

**YOU
exclusive**

IN Goodwood near Cape Town she's known as Michelle. She's the woman who loves high heels, detests trousers and has a strangely deep voice. And she's so devoted to dresses she even asks her daughter why she doesn't wear them more often.

And the child's answer: "But, Dad - I like trousers."

Dad?

A dad in high heels, well made up and wearing a wig?

The truth is that Dad's name is Michelle and Dad is really a woman.

And then there's Mum. Her name is Liz and she and Dad (who is really a woman) still hold hands like young lovers after 20 years together. Mum is also a woman.

Those who see them near their flat in Goodwood are not quite sure what goes on. And sometimes when they see the couple in the local shopping centre chatting and laughing together - obviously in love - they even wonder aloud.

Sometimes the children too aren't entirely sure what's happened to Dad and why Mum still sticks with him...

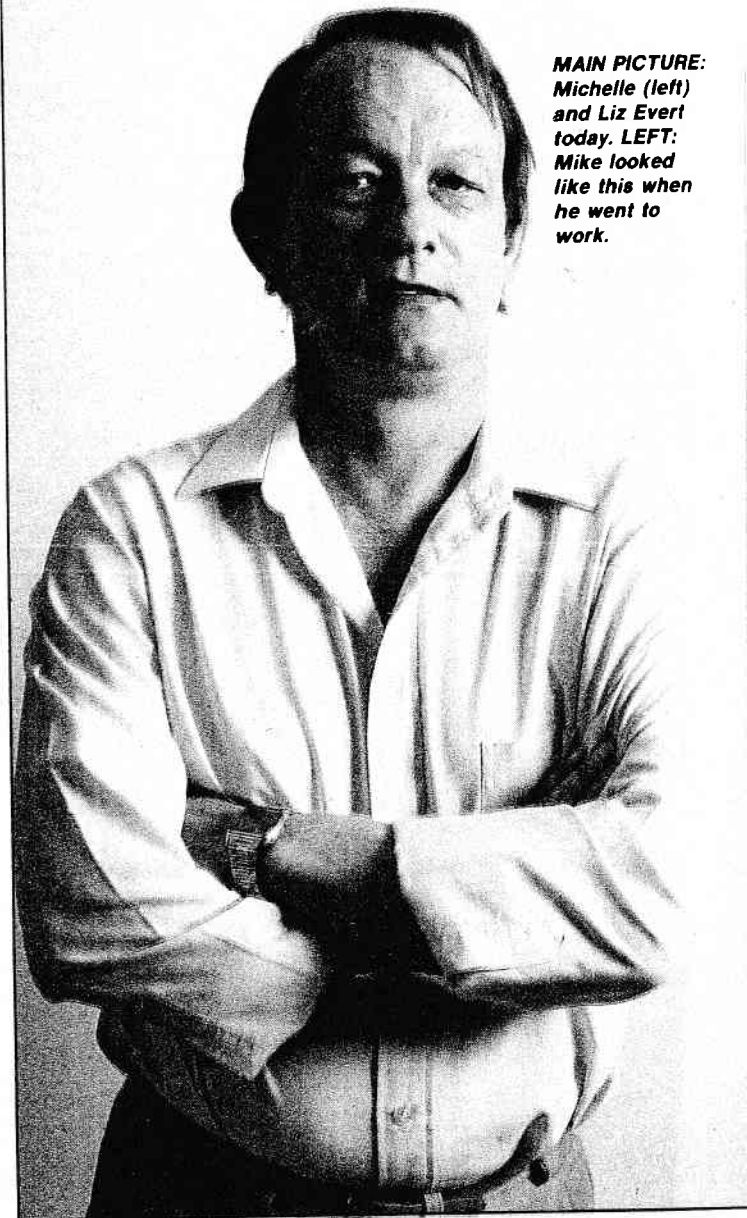
But, as the saying goes, you can choose your friends but not your family.

Incredible story of Mike, father of three, who became Michelle...

The operation that turned Mike into Michelle lasted eight hours and when she awoke Liz was at her side. 'It's over, Love. You're a woman now,' Liz told Michelle. For years Liz had lived with the husband whose greatest wish has always been to be a woman. And how do their children accept a father who is a female?

By EDWARD PARKER

Pictures: CORRIE HANSEN



MAIN PICTURE: Michelle (left) and Liz Evert today. **LEFT:** Mike looked like this when he went to work.

'It's over, Daddy - you're a woman now...'

All the children know is that Mum married Dad 15 years ago, wearing one of his favourite dresses, and that at that time Dad was still known as Mike.

IT was a lovely dress; golden taffeta with puffed sleeves and a pinched waist.

Not one of the wedding guests could have dreamed the

lovely bride was wearing one of the groom's favourite frocks. He, like most grooms, was dressed in a formal suit. But unlike most grooms, he hated it.

"My only pleasure was the underwear I wore," said Mike. "It was silky and feminine under the coarse material of my trousers."

A few years later when Liz

told their friends about the clothes they wore to their wedding they laughed uproariously and exclaimed: "You can't be serious!"

And Liz answered: "But we are!"

Few can accept that Liz has

spent the past 20 years married to a man who has spent most of his life wanting to be a woman.

No one understands why every evening she lovingly places her husband's feminine underwear, lipstick, high heels

Once they were man and wife



and a pretty dress on his bed. Relatives keep saying: "Think of the children - what excuse could they give their friends if they were to find out?"

Mike has three children and Liz has two. Two stay with them, another is in the army, and the others are worried and live elsewhere.

Until recently they were a family like any other - except for this important difference: the children knew Dad was what people refer to as a transsexual, a man who loves wearing women's clothes and feels like a woman trapped in a man's body.

They grew up with their father's predilection, learnt to ac-

cept it and avoided as far as possible inviting friends home.

During the day he would dress like a man and do a man's work for the company that employed him as a tool-maker. At 5 o'clock he would go home and gratefully become a woman.

Jekyll and Hyde, Hyde and Jekyll. Now you see a man,

now you see a woman. Call me Dad in the morning, and at night...

Eventually the wait until 5 o'clock became too long and the drive home too slow. Mike could barely bring himself to wait until he got home to shower away his masculine sweat and put on his wig, a dress, his sheer nylon stockings, make-up and perfume.

He decided he would have to stop his double life and in desperation consulted a plastic surgeon and a psychologist.

After many extremely traumatic months that only Liz and Mike's closest friends knew anything about, he finally got what he wanted. A few weeks ago a surgeon operated on Mike Evert and turned him into Michelle, the woman he had always wanted to be.

But nothing much changed in his private life.

"The only difference is that I'm much happier than ever before," says Michelle (Mike) as she delicately crosses her legs as only a woman can.

TO Michelle the weeks and months before the sex change operation were a hell she now intends to describe in a book.

"As long as I can remember I said the same prayer every night when I went to bed, 'Please, God, please let me wake up a woman.'

"I'm now 47 and what I prayed for never happened. So when I read about all the sex change operations being done overseas I decided I would *make* my dream come true.

"But there were many factors I had to take into consideration: the reactions of my three daughters, the reactions of Liz's two children from a previous marriage, and what my ageing mother would say if she knew. But I also had to consider myself.

"It was a difficult decision to make but the scales kept tipping in the same direction.

"Every morning I had to look at myself in the mirror. It was
(Turn over)

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terrible. I hated my naked man's body and the fact that I had to shave and wear ugly masculine clothes.

"I find nothing more revolting than men's coarse trousers and jackets.

"But every morning I had to wear these despite an absolute yearning to wear silky stockings and a dress.

"Weekends were bliss – a welcome escape. That's when I could wear women's clothes 24 hours a day and walk in the street with Liz dressed as a woman and feeling totally... feminine.

"But every Monday morning I had to remove my Cutex and pack away my wig and become Mike again – and I hated Mike.

"I didn't even think like a man. Knitting, needlework, cooking and pretty clothes



ABOVE: Michelle (right) and Liz chatting over a cup of tea. **LEFT:** Liz helps with the make-up. **FAR LEFT:** Michelle examines her face. **BOTTOM:** Two women in one house at the stove – Liz peers over Michelle's shoulder.

were the things that occupied my mind most of the time. Oh, I so loved buying make-up and experimenting with the different colours.

"I never went out 'jolling' with the boys because I had absolutely no interest in sitting in a pub talking man talk. At work I was an outsider and I spent my free time discussing what women find important – with the women.

"I discussed the matter with Liz and the children and told them I could bluff everyone except myself and I no longer wanted to continue the farce. I was not gay, I just wanted to be a woman more than anything else. I begged them all to understand.

"Liz did understand, but the children ...

"I went from hospital to hospital looking for someone to give me a sex change operation but the doctors at each were doubtful.

"Society did not readily accept a woman who used to be a man, they told me. It was unnatural, they said, and rejection was common.

"Next I visited psychologist after psychologist. One told me I was too old for such an operation and said I should have considered something like this years ago.

"What frustration! Years ago such operations were never considered in South Africa.

"But I eventually heard of a private plastic surgeon who was prepared to do the operation. That was at the end of last year."

ABOUT that time a woman at work who was aware of Mike's passion for women's clothes persuaded him to go home with her. "Mike," she urged, "let me prove to you you're a man."

An extremely confused Mike accepted the offer and they had a relationship. But it lasted only a short while before Mike returned to Liz begging forgiveness.

"I couldn't live like that. That affair proved to me finally that I could not live as a man. Although I had a man's body I was psychologically and spiritually a woman.

"In my relationship with Liz she had always played the masculine role. She protected me, comforted me and made me feel special.

"She would accompany me when I bought make-up and helped me apply it. She was excited when we went shopping for a new dress for me. She was the one who combed my hair and held me when I was feeling down.

"My affair helped convince me that I had to stop postponing the operation - I had to get rid of Mike.

"The factor that finally decided me was my mother's death - she wouldn't know about it."

The plastic surgeon and psychologist decided the operation was possible but Mike had to think it over again very carefully. "It's a big step. Think about it very carefully," Mike's doctor told him, and advised him to take leave from work.

"I COULDN'T wait for the operation but the doctors again gave me a chance to think things over," says Mike. "Before the operation they discussed with me in detail what they would do.

"My masculinity would be removed and by means of advanced plastic surgery I would become a woman.

"Months before, I had begun a course of hormonal treatment to make my breasts develop and retard hair growth on my face. Before the treatment I used to have to shave every day but I was now doing so only once every three weeks.

It was September but still winter in Cape Town. At 8 o'clock on the chosen morning they fetched Mike from his bed at the hospital, gave him an injection and left him for a while

in a small room. It was raining outside.

He had 15 minutes to think things over once more before being taken into the operating theatre.

"Thirteen minutes later I told

A sergeant with lingerie under his uniform

them to get on with it," says Mike.

"They then wheeled me into the theatre and only at the door did Liz leave my side. She held my hand and we prayed together. I told her it was best this way and she understood.

"In the theatre the anaesthetist, who stood ready to administer another injection, gave a final warning, 'There's still time to change your mind. Are you sure?' I was sure so he gave me the injection."

The operation to turn Mike into Michelle lasted eight hours. When she awoke Michelle's lower body was bandaged and anaesthetised. Liz was at her bedside.

"It's all over, Daddy," said Liz. "You're now a woman."

MICHELLE'S children were not sure what to call her - Dad or Mum. His/her stepdaughter had always called him/her "Uncle Mike". Now she avoided using any sexually specific term.

Michelle's own daughter says: "I still don't know what to think. It's been a shock to all of us but we'll probably get used to it."

But Michelle has no doubts. "It was the only choice.

"I tried for years but it was never any good," she says. "In the army I rode a motorcycle, drilled and jogged and was eventually promoted to sergeant. But all the while Sergeant Evert wore women's underwear beneath his uniform.

"We usually had to shower together and one of the guys once saw my panties. They laughed and mocked and called me a poof but I'm not gay, I don't even like men and wouldn't want to go out with one.

"I'm happy with Liz and I want to stay with her. She accepts me as I am and it would be pointless to go our separate ways at this stage of our lives.

"For years we've shared a double bed."

To gentle-natured Liz, a middle-aged woman with a responsible job, the sexual side of their relationship had never been particularly important.

"I married Mike because I loved him as a human being and now that he's Michelle I love her. If wearing women's clothes makes her happy then so be it, I accept it and understand.

"There has been plenty of unhappiness in our marriage but love always triumphs. Now we attend church as a couple of women and live together as women.

"I suppose my children will one day marry and move away and we'll be left alone together. That's why I can't think only of my children, I have to consider myself. I don't want to be left all alone."

BUT why did Mike need and choose to become Michelle? "As far back as I can remember I wore little girl's clothes," she says.

"I was born during the war and my father desperately wanted a daughter but got me instead. He seemed to lose interest in staying at home and went off to war - never to return.

"My mother often dressed me as a girl and even let my hair grow long. Some time after she remarried I gained a sister and it became immediately clear to me that the sister was more cherished."

When Mike's sister suddenly died at the age of nine his life changed dramatically. He had always been very attached to her and was never aware of the differences in their ages and sex.

"Her death was a great shock to me but it was also an opportunity for me to take her place.

"After school I would wear her clothes and my mother never protested. In this way my need to wear her clothes grew stronger. When I reached high school I realised I ought to behave more aggressively and stop wearing a little girl's

clothes.

"But I *couldn't*."

"After matric I joined the army because that seemed to be the easiest way of showing the world I was a man. But beneath my coarse army clothes I wore women's underwear. I told no one about this and always tried to undress in the dark."

And then Mike met his first wife, Isabel.

She was a nurse at the Pretoria hospital where Mike received medical attention after a motorcycle accident. She was the one who removed his army uniform and discovered feminine underwear beneath.

"She wanted to know why I wore it and we got into conversation. One weekend she invited me home. Her parents were dead against our relationship but in protest - and perhaps to prove to them I was a man - I married Isabel.

"We spent many years together and had three children.

"But Isabel always had a struggle to accept my behaviour. And then I met Liz, the first woman who didn't criticise me for it."

At first they were friends but after they fell in love she divorced her husband and married Mike.

"Today we're still together. She was the one who stayed by my bed 24 hours a day after my sex change and reassured me it had all been worth while.

"I endured so much pain that at times I wondered if I had done the wrong thing.

"Now, two months after the operation, I know the pain was worth it. My employer knows what I've done and still employs me - the only condition being that I work for him as Mike, in men's clothes.

"And it just doesn't bother me any longer. I still hate men's trousers and their uncomfortable shoes but this time at least it's not a farce. Now I know I'm a woman not only spiritually but physically too.

"That fact makes all the difference.

"My children will gradually learn to accept what's happened, and so will the church. But even if everyone turns against me I have one certainty: Liz is with me all the way.

"Long ago she promised to stick with me through thick and thin and she will keep her word." □