

I CHANGED MY SEX by

Here is the frank disclosure of an ex-GI who became a woman—with a warning to others who would try a sex change

Charlotte
McLeod

A SEX change operation can be dangerous. I know, for I very nearly died in Copenhagen, Denmark, a year ago in the course of operations that were to change me from a man into a woman.

A change in sex is not something to be entered into lightly. Even with the best of medical help there are a number of complications that can, and probably will result. Not only are the operations themselves hazardous, but the constant and agonizing post-operative pain is a terrible drain on one's physical and mental strength.

I utter this warning because of the large number of letters that have come to me from men all over the country since my return to America on April 16 of this year. Many men seem to think that they can be helped by such an operation.

The number is really quite surprising. Beyond a doubt a small percentage of these men may fall into the category that can be helped by sex-changing surgery. But it is not as easy as they have been led to believe.

A man who has a masculine physique and an effeminate mind, who hopes to find an answer to his frustrations in surgery, is doomed to disappointment. A widespread illusion seems to spread that, due to a new medical miracle, any male can be treated with the female hormones and the result will be a beautiful woman.

This is not so.

A patient must possess the outward physical attributes of a woman beforehand if the operation is to result in true effeminacy of appearance. For instance, the bone structure of the body is not going to undergo some miraculous metamorphosis.

The features can be expected to soften and the body take on more rounded curves, but the feminine beauty cannot be created where none existed before.

Beauty can be a terrible affliction if a rare mistake of Nature bestows it on the wrong sex. My former



Before the operation, Charles posed for this photograph while aboard ship enroute to Denmark.



Portrait of Charles McLeod (inset) was taken when he was 21. After operation to make him a woman, he changed his name to Charlotte.

I CHANGED MY SEX by Charlotte McCleod



While in New Orleans, working for a shipping company, Charles made up his mind to try operation.

life was a nightmare of complications and conflicts.

I was afflicted from birth with a body so effeminate, hair so curly, hands so soft, and a voice so high-pitched that I was never able to do a man's work or take a man's place in society.

I WAS torn between two groups of doctors who gave me conflicting advice. One group suggested that I undergo male hormone therapy and change my effeminate body into that of a normal male, but they could never guarantee that my mind could be made to undergo a corresponding change.

I had thought as a woman, felt like a woman, and, I must confess, probably acted like a woman for 28 years. I thought it was a dangerous experiment to attempt for it might wind up making me a mal-adjusted homosexual.

I have seen many men with husky bodies and effeminate minds. From observing these poor creatures, I decided against anything that might put me in their confusing plight.

The second group of doctors seemed to be in sympathy with the idea of a sex change that would allow me to live as a woman. But because of ethical restrictions imposed by the American medical profession and legal restraints imposed by archaic statutes enacted in the 19th Century, they could not give me any surgical aid.

Many of these doctors, recognizing my hopeless mal-adjustment arising from the fact that I was a man without a man's bodily development, advised me to find such little happiness as I could in life by going to one of the "colonies" that abound in our large cities.

I moved to the French Quarter of New Orleans, but my experiences there were such as to convince me that I should definitely undertake the drastic step of a sex change. I did not fit into the normal world and my whole spirit rebelled against trying to live the life of the homosexuals.

I was appalled at the insincerity, insecurity, and promiscuity practiced among them. I did feel a great sympathy for many of these young men and women whom I met, but I could find no peace of mind among them.

For 95 per cent of these victims of misdirected sex, I believe the treatment probably should be mental, but for the remaining five per cent the new surgical procedures perfected in Denmark can offer hope.

IN my own instance, I risked all on the dangerous gamble of surgery. I did so because I found life so unbearable, that I truthfully would have preferred to have it end than to continue as a living lie—a man who wasn't really a man at all.

Perhaps a brief account of my own experience will prove a deterrent to those who think that a short trip to Denmark can be a cure-all, or that it is something that is done as a publicity stunt.

When I arrived in Copenhagen in April, 1953, to seek the help of physicians there, I found to my dismay that the government of Denmark, alarmed by the unfavorable publicity their beautiful little country had received, as the result of other cases, had forbid-

den the operation to anyone but natives of Scandinavia who were not over 26 years of age.

I was determined, however, that I had not come halfway around the world only to find another door closed in my face. I decided that I would rather die there than return to the unhappy existence I had known as an effeminate male in America, where masculinity is a badge of distinction.

I thought back to the cruelty of my experiences as a G.I. at Fort Jackson, S. C., in 1948 when despite my best efforts, and the help of sympathetic officers, I had been unable to make the grade in basic training and had ended up with a medical discharge after 90 days. And my mind was made up that if it was a woman that Nature really intended me to be, it was a woman I would become.

THROUGH acquaintances in Copenhagen, I learned of a rather unscrupulous physician, a man who had been charged with collaborating with the Nazis and who had



When Charlotte returned to U.S., she was "ill, tired," and shunned publicity. Hassle later ensued when a photographer tried to snatch her fur.

only recently returned from exile. He was a doctor who was willing to perform any operation for a price. His price was high, but I met it.

The doctor was a man of frightening appearance who, from the results of a British bullet through the base of his skull, habitually walked so bent over that he never met one's eye. When I first met him, he was running with his dog, a huge Great Dane, flapping his arms like a bald eagle in full flight.

I later learned that he took sudden spurts of this violent exercise because he was addicted to narcotics and immediately after taking his early-evening injection would become so stimulated that it was necessary for him to wear it off in this manner.

Only the sense of utter desperation that I felt led me to place myself in the hands of such a doctor. I moved into the already-crowded apartment which his poor, harassed wife labored in vain to keep clean and orderly.

There for five days I waited in trepidation for the first operation which was to initiate the sex change process.

During this time none of the usual precautions to minimize the dangers of (Continued on page 54)



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I CHANGED MY SEX

By Charlotte McLeod

(Continued from page 131)

surgery were taken, such as blood tests, or preparatory medication. The doctor's major concern, as well as that of his wife, was to figure out a way to get him tapered off narcotics to the extent where he could exercise his still-great surgical skill.

They concluded that if he took a heavy dosage about 7 p.m. and then tapered off on smaller doses, he would be in condition to operate about midnight.

I am sure that even in my desperate frame of mind, I would not have placed myself in the hands of this man if it had not been for his wife and his oldest son who were to assist in the operation.

I had confidence that if drastic complications set in, they would summon assistance and get me to a hospital rather than have me die on their hands.

THE kitchen table was chosen as the scene of the operation. About 10 p.m. of the night selected, the wife and son began boiling instruments on the kitchen stove. The table was covered only with an oil-cloth and the doctor was dressed in the same baggy, dirty ski pants that he always wore around the house.

He donned rubber gloves but had no mask or surgical cap. His nerves seemed to be in good condition when the fateful hour arrived. As I entered the kitchen and laid down on the table, the doctor's son, who was fond of music, asked me if I recalled the tune of "Frankie and Johnnie."

In a trembling voice I sang this little song with him as the doctor's wife made ready with the anesthetic. My last conscious thought was trying to finish singing this tune.

It was almost my last conscious thought on this earth, for when I awakened in great pain many hours later, I learned that the operation had not gone well and that I stopped breathing at one point. The doctor stopped operating immediately and brought me back to life through artificial respiration.

It is nothing short of a miracle that I survived, for I also hemorrhaged badly, and the doctor was obliged to interrupt the operation

several times because of my weakness.

In all, the operation for removal of the male sex glands lasted four hours and at the end the doctor's nerves were so unstrung that he did a very poor job of stitching.

I was in agony when I came to the next day and several times became so delirious that they were obliged to restrain me to keep me in bed. The doctor seldom came near me, sending his wife or son to tend my needs.

The operation had proved too much for him. One night I heard a terrible crash outside my door. It was the doctor, who had taken so much dope that he had fallen on the floor in a coma.

Unwisely, I tried to help pull him up, and tore the stitches in my abdominal incisions. A dreadful infection set in after this that again threatened my life.

On the whole, I count myself fortunate that I survived such ghastly treatment. As soon as I was able, I fled from the doctor's apartment and went back to a reputable physician to seek treatment.

He was appalled at what I had done, and said it would not have been necessary for me to go to this maniac if the reputable medical profession had been allowed to treat me as it should.

NOW I faced the ordeal of the second major operation for removal of the remaining organ and rerouting of the urethra. This operation is no less dangerous than the first and is even more painful because of the many nerves which must be severed.

It is a major operation in every sense of the term and is not to be undertaken except as a last resort to correct an affliction which Nature cannot otherwise remedy.

Because of the unfavorable publicity which has attended some cases of this kind, it was only with the greatest reluctance that a great Danish surgeon agreed to undertake the operation.

I am sure that he would not have done so had it not been for the fact that I came to his office dressed in feminine attire (which the Dan-

ish police permitted me to don after the first operation) and it was not until I had completely undressed in his office that he suddenly grasped the fact that the patient he was about to examine was a man.

He quickly comprehended the tragedy of my life and agreed to complete my transformation in sex.

The second operation was performed in a famous hospital, but even though I had the best of care, a number of complications developed. One of them was the development of a large stone in the bladder which was removed after my return to America.

I passed the acid test, however, of entering an American hospital without anyone but the doctor attending me and one nurse in whom he had confided the secret having any inkling that the female patient whom they were treating had not been a woman all her life.

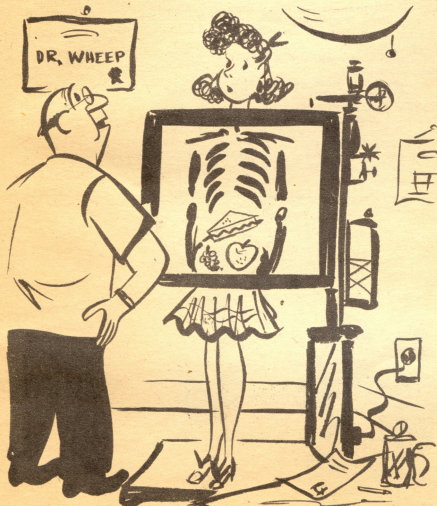
I should also mention the pain

and discomfort caused by the sudden withdrawal of male hormones from the body and the impact upon the body of the prescribed doses of female hormones necessary as a part of the sex change process.

I noticed, among other things, that I was more sensitive to chill temperatures, just as women always are, and that very sharp pains developed in my breasts as they began to swell and take on feminine proportions. My breasts had always been unusually rounded for a man, and I hated to appear on the beach clad only in swimming trunks for that reason.

Like many other things about my effeminate body, my "bust" had embarrassed me. Now I find it flattering and recently passed another acid test when I went into a women's foundation shop to be fitted for a brassiere.

The woman in charge of the fitting calmly proceeded to strip me



"My advice to you, Miss La Rose, is to stop bolting your lunch."

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to the waist, and, as she examined me, remarked that I had a very good development for a girl so thin and angular.

Much of the angular proportion of my figure is due to the fact that I lost 40 pounds in weight during my ordeal in Denmark.

NO less painful than the physical reaction which follows the sex change operation is the burden of the public ridicule and notoriety which inevitably results. The people of Denmark, when my case became known through the papers there last February, proved themselves very mature and understanding.

After all, such cases have been treated in their country for years and it was news only because I was an American who had had to come to Denmark because of the restrictions on the medical profession in my own country. The Danish people displayed every courtesy toward me and were very sympathetic, opening their hearts and their homes to me.

Far different was the reception which I received in New York City upon my return to this country. I was ill, tired, and did not desire to pose for pictures.

When I entered the lobby of the Hotel Statler to seek accommodations for the night, a barrage of newspaper and newsreel photographers besieged me, popping their flashbulbs in my very face until I was singed by the heat and blinded by the glare.

When I refused to take my scarf away from my face, one photogra-

pher seized me by the shoulder to force me to drop it, causing me to fall to the floor of the lobby. In the ensuing struggle, I struck him with the umbrella I was using as a cane, and he had me arrested on a charge of assaulting him!

I was taken to the police station, but thanks to the fact that hundreds of spectators in the lobby had seen what happened, he dropped charges. The photographers refused to stop, however, until they had what they regarded as a suitably sensational picture of me on the arm of a police officer.

Questions addressed to me by the reporters were rude and insulting—and went unanswered.

I also face difficulty in earning a livelihood, for wherever I may go, taking the type of office work for which I am trained, I face the possibility of disclosure of my identity and embarrassment to my employer and associates.

AFTER completion of one more operation of plastic surgery I will be able to marry, although not bear children. Science and medicine can do much, but only God could do that. But this and all other adjustments to life will present their complications.

I mention these unfavorable aspects of a sex change operation because I want to emphasize that it is not a simple process.

Yet it tears my heart out to read the pitiful letters that I receive from men who have not been able to make a go of life because Nature has not given them a body or a

hormonal structure that will match their outward male sex organs. I feel that medical science ought to take more interest in treating these hapless victims, who are shunned and cruelly ridiculed by society.

A trip to Denmark is not the answer for these victims. The Danish medical profession has said in outspoken terms that any operation they perform there can be done equally well in the United States. Until now physicians in America have not been willing to recognize that a sex change operation could be carried out successfully.

Any American doctor who remains doubtful can study my case. I can guarantee him that I can come into his office and not until he makes a very penetrating examination will he have any inkling that the woman he is examining spent the first 28 years of her life as a "man!"

The American public needs to accept the fact that there can be physical afflictions pertaining to sex, just as to other organs of the body. Just because it deals with sex, we need not blush and run or make crude jokes.

Sex change is not a new "fad" and sensation-seekers ought not to label it as that. It is a serious medical answer to a serious medical problem, that of the individual who is misplaced by conditions contributing to his being labeled a social outcast. He cannot be rightfully blamed for these conditions anymore than if he had been born with cerebral palsy.

THE END



"I want to speak to you about your daughter's hand—I'd like the jewelry on it back."