

## **After the Thrill is Gone**

By Michael Hernandez

Most of our resources and support tend to be geared towards those struggling to determine whether transition is right for them or for those in the beginning stages of the process. Support groups, therefore, tend to be cyclical in nature. By that I mean that discussions seem to be centered around recommendations for therapists, physicians and surgeons, information regarding testosterone, coming out to friends, family and coworkers, and issues regarding relationships. Just when the group begins to delve into other topics a new person comes into the group and the cycle repeats itself. While we certainly need resources so that people are supported, regardless of whether they decide to transition or not, the fact of the matter is that after a few cycles of these types of discussions some of the “older” group members start to withdraw or in some cases disappear entirely. The result is that we have an entire group of individuals who are no longer part of the “community” and not a lot is known about the things that arise after the first ten years or so.

What happens after the thrill is gone? We discuss and think about transition and some gender issues and less. Some stop attending group functions such as conferences and support groups. Some leave the various internet lists or groups that discuss trans issues. Specific fears, such as passing, become nonexistent. Going into the men’s room becomes second nature. We come to feel more like spectators than participants in our various communities. Simply stated, this aspect of our experience or identity becomes integrated rather than being the entire object of focus, so that matters such as family, career, aging, and the like come to the forefront.

### **Packing**

One thing that tends to fall by the wayside is packing. One reason this may be is that some surgical options have made packing moot. For those who have not yet had or have decided not to have surgery, there are a variety of reasons for packing. At the beginning of transition, many may suffer insecurities concerning their manhood or masculinity. Some FTMs feel that the presence of balls and a surgically created or enhanced dick are necessary to feel or be complete. Others don’t share the same view, but want all of bulges in the right places. At times packing is just that “kick in the pants” that boosts the self-esteem.

In the early 90’s the options were limited to homemade creations one of which involved the use of hair gel, condoms, and knee high pantyhose to create a cock and balls. Of course, the hair gel tended to collapse over time, that is if the latex didn’t deteriorate cause leakage at the most inopportune moment. The only other options at the time were an industrial foam sponge that was carved into the desired shape (horrid for swimming) or the incredibly uncomfortable harness and dildo that simply did not bend and thus resulted in the dreaded ball-shear (that’s just what it sounds like. The pressure

from packing would cause the balls on the dildo to shear right off). At \$60 a pop of a dildo, this was not very economically feasible.

We held workshops on how to make your own or how to improve on what you managed to get your hands on. There was much experimentation into functional balls, etc. Information was passed by mouth. Enter the internet, some progressive inventors, and voila we have a variety of affordable options today that work for far better than anything we had before.

But, as with anything else, those things get sweaty and because they aren't attached to our bodies, they tend to slip, rotate, move, or simply just fall out at the most inconvenient times. Sometimes the anxiety of a keeping the darned thing in place can be higher than the anxiety of not passing. So, packing which was critical at the commencement of transition, takes a back seat to convenience. But is it really this simple? Is it only about convenience or as we have become more comfortable with our bodies, our identity, and the manner in which we are perceived has packing become less important?

### **Disclosure**

Disclosure is a life-long process whether we like it or not. Many transmen think that once they have surgery nothing needs to be said and that disclosure falls by the wayside. Not necessarily true. For those men who have good fortune and ability to marry, your past could wreak havoc on your future. Imagine a partner who discovers your past and feels betrayed or worse, defrauded. In my opinion, you are better off opening your mouth at the beginning than your pocketbook at the end.

Even opening your mouth may not save you. Your spouse could play the transgendered card against you, surgery or no, to gain sole custody of children, to annul the marriage, or for other ends. Not only does this have an adverse effect on you, but if the case goes up on appeal, it could have more far reaching consequences.

In this day and age it is difficult to completely disappear. The long and the short of it is that even if we live in stealth throughout our lives, things can still crop up in medical charts. "You're full of it" you may say. "Even my doctor does not know". Well, I say to you, the day will come when a physician feels the need to palpate the prostate that is not there and what will you do then? What about emergency surgery? Parents or siblings being contacted, etc? Good health is not a guarantee and if you are fortunate enough to have evaded the radar there's still the fallout that could occur after your death.

This was supposed to get easier, right? How many of us even bothered to give disclosure a thorough examination when struggling with the issue of whether transition was right for us. I'd venture to say that it was far down on the list if at all.

While disclosure may not be as difficult, or the response as personal as it was in the beginning, it still remains a royal pain in the behind. It all boils down to how you are feeling at the moment. If your self-esteem is in the dumps, it's difficult, at best. If you're riding high on a recent success, it can be entertaining but I would not go so far as to call it enjoyable.

## **Aging**

People are transitioning younger and younger these days. Very little data is available regarding the issues of long-term trans health. We know that there are risk factors such as cardiovascular disease (high blood pressure, heart attack, polycysthemia) and the ever dreaded receding hairline, but what are the long term effects of taking testosterone? In the absence of studies or until the currently aging trans population tell their health stories- who can know for certain? Only time will tell.

Then there are the things that we thought would never happen to us such as erectile or sexual dysfunction. Have you been in the mood for love, but your body refuse to cooperate? How about taking longer than usual to climax only to experience a fizzle as opposed to an explosion?

There could come a time when your erections may not feel as strong as they once were, you may experience difficulty maintaining an erection, or you may experience difficulty achieving orgasm. This could be part of the aging process or a sign of some malady that requires medical intervention. Stress, poor diet, and a lack of exercise can mess with your mental, as well as your physical health.

The mind is slow to realize that our bodies are not as resilient as they were in our 20s. This does not mean that now that you've hit your 40s or 50s that it's time to throw in the towel. It just means that making minor adjustments, like getting enough sleep, can work wonders.

## **Hair**

Did you have a vague recollection of use magnifying glass to find that first chest hair? It's not an isolated experience. If it didn't happen to you, you surely know someone who did this. Did you look in the mirror every day searching for whiskers? Did your friends ever shun you because hair was always the main topic of conversation? If you answered "yes" to many of these questions, you may have wished too hard in the beginning.

Have you noticed that hair is now coming out of places that you never imagined, such as your ears, nostrils, the top of your nose, while rapidly departing from the place where you like it the most? Like me, you may now shed more than the cat or dog. FYI the tacky stuff on a stick that is used to brush the unwanted pet hair out of your clothes works wonders.

## **What, Me Worry?!**

Whether we like it or not, there was a price tag that came along with transitioning. Part of the price was visible such as dealing with family, work, our partners, baldness, etc. Part of it was unseen and became more evident as time went on.

The question that I'm often called to answer is whether I would do it all over again. Despite the above grouching, the response is a resounding "yes".

I'm finally comfortable with who I am. I've had to look closely at my life and the paths that I've taken. I've experienced pain, disappointment, and loss all the while balanced by immense joy, passion, and peace of mind. The fact remains that there are and will continue to be good days and bad days. That is the nature of life. There is plenty to be thankful for. It's all about making the best of what you have.

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By Michael M. Hernandez

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