

In September 2008, Transgender Aging Network Executive Director Loree Cook-Daniels asked a selection of transgender and SOFFA individuals age 50+ to answer a series of questions for a short article for OutWord, the electronic newsletter of the LGBT Aging Issues Network of the American Society on Aging. Below is the full text of the questions and answers.

Please do a short self-introduction: Name, the length of time you've been in the trans/SOFFA community, and a brief introduction.

Bee: I live in the “wilds” of north central Wyoming, home of Butch Cassidy, et. al., an area that is extremely conservative and proud of it. I am MtF, have been out since the late '90s and full-time since 2001; I have been on [hormone therapy] since 2004. For health and financial reasons, I will probably never be able to have surgery. I am 64 (65 in October), disabled (deaf and back problems), and live on Social Security (hence, the financial reasons). I first entered “the community” in 1999 when I went to Tucson and joined SAGA. After I moved back to Wyoming in 2000 I was outside any community until I connected with [ElderTG] a couple of years ago, now, I guess it was, at the urging of Irene Preiss.

Dan: I'm Dan. I'm a genetic guy, and my spouse is FtM. We began to transition 3 or 4 years ago, so I am still new to the trans world, but beginning to feel comfortable here. I'm 62, my spouse is 49. I'm a retired academic --- an anthropologist. Since my sweetie came out to me and I agreed that we should transition, together, I have become a serious - perhaps rabid? - advocate for transpeople and their families. I am contributing what I can at the local, regional, and national level. I came to ElderTG because of some realistic concerns and questions about what it might mean, medically and socially, for my spouse and I to face some of the trials of elderhood.

John: I'm 63, and started transition (FTM) eleven years ago. At the time I was a therapist in private practice and had worked with trans people for several years among my clientele. Work experience has been in university teaching, counseling in a variety of settings, training people in non-profit organizations, and serving on pastoral staff in churches. Currently [I'm] semi-retired and starting a writing “career.” Knew I was a male in a female body when I was 4 years old.

Karen: I transitioned 20 years ago, when I was 40. I am 60 now. I was in a panic at age 4 and a half when Christine Jorgensen made the newspapers. I couldn't read, but I saw pictures and heard people talk about her. I was in a panic because I felt people would know what to look for and I would be found out. I wasn't always successful in passing as an ordinary boy, so I was often in withdrawal. Or was it disassociation? My wife and I met in high school, and we got married at age 20. Our daughter was born 8 years later, and our son three years after. Our daughter called me out on my gender issues when she was a high school senior. By age 40

I was referred to a gender clinic after a suicide attempt. I was dropped from the clinic since I would neither divorce my wife nor take on a boyfriend. My wife and I have soldiered on and have made our own way through life as we meet our needs.

Kerwin: I'm currently 62-1/2 years old and work as an MRI tech in the local hospital. I haven't really been involved with any trans community, except online, because I live too far from anyplace with a significant number of transfolks.

I have lived most of my life as an androgynous woman, but always felt I should have been a man. As far as I can tell from my experience, I was born this way. No amount of denial has ever made it go away. I've been married. I had a son, now deceased. At one time in my life, I tried to be a lesbian, but that didn't fit me either.

At the ripe old age of 55, I decided that I would try no longer. Early in 2001, I began taking testosterone. In June of 2002, I had chest reconstruction surgery, then a year or so later, I had a very limited form of genital surgery. Strangers now perceive me as a man, and most of my friends, family, and co-workers have gotten used to seeing me that way also.

Rivkah: I've been in the transgender community since 1994 and began transitioning in 1992. Age: 54. I was born in Appleton, WI, and raised in Neenah, WI. I spent many of my middle adult years in Madison, Wisconsin. I had been married in 1981 and divorced in 1992, and I have a now 17-year-old son from that marriage. At the age of 38, I began exploring both sexual orientation and gender identity. After a brief period thinking I was gay, I found that I was a transsexual female. I formally entered the transition process in 1994 through the Pathways Counseling Center in Wauwatosa, WI. I had sex reassignment surgery with Dr. Menard in Montreal, QC, in 1996. Subsequent to that, following periods of unemployment and the deaths of my parents, I entered seminary in 1999 in the Twin Cities, graduating with an MA in Women's Studies in 2002. Following difficult times of continuing unemployment and under-employment and then living in a women's transitional home in Minneapolis, MN, due to homelessness, I relocated to San Francisco, California, where I now make my home. About a year ago, I converted to Judaism and am very active in synagogue and the larger Jewish community.

Robyn: I am a 71-year-old postop MTF who has been in the trans/SOFFA community since 1996. I've been married to my FTM husband for over 8 happy years. We are fortunate to have good medical coverage thanks for my 20 years in the Navy.

What's been the best thing about being a transgender/SOFFA elder? The worst thing?

Bee: The best thing by far is being able to live as, and BE, the real me. I don't have to hide anymore. The **worst** thing: Tolerance, rather than acceptance; there is a WORLD of difference between the two. There are limits of which I must be constantly aware, and never, never overstep or else 'tolerance' will acquire the letters 'I' and 'N'.

Dan: The best thing? There have been many. I've made so many new friends in the trans community, transfolks and spouses. It's a wonderful world of very interesting people who each have a more realistic, and perhaps idealistic, understanding of gender and its impact on us all. The worst thing? I've been lucky. Nothing awful. I miss my spouse's female body, because that's how my desire runs, but I love him nonetheless, and our working out new ways to adjust to the "facts on the ground" have their own rewards.

John: The best thing is encouraging and supporting younger trans people and giving educational presentations about us at professional continuing education programs for social workers and seminary students. I can't think of anything negative about it.

Karen: The best? Rapport with our daughter and our daughter-in-law. And being able to think outside the box on most things. The worst? I was gang raped at age 10. Life goes on.

Kerwin: I feel I can appreciate the very fact that I have been able to transition and live as a man much more than many of the younger folks can, because I remember so very vividly what the world was like in the past, and what it felt like to live in that world.

The worst thing is much the same as it would be for any other aging person: the possibility of becoming incapacitated and ending up in a nursing home. This fear is made deeper for transfolks, as there is no guarantee that we would be allowed to live as our chosen gender, should we find ourselves in that unenviable position. However, given the changes happening even now in society and within the medical field, I have reason to hope that our choices will be better respected in the future, so that I will never have to face that particular aspect of being in a nursing home.

Rivkah: The best thing about being a transgender elder is that I now am benefiting from the experience and stability afforded by age and the school of hard knocks. I'm far more settled in my identities...female, heterosexual, and Jewish...than ever before and enjoying my life holistically, with less emphasis on gender. I have survived a great deal of personal traumas relating in one way or other to being transgender in this society and I am hoping all of that is now behind me. The worst thing about being a transgender elder is that as an older person, it seems much more challenging to find myself a suitable husband to share life with. A close second to that is the gradual loss of health and physical abilities because of, among other things, arthritis.

Robyn: The best thing about being [transsexual] is living my truth, the truth of who I am. The worst thing is seeing all of the bigotry, hatred and lies of those who talk about how God hates His children.

What scares you or excites you (or both) about growing old transgender/SOFFA? What are you looking forward to?

Bee: Actually, there is very little difference, to me, between growing old transgender and simply growing old. I suppose if I had, or planned to have, surgery, that might change a bit, but in my situation, really they are “all the same difference.” Being transgendered is basically irrelevant to the aging process.

Dan: What scares me....? This year I had to go to the ER for something not terribly frightening, but serious nonetheless. As I laid on a bed, surrounded by privacy curtains, for hours, waiting for a doctor to see me, I finally asked if my spouse could be brought in from the waiting room. The nurse duly obliged and went out and called out for “Mrs. M.” to come into the ER. Well, Mrs. M. is Mr. R., and when my obviously masculine partner came forward, eyes rolled and tsks-tsks were heard everywhere. We were both angered by this. I don’t want to have to explain my or my spouse’s life history to receive basic medical care and social courtesy. I worry that someday we will be denied visitation rights, or our insurance will be challenged, or even our rights to own and share property.

What am I looking forward to? To the day when a person can come out as trans and nobody will think it’s a crisis. Or even that much a novelty. When all anyone will think is, well, shall I come with you when you shop for new clothes?

John: Just being alive excites me. My health has been so much better since transitioning and I am loving life in my true gender. I would have died at age 52 if I had not transitioned - by my own hand. I’m looking forward to savoring every day and/or year I have left on this planet and life in the world to come.

Looking forward to? Retiring and being able to do as I wish. The trans aspect of this for me would be to no longer have to associate with co-workers who know my history. While many of them support me and accept what I’ve become, there are others who still can’t seem to remember to call me by the correct pronouns, despite the fact that the general public overwhelmingly sees me as male.

Karen: Scare? Being vulnerable to abuse as we get older and facing neglect as a patient. Being stereotyped. Being a scapegoat for other people’s fears about sex and gender.

Rivkah: What scares me about growing old as a trans person is probably rather universal in that I worry about steadily decreasing levels of independence. I am also uncertain whether I’ll be able to afford the care I will eventually need and even more critically, whether the care will be provided in a safe environment by caregivers who are knowledgeable and sensitive to transgender needs. For example, I wear a wig and I may need to have others shave me. I hope that wherever I am to live in my later years, it will be safe, nurturing, and

affirming for me. What excites me is that I'll have a bit more freedom in my elder years to just do the things I want to do and that are meaningful to me without the burdens of the rat race. Though I don't have much money, living on Social Security, I am involved in social, religious, and political activities to the degree I am able. I look forward to the possibility of sharing life with a future husband who will hopefully also be a soul mate.

Robyn: Not much scares me. At 71, I am still doing valuable Navy work for good wages and have reasonably good health. Even so, I don't expect a crowd of bereaved family members at my funeral. I'm looking forward to driving a sporty Mercedes with my husband when I turn 120.

What should aging services providers know about transgender/SOFFA elders?

Bee: I'm going to SEEM to contradict what I just wrote above. Actually, there is a practical difference between the two questions. Service providers need to understand the needs of aging transgenders. Most of these are psychological needs, rather than physical. We need to be respected for what we are; we need to be accommodated for what we are - don't treat us as the SEX they perceive; treat us as the GENDER we are. But, before THEY can do that, the general populace needs education, as well, or else there will be constant public rows over the issues arising from this.

Dan: They should know to treat trans elders like the gender they present, while carefully examining them for conditions typical of their natal sex.

John: That we need for them to honor, respect, and provide for our continuing need to be able to live physically and socially in our true gender.

Karen: We are individuals, and as such, we are each as unique as any other human being is unique.

Kerwin: If medical, they need to be very aware of our use of hormones and learn more about it, in order to treat us with that in mind and be careful of any other drug interactions that might prove dangerous.

Nursing home services, I think the answer would be clear from what I've already said. Don't try to turn us back into something we are not!

Rivkah: Service providers will have to know what our medical needs are, such as personal hygiene issues particular to transgender elders (such as shaving, wig care, dilating in privacy, etc.), ongoing hormone treatment and, for those who are post-op, particular care needs related to that. They will need to be sensitive to our fears and concerns. First-line staff of clinics, assisted living facilities and nursing homes will need to be trained in the appropriate care and attitude toward transgender elders, especially since many first-line staff members

are new to the country and often come from national/ethnic/religious backgrounds that are hostile to LGBT people. They will also need to know the difference between sex and gender identities and sexual orientation.

Robyn: They should know that we are to be respected, and they should understand that we retain some health factors from our birth genders.

Tell us a little about how your family reacted to learning you (or your partner) were transgender. When did you realize you (or your partner) were transgender and when did you tell them?

Bee: I first realized I was transgender in 1997, though at the time, I was totally unaware of “transgender/transsexualism.” After about a year, an ex who had been doing work with transgendered people with AA told me what was happening. After that, I started the process of coming out to family, my immediate family first, then gradually enlarging the circle of family and friends who knew. (This process continues as I occasionally run into old friends and acquaintances I haven’t seen in 30 or 40 years.) I have been exceptionally fortunate in my family, and reading the posts in [ElderTG] have made me increasingly aware of that. With one minor exception, all of my close family has been fully supportive. As my mother said when I told her, “Whatever you need to do to get your life in order, go for it.”

Dan: There were a few poor reactions to my spouse’s coming out to his family. They generally still do not use proper pronouns, but neither do they use improper pronouns. They are respectful and keep their negative opinions mostly to themselves. Other family members have embraced us wholeheartedly. All in all, friends and family have been very understanding. My partner knew he was trans from the time he was a child. He had thought about and looked into transitioning when 17. But he was 45 and I was 58 or 59 when he finally came out to me. It was just a few months before we came out to friends and family.

John: I lost my 13-year relationship with my partner - also a trans FTM person but mildly trans and with no intention of transitioning. My family mostly had the V-8 reaction - “Oh! That explains EVERYTHING!” One niece, who had never met me, was upset with the idea; she was 17 at the time and life in general was upsetting for her, so I did not take it personally; now that she knows me, we have a very pleasant relationship.

I had tried to tell my family when I was four and a few times after that, but it was considered a cute joke...until I was 12 and it was no longer acceptable to bring it up.

My ex-partner and I worked through this several months before I transitioned and agreed, with sadness, to part. We are still friends. I told my family about my transition in a letter to all of them a couple of months before I started hormonal transition.

Karen: My wife and her family always accepted my eccentricities and non-typical interests and behaviors. The issue became explicit with my second suicide attempt, an effort to stage an apparent accidental drowning. My wife's only concern was that I might be oriented towards males as she couldn't compete in that field. Our children refer to me as Dad although the pronouns are feminine. When asked by her supervisor at work if she would have difficulty working with a gay colleague, [my daughter] responded, "Are you kidding? My father is a lesbian." When asked about the gender of her baby she has answered, "His sex is male, but I'll ask about his gender in a few more years." My in-laws are supportive, as are my nieces and nephews. My sister doesn't speak to me, and my parents never did anyway.

Kerwin: My parents are both dead. My son and his wife, although perhaps a bit puzzled about it, worked diligently to refer to me as male, once the physical changes became apparent. My young grandchildren know me only as grandpa. When and if I ever tell them about my history will depend on their level of understanding and other circumstances at the time. My partner knew all along, as I only met her after I had begun my transition.

Rivkah: I come from a family of 3: my parents and me. The most traumatic time for my parents was immediately after I came out to them in early 1992 as, presumably, gay. Within months, my parents grew to accept me and even joined PFLAG. So when I called them down in Florida to announce in 1994 that I was about to begin taking estrogen and transition to female, they found that news almost, to use their word: anti-climatic. It took my dad a couple of months to get used to my new name and my mom went with the flow quite well. Within a month of my coming out to them as a transwoman, they sent me a heart locket necklace for Christmas. My son, who was quite young when I began transition, went with the flow, too, and I gave him what information I could that was age-appropriate and timely. It was a journey, an adventure, for both of us. Now that my son is nearly all grown up, I do not really know just what he feels and thinks of my being a transgender parent.

I didn't realize I was a transsexual female until 1994, at age 40. One has to remember that growing up in the '50's and '60's in northeastern Wisconsin, there was no information or community or anything at all to help me figure out my sex and gender identity. Now, looking back, I can see that there were many clues along the way that were strong indicators that I was a girl and not a boy. But back then, there was no way to articulate what was going on. And even if there were and I came out as a child or teenager, there is some likelihood that I would have been ill-treated by the medical establishment of that time and place.

Robyn: My then-wife abused me physically. Two daughters have been fully supportive, and two others have been more reserved.

What do you wish someone would research about transgender/SOFFA aging? What questions do you have that you haven't been able to get answers to?

Bee: I really cannot answer that. Because of the lack of local resources, I not only can't get answers, I'm not even sure what the questions are.

Dan: As a genetic male, my testosterone levels have been in decline for 20 years. My spouse, on the other hand, has T levels like a 30-something guy. I'd like to know what the effects of full T dosages through elderhood are on a transman. I'd also like to know what happens if he, my spouse, begins to taper his dose to more closely approximate the levels of a genetic male.

Karen: Medical issues, such as response to pharmaceuticals and aging processes.

Kerwin: Long term effects of taking hormones would be a very useful area of research. Finding out how our surgically-altered bodies react to the normal changes of aging would also be helpful.

Rivkah: One big question for me, and all I've seen to date is anecdotal data, is what the long-term effects are of the use of hormones over a period of decades? Researchers do not seem to be following up over the years with folks who have transitioned. I would like to see some sort of research done concerning social and medical issues particular to elder transgender folks. I would also like to see a program to certify assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and in-home care providers based on their knowledge of transgender issues and their performance in that area. Some work is being done in this regard in the Twin Cities.

Another area that needs addressing is making sure that funeral directors and services are up-to-speed on transgender needs and issues.

Robyn: The long term effects of hormone therapy should be studied. Also, the assisted living situation for transgendered people and their spouses/partners should be developed.

Is there one experience you've had that you feel is particularly significant that you'd like to share?

Bee: One (multiple?) experience I've had leads me to believe I expect things to be worse than they really are. I've never had a lot of friends, and nearly all of them and I have drifted apart over the years because of time, distance and different life experiences. Recently I re-connected with two of them after some 40 years. In e-mail correspondence it became obvious that there was no way I could bring them up to date without telling them everything. These were local products of the extreme conservatism of the area, so I felt a great deal of trepidation in telling them. I was completely amazed by not only their acceptance, but their understanding, as both of them have had experience with the whole LGBT thing.

Dan: As an elder SOFFA, I have found a very rewarding role serving as a friend and confidant/advisor to younger GLBT folks, especially transmen and transwomen. It's not that I have any special insights to offer, but I sometimes think that just having an older non-trans ally helping them feel "normal" is a real source of strength and confidence for them.

John: Tons of experiences but none particularly more significant than others, I think, except to say that it was a key part of my faith journey and my call to serve God. When I was first dealing with how severe my dysphoria had become (along with a number of other life decision-making issues I was facing), I had a strong personal relationship with God and told God I wanted to follow God's Will at any cost - that was (and is) most important to me. I did that during my Good Friday retreat. On the following Sunday (Easter) morning, I awoke to God's Voice saying, "Arise, my son, it is time to become the man I created you to be."

Throughout my journey, it was spiritually guided and supported and it strengthened my relationship with God even more to have that intimate strength of companionship through all the physical and emotional pain and the craziness of the reactions of friends, church members, and everyone who interacted with me on a regular basis from clients, to my auto mechanic, to the woman who worked at the print and copy shop that served my business, to the people who worked in the building where my office was.

I'm working on a book to share it all!

Karen: Our attitude towards ourselves sets the mood for other people's attitudes. If we seem to be suspicious, withdrawn, and untrusting, then those around us will reflect that attitude. If we accept ourselves, then those around us feel we accept them. That puts the onus on them to treat us fairly. The battle to overcome transphobia starts within ourselves.

Kerwin: Only that the hospital where I work, although not located in a big city, has been very supportive of me. I have been treated respectfully and appropriately during any tests I have had done there.

Rivkah: While surgery isn't the be-all and end-all for me, the way in which I experienced it remains a treasure in my memory chest. I had my surgery in January 1996 in Montreal, Quebec, with Dr. Yvon Menard. It was so nice to have the girls, pre- and post-op, living in a private residence, where we shared camaraderie and community. We also enjoyed gourmet meals prepared by Dr. Menard's French chef and in between, we could raid the fridge, just like home. The post-ops could share their experiences with the pre-ops, and there was always someone around with whom to share our joys and fears. Medical help was always close at hand if needed. This setting, unique I believe, in the [Sex Reassignment Surgery] world, made for a very special experience.

Robyn: I asked my minister why THIS challenge. His reply was that we don't get to choose God's challenges. We only get to choose to accept them now or later. That's when I decided to transition.

What do you think has changed in the trans community between the time you "came out" and today? What *hasn't* changed?

Bee: Because of my limited experience in the trans community, I can't really speak of changes within the community. I CAN, however, speak to changes from outside the community. There has been a growing awareness of transgenderism in the general public, and in many ways, awareness has led to acceptance, or at least, "tolerance." Unfortunately, in many ways, that has NOT changed. There is still a lot of intolerance out there, and it is something that one has to be constantly aware of and be prepared for.

John: I'm not in a position to respond to those. I moved out of a large metro area four years ago, and do not have much contact with the trans community in my small Pennsylvania community. I do keep up e-mail correspondence with several trans friends.

Karen: Some members of the medical community are gender variants. The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association has made progress. Society's fear of sex and ignorance of gender remains a challenge.

Kerwin: I haven't quite made it 10 years yet. I also have not really had enough contact with the trans community to know for sure [what has changed]. Possibly a greater understanding and inclusion of those transfolks who define themselves as homosexual, rather than heterosexual.

Rivkah: I believe the transgender community has become more organized, focused, and strong since the early '90's. There has been an explosion of both academic and non-academic transgender literature. Many more governmental jurisdictions have gender identity protection laws and far more employers have written gender identity non-discrimination policies than in the early '90's. There are more transgender programs and organizations to serve the social, legal, and political needs of transgender people. And there are many more ways to be gendered or non-gendered than there were years ago.

Unfortunately, what hasn't changed is that we still do not have an inclusive ENDA [Employment Non-Discrimination Act] bill out of Congress and we still have much discrimination, laws or not. There are vast areas of the U.S. and around the world that are unsafe and even dangerous for transgender people. There are very few places in the U.S. where there are large and vibrant transgender communities. Even in the cities that are known for being trans-friendly, even in San Francisco, there still is violence directed at transgender folks. The rightwing continues to lash out against us with lies and innuendo that only encourages those with a violent bent to attack us. We still have many transgender folks

who get fired from their jobs for being who they are and who have job offers rescinded for the same reason. And far too many of us lose our spouses and even the right to see our children after we come out. Yet in many ways we have, as a community, gained a great deal in a very short period of time as even a casual perusal of the Internet will attest.

Robyn: What has changed is the incredible growth in on-line community and support for trans folks and - to a lesser extent - for their SOFFAs. What hasn't changed is the unrelenting evil of those who pick and choose words from some English translation of the Bible to raise money and increase their power by vilifying God's beloved Children.

Have you found that significant parts of who you are have changed over time? For example, has your desire to be out or stealth changed? Has your sexual orientation or behavior changed? Has your overall mood shifted?

Bee: Yes, I have changed a great deal. I have lost most of my old male conditioning, which I never really understood anyway. At the same time, I have not had the benefit of female conditioning (although I understand it a LOT better than I ever did the male conditioning). Sexual behavior hasn't changed. (Nothing plus nothing still equals nothing! <smile>) I will admit, though, that interest/orientation HAS changed more towards both, rather than almost exclusively female. I even dream about men sometimes <blush>. Overall mood has shifted towards being more comfortable and satisfied with what I am than I ever was before, though I still feel "ambiguous." I think my feelings are kind of like Kate Bornstein wrote: "I'm not a man, but I'm not quite a woman, either."

John: Before transitioning, I battled depression several times in my life. Since transitioning, I have had no problems with depression.

Who I am has not changed in any particular way. I am much more able to be all of who I am, however. For instance, from childhood until transition at age 52, I suppressed all my more stereotypically feminine gestures and interests, because I did not want to reinforce in anyone's mind the idea that I was a female. Since transitioning, I have been able to enjoy and express my more flame-y gay gestures and my interests in such things as interior decoration.

Karen: Keeping a secret can be more destructive than the secret itself. We have lost only a few friends from our past. Coming out (again, after so many years in stealth since age 10) was the greatest sensation of liberation I have ever experienced. My sexual orientation remains focused on women, especially lesbians. My wife and I have an exclusive marriage and remain faithful to one another.

Kerwin: No, not really. Other than being happier with my body and my place in society, I can't say that I've changed in any significant way. I'm still what I always was, but more so, since I am now visibly a man, as I was not before.

Rivkah: Yes, I've changed since coming out in the early '90's. Some of that is simply due to aging, some of it due to all the traumas I've been through because of my transgender identity out in the world, and partly it is due to my continuing evolution as a whole woman. In the early days of my gender journey back in Madison, Wisconsin, I felt quite like a teenager suddenly free to explore this whole new life I'd entered into. Now I am far more settled and comfortable with my own skin. When I look back on my early transitional days, I think of the outfits I wore and the places I went out to wear them in and I cringe, thinking I wouldn't be caught dead dressed like that now. I've also found that I prefer not to figuratively carry a label on my forehead saying that I am transgender. I've struck a balance between continuing activism in the community and simply living as a woman. At the same time, unlike the early days, I am developing other areas of my life. I'm now putting a fair amount of energy into my newly discovered Jewish identity, for example. And at this point in life, I gladly leave the nightclubs and other such hangouts for the younger crowd. I'm not stealth, because for me, that would be tantamount to going back into the closet, in which I spent way too much of my life. My trans identity is given out to people on a need-to-know basis. And if some folks "read" me, well, go ahead and read.

My sexual orientation has changed because I am now fully a woman attracted to men. In all my prior life before transition, I was also attracted to men. So the subject of my desires has not changed over the years. I'm less focused on having sex and value sex within the context of companionship and commitment at this stage of my life.

Yes, my overall mood has shifted. When I first came out and then began transition, I felt so elated, excited, and energized in the way an adolescent might be. I was then on a path of discovery. Now I am more settled and comfortable in simply being a heterosexual, Jewish woman. I am still on an incredible journey but the feelings are different, less intense, less single-mindedly focused than in my early transitional days. Looking back, I am glad I've had this life, this journey. I wouldn't change it for the world! I just wish the terrible cost and painful traumas didn't have to come with it because so much of that is due to societal bigotry and discrimination. There is much good that is on the horizon for transgender folks, and while some of it I won't be around long enough to see, I'm glad to have had a role in this transgender tapestry we're all part of. And no, I'm not ready to be put out to pasture yet!

Robyn: Who knew I'd become an activist? Although, I'm beginning to slow down and enjoy other pursuits.

What else should we have asked? (Then answer it!)

Bee: There is one thing I have never seen discussed: the needs of those with the combination of disability (in my case, deafness) and transgenderism. There needs to be a LOT more investigation into this particular area. For instance, being deaf is difficult; being transgender

is difficult; being deaf AND transgender is twice as difficult. (Insert your own disability of preference.)

John: Perhaps you might want to know, for those of us who have entered transition, the extent to which we have taken transition procedures. What surgeries, if any, hormonal or non-hormonal transitions, etc., and how comfortable we are with where we are. I had chest surgery (praise God!!) as well as hormonal transitioning. [I am] financially unable to have further surgeries, but I am quite relaxed and comfortable and able to live with the degree of transition I have.

Kerwin: How about the financial aspects of aging, given that many transfolks don't have a lot of money or terrific jobs, and have often had to pay out of pocket for their various surgeries, which may have reduced their savings dramatically? How are we to continue to afford hormones, when they are usually not covered by insurance? I wish there were good answers. Persuading health insurance to cover our hormones and surgeries would be a great help, especially in the case of Medicare and Medicaid.

Robyn: You could have asked if the gains have outweighed the losses. My answer is that nothing can outweigh living one's truth and being comfortable in one's own skin.