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# My Journey to Thailand

## Surgery with Dr. Sanguan Kunaporn

by Joanne

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Dr. Sanguan Kunaporn

**F**or much of my life I was aware of characteristics and traits inconsistent with my birth gender. This became noticeable during adolescence and later, around the age of forty, became incompatible with my male persona. These characteristics led to concern among those nearest and dearest to me.

*I am now back to pursuing my broad range of interests and activities that have been ongoing since I retired five years ago. My life is now very settled and happy.*

It wasn't, however, until I was fifty-three, long after having completed university, and years in various managerial positions with multi-national companies, that my lifelong conservative and traditional values were shattered following the breakdown of my marriage.

I found myself free to discover myself and immerse myself in a series of personal growth courses with a focus on self-awareness. I also openly explored cross-dressing whenever I could.

I discovered the Seahorse Society which opened my eyes to the transgender world. After four and a half years, I had developed a commitment to living more completely in my true

gender. I embarked on a 700 hour course of electrolysis. Fortunately for me, the electrolysis practitioner was a transgendered woman and became an important source of information for me at that critical time of my life. She helped me to understand that, if I were to be completely happy, I would have to make some very difficult decisions. In August 2010, I commenced hormone treatment and consulted a psychiatrist.

In February 2010, after a period spent researching my possible options with regard to surgery, I made contact with a Dr. Suporn who, by all accounts, was considered to be among the top Thai surgeons. Unfortunately his age limit for affirmation surgery was sixty-four which ruled me out. I also considered Dr. Chettawut. Eventually I settled on Dr. Sanguan Kunaporn, from Phuket, Thailand, who also enjoys a high reputation, especially in terms of a technique that involves a two-stage process which enhances internal healing.

In May 2011, having booked the surgery for late August, I was advised by a woman friend with a transgender background that it would be highly desirable to have a support person with me in Thailand after leaving the hospital.

At this time the surgeon recommended a second psychiatric report which delayed the surgery date to late October 2011. I made an appointment with the passport office and took letters from the surgeon and my G.P. in support of my application for a twelve-month limited validity passport showing my correct gender and name. I was then in a position to book direct flights to and from Phuket with Jetstar for myself and my support person. Accommodation arrangements were left open until I left the hospital.

The surgical technique used by Dr. Kunaporn requires a fourteen day hospital stay. Admission was at 10:00am the day prior to surgery, with chest x-ray and other tests. I moved into my room at lunchtime and there were afternoon visits from Dr. Kunaporn, the anaesthetist and a clinical psychologist to give final approval for surgery under Thai law.

That evening I went through various preparations for the surgery. After a relaxing sleep I was wheeled into the operating theatre, the senior theatre sister said "everything will be okay". My response was "I know". When I awoke eight hours later, following five and a half hours of surgery, I was back in my room and drowsy, with no pain.

There was no pain at any time following the surgery. The surgery I had, had involved saving the scrotal tissue for the second stage lining operation, using the head of the penis and frenulum with nerve and blood supply intact to create a sensitive clitoris. The urethra was redirected to the correct position and a vaginal canal was created. Labia minora and labia majora structures were also created. I was able to walk (with attachments) on the second day after surgery.

Three days later, it was back to theatre to have the vaginal packing replaced under anaesthetic. Then six days after the initial operation, back to the theatre again, under anaesthetic to have the scrotal tissue placed in the vaginal cavity as lining. Then it was four days lying on my back with no movement, eating only soup to avoid bowel movements. This was to allow the lining to adhere and to assist the healing process.

On day twelve, after the initial operation, the vaginal packing was removed in my room and the surgeon was able to teach me something about my new female anatomy. Then he performed my first vaginal dilation, demonstrating that I had five and a half inches of internal depth. On day fourteen I was discharged from hospital to the hotel next door where I had stayed for one night prior to admission to the hospital.

The hospital was the Phuket International Hospital, a large private hospital catering for international clients and wealthy locals. This hospital was equal to the best Australian private hospitals in every respect. The surgical ward was on the fifth floor and each rooms had a bathroom. All rooms had a refrigerator, safe and television, as well as tea/coffee making facilities. All senior staff spoke English well. All staff on the surgical ward were highly professional and very friendly. The food menu had good choices of Thai and Western food.

The surgeon recommended that I should plan to stay in Phuket for two further weeks after leaving the hospital in case of complications. All transportation was provided on a complimentary basis, on arrival, departure, transfer to resort accommodation and to return to the hospital for outpatient appointments. I went to Thailand with a sixty day visa to allow for the possibility of complications. My support person arrived at the hotel the day after I left the hospital and she found accommodation for us for two weeks in a two bedroom apartment. This was a difficult project for her, as the floods in Bangkok had resulted in lots of wealthy people coming to Phuket and taking up all the apartment accommodation. The gods were with us as my friend finally found two fully furnished spacious studio apartments next to a large swimming pool on the ground level of a timeshare resort. Each studio apartment cost only \$27 per night for thirteen nights.

There was an outpatient appointment each week with the surgeon in the operating theatre, where stitches were removed, external tissue was trimmed and an internal speculum examination was carried out. During this time the task of dilating three times a day was quite time consuming.

My friend and I visited a number of major supermarkets to provide for breakfasts and lunches. Each evening we walked or took a taxi to a Thai restaurant for dinner. Our resort was located about a thirty-minute walk from the main shopping area and Patong Beach. Outings included shopping for clothing and souvenirs at markets and shopping centres. Also there were several walks to and along the beach in the final week when I had more energy, plus a facial in a beauty parlour, the icing on the cake.

This was my first international trip on a female passport and everything was very routine at Sydney airport, Phuket airport and on the flights.

There were a few setbacks. On leaving the hospital I was wearing thick pads throughout the time in Thailand and on the flight home. The long walks with pads in the last week in Thailand created irritation in the area around the urethra and this caused loss of skin and rawness. There was even some blood spotting from this area on the flight home. A woman friend who collected me from the airport and my beauty therapist whom I saw the next day both advised me to cease using pads and use thin and long panty liners instead. I also saw my G.P., who advised me to spray the urethral area after urination with a pharmacy saline solution. Salt water baths were recommended after every dilation. The skin healed during the three months following surgery.

Another major setback related to my over-zealous use of a vibrator. The surgeon had recommended I buy myself one for Christmas, two months after the surgery. So in January I was having a lot of fun and doing some internal localised damage in the deep part of the vagina. My G.P. recommended an anti-inflammatory drug but it did not fix the problem. Later, at the end of February, the G.P. suggested a longer course of anti-inflammatory medication and referred me to a gynaecologist. At the time of that consultation at the end of March everything was okay internally and he observed that the surgeon had done an outstanding job.

So what does life hold for me now? Ongoing dilation is easy and is now only daily at twenty-seven weeks post-op.. This follows an initial ten weeks of dilating three times a day, then fourteen weeks dilating twice a day. Dilation will become less frequent at about twelve months post-op. Due to more than six months of healing, there is now no problem using the vibrator or dildos. Also I now am ready for the "rite of passage" experience of having sex with a heterosexual man. My position is that I am open to intimate relationships with either a woman or a man.

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