

America's controversial sex-change tennis player says:

"I want to be Wimbledon Ladies' Champion"

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SMATZ

NOW I believe I have the drive to be the best woman tennis player in the world. And if I should be at my relaxed best on the

Wanting to win Wimbledon is a common enough ambition for every woman tennis player. But what is startling about this statement from Renee Richards is that she was born

was a girl and that's why I was dressing up in her clothes. I don't believe she was horrified although she did ask my mother: "What do you do with boys that want to be girls?"

much as when I was a man. But there is a difference. Dick—my name when I was a man—got pleasure from the tenseness and the heat of the competition but I think that now, as a woman, I enjoy the actual playing and practising more.

sex change which has upset the sports world
Interview by Fred Robbins

and inwardly being myself whenever I could. Which meant dressing in my sister's clothes in private and sneaking out of the house. I was furtive, and termed or being found out, confused because I knew that it was not normal behaviour. I thought no-one else in the world had the same problem. The first time I realised I was not alone was when I read about the case of a Danish painter who had been posing for his wife, a sculptress, and gradually his body began to change into a more feminine form. The book was a tremendous source of hope for me.

Ever since I can remember I felt myself to be truly a female rather than a male. I knew I had a boy's body and was supposed to behave like a boy. And no matter what kind of success, friendship or accomplishment I could achieve as a male, it was uncomfortable for me. And the drive and desire was always there to be a woman, outwardly and inwardly.

sexual organs. I lived in a household of women, with a dominant, overloving mother. And a maiden aunt, a maternal grandmother, a sister, and a nanny. My father was a relatively neutral figure, busy trying to start a practice in medicine. He was hardly ever in the house. All those things must have had an overwhelming effect on me.

was expected of me and I responded to social pressures to be like a boy.

As a three-year-old, without any prodding, I started to dress up in my sister's and my mother's clothing. I wanted to be like the little girls who were my friends. I felt that having a male body meant there was something wrong with me.

Obviously this couldn't be the only factor because there are normal boys who grow up in households where the influence of women is stronger than it was in my case. Perhaps there is some unknown

The feminine side of me was there, but covered up because I knew that it was not acceptable. I think it came as rather a shock to my father when in my late teens or early 20s he first found out that I had this problem. After all, his son had become an outstanding student who enjoyed football, baseball, tennis, running, and had all kinds of normal male friends. Our relationship, although not super close, was a good one albeit on a slightly superficial level, consistent with many boys and their fathers.

When I got to college, to be heterosexual and to start dating brought more pressure. I had no homosexual inclinations so I couldn't channel my drives in that direction. So I started dating. And my total personality make-up did have some male in it. Because Dick did have strong feelings for the girls and women he became involved with. It was not a put-on. He was very enamoured of a few of the women (Please turn to p. 48)

I didn't translate the [unclear] at that age, like saying that I didn't like my penis and wished I had a vagina—I think then I was unconscious of the

genetic, embryonic or pre-birth hormonal imbalance, of some added medical and psychiatric world isn't even aware of in the genesis of transsexual behaviour.

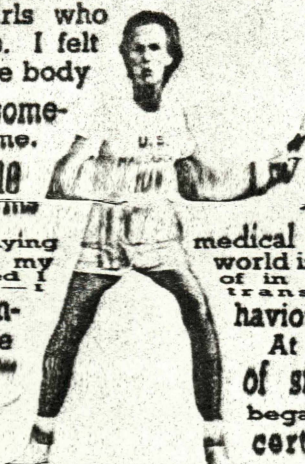
My sister first knew when I was about 16, because she caught me dressed up in her clothes. I was surprised. But she handled it rather matter-of-factly. I explained that I really wished I

For 12 years I was periodically taking female hormones

At about the age of six or seven I began to realise that certain behaviour

I also had an operation to reduce my Adam's apple

I was then a rather weird-looking man until I had the final operation



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that he had relationships with. But, of course, it was confusing because there was always a battle between Dick's behaviour and drives and Renee's. And in the beginning Dick could win out a good part of the time, but as the years went by Renee began to assume the ascendancy until it was about even. And then, gradually, Renee took over.

I went to college in the days when sex was not as free as it is now. And my first experience of sexual intercourse was, as it was with many boys of the time, with a prostitute.

It was a failure because the prostitute tried to arouse me first. And I was totally impotent. Because I did not like my penis, I could not be stimulated. This is a big difference with homosexuals, by the way, who like their male organ. I didn't like it—I hated it and didn't want it touched, and didn't want anything to do with it. So my experience of sex was a total failure.

I finally did have successful intercourse later that summer—I was determined to do what all the other boys were doing. But it reinforced in my mind that there was something radically wrong with my being male. Apart from the prostitutes, I was attracted to

girls. But I only ever had one girlfriend at a time.

With that one girlfriend there was always love-making and affection. And there may have been on my part a great deal of identification with the girl I was involved with, rather than a true heterosexual relationship. I satisfied the girl I was involved with, even though the sexual part of it was not satisfying for me. In terms of the satisfaction and enjoyment of the sex act that I get now, as a woman, there's no comparison. And this is what sex should have been like for me from adolescence, rather than from the age of 40.

I turned to one psychiatrist after another

I felt that a dirty trick had been played on me. Why should I have these feelings and this compulsion to be of the sex that anatomically I wasn't? I felt that I was kind of stuck with this horrible situation that I could not resolve, and I turned to one psychiatrist after another for help.

The psychiatrists, of course, were all of the Freudian school then, and they attempted to turn me round to being a man emotionally, psychologically and mentally as well as anatomically. But eventually they gave up on me, even though it took about eight or 10 years of trying. That's when I finally decided to seek ultimate surgery.

If a person is a true trans-sexual

and if the compulsion and drive are very, very strong, it will not be eradicated by psychiatry. Trans-sexual behaviour can be of all degrees. I mean, somebody with a very slight compulsion to trans-sexualism can probably live with it and tolerate it. And perhaps some transvestites are in that category. But if somebody has the compulsion from early infancy, then no, he cannot live with it. It is ineradicable, pervasive; it grows, overwhelms and is not to be denied.

There may be genetic imbalance. There is sometimes a definite chromosomal imbalance. Trans-sexuals often have an extra X-chromosome. There may be a hormonal imbalance in pregnancy. Trans-sexuals may be subjected to a heavier environment of oestrogens at the critical stage of male organ development and this may have its effect in later life.

Then you have the whole gamut of early environmental conditioning which is very important as well. I think that in every case of trans-sexualism that has been subjected to scrutiny the child almost always came from a family where the mother was overwhelming and dominant and the child identified with the mother and not at all with the father.

As I grew up, my parents used to joke: "You can be any kind of doctor." My mother, father and sister are all physicians. And there was no doubt that I was going to be a physician, too. And that is

what I became. The attitude of patients to me varied depending on the stage I was at.

The first stage was in New York, when I was going through all the changes and was a rather weird-looking man. The second stage was when I had had the surgery, had become a woman but was practising as a man. The next stage was when I moved to California and started practising as a woman with nobody knowing that I had been a man. And the final stage was practising as a woman when everybody had found out who I was.

Dick was not that kind of guy

Some people thought I had cancer and was taking female hormones because of that. It was partly because people couldn't conceive of Dick Raskin becoming a woman. He was just not that kind of guy. And I did nothing to refute that because it was a good cover-up. But doctors who referred patients to me for special consultation sometimes told me that the patient would say: "I wasn't sure whether I was being treated by a man or a woman."

The effect that my change of sex had on my former wife, Barbara, and our child is an area I won't get into. They were not born with my problem. There is every reason to protect them from any involvement. All I will say is that Dick

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fell in love with a very beautiful, charming woman. It was a true feeling, and a very warm and wonderful relationship.

I don't think my marriage or its break-up had any direct relationship to my change of sex. There are trans-sexuals who have been married and divorced and then have their surgery. There are some who are married and have their surgery and stay married.

The actual change of sex took place over 12 years, when I was periodically on female hormones. I had undergone intense facial electrolysis. I also had my Adam's apple reduced—that's why everybody thought that I had had throat cancer. And I was certainly primed and ready for the eventual surgery when I got it.

When I woke up after the operation I was in more pain than I had ever conceived possible. But the day that I walked out of the hospital I had a tremendous feeling of relief, of having reconciled an intolerable conflict, of harmonising my existence. Gradually, I was feeling pretty good, and after a month I showed up in my surgery.

Having been both a man and now a woman, people ask me if I now think as a woman. There may be some differences in certain respects but probably not as many as commonly thought. Basically I think the same as I always have. I don't believe my personality is very much changed.

I'm certainly more emotional than I was. I laugh and cry readily. I think I'm less impulsive and less aggressive, although I can be aggressive and I am competitive. And I do have more patience and willingness to compromise or yield than Dick did.

As far as tennis is concerned I think Dick was a better competitor and probably a better sport than Renee. Dick was never one to give up, no matter how many match points against him. He never questioned a call or got upset with an opponent. Now I've given up medicine and I'm a professional tennis player. My

goal is to be the best woman in the world.

But, of course, even if you allow for the fact that I'm now well known, suddenly to become a woman over 40 does create a whole new set of problems. It's tough enough to be a woman divorcee over 40 to begin with, let alone to be a new woman over 40.

It's difficult for me to find guys to date, not because I'm unappealing. I flatter myself that I'm an attractive woman. But I'm six feet tall and I only feel comfortable with guys who are bigger.

I dress in clothes that I feel comfortable in, and I hope make me attractive to men I'm interested in. I like fashion. That's probably one of my more female characteristics.

Sometimes I wear a bra. I always do when I play tennis. The size of my bra is 36B. I'm a 12 or 14 dress. I wear both pants and dresses. I don't think that my taste in clothes could be considered ultra-feminine because I'm not into frilly, lacy clothes for the most part. But I don't think my clothes are mannish.

People that I come in contact with always seem to be on my side and friendly. And I get letters of encouragement. I never get any hate letters. I do know that there are people who don't approve of what I've done. But I don't read what's written about me.

I must say I'm rather disappointed that Billie Jean King hasn't come out vocally in my support, given that she's a champion of equality and pushing the cause of women's tennis. To those women tennis players who don't think they should be asked to play against a trans-sexual, all I can say is I think their opinion is very uninformed. Would these people who oppose me be against all women who don't menstruate from playing competitive tennis? If so, they'd be keeping out an awful lot of women.

I would be very disturbed if I felt that I was being treated differently from other women. I don't want to be considered a third sex or something totally different. I very much want to be a woman in a world of men and women.

▶ THE END

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DR. RICHARDS EXPLAINS HER SEX CHANGE OPERATION

First the testicles are removed. The scrotal skin is used to help fashion the labia of the vagina. The penis is removed. The skin of the penis is envaginated and forms the lining of the new vagina. The urethra is opened into the new vaginal cavity and a mould is placed into this space where the vagina is going to be. And around this mould is laid the skin of the penis which has been inverted. The sensitive parts of the penis, skinwise, with the nerve endings, are left so that erogenous stimulation is preserved.

The whole operation takes between one and a half to three or four hours. It depends a bit on whether additional skin has to be used to form the lining of the vagina. By the time a patient is

ready for surgery, the penis is often very small and atrophied as a result of many years of oestrogen therapy, and this was the case with me. And being a tall woman it was important to have a vagina consistent with the rest of my body. So a skin graft had to be taken to add more skin.

After the operation I had to wear a plastic mould in the vaginal canal to keep it open while healing. It was removed six or seven days after surgery. Then the patient has to use a dilator (like a dildo) periodically, to keep the space from contracting and closing up.

The same procedure is followed for a girl born with too small a vagina or with a blind cavity.