

## anatomically incorrect

### Looking for others

by Ronda Shouse  
Special to Q-Notes

[Ed. Note: This column details the life experience and struggles of one Charlotte transsexual. Some content may be uncomfortably graphic for some readers.]

Once I began reading Melanie Ann Phillips biography, I quickly began to realize that I was not alone in this situation [of being transgendered]. But who were the others? Where were they? How was I going to meet or talk to someone? I had just turned 52 and felt that I was maybe just too old to do anything and I would be facing a life as I was without ever being my true self.

Having been a regular web surfer and a user of AOL, I knew I could place an online ad and I did. I then wrote an email to Dr. Ann Lawrence. It was her web site that I had first found. Even though she had a notice posted that she did not take email questions, I wrote to her anyway and titled my letter "HELP." Surprisingly she responded back within 24 hours and it was to be a major boost for my spirits and a change in my thoughts. She explained that what I was experiencing was not that uncommon. Baby boomers who had repressed their feelings all their lives were discovering the truth through the Internet. She explained that transitioning at my age was not unusual at all. She went on to say that it was

being done by people in their 40s, 50s and even in their 60s.

I received several responses to my AOL ad. Quickly, I found out that most were sexual predators. However, two responses were from very sincere women who were themselves in the process of doing what I needed to do. We began to share email with one another. They were both very interested in giving me all the facts that I needed to know and neither one ever made suggestions to convince me that this was the thing to do. In fact, they both asked over and over if I was sure about this. They reminded me that this was a life-altering decision and I should be absolutely positive. The repercussions of my decisions would affect many people besides myself. Once they realized my sincerity they both began to offer me help and assistance. One went even further. Gina asked to meet me so we could talk about this face-to-face.

By this time, my ex and I were arguing on a frequent, almost daily, basis. Life was becoming more and more difficult for me emotionally. I called Gina on my cell phone and we agreed to meet at a public park.

We took a long, slow walk and Gina told me about her marriage and how it had failed due to her transitioning. She answered all my questions openly and honestly. After a couple of hours, we said good-bye. I have not seen Gina since, but I have exchanged email with her. I do not know much about what has happened to her, but I do know that she has been to Thailand and had reassignment surgery. Mutual friends say she is doing very well now and is quite happy in her new life.

The other girl who wrote to me was B. (I will not divulge any more about her identity to secure her privacy.) She and I have become good friends. B was very supportive during those ini-

tial days and weeks, especially as my marriage self-destructed very rapidly in front of our eyes. B suggested that I attend a support group for crossdressers known as Kappa Beta. They are a subsidiary of TRI ESS (Society for Second Self).

That event turned out to be a real "bummer." The psychiatrist I was seeing had told me that before he could or would even begin to make a diagnosis of Gender Dysphoria, I had to start dressing as a woman. I had not done that in nearly 30 years. Now, here I was single again and it seemed like a good idea. I called the group leader and agreed to attend their next meeting in Charlotte. I was looking forward to it. B had been telling me that she had made many friends there. But she warned me not to say anything about being a transsexual, as this group was supposed to be for "heterosexual crossdressers" only, and they did not want to upset spouses or significant others. I have since learned that the membership nationwide includes many gay men who enjoy dressing up and many transsexuals.

I had gone to the store and purchased makeup and was now ready to go to the meeting. Having never before applied makeup, I had to have help from someone who knew what they were doing. One of the group's members was supposed to be very good at this and agreed to do a makeover for me. When I looked in the mirror I looked like a clown. Of course, when you have never seen yourself made up before, it is going to be a shock; but this went beyond shock. I went ahead and attended the meeting and the dinner. B was there to support me and ease my nervousness. After dinner and the meeting, B and I went with two other members to Oleens for the evening. I ended up having a great time with B. We are still in touch on a regular basis and she still attends the meetings.

I have never been back. When I was ready to return, I was already living in my correct gender. A letter was sent out to all members that when we were at the hotel where the meetings were being held, we all had to use the men's restroom. For the other members that presented no real problem; for me it did. According to the Standards Of Care (SOC), I had to live in my gender role completely — going to a men's room was out of the question. Besides, it would have been extremely embarrassing.

Online, I argued with other members about this and refused to do what they wanted. The real problem was that the members were and still are men. Before they went home they could take off their dresses and makeup and become macho men again. I couldn't, nor did I want to. So I resigned.

During the summer of 1999, I created a web site about myself. I posted one photograph of myself and the rest of the site concerned the same issues that this series of articles will cover. I created a link allowing people to email me. I received some comments over the next month, but surprisingly not very many. It seems that most hits were from men looking for pornographic photos.

One response, though, was from a woman in California who briefly told me that she worked in the medical profession, was single but had been in a common law marriage and had a son. She found my site interesting. I immediately wrote back. That letter led to another, then another. We were becoming very friendly online. Finally, I gave J my phone number and one afternoon she called. From the moment we began to talk, something clicked as if we had always known each other. As J began to tell me her story, I became even more fascinated

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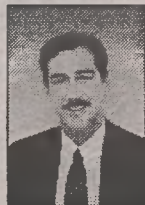
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