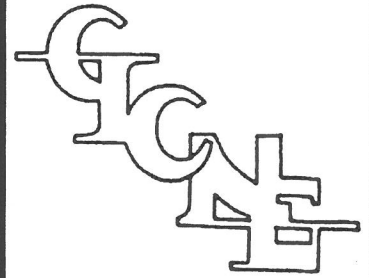


# TWENTY

The Official Newsletter of the XX Club

November/December 1994



## I'm Growing!

As I put together each new issue of "Twenty", I think a lot about the design and how it looks. After all, my background is in graphics. That's what I'm comfortable with. And being comfortable is something I hold onto very, very tightly. But it's that tenacity for comfort that has kept me from trying new things. Kept me from taking chances and risking failure.

By nature, I am a quiet individual, not prone to stepping into the limelight. I tend to avoid being the center of attention. Not always possible for someone in the process of transitioning from male to female. For myself, I know I looked pretty goofy when I first started. But I DID it! Somehow I got over that initial hurdle, past the insecurities, the fears and did what I needed to do. Durned if I know how.

Now, two years later, I am, for the most part, comfortable with my appearance. I am regarded as female in my everyday life, and if not, I have learned not to let the reactions of others bother me (too much).

But, I still need to grow. We all do. For me, if I stop growing, stop trying to better myself, to be the best woman...the best person I can, then I have only myself to blame for my failures.

Which brings me back to the issue of "trying new things". That's one of the reasons I decided to become the editor of "Twenty". I have never done anything like this before. I don't know the first thing about being an editor. But, I wanted..., no,... I needed to get involved. Not only for myself, but for our community as well. The XX Club has helped me so much, that

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## Tripping the Light Fantastic

*Staying Sane and Whole While in Transition*

by Dallas Denny

(Down-loaded from America On Line Gender Group)

Gender reassignment is one of the most radical and disruptive things that an individual can do. It strains and often severs social relationships, imposes economic hardships, involves a good deal of physical pain and a great deal of psychic pain, and requires study and hard work in order to even begin to hope to pass in the gender of choice. Transition must be pursued in the face of the general disapproval of society and the specific disapproval of loved ones, the reluctance of the medical community to provide services, a scarcity of resources, and countless legal and social obstacles. The body of one sex must be somehow whipped into the semblance of that of the opposite sex, generally after puberty has wreaked irreversible somatic changes. Old behavioral patterns must be unlearned and new ones added. A new life must replace the old.

The transsexual person runs a gamut of obstacles, with no guarantees of success. Indeed, probably fewer than ten percent of those who set out to change their gender succeed in doing so. And yet, tens of thousands of people are happily and successfully

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working and living in the gender of choice. Transition is possible. It can be done. It just can't be done without disruption and sacrifice and hard work. It can't be done without stubborn determination. It can't be done without money. It can't be done in the absence of support, and it can't be done without pain.

My crossdressing friends tell me that the transsexual people they know are no fun: "They whine all the time. They're preoccupied with their problems and their bodies. They need to lighten up." To them I say, "Please appreciate the tremendous pressures that these people are experiencing. Please understand that every aspect of their lives is affected by their decision to change gender, and that they must become somewhat self-absorbed in order to prevail against odds which are nearly insurmountable." And to those who are in transition, I say, "Lighten up!"

I don't have the space in this article to point out all the potential hazards in the mine field of transition. OUR SORORITY simply isn't big enough. ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA isn't big enough. You'll have to look elsewhere for that (you'll find a listing of such resources at the end of this article). I do have some strategies and approaches that may be of help. Here they are.

**1. Keep Your Sense of Humor** (and if you don't have one, cultivate one). You will only be as unhappy as you allow yourself to be. You can plod miserably along, or you can enjoy yourself. You can find humor in the ludicrous situations you will find yourself in and the things people will say which have a whole different meaning because of your gender status. Those you meet along the route will prove amusing, if you allow them to be. They will be your comrades in arms, and some of them will become your friends. If you approach transition with a sense of wonder and awe, your experiences will be more pleasurable than they will be if you inject fear and guilt. Yes, it'll be damn difficult, but you can still have a good time. Being miserable and depressed does not

make for a good prognosis.


**2. Don't Allow Transsexuality to Become Your Entire Life.** You shouldn't go through transition as if you were Ahab in pursuit of the White Whale. Ahab needed to get a life, and so do you. You mustn't defer your entire existence in anticipation of a hypothesized bliss once you jump genders. An empty life in the gender of original assignment will probably become an empty life in the gender of choice. Reassignment will not solve your problems; you'll still have the same troubles, but in a different gender. You would do well to have life goals other than transition. You should cultivate friends and interests outside the gender community.

**3. Keep Your Perspective.** You must not allow your transsexualism to become a fantasy or a fetish. As my friend Rachel has said, "You must weave reality back into the fabric." Don't place undue weight on reassignment surgery; it won't magically transform you into a man or a woman. You should at all times know where you are and where you are going, and this should be firmly grounded in reality. You must come to terms with your physical and behavioral assets and liabilities and incorporate them into an emerging identity. You must have realistic ideas about the social roles of men and women, and what sort of man or woman you want to be. Remember that transition is a process-- a becoming, if you will. You will be gradually changing. You won't just wake up one morning and find that you are magically different.

**4. Don't Box Yourself In.** You must somehow keep functioning. If you prematurely dismantle your old life, you will be unable to replace it with a satisfactory life in the gender of choice. You will be left with a twilight existence, an identification as a transsexual. And if this negatively impacts your earning potential, you can get stuck, unable to complete the procedures which will produce the bodily changes necessary to successfully pass in the gender of choice (for instance, electrolysis for the male-to-female; reduction mammoplasty for the female-to-male). You must maintain as much support as possible. You should know that in some cases that may mean clinging onto your old identity a little bit longer.

**5. Let Go of Your Crutches.** As your body changes, it will become less difficult to pass. You should rely less on contrivance and incorporate your natural aspects into your presentation. This may mean using your own hair instead of a wig, doing away with padding, and using less makeup. Or it may mean using your birth name, if it has a chance of working, instead of an idealized feminine name. It may mean becoming

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relationships and negotiations. When this blend exists, the male-to-female postoperative person can be a startling success in her abilities to inter-relate with all in her life. So often, I encounter a person whose attitudes and function is so top heavy with maleness as to make their transition and their continuance in the contragender role a nightmare for themselves and those around them. Many times I ask the questions, "Now that you are postoperative, now you are a new woman with conformity between your gender identity and body - do you think and nurture as a woman? Do you know how to deliberate and reach as she does? Most important - do you have any insight at all into her culture?"

Often, the answers are, "I don't know what you are talking about," or "I don't know what women discuss, nor do I understand what interests them, and when I do, sometimes I find it quite boring." Others will answer, "I know what you are asking - I don't have a key to that special circle." Many individuals admit that they feel hat they are on the outside, and they are not certain as to whether their acceptance by women is based on being a woman or being a successful transsexual.

My advice is always this: You must make every effort to learn all you can about women's culture and how they live in it. If you don't make that effort, you will fail. You have no choice but to learn in order to join that special society. You must learn about the topics that concern women, and even more, you have to learn about the ways in which they discuss and solve the problems of those topics. You must master the problems of appearance and comporment, it's true, but even more, you must think, respond, and involve yourself as does a woman. This does not mean that you obliterate your masculine traits and techniques, but it does mean that you embark on a careful practice of the use of those techniques as adjuncts, as additives, and learn effectively how to integrate into the ways in which women function. Your success all through your new life will depend upon your ability to do this.

To be sure, it is not a demotion to begin to think as a woman does. Foolish, unknowing men think so, but they are dead wrong. You no doubt have male techniques and mechanisms quite well developed. Now you must learn much much more superior techniques and thought processes - those that are utilized by women - and begin to blend them with what you've learned in your male life. Certainly, you are not to dismiss or discard your maleness, but rather take from those attitudes and techniques the positive attributes and blend them with the female attributes that will help provide insight and compassion. It will be a lifelong process, it's true, but you will be quite gratified and quite benefitted in that process, and it gets easier all the time.

*Sheila Kirk is a physician and Director of Medical Services for the International Foundation for Gender Education.*

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comfortable with interests or aspects of your personality that aren't a good "fit" in the gender of choice. But whatever your perceived shortcomings are, you will need to face and come to terms with them and let them go.

**6. Sacrifice and Compromise.** Being in transition will cause big changes in your life. You must be prepared to meet all challenges and to give your transsexualism a high priority. You'll be deluding yourself if you think you can maintain your previous standard of living in the face of bills from psychologists, endocrinologists, electrologists, and plastic surgeons. You must maintain your pace. If you delay procedures such as hormonal therapy because of lack of money or time, or for other reasons, your transition will eventually be delayed. And here I will insert a caveat for the male-to-female transsexual person: Don't put off electrolysis. You'll be sorry if you do. Once you are living in the gender of choice, it will nearly impossible to bring yourself to grow the hair long enough for the operator to grasp it with her tweezers. And passing will be at best a struggle, and quite likely impossible, until the hair on your face is gone or at least appreciably diminished.

**7. Be A Good Consumer.** You must at all times act with discretion and proper respect for your body. You should not act out of desperation. Although services can be difficult to obtain, they are available. You will minimize your chances of failure if you use competent service providers. Otherwise you will risk delays in obtaining diagnosis (and hence hormones), a regimen of hormones inadequate to masculinize or feminize you, and even botched surgery. You have only one shot at transition, and it is decidedly in your best interest to proceed with reasonable precautions and care, making sure that your doctors know what they are doing.

**8. Join a Support Group.** It will be to your advantage to find your peers. Support groups can educate you, assist you with referrals, and help you to perfect a masculine or feminine appearance. You will probably make friends with other group members. But

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*Relationship, Stress and Women's Issues*

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(GROWING Continued from page 1)

I wanted to give something back.

So here I am. In the limelight, center of attention. All eyes on me...EEEEEEK!

It's up to me to decide what goes into these pages and so far I've just been winging it.....or so I thought. As I look through the small body of work I've produced so far, I've noticed "Twenty" taking on a definite personality. In many ways, it's reflective of my personality, quiet, subtle, sensitive, funny, caring, artistic, sometimes late (oops).

This issue is especially "tuned-in" to issues that I've been facing for the last few months. Issues that deal with integrating into a female peer group, the frustrations that we all feel sometimes and trying to "stay sane" through it all. I'm pretty sure I'm not alone.

If anyone has an idea for a topic or they would like to contribute something, I would be more than glad to hear from you. (Ecstatic, actually, I always need material)

I hope you have enjoyed reading the "Twenty" newsletter these last few issues. I've been having a bunch of fun producing it for you...really, I'm serious. I'm learning a whole lot of new things, and when I'm learning, .....Hey! I'm Growing!

-Kathy-

Guess what! The January/February issue of "Twenty" is already in progress. I'll be caught up before you know it.

-Kathy-



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more importantly, you will see your peers in action, making decisions both good and bad. By observing them, and by talking with them, you can learn strategies for coping and avoid pitfalls.

### 9. Follow the Benjamin Standards of Care.

The Standards of Care of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, Inc., are guidelines to safeguard transsexual people and those who provide services for them. Many transsexual people see them as obstacles to be overcome, and so they are. But by following the Standards of Care, you will minimize your chances of failing in your transition, and maximize your chances of surviving failure, if it does occur. The Standards will let you opt out anywhere short of reassignment surgery. The best of transitions will be painful. The worst do not even bear thinking about. You should not expect a perfect experience, but by exercising common sense and foresight, you will minimize disruption and conflict, and have a smoother ride.

### A Brief Resource List

- Denny, Dallas. (1990). **Deciding What To Do About Your Gender Dysphoria: Some Considerations For Those Who Are Thinking About Sex Reassignment.** (\$6.00).
- Denny, Dallas. (1991). **Discovering Who You Are: A Guide to Self-assessment for Persons with Gender Dysphoria** (\$6.00).
- Denny, Dallas. (1991). **Dealing With Your Feelings: A Guide to Coming Out for Persons with Gender Dysphoria** (\$6.00).
- **Chrysalis Quarterly.** (\$30.00/4 issues; includes the three booklets, above).

*The above are available from American Educational Gender Information Service (AEGIS), P.O. Box 33724, Decatur, GA 30033.*

- Devor, Holly. **Gender Blending: Confronting the Limits of Duality.** (\$14.50)
- Elizabeth, Sister Mary. **Legal Aspects of Transsexualism--1990 Edition.** (\$10.00)
- Laing, Alison. **Speaking as a Woman.** (8.00)
- Stringer, JoAnne Altman. **The Transsexual's Survival Guide.** (\$20.00)
- Stevens, Jennifer Ann. **From Masculine to Feminine and All Points In Between.** (\$22.45)
- **TV-TS Tapestry Journal.** (\$12.00/issue)

*The above are available from International Foundation for Gender Education (IFGE), P.O. Box 367, Wayland, Massachusetts 01778.*

SOURCE: AEGIS/Dallas Denney, M.A.

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