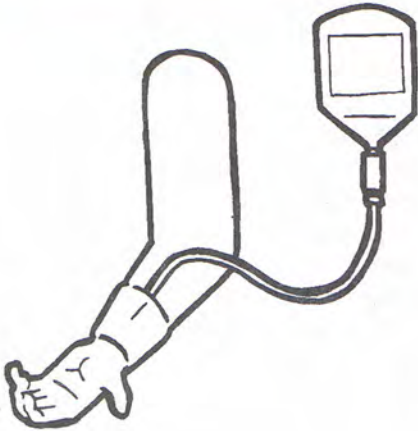


Interview



Weight and Transition

Sharon, at age 41, is a male-to-female transsexual person. Two years ago, at more than 370 pounds, Sharon was working as a man. In February, 1989, she took her gender-change plans off the back burner and went on a serious program of diet and exercise as she prepared for transition. Living full-time since moving to Atlanta nearly a year ago, she now weighs 215 pounds and remains on the same program of diet and exercise. Her goal is to reach 160 pounds by end-1991. Her reassignment surgery is scheduled for July, 1991. Convincing in her new role, Sharon has found full-time employment as a social worker.

CQ: *How did your excess weight affect your expression of gender?*

S: I was always heavy, but it was only in the 1980's that I went higher than the mid-200s. At that weight, I rarely crossdressed. What was the point? I was wearing size 52. I couldn't find dresses, even at Lane Bryant. Makeup didn't look right on my face. I got little satisfaction from cross-dressing, for my self-image was not that of an obese woman.

CQ: *How did you gain so much weight?*

S: Simple. I ate too much and exercised too little. But I did so because I didn't care how I looked as a man.

CQ: *What made you decide to undertake such a drastic weight loss? And why did you wait so long to do it?*

S: I was tired of being fat. I was tired of being a man. But I wasn't necessarily tired of being a fat man. By that I mean that I had my reasons for staying heavy. When I lost weight before, I had always seen this masculine body emerging, and I hated it. There was a certain androgyny in being fat. My decision to lose weight went hand-in-hand with my decision to make the gender jump.

CQ: *Why?*

S: When I was about fourteen, I saw a glimpse of what I could be—a stunning woman, as opposed to an ordinary-looking man. I procrastinated for years, denying my feelings, searching for alternate paths to happiness. I went to college. I went to graduate school. I got married. I got divorced. I almost got remarried. As my 40th birthday

approached, I finally decided to go for broke. Fortunately, I had been taking estrogens while I had myself on hold. Ten years of hormones made transition quick and easy. And when the weight began to come off, I saw a woman's body emerging, and not a man's.

CQ: *How do you feel about yourself when you were fat? And how do you feel about yourself now?*

S: I disgusted myself. I feel much better about myself now, but I'm still about six months short of the mark. I am totally re-inventing myself, and that takes time. I'm still a little heavy, but that's temporary. There's no doubt in my mind that I'll reach my goal.

CQ: *160 pounds?*

S: I'm not absolutely sure, never having previously reached even my present weight, but yes. 160 is

probably about right. I'll lose until I look right. 150, 160. Whatever it takes.

CQ: *Could you have been a 370 pound woman?*

S: Certainly. I just didn't want to be. I had no pride in my appearance as a man. I didn't really care what I looked like. Now I do care. And I'm willing to work and to sacrifice in order to look good.

CQ: *Did your excessive weight cause any adverse health effects?*

S: Not really, but it was on the way. I could feel it. I was lucky. I was at risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes. I was short of breath. I had trouble bending over. I had a terrible snoring problem. I was developing sleep apnea.

CQ: *That's where—*

S: Yes. You stop breathing in your sleep.

CQ: *And now?*

S: As soon as I cut down on my food intake, the snoring stopped. After a month or two of walking, my endurance was much greater. I grew more limber as my girth decreased. Now, after a year and a half, I'm in much better shape. My blood pressure is down. I walk at least 3 miles every day, and lately I've been running. Just the other day, for the first time in my life, I ran a mile, nonstop. I've done Nautilus for the past five months. Last fall, I hiked thirtysomething miles on the Appalachian Trail, car-

rying a 50-pound pack. I found out I wasn't in such great shape as I had thought, but to read the notes in the books in the shelters, neither was anyone else. I could have hiked the whole 2000 miles, if I had the time and the inclination.

CQ: *Your surgeon has requested that you be below 200 pounds before reassignment surgery.*

S: Yes. I'm working very hard to reach that weight.

CQ: *Had you remained at your former weight, what do you think would have been your chances of surgery?*

S: Minimal. No one would have agreed to do it. And if they had, I would have been at great risk on the operating table. I'm fortunate that I was able to do something about my physical condition.

CQ: *What about your sex life?*

S: As a man, I was in a monogamous relationship, but we stopped having intercourse when I became physically unable because of the hormones. Still, we stayed together. When I changed gender roles, the relationship broke up. She met someone else, and so far as I know, she's married now. It has taken me nearly a year to feel ready for a relationship. I now have a boyfriend, a wonderful man.

CQ: *Do people react differently to you now?*

S: Oh, yes. About two years ago, I

was in a mall, and a young boy said, "Mom, that's a big lady." I passed, even at that weight, but I was definitely something of a curiosity. Another time I was in a club, and a man danced with me. His friends were kidding him about it, because I was so large. People were polite, but I was so fat that they knew that I didn't care about myself. These days, I'm no bigger than lots of folks. I don't see that "Why has she done this to herself" look in their eyes. In fact, men are beginning to notice me, wave at me when I'm driving—that sort of thing. I expect more of that as I continue to lose weight.

CQ: *Do you have anything in particular you would like to tell us about obesity?*

S: Yes. Being fat helped to mask the physical changes caused by the estrogens I was taking. Even though my breasts grew quite large, they just looked like fat boy breasts. I don't recommend gaining weight for that reason, but in a way, it was a benefit.

Also, I'd like to say that there's nothing wrong with being fat. That was my choice for many years. It's only a problem if you don't want to be fat.

CQ: *Thank you for agreeing to this interview. We wish you luck in achieving your goal.*

S: Don't wish me luck. Wish me willpower. ☺

Southeastern Regional Conference Presents

The South's
First Major
Gender Event



Four days of fun
and learning in
the heart of the
south.

The Southern Comfort Convention October 3-6, 1991

For more information contact:

Linda Peacock
Sigma Epsilon
P. O. Box 7241
Tallahassee, FL 32314-7241

**Come to Atlanta
and Have a Peach
of a Time!**