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sex-change program. I am a woman.

I am the way I am.  
It is a fine way to be."

**DIANE LESLIE FEINBERG**

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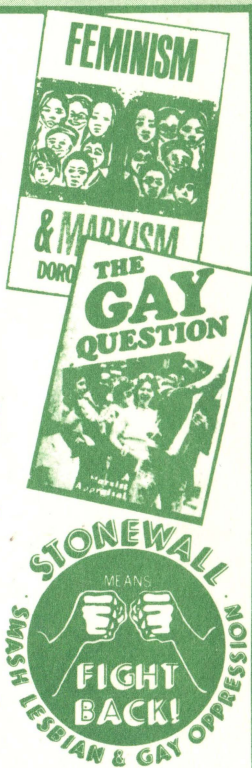
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**DIANE LESLIE FEINBERG**

**Journal  
of a  
Transsexual**

50¢

## Background for “Diary of a Transsexual” by Leslie Feinberg

### Description:

A short theoretical piece in the form of a memoir by Leslie Feinberg, published in 1980. This work was Feinberg's first public attempt to put forward a political stance on trans liberation outside of Feinberg's work as a comrade within [Workers World Party](#), an independent communist party. WWP's publishing arm was "World View Publishers," which printed this pamphlet and also Feinberg's expanded 1992 theorizing in ["Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come."](#) This pamphlet examines Feinberg's thoughts on the intricacies of gender and gender non-conformity; the work engages with these ideas to shed light on how the lesbian and gay movement had yet to be inclusive of trans identities. To see how Feinberg's understanding shifted, in addition to the 1992 work, read ["Author's Note on the 20th Anniversary Edition,"](#) *Stone Butch Blues* (2013), which includes these words from Feinberg: "I can only note that, like planes, trains and automobiles, the same technological vehicles of hormones and surgeries take people on different journeys in their lives—depending on whether their oppression/s is/are based on sex/es, self/gender expressions, sexualities, nationalities, immigration status, health and/or dis/abilities, and/or economic exploitation of their labor."

**From the "Author's Note on the 20th Anniversary Edition"  
STONE BUTCH BLUES (2013)  
By: LESLIE FEINBERG**

### ON LANGUAGE

The use of the word “transgender” has changed over the two decades since I wrote *Stone Butch Blues*.

Since that time, the term “gender” has increasingly been used to mean the sexes, rather than gender expressions. This novel argues otherwise.

I have been isolated by illness from discussions about language for more than half a decade.

So I can only note that, like planes, trains and automobiles, the same technological vehicles of hormones and surgeries take people on different journeys in their lives—depending on whether their oppression/s is/are based on sex/es, self/gender expressions, sexualities, nationalities, immigration status, health and/or dis/abilities, and/or economic exploitation of their labor.

I agree with CeCe McDonald, who wrote from a prison cell:

“We need for our mission to promote racial, social, and economic justice for trans youth, with freedom to self-define gender identity and expression.”

## ON PRONOUNS

I respect each person's pronoun as an important part of their personhood. My own pronoun usage has had to be complex because of overlapping oppressions.

But in recent years, I have become as concerned with the pronoun *we* as I am with the pronouns *she*, *he* and *ze*.

I am including links to two articles I wrote after *Stone Butch Blues*, which are about the pronoun *we*:

"Many Histories Converged at Stonewall: Lavender & Red 71" <http://www.workers.org/2006/us/lavender-red-71/>

"Honoring LaTeisha Green" <http://www.transgenderwarrior.org/lgreen>



# **Journal of a Transsexual**

**DIANE LESLIE FEINBERG**



WORLD VIEW PUBLISHERS  
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*For Jeanette and Eddie, Bob, Dotty and all my comrades:  
you've listened and given, encouraged and cared. Now, after  
these years, I can't even put into words the feeling I have for  
each of you because it is greater than the sum total of its  
parts.*

*This is a Workers World Party publication*

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by voluntary labor.*

## Foreword

### *THE ROAD NOT TAKEN*

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

—Robert Frost

Every pore of living, social education exudes the theory that “men are masculine” and “women are feminine.” We are taught that this is human nature—it has always been this way and thus will always be. And woe to those who cannot conform to this needlessly narrow norm! But what are defined as masculinity and

femininity cannot be distilled, bottled and dispensed to the “proper” gender like perfume and cologne—they are social concepts. In truth, each person demonstrates an ever-changing balance of both characteristics, although heavily influenced by social pressure.

I am a very masculine woman. Perhaps that is the easiest way to introduce myself. I lived convincingly as a man for four years on a sex-change program before leaving that program. I am a woman. I am the way I am. It is a fine way to be.

History—both recent and ancient—is rich with examples of women who passed as men and men who passed as women, often so successfully that they were not found out until after their deaths.

The development of surgery and the commercial manufacture of hormones are relatively recent discoveries of this century. Since then tens of thousands of people in this country have reached a crossroads in their lives and have made a long and difficult decision: to change their sexual identity, to live in a way that may bring some relief and comfort.

Many people would be surprised to learn that an equal number of women as well as men are entering sex-change programs. Some people stay in their new lives, others leave the programs after a time and try to go back to living as their original gender.

All of us who do the work of the world want a chance to live in dignity and with respect. Everyone wants to be accepted.

Yet people who are transsexual must cope with bigotry in the form of humiliation, harassment and hounding unless they can keep the gender they were born with a guarded secret. Transsexuals and transvestites are often the victims of chilling violence.

Recently the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled against a person who is transsexual in a job discrimination suit. The court decision said that people who are transsexual are not protected by the laws against discrimination in the Constitution!

I am the way I am. You are the way you are. In a humane society the subject would be closed. But this is not a humane society, and so, this is where my story begins.

## Monday, July 2

Between the sound of the rooster crowing in the backyard just before daybreak and the sound of the news snapping on with the radio, some things can be learned about the day.

In summer, this preparation time is longer—highly valued since the sun is hot and high in July and any moment on the street could easily become a nightmare.

On a summer day like today, my hormone-lowered voice and facial hair, and the fact that I've had a mastectomy, makes the question of whether to wear men's or women's clothing, including a bra, an important one, and to some extent determines whether or not I will be confronted with situations that demand of me fight-or-flight.

On a cloudy, rainy day in summer I can throw a plastic poncho on myself and go into stores to buy a newspaper or a cup of



coffee pretty much as I choose. Yet, I am considered queer in a men's or women's bathroom: too feminine to be a man, too masculine to be a woman. There is no escape from the contradiction.

As the seasons change, autumn mourns the end of a period of summer struggle, just when I'm getting the hang of it!

In winter, once I'm covered by a coat, I could argue that I'm a woman 'til I'm blue in the face. It gets me nowhere. In winter I lose ground. Territory liberated in the summer often is overturned by bigotry in the winter. It is a time of rest for jangled nerves. As long as I do not argue that I'm a woman, I am treated more like a human being.

Spring is the time of greatest tension: the coming off of coats time. And not slowly, gradually the way emotions would require, but the way weather comes—full of surprise. Then each store, each route must be reexamined before the fresh challenge of summer: women's or men's clothing, to wear a bra or not. This is the time of year no restaurant will serve me without insult. I remember to keep moving

at all costs, to ignore petty discourtesy on the street and avoid waiting for trains with groups of young men getting high and looking for fun.

I am well-known in my neighborhood. The neighborhood children help to bridge the gap between the adults and myself.

I look out my window to see what the situation on the street is.

As far as I can see are tenements. Some abandoned, some lived in—the difference is slight: bright pieces of cloth tacked up over windows. Sprawling vacant lots with wildly growing weeds and chickens and dogs running in them. I can hear the whistles from the garment sweatshops on each block but I cannot see them.

Some streets are safer than others. I set a bearing each morning, taking into account how I am dressed. The difference of a block or two can mean dodging stones thrown at me by teenagers.

I feed the plants and myself before leaving for work. I look out the window, I look down to the street corner. Beyond that, I can see no further what the day will hold.

## Tuesday, July 10

Should I cross the street to avoid the young man at the corner restaurant who leans over the knish counter to make rude remarks?

I decide to walk defiantly past.

“Hey! You want some cream in your coffee? Hey, mister!,” he calls out making a gesture of masturbation.

“How cruel you are!” I turn and tell him but people at the counter are smirking and laughing with him so I walk on.

“Faggot!” The taunt sears my back like burning metal. I am on my way to work.

I am on my way to work.

## Thursday, July 12

In the morning, most of the women from the bindery eat rolls and drink coffee together the way they have for years, before the plant whistle steals the last moment.

I am still new here. I am the topic of their conversation today. Throughout the

plant there is this question: man or woman, boy or girl?

An older woman from another part of the warehouse offers me wonderful coffee from her thermos and half a danish. Other women come to stand around us.

“You see Mabel, **he** likes my coffee even if you don’t.” She is blushing as our co-workers dart with their eyes to see if I am hurt. I flush because she is serving me and with such affection.

The coffee seals my fate—today I must use the bathroom. Asking for the bathroom must include forthright: which one?

Outside work there is the danger that the police will come right in to ask me what’s going on. That’s the worst.

I find the women’s bathroom and walk in. Three surprised faces glance and then double-take, mouths open in protest, fingers half-raised pointing to the sign. They stop, seeing my bra.

Silence. I wave, a silly thing to do. I smile reassuringly.

Hands bulldoze cosmetics back into open purses and single file they bump into each other in their rush to leave.

I glance at the mirror to see if I have become a monster. Just me looking back at me.

Later in the day I am able to stand and chat in the bathroom. For me, too, it's the only place off the production floor to hide!

After a while, when someone from another department asks, "Is that a boy or a girl?," the elder women will say, "A girl. Oh, you know this younger generation."

Not all places are so kind. In some shops a few bigots and bullies hold sway. In others, co-workers who are angered by cruelty put in their two cents worth for me.

## Wednesday, July 18

When I first entered a sex-change program a decade ago, in order to avoid embarrassment my parents disposed of all pictures of me, a little girl or young woman growing up with the tenseness of puberty etched on my face.

When I later took back control of my body after four years of being on the program, my parents discarded all pictures of me living as a man.

I have one photo left. A friend took it thirteen years ago. It is tacked up on the wall: a 17-year-old and 28-year-old woman sitting against each other on the floor, just looking at each other. Captured tenderness between two women.

One woman has long hair; she is not yet dressed up to go out to a gay bar. The other woman has short cropped hair, wearing half a suit with a tie, jacket on the couch.

To dance together was against the law then, and enforced.

They danced together well.

## Thursday, July 19

It's hard to believe it but I'm laid off again.

Thirteen jobs last year before I made 20 weeks eligibility for unemployment.

Seventeen jobs the year before that before I made 20 weeks.

Seven this year. Am I doing something right?

I have been pricing a meal all morning. I stop where I can get a hamburger and



iced tea and still leave a tip. When I order, I feel uneasy. After I've ordered I know I've made a mistake. Wasn't I in this place before? The cook is laughing and says, "Look what the wind blew in! What is it?"

My hamburger and tea arrive. The man sitting next to me is staring at me. I start chewing.

Then he gets up slowly and circles behind me. He stops directly behind me. Every nerve ending is acting as an early warning system.

The waitress stands in front of me and asks the guy, "Will there be anything else?"

He makes no sound and she looks at me. I smile wanly and chew. She moves out of the way.

I am chewing what now tastes like paste. It is my meal godammit! I wish I could wrap it up in a napkin and relish it with iced tea later in the day.

I keep chewing.

He has not moved for a long time. I can tell by the smile on the face of the cook (who has full complicity in this) and the direction the other customers are looking, that he is still two feet directly behind me.

- My little hamburger is nearly done. I try to take smaller bites. Finally the owner intervenes (it's about time) by gesturing to take the man's check. After what is a very long transaction right next to me, he is gone.

I look for the hamburger and iced tea and realize they are gone, I finished them.

"Will there be anything else?" the waitress asks me.

"No, that's fine, thanks."

## Monday, July 30

Oh god, it's 11 o'clock at night and I'm being tailed by an undercover cop car. I am so near to home. I try to walk faster without looking like I'm walking faster.

"Hey," they shout. Laughter. "What's your hurry?"

They have pulled up right next to me and are slowing down.

They invite me to get in the car, but an invitation from armed cops is a threat.

"You give good head?" they call out. More laughter. I don't look at them.

"Hey mister. I'm talking to you."

This is the point of flight.

I run through an alley and into a back lot feeling like a swift and effortless runner since I quit smoking. I pause for a moment. My heart is beating fast. A car door slams and I already hear one of them on the alley. In front of me is a fence. A dog is barking on the other side. I run across several lots, making too much noise in the tin cans and rubble. I come to a fence half torn down and hope I can make it over. Adrenalin is furiously pumping through me. As I spring up over the fence I feel as though I could bound over buildings and away from the danger on earth. On my descent, my ankle hurts and my temples are pounding with blood.

Noise behind me and I take off zig-zagging in case he's pulled his gun.

I am running from a mortal enemy. I am remembering the things they did to us when they raided the bars. I am remembering friends of mine who fell after what the cops did to them; remembering the bulls tanks and queens tanks. (If they don't have one they'll make one up for you special!)

I am on my block now. I am in my house. My lungs ache from running.

## Friday, August 3

The day began well.

A job prospect. An interview, coupled with a rainy day so that what I wore would not be so dangerous.

I am on my way to the interview.

It developed on the subway in a few minutes' time. A young white man stops to ask me to buy some stolen aftershave. I wave no but he notices me. I can't wave him away. I must now watch this problem, it is not going away.

He is baiting me, saying things at me. I can't listen. Swimming in a murky void I am studying to see at what point this will break out in physical confrontation. It is already out of control.

Abruptly he sits down next to me and lights a cigarette. He turns and blows smoke in my face. His arm and leg are now blocking my exit and slowly pushing me. What I am saying to him is of no im-

portance. I make my move to break out of his hold.

I am on the floor, can't remember being thrown. The door of the train is about to close—now it is closed.

He is coiled, wound tight by an unseen hand. I am on my way to a job interview.

Who else is on the train? They've long since moved to another car.

Two men sitting on the far end of the car. Frozen. No help there.

A smallish looking man in a rumpled cheap suit is sitting mid-way in the car. I try not to move to a seat next to him too quickly for fear he will run and make my situation worse. I move to a seat halfway between us but this nut moves with me from seat to seat.

Now I move to where my new ally is sitting. I have to win him. I speak to him slowly, gingerly, as though we were interrupted by this guy from nowhere, which is true enough. I try to tell him that I don't know what's going on but I am trying to convey that, "Isn't this guy throwing me around really a problem for both of us?"

Now it is two against one. Mr. Rumply-suit tells this youth he really should leave

me alone. The guy smacks me upside the head a few times. At each point of contact I can feel his misdirected anger, his potential for even greater violence.

I keep my face from being marked—the stamp of a victim. My clean knuckles remind me I haven't thrown a punch yet.

The doors open, a stop at last. My ally moves to the door looking for a cop. I wish he wouldn't. The cops will use this to take me in on suspicion that I think I have a right to survive and to live.

I move to the door, the nut moves to the door. Pow! He smacks me once more on the head. Now! The doors are shut and he is out.

"Yes, just from nowhere," I offer no explanation as to why I was chosen. The men from the other end of the car thaw and rush over to tell me that this man may have brutalized their friend in the past.

Fifty-ninth Street is the next stop. That's my stop.

I try to walk in for the interview relaxed, easy. As though nothing ever happens to me.

This is the front office of a sweat-shop, you can't fool me.



I pull off my rain poncho so that it is clear that I am wearing women's clothing. I say to the woman at the front desk, "My name is Diane Feinberg and I'm here for an interview with Roy Bird."

She never takes her eyes off me while she says into the loudspeaker system, "Roy, there's some guy here to see you."

After the formalities of an (this is an equal opportunity) interview I am back on the streets of mid-town in mid-morning.

I tell myself that the most important thing is that this morning I won over the support of one other human being during a nightmare, that there is more than one way to fight. True. But now I wish I'd fought the guy on the subway with my fists. Now I wish my face told at a glance that I'd taken a beating and that my knuckles would show that I didn't take it sitting down.

Now I'm ready for a fist fight and there are no takers. Just a lot of businessmen scurrying around.

My throat closes. An unmistakable sign my eyes will soon fill with water.

## Saturday, August 4

A hot wind billows around the crowded subway car, pushed by an ineffective fan.

We have been stopped between stations for what seems like a long time.

A woman leaning on her boyfriend whispers a question in his ear. He looks at me from head to foot.

"A guy," he says out loud.

A nasty little ten-year-old adds on to that, "Mister, you look like a girl." Mother pulls the little darling close to her with a look like I deserve the cuffing!

The train is still not moving. My eyes are heavy, drowsing. They close, slowly, then snap open, but there is no immediate danger here.

My eyes close again. In a muffled world I hear the train start up, stop and start again. It is hot.

My thoughts go back to the fight yesterday morning in the train. The fight has snagged my pride, pulling me irresistibly in its direction. It is as though,

in a shower of insults, one rained on a raw nerve and became the injustice to end all injustices. Really the man has little to do with the existence I am locked into. It is a struggle to stay on course, so much of it uncharted.

I think about the fight again, testing my timing, retesting each movement and decision.

I am thinking I have until next week to find another job. Otherwise the landlord and phone company will come down on me with the swiftness of a guillotine.

I think how nice it would be to unzip my body from forehead to navel and go on vacation. But there is no escaping it, I'd have to pack myself along.

I turn my life over in my mind like a smooth stone slipped into my pocket whose texture I know in its every detail by touch.

I open my eyes. The train is nearly empty. I am facing a woman holding a child on her lap. Her arms are folded across him. They are of the same dark skin and equally as handsome. Their faces together, they are running with sweat like a river down one body.

All our eyes meet in one moment. I smile warmly, without restraint. His eyes look up at hers. She returns the smile in kind.

I am sorry when they get off at the next stop.

My thoughts wander unfocused but find their way again and again to the fight on the train. Then something nudges me to smile:

I have lost more battles than I care to count. I could write a volume on the art of retreat. This is not an easy life. It is a struggle to survive. It is a fight.

But I have survived. It's a fight that I am winning.

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