlistment as a file clerk at Fort Dix, New Jersey, processing demobilisation paperwork for the combat troops streaming home from overseas. Later, after failing miserably to find work in the Hollywood film industry, she returned to school in New York and resumed her studies. Jorgensen was desperately unhappy with her lot in life as the 1940s drew to a close. She found hope, however, in the stray accounts she'd read in the popular press of hormone experiments carried out on animals, which had reportedly changed their secondary sex characteristics. After a handful of humiliating visits to clinical endocrinologists to see if such treatments were available for humans, followed by a few research trips to a medical library, Jorgensen decided to take matters into her own hands. She prevailed upon an unsuspecting pharmacy clerk to sell her a bottle of oestradiol, a recently synthesised version of oestrogen. She began to self-administer the drug, which promoted breast development and a general softening of her appearance. A few months later, Jorgensen set sail for Europe - and the history books - in search of doctors who would provide the sex-change procedures she sought. She found them in her ancestral Denmark, and soon became for all the world the woman she had long considered herself to be.

Jorgensen's subsequent celebrity is especially remarkable given that she was not the first person to undergo surgical and hormonal sex-reassignment - that

had been going on for more than twenty years before her story hit the headlines. The procedures employed on her behalf, as well as the rationale for using them, had been championed by the eminent German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, at his Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin, in the years between the World Wars. Jorgensen herself notes that her doctors were familiar with dozens of cases similar to her own, some of which had even been widely reported in popular media in Europe and the United States. None of that seemed to matter - Jorgensen was christened the atomic age sex marvel the second her story leaked out. Historical context helps to explain why Jorgensen became an emblem of her era, an icon representing some fundamental shift in human affairs to an audience of millions. First and foremost, it is crucial to recognise the extent to which massive population mobilisation of World War II refigured conventional notions of men's and women's proper social spheres, and helped unsettle familiar concepts of sexuality. Women left the home and entered the paid workforce in unprecedented numbers to meet the demands of the burgeoning wartime economy, while members of the armed services could scarcely help but notice the homosexual activity that flourished as never before in sex-segregated military settings. American society hasn't been quite the same ever since. Jorgensen's story became a lightning rod for many post-World War II anxieties about gender and sexuality, and called dramatic attention to issues that would drive the feminist and gay-rights movements in the decades ahead. Years later, in the twilight of her career, Jorgensen herself commented that while she couldn't personally take credit for launching gay liberation, the women's movement, or the sexual revolution, her notoriety had given each a "kick in the pants" by drawing unprecedented scrutiny in the mainstream media to questions of personal identity; sexual orientation, and gender roles. Many formerly taboo topics were publicly discussed in the post-war era with specific reference to Christine Jorgensen.



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Jorgensen's fame was undoubtedly structured to a certain degree by the paranoid logic of Cold War cultural fantasy. At the height of the United States global military dominance, "traditional" American masculinity seemed from some reactionary perspectives to be paradoxically on the defensive: subverted from within by an increasingly visible homosexuality, challenged from without by an economically empowered womanhood, and menaced from abroad by the spectre of communist totalitarianism bent on subjecting it to unmanly servitude. In an era when atomic bombs could now rip open the fabric of the physical universe, the sudden spectacle of male-to-female transsexual re-embodiment offered further giddy proof that science had indeed triumphed over nature. Jorgensen's notoriety in the 1950s was undoubtedly fuelled by the pervasive unease felt in some quarters that American manhood, already under siege, could quite literally be undone and refashioned into its seeming opposite through the power of modern science.

All this cultural baggage - everything from the mind-numbing implications of the atom bomb to tectonic shifts in gender roles - added up to a rather heavy cross for a twenty-six-year-old American to bear as she lay convalescing in a Copenhagen hospital in December, 1952. At first, Jorgensen seemed utterly bewildered by the storm of publicity that surrounded the revelation of her intensely private quest for personal happiness, though rumours persist that she herself leaked the story to the press. Whether she intended it or not, the sheer magnitude of her celebrity quickly precluded any prospect of returning to a low-profile career in photography. From the moment she hit the headlines, Christine Jorgensen was a star - destined to stand before, rather than behind, the camera.

If a perceived crisis of American masculinity fed some of the hysterical attention to Christine Jorgensen, her stardom definitely played itself out in terms of American womanhood. She was presented in the media as a blonde bombshell - fashionable, desirable, slightly aloof, blending Doris Day's wholesome propriety with Marlene Dietrich's sly wisdom in the ways of the world. Jorgensen rose admirably to the occasion. Fate placed her in the limelight, but her own talent and charisma kept her there. Other transsexuals made news in the immediate aftermath of Jorgensen's story, but they all sank quickly into obscurity.

Fortunately, the formerly introverted Jorgensen blossomed into her new role. Following the advice of seasoned theatrical agent Charlie Yates, who later became her manager, Jorgensen pulled together a surprisingly polished nightclub act in the summer of 1953. She sang a little, danced a little, told some jokes, and made quick costume changes, but mostly she simply performed her own identity on stage for paying customers. Though her audiences initially seemed interested in gawking at a freak show - harbouring the same expectations they might bring to a female impersonator act or a burlesque show - Jorgensen generally left them feeling enlightened as well as entertained. She managed to keep her name in marquee lights well into the 1960s, often earning more than five thousand dollars a week in top venues around the world.

Christine Jorgensen's long-awaited autobiography first appeared in hard-cover in 1967, just as her life on stage was coming to a close, and it helped launch the next phase of her career. The Bantam paperback edition issued the next year sold over four hundred thousand copies, yet it remains hard to find in second-hand book shops due to its continued popularity with the many transgendered people who consider Jorgensen a pioneering role model. An exploitative film version of Jorgensen's life story based on the autobiography appeared in 1970, starring cross-dressed Olympic swimmer John Hanson in his acting debut. The film quickly disappeared into well-deserved oblivion. Jorgensen, however, rode the new wave of attention created by her book and movie to establish herself as a highly sought-after speaker on the college lecture circuit, where she regularly drew audiences of thousands into the mid 1970s.

By the time she slid more or less gracefully into a modest retirement in the 1980s, she had been in the public eye for more than a quarter-century. Even in her final years she remained a feisty presence in the social circles in which she moved. With her health and fortune failing fast by the late 1980s, she would still pry herself out of her favourite armchair where she spent so much of the day reading newspapers and working crossword puzzles, put on a carefully chosen outfit, fix her face in a flattering style, and announce "It's show time!" to whomever was listening as she dashed headlong from her apartment and into the night. Bravado notwithstanding, bladder cancer eventually brought down the curtain on Jorgensen's life in 1989, at age sixty-two.

In her autobiography, Christine Jorgensen does an admirable job recounting the inner turmoil of her youth, as well as the triumphs and tribulations of her glory years. She does so with a steadfast determination to present her story in a dignified and understated manner - so understated, in fact, that the book sometimes makes for admittedly dull reading. So intent is she on proving her respectability and countering the many untrue and unkind things said of her in the press, that parts of her story seem little more than lists of which famous and important people she lunched with during any given week, which fabulous and exclusive clubs she performed in, and which tasteful ensembles she wore while doing so. This is a pity, for Jorgensen's life was anything but dull. It's a shame the prejudices of others persuaded her to tone down a vibrant, often bawdy personality for the sake of posterity's opinion.

The photographs included in the edition published in 2000 offer tantalizing glimpses of the woman behind the veil of propriety she draped around herself: Christine surrounded by hungry eyes at a Havana resort, Christine belting out tunes in a Philippine nightclub. To see Jorgensen in her prime in old newsreel footage is to be struck by the ironic distance between the staid persona presented in the pages of her autobiography and the vivacious starlet who exudes sexuality for the camera like a young Marilyn Monroe. To read her own descriptions of her nightclub act one would think she recited Shakespeare in a high-necked gown; to read her actual stage material is to appreciate her keen assessment of the roots of her popular appeal. "It's a Change," one of Jorgensen's trademark numbers, was full of double entendres that played on the public's titillation with her shift in gender presentation, and with the ambiguous desires that eddied in its wake.

Understandably, Jorgensen's autobiography also skimps on the details of her many behind-the-scenes struggles and personal shortcomings. She smoked and drank excessively, and had a tongue sharp enough to drive away the most dedicated and long-suffering supporters. She was more than a little star-struck, perpetually impressed with herself for having hobnobbed with show-business glitterati. She was litigious, constantly embroiled in petty lawsuits and legal actions. She peddled an endless steam of improbable projects that never went anywhere: Danish cookbooks, wretched screenplays for movies in which she played the female lead, a guide to the graves of movie greats. Towards the end of her life she even contemplated a new no-hold-barred, tell-all autobiography, complete with nude photos of herself. It, like all the other projects, ultimately failed to pan out.

But what of it? Christine Jorgensen's human failings do little to tarnish the zest with which she tackled the role that history handed her. She threw herself heart and soul into playing the part of the world's first famous transsexual: educating and entertaining, being gracious and glamorous, striving for the respect that every individual should be given as a birthright, but which is all too often denied those, like Jorgensen, who express their gender identity in an atypical fashion. Even now, straying too far from rigidly enforced gender norms makes one vulnerable to employment discrimination, familial abandonment, emotional violence, vicious hate crimes, and other potentially life-threatening difficulties. Jorgensen faced those challenges in far less tolerant times, and transcended them. Given a very narrow path to walk through life, she found a way to walk it with style. This act of simple dignity is her enduring achievement and greatest legacy.

For the personal courage she showed in her public life, Christine Jorgensen remains a heroine for many transgendered people today, though she has largely faded from our general culture's collective consciousness. It is a pleasure to celebrate her life once more with those for whom her memory is still very much alive.

Christine Jorgensen

From *Queers in History*: ☞ Christine Jorgensen was born in 1926 and named George William Jorgensen, Jr. She grew up in the Bronx area of New York and was self-described as having been a "frail, blond, introverted little boy who ran from fist fights and rough-and-tumble games". She graduated from high school in 1945 and shortly thereafter was drafted into the Army.



Returning to New York after military service and increasingly concerned over her lack of male physical development, she heard about sex reassignment surgery and began taking female hormones on her own. She intended to go to Sweden, where at the time, the only doctors in the world performing this surgery were located, but during a stopover in Copenhagen to visit relatives, she met Dr. Christian Hamburger, a Danish endocrinologist and specialist in rehabilitative hormonal therapy. Jorgensen stayed in Denmark, and under Dr. Hamburger's direction, begin hormone replacement therapy. She then received special permission from the Danish Minister of Justice to undergo a series of operations. First her testicles were removed and a year later, still in Denmark, she had a penectomy. Jorgensen then returned to the U.S.A. and eventually obtained a vaginoplasty when the procedure became available there.

A media sensation developed on December 1, 1952 when the *New York Daily News* carried a front-page story announcing that Jorgensen had become the recipient of the first "sex change". This claim is not true as the type of surgery had previously been performed by pioneering German doctors in the late 1920s and early 1930s. When Jorgensen returned to New York she became an instant celebrity. There has been speculation that Jorgensen leaked her story to the press. The publicity created a platform for Jorgensen, who used her publicity to advocate for transgender people.



Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography
Authors: Christine Jorgensen and Susan Stryker
Publisher: Cleis Press (2000)
I.S.B.N. -13 978-1573441001

From Amazon Books: ☞ This handsome reprint of Jorgensen's 1967 memoir makes it abundantly clear how moments of grace can descend on even the most ordinary of lives. When ex-G.I. George Jorgensen went to Copenhagen in the early 1950s to consult experts in sexual deviance, he was afraid they'd simply proclaim him a fairy. A full battery of hormonal and psychological tests revealed that, while he was drawn to men, he was no garden-variety homophile; he was a lady. Keeping the secret from his family, Jorgensen endured a groundbreaking series of operations, finally emerging in November 1952 as a

delicately beautiful young woman. "I merely wanted to correct what I considered a misjudgement of nature" wrote Jorgensen, who died in 1989. No one seeing the photographs included here (many of them new to this edition) can doubt the success of Jorgensen's transformation or wonder too long at the fascination she engendered back home, where a newspaper bought her story for \$20,000 and she was proclaimed New York City's "Woman of the Year". A stage and screen career soon followed. As Susan Stryker points out in a new introduction, Jorgensen offers a somewhat flattering and selectively abridged account of herself in the autobiography, but no more so than any plucky girl smiling her way through what must have been, at times, a harrowing and lonely journey, but one that she conducted with remarkable dignity. - Regina Marler

Further Information

[Wikipedia: Christine Jorgensen](#) 

[Christine Jorgensen Website](#) 

[Christine Jorgensen Biography](#) 

[Christine Jorgensen \(1927–1989\) – Life Story](#) 

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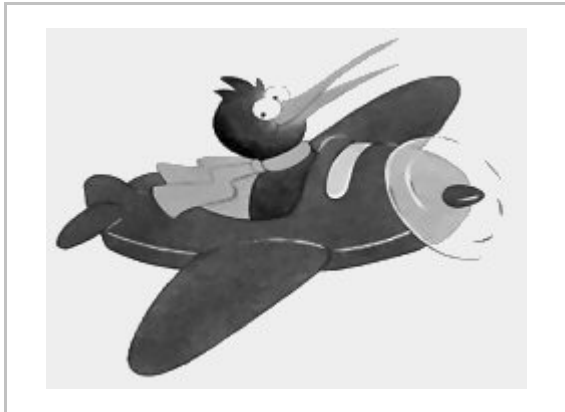
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A Kiwi Takes Flight

... and Lands on Her Feet!

by Juliet Scoble

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My transition began at the end of January 2002. One day I was out and about as a male and the next I was a woman. The only difference in people's attitudes towards me was they seemed friendlier, perhaps because I was now happier living as my true self. I received acceptance, encouragement and support.

Volunteering has done so much for me, especially in establishing my womanhood.

I had begun laying the foundations for this amazing day many years ago. By the mid 1990s my life was collapsing, with severe gender identity issues adding to the problems. After a failed suicide attempt I started on the road to rebuilding my life by changing to a more positive way of thinking.

Through the use of thoughts and imagination we create our lives. This can be good or bad, depending on what thoughts we have. The theory is simple ... good thoughts equals a good life ... but the practice is difficult. Even now, negative thought patterns that I thought I had abandoned can strike without warning. Constant vigilance is needed.

Slowly I started to turn my life around. I had always enjoyed a good relationship with people but these improved, too. Then in August 2001 I reached the point where I could no longer ignore my gender identity issues. I had only two choices - a gender change or death. I chose the former, a decision which changed my life from a bad dream to a fairy tale (well, most of the time). At first I had absolutely no idea where I could get the help I needed, but during the search I was putting my thoughts and imagination to work. By the time I started on hormone treatment at the end of November, I had transformed my mental image of myself to that of a female. I also started to love my body for the first time. This was difficult as it was still male; previously I had hated my body with a vengeance.

A week or so after starting on hormones I began disclosing my gender change, as I intended to live as a woman fulltime. This scared me, as being transsexual was my secret of secrets. The first person whom I told, a friend of many years, accepted my disclosure well, which in turn gave me the courage to tell others. People were surprised ('shocked' might be more accurate) but they only reacted positively.

On 4th January 2002 I legally changed my name. No turning back now; not that this was ever an option. Changing my name on legal documents, such as bank account and tenancy, was easier than expected. People were just so nice to me.

My changeover day was coming closer. By now all fear had vanished and excitement was increasing. All the while I kept imagining people accepting the true me.

Then Friday 25th January dawned. It was a usual Wellington summer morning - wet, cold and windy, but I was too excited to really notice. My clothes and make-up went on really well even though I had never had a full rehearsal. For some reason I never thought I needed to. The big moment had arrived - the beginning of the end of my real life horror of being a woman trapped in a man's body.

When I opened the door of my flat, I felt a nervous twinge. But this vanished as soon as I stepped out the door. The day turned out to be a marvellous day. Everywhere I was accepted as a woman by everyone and received so much support and encouragement. Wellington is full of such wonderful people and I'm so lucky and privileged to have so many in my life (as it was to turn out, this was to apply equally to other parts of New Zealand).

During the first week of my transition I received more compliments about my appearance than I'd had in my entire life. As an example ... new houses were being built next to the driveway to my flat ... "You're gorgeous," said the builder when he first saw me.

But of course my transition did not solve all my problems, in particular long-term employment and living in a sub-standard council flat. Getting up-to-date experience doing volunteer work might be a solution, so about three weeks after my changeover I visited Volunteer Wellington. This is a non-profit organisation which provides a volunteer referral service to similar organisations.

I was referred to a couple of organisations but ended up with a position at Volunteer Wellington itself.

Living as my true self I found a self-confidence I never had before. Working at Volunteer Wellington gave me a way of putting that self-

confidence into practical use. With each successful accomplishment my confidence grew, both in my work and as a woman.

My volunteer work has transformed my life. The people at Volunteer Wellington are absolutely marvellous and accepted me straight away. Only once before in my working life have I enjoyed my work so much. A number of friendships have developed, with one in particular becoming very special (although strictly platonic).

On 25th July a number of the women in the office accepted my invitation to celebrate my having lived in role for six months.

Some of my work has been mundane but most is very challenging. Old skills have been renewed and new ones developed. My contribution to Volunteer Wellington is giving me a lot of satisfaction.

One developing skill I'm particularly pleased about is the way I'm communicating with people whose native language is not English. Many people from non-English-speaking countries are here on students' and visitors' permits and cannot legally accept paid work. But they can do volunteer work and do so to improve their English skills and learn about the New Zealand way of life.

I have to listen very carefully to what many of these people are saying in order to understand them, and choose the words I use when speaking with them very carefully. These new communication skills are bound to help me in all areas of my life.

Volunteer Wellington holds lunchtime forums as part of the advice and training on volunteer management it offers to its member organisations. At the first forum I attended, shortly after starting, I was flitting about introducing myself and talking to the participants as they arrived. As my false self I only dreamed about being able to do such things and instead usually sat in a corner trying to blend into the wallpaper.

Volunteering has done so much for me, especially in establishing my womanhood. I used to sit on the edge of society but now I have etched a good little spot for me in it. No pay in terms of money but I have received rewards no amount of money can buy.

I'm not saying money isn't important - it is. I need and want more money - living in poverty and slum accommodation ain't no fun. This is why I would like other unemployed transsexual people in transition or about to transition to consider volunteer work. It has transformed my life, it may do so for others.

Working at Volunteer Wellington has also given me the confidence to start my own business, so that I can finally get off the dole and have a better lifestyle (and afford my surgery).

Things haven't gone as well as I expected on this front, which has knocked me a bit, but somehow, some way, I will succeed. And that will be a matter of having the right thoughts.

After all, I am now living as my true self. I have become a successful woman with the confidence to go after what she wants.

And get it!

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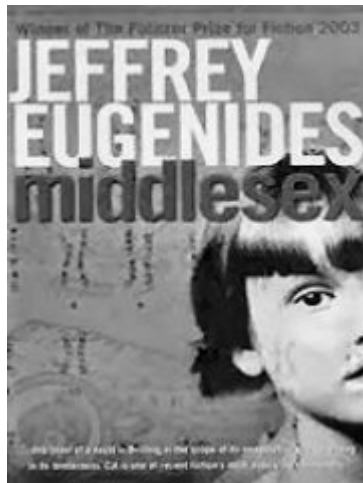
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Book Review: Middlesex

Pulitzer Prize-Winning Novel by Jeffrey Eugenides

Reviewed by Sharon

Article appeared in Polare magazine: December 2002 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Middlesex, by Jeffrey Eugenides.

Middlesex

by Jeffrey Eugenides
Published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (2002)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 1897082003

The sequences in which Callie discovers his sexuality are done with humour and sensitivity.

Jeffrey Eugenides had great success with his debut novel *The Virgin Suicides*, which was filmed recently by a daughter of Francis Ford Coppola. His second novel has been a decade in the making.

The genetic condition 5-Alpha-Reductase Deficiency Syndrome (5-A.R.D.) is well suited to Eugenides' fictional intentions, which relate to cultural transformation. A baby thus marked may resemble a girl, or be raised as a girl, but is a genetic male (XY) who will usually virilise at puberty if left to his own hormonal devices. As it happens, 5-A.R.D. occurs in parts of Asia Minor long contested by Greece and Turkey, which also suits Eugenides, a Greek American by origin.

Love interests being scarce in the home village, Greek siblings Lefty and Desdemona turn to each other. They flee Asia Minor for America when Smyrna (Izmir) is sacked in 1922. In the baggage are Greek culture, a lifetime of guilt, and the 5-A.R.D. gene.

Lefty's granddaughter/grandson Calliope Stephanides is the unlucky recipient of the 5-A.R.D. time bomb. Now forty-one, he replays history from the Smyrna tragedy up to his own teenage migration across the gender divide.

Furnished with this useful set of excuses, Eugenides covers a rich and speculative canvas with bootlegging, World War II, the Black Muslims, race riots of the 1960s, Luis Bunuel, and a raft of Greek myth and customs.

Nothing is sacred, all manner of artifice is permitted. By a huge coincidence, Callie's mother spots his father-to-be Milton on a war newsreel, and promptly breaks off her engagement to a tedious priest. Kept under wraps for most of the novel, the priest is wheeled out near the end for an unlikely criminal spree. Similarly, fluky car accidents many years apart are turning points for Milton.

As a serial jokester of the classics, Eugenides invests the tiny egg that finally breeds Callie with so much cultural jesting and symbolic baggage that it ends up, as it were, the size of a football. He is quite capable of linking the indeterminate aorist tense in Greek verbs with interminable acts of window cleaning by the senescent Lefty. Thankfully, a serious edge underlies the narrative, one in which "Everyone struggles against despair, but it always wins in the end".


5-A.R.D. is very much a context, rather than the content, of the fiction. There is not the sense of earnest social commentary found (for example) in Chris Bohjalian's recent novel of transsexuality, *Trans-Sister Radio*. Eugenides is more interested in the literary implications of the problem, not least the obvious analogy between the Stephanides' continental transit and Callie's gender transit.

The sequences in which Callie discovers his sexuality are done with humour and sensitivity. When Callie finally crosses over, he wonders how he will cope with the required male gestures and mannerisms. Then he realises that all the other XYs are bluffing too.

It is not that Eugenides doesn't care to invest too much in finer emotions, it's just that he is not self-conscious about Callie's sexual nature.

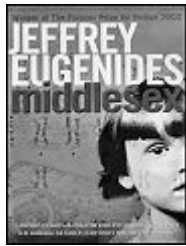
For all that, the (straight) author has done his serious fieldwork on the politics of intersexuality, which is put to good effect as required. There are plenty of real-life precedents for the deviousness of Callie's doctors.

Jeffrey Eugenides

From Wikipedia:  Jeffrey Eugenides is an American novelist and short story writer. He has written numerous short stories and essays, as well as three novels: *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), *Middlesex* (2002), and *The Marriage Plot* (2011). *The Virgin Suicides* has been filmed, while *Middlesex* received the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in addition to being a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, the



International Dublin Literary Award, and France's Prix Médicis.




Middlesex

Author: Jeffrey Eugenides

Published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 1st edition (2002)

I.S.B.N.-13 978 1897082003

From Amazon Books:  "I was born twice: first, as a baby girl, on a remarkably smogless Detroit day of January 1960; and then again, as a teenage boy, in an emergency room near Petoskey, Michigan, in August of 1974. My birth certificate lists my name as Calliope Helen Stephanides. My most recent driver's license records my first name simply as Cal."

So begins the breathtaking story of Calliope Stephanides and three generations of the Greek-American Stephanides family who travel from a tiny village overlooking Mount Olympus in Asia Minor to prohibition-era Detroit, witnessing its glory days as the "Motor City", and the race riots of 1967, before they move out to the tree-lined streets of suburban Grosse Pointe, Michigan. To understand why Calliope is not like other girls, she has to uncover a guilty family secret and the astonishing genetic history that turns Callie into Cal, one of the most audacious and wondrous narrators in contemporary fiction. Lyrical and thrilling, *Middlesex* is an exhilarating reinvention of the American epic.

Middlesex is the winner of the 2003 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

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Book Review: Sublime Mutations

By One of the World's Most Controversial and Exploratory Photographers

Reviewed by Dr. Tracie O'Keefe D.C.H.

Article appeared in Polare magazine: December 2002 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Sublime Mutations by Del La Grace Volcano

Sublime Mutations

by Del La Grace Volcano
Published by Janssen Verlag (2000)
I.S.B.N.-13 978 3887691356


This is a large book of photographs by Del, who throughout the past few decades, has been one of the world's most controversial and exploratory photographers of our time. As a book to live on your shelves it is truly a beautiful piece of art that explores the body and its pretence to sex and gender affiliation. As a prize-winning photographer Del La Grace, as he was known before his mutation, was a very well-respected female artist often exploring queer and women's imagery.

The book is a selection of his work over the past ten years, which records his fascination and documentation of tranz, meta tranz and intersex bodies' self-presentation. The photographs really are of the most exquisite technical quality and all pregnant with challenge and revelation. Those within are the lesbianboyz who are girl, transmen's faces and dicks, boldly naked dykes with cunts, babes and bottoms in stilettos, coquettish boys in underpants, the beatification of women with cancer after a bilateral mastectomy, psychedelic steel-studded cocks in the mouths of girls who get fucked for looking like boys. Del, who is confrontational by nature, by putting this collection together leaves the viewer


with little resistance to variation in sex and gender. He goes further by forcing us to question our sexuality as we can do nothing but lust over at least a few of his subjects' invitations to join their world as voyeurs or even participants. What was most delightfully surprising for me is that his sense of colour can be as seductive as his black and whites are mood-changing.

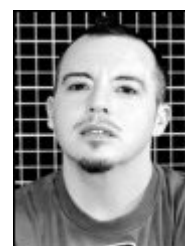
Nowadays Del describes himself as a hermaphrodyke or a female-to-male intersex person by design, but that is an ever-changing equation as he is unlikely to allow anyone to pigeonhole him for long. This is a picture book for lovers of beautiful people or a gift for someone you want to play mind-fuck games with, so you know it will reoccur in their dreams, come what may.

Del LaGrace Volcano

Edited from Wikipedia:  Del LaGrace Volcano is "one of the instigators of polymorphous perverse queer culture". A formally trained photographer, Del's work includes installation, performance and film, and interrogates the performance of gender on several levels, especially the performance of masculinity and femininity.

Born a female, Del lived the first thirty-seven years of his life as a woman, but since then has been living as both male and female (gender-queer). Del earned an Masters in Photographic Studies at University of Derby, U.K. in 1992 after studying photography at the San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco U.S.A. from 1979-81. Prior to Studying in San Francisco, Del attended Allan Hancock College as a student in the Visual Studies program from 1977-79. Volcano's work complicates understandings of both femininity and masculinity by depicting lesbian masculinity. In "The Feminine Principle" Volcano takes queer femininities as a focus. Included in this project is a portrait of Kate Bornstein. In "Lesbian Boyz and Other Inverts", Volcano's celebration of butch dykes, transsexual boys and other gender-queers, masculinity is shown as a tool of subversion.

Volcano's most recent photographs demonstrate how intersexed bodies can offer an entirely new perspective on the body. The "normal" body in relation to Volcano's photographs becomes queer. Volcano describes the bodies in his latest works as "sites of mutation, loss, and longing". In these newer works, Volcano takes on the loss of his friend, Kathy Acker and the transformation of his lover Simo Maronati's abled body into a disabled one. Here, Volcano illustrates the queerness of any body marked by illness or trauma. Read more about Del La Grace Volcano at [his website](#) .





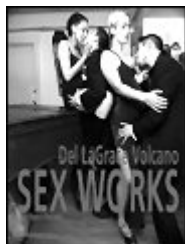
A 'show and tell' presentation that is as political as it is personal. Del LaGrace Volcano shares both process and the products from 30 years of real life experience, re-presenting images made in collaboration with queer subjects from the communities herm belongs to. Courtesy [TransSeminars](#) and [YouTube](#)



Femmes of Power: Exploding Queer Femininities
Author: [Ulrika Dahl \(Author\)](#) [Del LaGrace Volcano \(Photographer\)](#)
Published by: [Serpent's Tail \(2009\)](#)
I.S.B.N. -13 978-1846686641.

From Amazon Books: Going beyond identity politics, *Femmes of Power* is a photographic tribute to a diverse range of queerly feminine subjects whose powerful and intentional redress explodes the meaning of femme for the twenty-first century. Celebrating the growing femme presence, here you will meet members of Atlanta's Femme Mafia, San Francisco's Harlem Shake Burlesque, and Paris' Fem Menace. *Femmes of Power* features both everyday heroines and many queer feminist

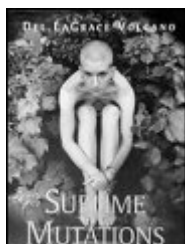
icons, including Michelle Tea, Virginie Despentes, Amber Hollibaugh, Marla Stewart, Lydia Lunch, Kate Bornstein, and Lois Weaver. The first book of its kind, *Femmes of Power* unsettles the objectifying male gaze on femininity and presents femmes as speaking subjects and high-heeled theorists. Look closer — these powerful, sexy, and sincerely ironic feminine figures are larger than life, bravely challenging femininity's negative connotations and replacing femme invisibility with a fresh new face for femme-inism.



Sex Works
Author: [Del LaGrace Volcano](#)
Published by: [Konkursbuch Verlag \(2006\)](#)
I.S.B.N. -13 978-3887693466.

From Amazon Books: This book features challenging images of non-normative sexual practices. Legendary alternative photographer and gender artist Del LaGrace Volcano returns with a photographic anthology exploring the world of L.G.B.T. sexual encounters. Del LaGrace Volcano documents queer and transgender sex practices in this remarkable collection of images. The result

of years of active participation in - and documentation of - the dyke, queer, trans and intersexual scenes in and around London and San Francisco. *Sex Works* is a colourful, provocative and explicitly revealing look at a world in which appearances are often deceptive and the exploration of uncertain boundaries is the coin of common currency.



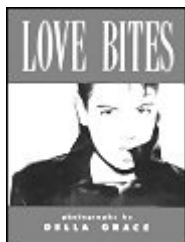
Sublime Mutations
Author: [Del LaGrace Volcano](#)
Published by: [Janssen Verlag \(2000\)](#)
I.S.B.N. -13 978-3887691356.

From Google Books: Del LaGrace Volcano broke onto the forefront of the queer avant-garde scene with the publication of *Love Bites*. Now, he goes one step further with *Sublime Mutations*, a unique and groundbreaking collection of work exploring new territory in the aesthetics of transgender studies and providing a crucial addition to the scant material available.

The Drag King Book
Author: [Judith "Jack" Halberstam \(Author\)](#) , [Del LaGrace Volcano \(Author, Photographer\)](#)
Published by: [Serpent's Tail \(1999\)](#)
I.S.B.N. -13 978-1852426071.



Del LaGrace Volcano's website: [📖](#) *The Drag King Book* explores the lives, communities and performances of many of the leading Drag Kings in mid to late 1990's New York, San Francisco, London, Berlin, Milan and Paris through photographs, text and interviews. In its second printing and still going strong it remains the first and unfortunately only visual monograph of a drag king scene that has expanded exponentially throughout the world in the six years since publication.



Love Bites
Author: Del LaGrace Volcano
Published by: Gay Men's Press (1991)
I.S.B.N.-13 978-0854491506.

Del LaGrace Volcano's website: [📖](#) Perhaps the first published photographic monograph of lesbian sexuality in the world made from an insider's perspective. In the early 1990's *Love Bites* generated a great deal of controversy and censorship in both the mainstream and lesbian/gay media. In the U.S.A. it was banned by Customs and Excise for two weeks. In Canada they cut the most "offensive" photographs out of the book before selling it. In England it was sold by mainstream booksellers but not in lesbian or gay bookshops who protested they couldn't take the risk or disagreed with the content. Although it has been out of print for over ten years it is still considered a queer classic.

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Lovegonwrong

If it Goes Wrong ... It Wasn't Love!

by norrie mAy-welby

Article appeared in Polare magazine: December 2002 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



norrie-mAy-welby

"When love goes wrong."

"When loves goes wrong."
Something about gender-fluidity ... boy meets boy-girl ... transperson meets boy, girl, anyone, love goes wrong. Or, as the directions they gave to me put it, "when gender becomes fluid, the path to true love becomes slippery."

Slippery.

Well, yes, that's what I thought too, maybe it's a lube joke, you know, path to true love, slippery, ho, ho, ho.

It's the most powerful force in human affairs, and it's not going to "go wrong" just because one partner's pre-existing script is not exactly the same as the real life relationship. I mean, if that is what causes love to go wrong, that wasn't love!

Oh, obviously, there's the assumption that love will go wrong whenever the nature of the gender or gender expression of one or either partner is enough to possibly challenge the gender expectations either partner has of themselves and/or each other ... But isn't that every relationship really? Negotiating roles, splitting up tasks, and sometimes compromising one's druthers for the sake of each other? Learning that we aren't quite like what we thought we were? Maybe finding out we're more like our parents than we'd have thought humanly (or humanely) possible?

But that's the nature of a relationship; It teaches more about ourselves, so a domestic or romantic relationship will reveal gender-fluidity to us. We learn who we are in relation to the other, and negotiate this, perhaps subtly changing to meet the other's expectations or needs, fitting in together in a dance of Yin and Yang.

Who's washing the dishes tonight? Who takes out the garbage? Who changes the sheets? Who's turn is it to initiate sex? To get the condoms? To fetch the tissues?

In some couples these roles are set, and in some, those tasks, those roles associated with gender, are interchangeable.

Two bottoms in a bed is only a disaster for the unimaginative. Like the stupid queen who said "I don't understand lesbians. How do they fuck?"

Gender is a relationship, and we are constantly re-negotiating relationships, even if we are just re-affirming our expectations. If you're in a relationship with another consenting adult, then there is a Yin and a Yang, a shifting give and take, I'll take charge of this, you take care of that, I'll play mother, you play daddy, whose turn to cut the roast?

So, what is this about, "when gender turns fluid, love goes wrong". Well, maybe in the fanciful imagination of some transphobe, and but that's about it really, unless we are confusing infatuation with love, perhaps.

Love is not pfft.

It's the most powerful force imaginable to human drive and motivation, it's the glue of human society, it's why we got presents every Christmas as a child, it's why we clean the cat tray, it's why we were out till 7:00am at the Taxi Club. In search of it, or in despair of it, or to drown the guilt we feel because of it.

Put your cynicism aside for a moment. Let go of your fear of being vulnerable for just a second. Feel your heart beat. Go on, take your right hand, place it over your heart, and feel it beat. Take a breath in, feeling your heart beat.

Let the breath go back out, feeling your heart beat. Breath in and let a smile come, if you feel like it.

There's something wonderful, something magical, about the energy, power or force that makes your heart beat.

That's love.

It's not pfft.

It's the most powerful force in human affairs, and it's not going to "go wrong" just because one partner's pre-existing script is not exactly the same as the real life relationship. I mean, if that is what causes love to go wrong, that wasn't love! It was pfft. Infatuation?

Sure, romantic love goes wrong for transmen, goes wrong if it's two butches, loves goes wrong for men and women and gender-fucking angels all the time, but it's not because of anyone's gender or gender role, it's for the same reasons love goes wrong for any of us.

I couldn't stand his drinking. She couldn't stand my cigarette breath. His politics are just fucked, man. She slept with my sister, dammit. He doesn't love me anymore. You keep interrupting me. We've got nothing in common. I need some time to myself. She's changed too much. He blew the rent, again. I just don't think this is working. It makes her feel bad more than it makes her feel good.

The things I like about him, I REALLY like, but the things I can't stand, I REALLY can't stand.

Oh sure, sometimes they make out it's because of our gender. One boyfriend broke up with me because he didn't want his parents working out I was a pre-op_ tranny girl, but it was okay for his gay flatmate to keep sucking him off because that was secret. But that wasn't about MY gender, it was about HIS expectations, sense of identity, and fear and self-loathing. And it wasn't love, it was just expectations about what love should look like. Two sets of expectations that failed to meet.

And then there was the boy who saw me through my sex-change, and dumped me before I was allowed to use it. So, was it because maybe the little bit extra had been that important to him? Or, was it because he realised that I had fallen in love with him only after and because he had cared for me through the medical recovery? He didn't break up with me because I'd lost my willy, he broke up with me because his feelings were hurt.

And I've lost trade because they didn't expect me to be a tranny, or affairs have ended when my trans nature became known. But these affairs weren't love.

They were desperate attempts to feel love, fear of loneliness, or just the sort of horniness that wears off in twelve hours.

I mean, that can be fun, but it's not love.

Or in longer affairs I've put up with shit because who else would love a tranny like me, and then the shit got too much to put up with, or I dared to raise my expectations of what I deserved. These relationships didn't end because of my gender, they ended because my needs and expectations shifted.

I'm sure it wouldn't take too much effort for me to look back on my relationship disasters with the back of my hand plastered to my forehead, oh it was because I'm a tranny, oh it was because I wasn't a real woman, oh it was because I wasn't busty enough, because I can't have children, oh woe is me. Anyone who's been called too short or too bookish or too vivacious or too different, well, we can all play victim, and blame our circumstances for our unhappiness. But at least in my case, it was only because I was choosing lousy partners, people who could help me recreate how I felt in my earliest dysfunctional relationships, or maybe weak people because I didn't feel safe with a strong partner. Gender may have been the excuse this love didn't last, but it was never the reason.

Immaturity, or differing levels of maturity, had a lot more to do with it.


I mean, sure, when I look back, I can blame the end of some relationships on me being a tranny, but none, not one, since I totally accepted being gender-diverse, without expecting to have to apologise for it, without any concession that being trans made me in any way worth less than anyone else. Since I stopped believing shit about myself, I stopped getting shit. Had I then been rejected before for gender reasons, or were my partners just faithfully reflecting back my own insecurities?

Oh look, maybe I'm just an old out-of-touch eunuch, maybe solid stable and matching gender is an important part of love for other people, but it's not what I see reflected in loving mature relationships. I see my parents over the years shifting their roles, giving ground, finding new ground, growing around each other. I see that in any couple (or threesome, or other combination) that lasts longer than a year or so. And I'm sorry, if you only stay together long enough to pop out a baby had you been heterosexual, that's not love, it's just a breeding behaviour.

True love doesn't care what gender or sex I am. True love never goes wrong. If you get dumped because you're a tranny, if you were dumped because she prefers the blond, if you dump him because you're worried about what your mates would think, if he dumps you for being too assertive, or you get dumped because she's really frightened of intimacy, because he's really frightened of commitment ... Well, if it's the first time, it's a shock; You get your heart broken; You move on; You fall in love again. If it's for the umpteenth time, it's a pattern; You do it again, or you get your head fixed.

But remember, with or without a partner, you always have love. It's what makes your heart beat. It's what makes you breathe when you're not thinking about breathing. It may not quite be the same as the dizzy intoxicating infatuation of having a fantasy played out when you "fall in love", but the love that makes your heart beat is much more powerful; It sustains the important things in life, and you can never really lose it, no more than you could the air that you breathe.


norrie mAy-welby

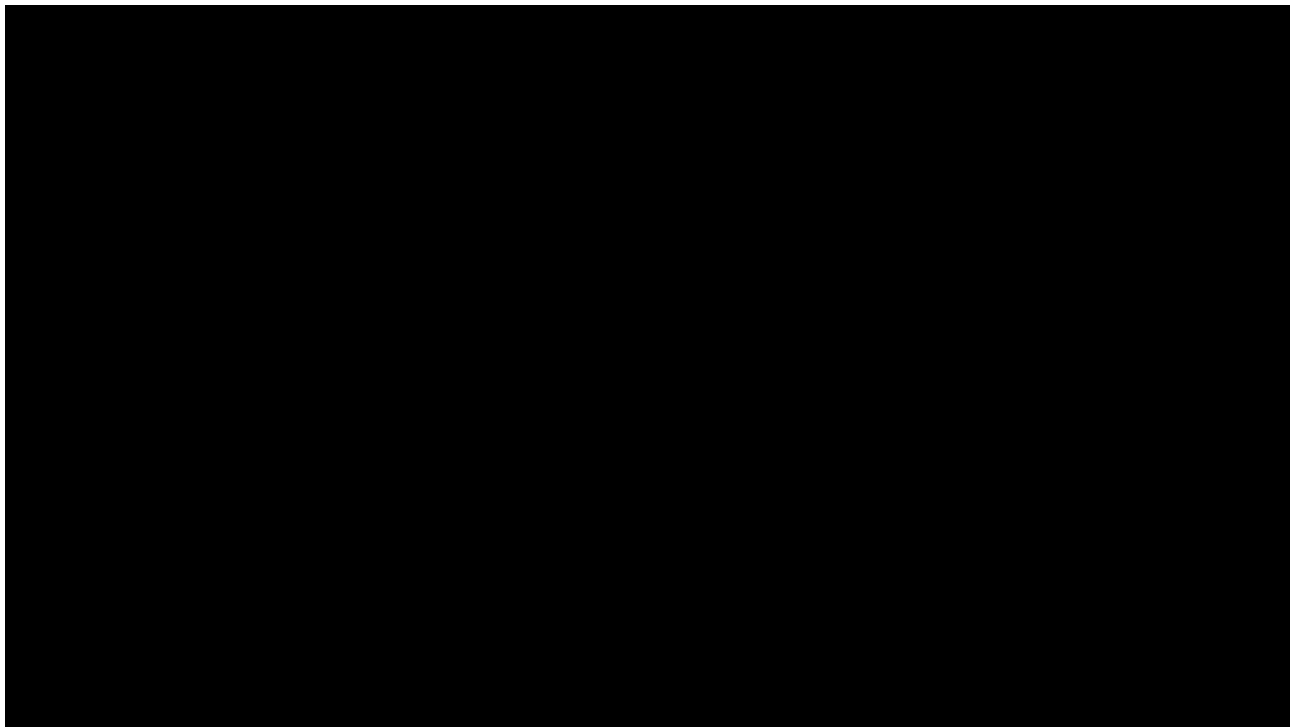
From [Wikipedia](#)  norrie mAy-welby became the first person in the world to be officially declared to be neither a man nor a woman, making Australia the first country in the world to recognise a "non-specified" gender.



Born in Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland, as a male and moving to Perth, Western Australia at the age of seven, norrie underwent male-to-female reassignment surgery in 1989, but later found that being a woman was not what zie felt like either. Zie moved to Sydney in the early 1990s. Doctors stated, in January 2010, that norrie was a neuter, neither male nor female, as hir psychological self-image was as a neuter, hir hormones were not the same as a male's or female's, and zie had no sex organs.

One of hir worries about being labelled male or female is that zie now looks like neither and is physically neither as well. Because of this, if hir passport states gender as being one or the other, it is possible that zie might be detained for not fitting what the gender field says zie should look like. This was one of norrie's reasons for seeking recognition as gender neutral. Of hir own sexuality, norrie has stated: "I'd be the perfect androgyne if I was completely omnisexual, but I'm only monosexual. Just think of me as a big queen girl."

norrie has been an integral part of the Gender Centre in many ways since moving from Western Australia many years ago. [Visit hir website for more about norrie](#)  Meanwhile, this excellent video has appeared on You Tube, an interview with norrie in which zie explains her views on many topics



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Kevin and Jennifer Revisited

Re: Kevin and Jennifer v Attorney-General for the Commonwealth [2001]: A Critique

by Andrew Sharpe, Senior Lecturer in Law at Macquarie University and author of *Transgender Jurisprudence: dysphoric bodies of law*.
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Kevin and Jennifer: In deciding that Kevin was a man for the purposes of marriage, Justice Chisholm placed special emphasis that Kevin was perceived to be, and was accepted as, a man by his family, friends and work colleagues.

The struggle of transgender people for legal recognition of their sex claims is not new. In relation to those jurisdictions governed by the common law, which include Australia, this

Now, in addition to the gaze of medicine and of law, transgender people making legal claims would appear to be subject to the gaze of the community.

struggle might be dated to the 1957 Scottish decision of *Re: X* [1] which involved the refusal of transgender sex claims. Since that time two distinct legal approaches to such claims have emerged in the common law world. The first, which has relied heavily on the 1970 English decision of *Corbett v Corbett* [2], has insisted that sex is determined at birth and by a congruence of chromosomes, gonads and genitalia. This approach, though perhaps on the wane, continues to have considerable purchase in some jurisdictions as rendered evident recently in the Supreme Court of Texas decision in *Littleton v Prange* [1999] [3]. The second approach has preferred to ignore biological factors as assessed at birth preferring instead to focus on present realities. Here the courts have emphasised the

fact of sex reassignment surgery and the need for law to reflect medical and social realities. Within this approach sex reassignment surgery has served as a threshold for legal recognition for a variety of legal purposes including marriage.

This second approach, which has been premised on the notion of psychological and anatomical harmony effected by sex reassignment surgery, requires further comment. Specifically, it is clear from the case law that sex reassignment surgery is equated with genital change. That is to say, legal recognition has required vaginoplasty/phalloplasty. Moreover, in many decisions the courts have emphasised not only the need for surgery but also that surgery is designed to produce, and indeed must produce, the capacity for heterosexual intercourse [4].

Indeed, in many decisions judges seem to make sense of the desire for surgery only in terms of an outcome that involves heterosexual penetration. More recently, in the New Zealand decision of *Attorney-General v Otahuhu Family Court* [1995] [5] Justice Ellis, and in contrast to these earlier reform decisions, insisted that post-operative capacity for sexual intercourse was an irrelevant factor for the purpose of determining sex claims in the context of New Zealand marriage law. Nevertheless, his decision reinforces the requirement that genital surgeries take place. In this regard sex (genital) reassignment surgery continues to function as a threshold in legal determinations of sex claims.

The Decision

It is against this background that the recent decision of Justice Chisholm of the Family Court of Australia in *Re: Kevin and Jennifer v Attorney-General for the Commonwealth* [6] needs to be understood. The decision is significant in a number of respects. First, while the reform approach of psychological and anatomical harmony had already established itself within the Australian context it had not hitherto been extended to marriage. Indeed, there are passages contained within prior Australian reform decisions that appear to insulate marriage law from the effects of those decisions [7]. In *Re: Kevin*, Justice Chisholm recognised Kevin to be a man and his marriage to Jennifer to be a legally valid marriage for the purposes of Australian marriage law. Thus the decision is significant as the first Australian decision to apply the reform approach to marriage law, an area that historically has proved the most resistant to reform. However, in these respects Justice Chisholm's judgement is not novel. The application of the psychological and anatomical harmony approach to marriage law can be dated to the 1976 New Jersey of *M.T. v J.T.* [8] There is, however, more to Justice Chisholm's judgement.

The decision in *Re: Kevin* does not merely endorse a well established reform approach in the Australian marriage context. Rather, it breaks with that approach in a significant respect. In contrast to prior decisions that had looked to sex (genital) reassignment surgery as a threshold requirement, Justice Chisholm recognised Kevin's claim to be a man even though he had not undertaken phalloplasty procedures. In this respect the decision places Australia at the forefront of transgender law reform through common law means. Nevertheless, the decision contains a number of features that, in my view, present difficulties. First, and most obviously, while

abandoning a requirement for genital surgery the decision otherwise retains the link between legal recognition and surgical intervention. That is to say, sex reassignment surgery, which Kevin had undertaken, is still required. The difference is that this does not necessarily entail genital surgeries. To this extent the decision might be viewed as simply an extension of prior reform decisions, whereby harmony, in the context of an approach premised on psychological and anatomical harmony, is re-imagined.

There are, however, two other features of the decision, previously absent or marginalised within Australian reform decisions, which might be viewed as troubling. First, the decision gives weight to biological considerations and in particular evidence concerning brain sex suggesting that gender identity is linked to the development in utero of a particular part of the brain. It is not my aim here to question the validity of this science. Rather, my concern lies with its relevance. It is clear from transgender reform decisions that the legal determination of sex can not be reduced to scientific understandings of the body. These decisions have instead focused on social policy and human rights considerations. To emphasise biological factors such as brain sex is to re-orient legal analysis away from present reality, a temporal moment around which reform has been built. In other words, it is to reinforce the significance of the birth moment. For those who might think that this has limited practical relevance, imagine that brain sex were to become a crucial ingredient in future legal determinations of sex. Then imagine that a brain sex test became available for living persons (currently determinations as to brain sex, the relevance of which it should be remembered is still currently debated within the scientific community, are only possible post-mortem). It may be that a transgender person whose sex claims are currently recognised would produce a negative test result. This could only serve to undermine his/her sex claims in legal contexts. It is particularly unfortunate that biological has been introduced in the Australian context given its prior irrelevance to reform. It is a step that in an important way undercuts the centrality of the present moment, of lived reality, to reform.

Finally, the decision in *Re: Kevin* is problematic because, in addition to the biological, it introduces other elements. Specifically, the decision introduces the elements of the social and the cultural. In deciding that Kevin was a man for the purposes of marriage, Justice Chisholm placed special emphasis on the fact that Kevin was perceived to be, and was accepted as, a man by his family, friends and work colleagues. While Kevin is fortunate enough to "pass" as a man and to have supportive family, friends and work colleagues this may not be the experience of many transgender people. It is unfortunate that legal recognition should in any way hinge upon the gaze of "others". Now, in addition to the gaze of medicine and of law, transgender people making legal claims would appear to be subject to the gaze of the community. This aspect of the judgement might be viewed as undermining further self-determination of transgender people and is out of step with human rights jurisprudence.

Notes

[1] *Re: X, Petitioner* [1957] Scot. L. Rev. 203

[2] *Corbett v Corbett* [1970] 2 All ER 33

[3] *Littleton v Prange* 9 v 3d 223 (Tx App. 1999).

[4] See, for example, *Re: Anonymous* 293 N.Y.S. 2d 834 (1968); *M.T. v J.T.* 355 A. 2d 204 (1976); *R v Harris and McGuiness* [1989] 17 N.S.W.L.R. 158; *Secretary, Department of Social Security v S.R.A.* [1993] 118 A.L.R. 467; *M v M* [1991] N.Z.F.L.R. 337.

[5] *Attorney-General v Otahuhu Family Court* [1995] 1 N.Z.L.R. 603

[6] *Re Kevin and Jennifer v Attorney-General for the Commonwealth* [2001] FamCA 1074

[7] See *R v Harris and McGuiness* [1989] 17 N.S.W.L.R. 158; *Secretary, Department of Social Security v S.R.A.* [1993] 118 A.L.R. 467

[8] *M.T. v J.T.* 355 A.A 2d 204 (1976)

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Transgender Positive

Maintaining Your Trans* Needs while H.I.V. Positive

by Joe Lunievicz, Assistant Director of Training for the National Drug Research Institute

Article appeared in Polare magazine: December 2002 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Rosalyn Blumenstein, Director of the Gender Identity Project (G.I.P.) at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Centre

Perception is everything. Are you a boy or a girl? Blue or pink? People view you as male or female, and this view is crucial to the way people in our society thinks, identifies, categorizes and define each other. It's woven into the fabric of our daily existence, and God help anyone who challenges this two-party, male/female system. History has shown that you will be beaten verbally, spiritually, emotionally and/or physically if you challenge it.

Empowerment is about letting the public know that we do exist. It's about telling myself, and others, we're not going to take the abuse anymore.

Rosalyn Blumenstein, Director of the Gender Identity Project (G.I.P.) at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Centre, and a female of transgender experience remembers, "When I was a child, I was told boys don't play with dolls and to stop crying like a girl. I thought the way I was, was wrong. Most transgenders experience a sense of difference at a very early age, and that this difference is wrong. If you don't fit into your category (boy or girl), you're going to internalize that there's something wrong with you."

Some transgender people defy categorization. This tends to disorient people who need to neatly define the world. According to Rosalyn, many people ask transgenders why they aren't either a man or a woman, and if they are unhappy with their gender, why they don't just have a sex-change?

When a transgender has a sex-change, people then say, "but you're not a real woman or man." Nora Molina, a peer educator at G.I.P. and a self-identified Hispanic transsexual woman adds, "We are looked at as neither female nor male ... we are treated like a foreign entity, a freak of nature." (Note: Rosalyn explained that one "s" in the word transsexual has been dropped to depathologize the word, and to empower and embrace the community). What defines a real woman or a real man and who makes up these definitions? What happens when a transgender person becomes H.I.V.-positive and stigma is placed on top of stigma?

Definition of Transgender

G.I.P., along with many other service providers, uses the term transgender as an umbrella term encompassing a diversity of gender expression including drag queens and kings, bi-genders, cross-dressers, transgender people and transsexuals.

Transsexuals are defined as people who find their gender-identity - their sense of themselves as male or female - in conflict with their anatomical sex. Some transsexuals may live part-time in their self-defined gender. Many desire to live fully in their self-identified gender. Some undergo hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery.

Empowerment

Because of stigma, many transgender people who have been marginalized and oppressed have difficulty with self-acceptance and live secret lives. Rosalyn, Nora, and Arbert Santana, the assistant coordinator of the House of Latex Project at Gay Men's Health Crisis, agree that one of the keys for transgender people to take better care of themselves is empowerment. It is also the foundation of G.I.P.'s mission.

Having "out" role models "seen" in public will help to change the stereotypes and is a big part of what G.I.P. tries to do. According to Rosalyn, "Being out challenges the face of pathology and stigma that surrounds transgender people. People like RuPaul are doing wonderful things for part of the transgender population because they are out and they are successful and they are not pathologised."

Gaining accessibility to information and resources is a big part of the empowerment process. Arbert is Mother of the House of Latex and works with the House/Drag Ball Community - a predominantly African-American and Latino group of young people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender. He says, "Information doesn't get filtered down to these young people. Their information is going to come from their sisters and from the black market on 125th Street."

Medical Services

As soon as a person of transgender experience walks into an office to access medical services, the male/female question comes up. Do you have a penis or a vagina? Being identified by others as a gender other than how you identify yourself, can be humiliating, embarrassing, and hurtful. This alone can keep many transgender people out of medical service providers' offices.

Nora, Arbert and Rosalyne all recommend that transgender people tell their service providers, if they can, the personal pronouns (he or she) they prefer others to use in addressing them. "Introductions are important," says Nora, "How you feel on the inside is identified by the words you call yourself and you allow others to call you."

Not all transgender people need to interact with the medical community around being transgender. The two main areas transgender people address with the medical community are hormone therapy and sexual reassignment surgery. Being H.I.V.-positive makes each of these that much more difficult to obtain.

Hormone Therapy

When it comes to being H.I.V.-positive, hormone therapy for a transsexual (pre-operative) can be a crucial issue. Rosalyne believes a transsexual male-to-female should be on hormone therapy. She uses treating depression with Prozac as an analogy: "There's an imbalance in the brain, and Prozac helps people to feel a sense of balance: it relieves the imbalance. Hormone therapy can do the same thing for a transgender person. The stress and turmoil of this imbalance in a person can be like poison. Producing testosterone because you have testicle producing male hormones creates tension."

Hormone treatments can be taken three different ways: orally (pill form), intramuscularly (with a needle in liquid form) and transdermally (through the skin with a patch). Ideally, all three forms of hormones should be prescribed by a physician.

Oestrogen therapy can cost from \$60 to \$100 each month. There is little information available on either women or men who have taken hormone therapy for long periods of time (for example, over thirty years to a lifetime). There is also little information available about the drug interactions between anti-retroviral therapies (e.g., AZT, ddI, DDC, and 3TC) and the different kinds of hormone therapies, to say nothing of the newer drugs like protease inhibitors. "A young H.I.V.-positive femme queen who starts AZT therapy," says Arbert, "and starts to have ... side-effects, might have to make a decision about whether to continue treatment, and which treatment to stop. This brings up large emotional issues about being able to finish the process - of being able to fulfil your dream of gender reassignment - and we need more information about this so people can make better decisions."

Insurance companies will not cover hormone therapy for transgender people because, according to them, it is an elective therapy, not a necessary therapy. Because of this, many transgenders are forced to get their hormones on the street. Although Rosalyne doesn't recommend it, she acknowledges that, "It's easier to get hormones on the black market, but you also don't know what it is you're getting." The realities are clear for transgender people who don't have the money for or access to the medical community.

Rosalyne recommends that hormones be taken orally as opposed to intramuscularly, because you avoid the difficulties of having to obtain, use and clean injection equipment. For someone who is H.I.V.-positive, this can be especially important because at its most basic level, a needle leaves a hole in the skin - a hole through which invaders can enter the body. The needle used for hormone injections is considerably larger than those used for other drugs. Needles need to be cleaned (sterilized with an alcohol soaked in boiling water, or with a bleach kit) after each use and should not be shared. If they are going to be shared, they need to be cleaned between each use.

Books like *The Pill Book: An Illustrated Guide to the Most Prescribed Drugs in the United States*, published by Bantam Books, have been used by transgender people to find out how a specific drug should look. "If you're buying on the black market, know what your pills look like," says Rosalyne. "Try to be an educated consumer."

Sexual Realignment Surgery

Rosalyne calls the operation sexual realignment surgery as opposed to its official name, sexual reassignment surgery (S.R.S.). "Realignment is much more empowering. It's saying you're just moving around pieces that were there that need to be in a setting with which you feel more comfortable. Realignment is better than saying "male turns into female, female into male" as if it were front page news."

S.R.S. is considered an elective surgery by the medical profession and by insurance companies, and therefore is viewed as a non-essential surgery. As with hormone therapy, insurance companies won't pay for S.R.S.

The estimated cost for a male-to-female S.R.S. is from \$7,000 to \$15,000. The female-to-male S.R.S. is considerably more - ranging from \$40,000 to \$70,000. Most medical professionals consider the surgery to be too intensive a blow to the immune system for surgeons to perform on people who are H.I.V.-infected. Service providers disagree. "Number one, it's not a ten-hour operation," says Rosalyne, "and number two, the amount of stress involved in living with a body that doesn't conform to who you are is probably much worse for the immune system over time. Elective versus necessary surgery becomes critical when talking about stress reduction. This is necessary surgery. Why not perform a surgery that's going to provide more self-acceptance and reduce my stress?"

Mental Health Services

The first barrier a transgender person encounters when trying to access mental health services, is the language that the mental health community uses to define them. The D.S.M. 3 classifies transgender people as having Gender Identity Disorder. "And when you're told you have a disorder, you sort of embrace it," says Rosalyne. Transgender people are pathologised before they even walk into a mental health practitioner's office.

"When we changed the language around (with regard to H.I.V.) and said you can live with H.I.V. (instead of dying from it), some people stopped taking it as a death sentence" says Rosalyne. "The stigma wasn't lifted but more people started going on with their lives and not dying from it." Just as being gay or lesbian is no longer looked upon by the mental health and medical communities as being a pathological disorder (having been removed from the D.S.M. 3), the same thing needs to be done with regard to being transgender.

In seeking group support services regarding H.I.V. issues, should a transgender person ask to be placed in a men's group, a women's group, or a transgender group? The rule of thumb is try to find a group in which you will feel most comfortable, whether it's male, female or transgender. Ask people to call you he or she, as you feel most comfortable being identified.

Drug Treatment

For many transgender people, the first obstacle they encounter at a drug treatment centre is "the bathroom question." Which bathroom do you let "them" use? And then, with whom do you let them room? Many transgender people simply leave and never return while staff tries to figure out the answer to these questions.

When talking to service providers about this issue, Rosalyne confronts them with, "Why are you looking over the bathroom stalls to see who has a penis and who has a vagina? Why aren't you doing what you should be doing, and get the hell out of the bathroom? Why can't you just allow people to use the bathroom they are most comfortable using?"

Another ideal would be for the transgender person to fight for the right to attend a transgender specific support group, while still in treatment at an outside location (such as at G.I.P.) so, "you can feel a sense of okayness. Don't buy into the bullshit that says you're not worthy," Rosalyne reminds her clients.

Programs like G.I.P. have been slowly educating staff at treatment centres, and many places are open to being educated about transgender issues. Twelve step programs can also be helpful in a number of ways. According to Rosalyne, they can be safe havens where you can talk, people won't do anything but listen, and everybody can have a chance to speak.

For those who are H.I.V.-positive, there are programs out there that will be transgender-friendly. The problem is, you have to find them. Treatment programs won't come to you, and they are too few and far between. Still, there are some out there. "Find the places that are going to be supportive, ones that will treat you the way you deserve to be treated," says Rosalyne.

"We must be an amazing group of people," says Rosalyne, "because we are still out there living. Empowerment is about letting the public know that we do exist. It's about telling myself, and others, we're not going to take the abuse anymore."

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