

## “CROSSING OVER”

MUSIC

DAVID GILMORE: From PRI, Public Radio International it's Outright Radio. I'm David Gilmore.

In this hour-long edition of Outright Radio, you'll hear stories on a theme of “Crossing Over” – stories from folks who gave up a significant part of their identity and morphed into a new way of being.

First up, we talk to a gay couple that splits up when one of the men becomes a Christian and renounces his homosexuality...

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M: And it was during this time of going to 12-step, [of] these childhood memories coming to surface, that he questioned his identity as a gay man.

DG: Then Aimee Pomorlow introduces us to a father and daughter who reconcile their broken relationship when the father becomes a woman...

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TG: I had to act like a man at work and in public, and I did that very well, so when I was at home if I continued to pretend to be a man all the time, I felt like I was disappearing.

DG: And finally a story from lesbian surfer Louise Rafkin who challenges the rigidly-defined code of ethics on her way to the waves...

MUSIC

LR: Several years ago, at the crest of my midlife crisis, I felt compelled to do something I'd never done before – I took up surfing.

MUSIC

DG: All true stories, all on a theme of “Crossing Over” in this edition of Outright Radio. I'm David Gilmore, stay with us as we present uncommon stories from the heart of the gay community.

MUSIC

DG: Our first Crossing Over story is about a couple – two men who met working for an erotic massage school. Frank was the regional coordinator for the massage school in

Toronto, while Matthew was the visiting instructor living in San Francisco. In this interview, you'll hear Frank talk about a transition that most of us gay folks would consider – Frank underwent a Christian-based program to convert from being gay to straight.

I have to wonder how much pressure Frank was under at the time of his conversion – I mean; growing up in a homophobic society puts a lot of stress on one's emotional and spiritual foundations. And as you'll soon hear, for much of his 18 years as a gay man, Frank was fighting an inner-battle with addiction and an underdeveloped sense of self. How could he go in with an eraser and wipe out 18 years of his life and completely change his identity.

MUSIC

When I first met Frank years ago, I was struck by his good looks. He sort of embodies that “boy-next-door” kind of look. It's that look that so many people are perfectly willing to project all sorts of things onto – for example, his lover Matthew projected onto Frank the possibility of having a happy, healthy relationship with a “dreamboy.” Well, as it turned out, Frank had a little bit more cooking than was evident on the surface.

M: The times we were together were times full of lots of love, lots of passion, lots of emotional connection... I made a decision then to move to Toronto to move in with him – which he was very happy about. So that's what I did! I moved to Toronto.

DG: That's Matthew. He's now 40 – a wiry, lively redhead.

F: My relationship with Matthew was quite interesting because I felt like I had finally met someone that I can have an open, honest relationship with and my... my sexual activities, or habits, or whatever, weren't anything that would shock or cause grief in the relationship. So, my relationship with him was one that was very open and nurturing in that aspect, so I was free to be fully who I was as a gay man – which seemed like a positive thing.

MUSIC

DG: This is Frank. He's now in his mid 30's – and he still lives in Canada. Frank and Matthew haven't spoken to each other since they split up two years ago. I interviewed them separately...

M: So my initial impression of Frank was someone who was very settled in who he was as a gay man; someone who was very attuned to his sexuality; someone who was on a path to create a spiritual life. And I was on that path, so that's what brought us together.

MUSIC

F: We were living together. I was working my practice and he was working his practice out of the same place.

DG: OK – when you hear Frank referring to his practice, what he’s talking about is an erotic massage practice – which both Frank and Matthew were doing to earn their living at the time. It was their way of helping people find a spiritual connection through massage that involved music, deep breathing and sex work in a sort of ritualized setting. Looking back, Matthew thinks that this work is what pushed Frank over the edge.

F: And what I found was that I would be erotically open to all these clients that I was having all day long and then whenever I’d leave the apartment, I’d be cruising for sex in anonymous places, in public places... and [I] started to lie to Matthew to try and cover up where I’d been for the last four hours. And at the time, I was seeing a psychiatrist, I’d been seeing this psychiatrist for three years, no, it was probably four years at this time. I had gone through this with a previous relationship where I spent more and more hours cruising for anonymous sex. And it started to happen with Matthew and I thought ‘well, this is crazy because he’s open to all this stuff – why am I so ashamed, why am I seeking this anonymous, promiscuous sexual activity?’ And so I was bawling my eyes out in my psychiatrist’s office and he said, “You know, do you think maybe you might be a sex addict?” And I said, “A sex addict? I don’t think so.” And he said, “Well you might want to consider that.”

MUSIC continues...

F: It took a lot of weeks and months of going to these meetings to realize that I actually was a sex and love addict – that every aspect of my life – every emotional response that I had – whether it was happy, sad, angry, lonely, tired – all of my responses would end up in the same way – I would seek someone to have sex with. I was drugging myself out by having sex so I wouldn’t have to deal with the pain or the happiness or whatever. I was just having sex as a means of getting stoned.

MUSIC continues...

M: And it was during this time of going to 12-step, [of] these childhood memories coming to surface that he questioned his identity as a gay man.

MUSIC continues...

DG: Frank met a street chaplain from a local food bank that he would pass on his way to his massage studio. He befriended Frank, who at the time was an atheist, and made the invitation for him to explore the teachings of Christ.

F: I was also starting to go to this church and getting more and more into discovering who Jesus Christ was and what does he mean for me? So there was a bit of a spiritual conversion going on. I was very up-front about who I was as a gay man. Matthew and I

were in a relationship at the time and it was absolutely no problem. They said, “Welcome, come on in... can I get you something to eat?” It was never an issue.

DG: So what about Matthew – was he supportive of you going to church and the 12-step programs?

F: Yes, Matthew was supportive of that. But there was another thing that happened, and that sort of threw a bit of a wrench into everything. This street chaplain that I had become friends with now – I’d been friends with him for over a year – he gave me this book, and it was a book written by a woman named Lee Anne Payne called *Broken Image*. I don’t know why he gave it to me, but he gave it to me and it was about people that were choosing to leave homosexual lifestyles. And I don’t think I felt very upset or whatever just having the book... anyway, I showed it to Matthew and he was very angry and told me to throw it away and told me “What kind of a friend would give me that book?” And I showed it to my psychiatrist and he said the same thing. But I wasn’t able to throw that book out and I left it on my bookshelf and didn’t do anything about it and still kept going to church, still kept going to these 12-step meetings and practicing my erotic, spiritual practice and just carrying on.

MUSIC

M: But what I remember, this book was written by this theologian, this woman, who was talking about father and son... her thesis was that the reason there was a father and son split – or this wound – had to do with homosexuality. She had studied cannibal culture and I (laughs) could not understand, but she was just saying that you could renounce your homosexuality if you came to terms with the relationship you had with your father.

DG: Now is this where you drew the line?

MS: Yeah. So, when he told me was reading this book, and of course I was really upset by that and I had a big reaction to it, and we talked about it... not that I wanted to talk him out of reading this book, but I wanted to say that this book, the ideas, were very convoluted and she was speaking from a Christian perspective. He agreed with me. That’s what he said to me. So, I found out later that he continued to read the book.

MUSIC

F: The lure of that book on my shelf kept calling to me, and at one point I couldn’t not read it – knowing that it existed – curiosity just got the better of me and I picked it up and I started reading it. She put into words the feelings that I had in relationships with men that I couldn’t explain. And these were feelings like wanting to devour men, wanting to be one inside, wanting someone else’s life... And she explains it in the terms of cannibalism and she explains in the book that cannibals eat people that possess the qualities that they feel they lack. And they believe that by eating these people that they will possess those qualities for themselves, and that’s exactly what I was doing with men.

Deep inside of me, I felt as if I was lacking what it was to be a real man. And by consuming men, I would get that inside for myself.

MUSIC

DG: Frank with his newfound insights began to renounce his homosexuality, which also meant that Matthew had to go.

MUSIC

M: I can say I was devastated. I was speechless when he said this. But I was also confronted by homophobia; I was confronted by the Church, his Christianity... I was confronted by his very clearly saying he didn't love me anymore – I was confronted by the relationship was over, I was also confronted by that he had basically ended the relationship without me being a part of it. So, it was basically – “it's over.”

MUSIC

F: It's amazing because what's working is that I've developed a spiritual connection – I gave my life to Christ in 1998. And so by giving my life to Christ, I said “Jesus Christ, I let you into my heart. You are my Savior... without you, I am dead – and through you I have eternal life.” And essentially that's it – I gave my life to Christ, and now instead of seeing me, God sees Christ.

MUSIC continues...

DG: Well, as you can imagine, the rift widened between what was acceptable to Frank as a Christian and how he'd been leading his life up until that time.

F: When I had my last client and I was in the middle of this session with him and I realized that I couldn't go on, and in my mind what happened is that Christ came into the whole scene and he moved me aside and sat me on the floor and he took all that shame that I was feeling about what I was doing onto himself – and he took care of that entire client for me and I never went back to doing that again.

MUSIC continues...

DG: And so that was basically the end of the Frank we used to know... end of his career and end of his relationship...

F: Matthew was very supportive, but, it was ultimate rejection for him...

F: Part of what he wanted me to do was to take a month and find myself. I'm still trying to find myself.

DG: Matthew moved back to California and Frank returned to his life as a mechanical engineer but with a new identity as a straight Christian.

## MUSIC

DG: Do you think that part of your wanting to renounce your homosexuality is having bought into society's homophobia or do you think you've chosen a more healthful path for yourself?

F: There are moments when I wonder if I'm chasing a big, pink elephant, and the only thing that keeps me going is faith that my life doesn't belong to me anymore, but Christ is directing my life. Because if I had to leave it up to me, I'd blow it all again and I'd probably go running back to something that's comfortable.

DG: Do you feel like you needed to renounce being gay in order to deal with your sexual addiction?

F: That bothers me actually because in the process of recovery they talk about changing gender preference as an alcoholic may switch from beer to wine thinking that it was better because he only had one glass of wine and had to have three beers. So in that respect, it bothers me that I'm considering or changing my identification and my labels because in the back of my mind is always this thought that it is the addict inside of me that's just switching from wine to beer.

DG: Do you think there's any doubt in your mind that this is going to work?

F: There is no doubt in my mind. There is no doubt in my mind whatsoever that this life of mine is exactly what God intended for my life... there's no doubt in my mind.

DG: I asked Matthew if he thought Frank could really be straight.

M: You know I get that question a lot: "Is he really straight, do you think so?" Frank has been in gay relationships since he left high school. When we separated he was in his mid-30s. So, for two decades of his life, he was in gay relationships – he was in the gay community... and so I believe his essence is – he's a gay man.

DG: Then I asked Frank if he had any regrets.

F: Uh, yes, I have many regrets, David. One of the hardest things I'm dealing with right now is being 37 years old and what happened to those 18 years of my life... Everybody that's not in the gay community is either married – or married (laughs) – with kids. And there is a huge amount of shame about the first 18 years of my adult life, and where was I and what I was doing. And now what really is very painful is that I don't have any kids and I'd love to have a family. That is the biggest, most painful thing I live with – is the pain of lost years and the pain of not having a wife and kids.

MUSIC (setup for a major mood shift)

DG: The next part of this interview, I have to say, was particularly disturbing for me. Here Frank is beginning to rebuild his life, constructing a new identity from the ground up. What was hard for me to listen to was that he's rebuilding his life with a fairly unrealistic, idealized sense of what family and gender roles should be. Frank spent his entire adult life in relationships with men and all of a sudden he is having to relate to women. And he's doing it with a roadmap of some pretty unexamined stereotypes that seem handed to him by someone or some organization. Not only is it disturbing to me, but it also seems implausible. How could you possibly be a spiritual sex worker one day and the next thing you know, you're a Christian family man? So what's going to happen to him two years down the road when he has a wife and two kids and on the way home he passes that public restroom where he used to have sex? Will he go in? What happens when you take the eraser to your shadow?

MUSIC

I'm reminded of the story of John Paulk – chairman of Exodus (which was, or still is, the leading homosexual recovery program) who was caught in a gay bar in Washington DC last summer and admitted that the process of conversion hasn't exactly "healed" him of his homosexuality. So, I have to confess that I went into this interview with Frank armed with this sense of disbelief. Yet I want to be fair to him and open to what he has to say, and trust that some impulse in him knows better than anyone what he needs.

F: One of the things that has happened over the first 18 years of my adult life is that my relationships have been exclusively with men, and what I'm exploring now is relationships with women. And, before, I thought that a relationship with a man was the only way to really feel how to be a man – what I'm learning now is that the more a woman is a woman and behaves in womanly manners, or fashions, the more I feel like a man...

MUSIC

F: One of the girls in the group that I hang around with wanted to go fishing. And all we talked about was, "let's go fishing, let's go fishing." And I, completely, in the past was a real sissy about worms.

(Laughs)

And this horror... I've been living with the shame of that. So this girl tells me she wants to go fishing – and I decide in my mind that I'm going to get over this phobia of picking up worms. So I get my fishing license, she gets her fishing license and we go up to this cottage – and there was a group of us, there are about ten of us – and one of the girls who is my very best friend, her father taught her all about fishing, and so I'm like, "Tammy, what do I do with this?" And she's showing me all these manly things, "You do this and you do this and..." It didn't make me feel very good. And then this other girl that really

wanted to go fishing – we get out in the boat and the first thing you do is – I put her first worm on the hook and then she decides that she’s going to do it for the rest of the week and all week long she’s putting her own worms on the hook. But, all week long, she never failed to tell me how absolutely grossed out she was about what she was doing. And all week long, it just didn’t bother me to break those worms in half and pierce them on the hook and stick it in the water and pull the fish off and all that kind of stuff. So by her admitting her feminine nature – that she really didn’t like these worms, but she was doing it – made me feel better about being a man. So, yeah, for me it was an example of how men and women can complement each other – which I had no experience with in the past because I had completely left women out of my life.

## MUSIC

DG: How did your parents deal with your being gay and then hearing that you switched over to being straight?

F: My parents are kind of funny, but they basically accepted me anyway I was. But I’ll tell you, David, my mother – I don’t think she was ever happy that I was gay. And I would bring Matthew there and my family would get along with him, they’d love him, they really did love him. And so my relationship ended; I told my mother what was going on and all this kind of stuff... and one day, I bring my friend Tammy, this girl that knows how to fish, I started bringing her around to my mother’s place. Tammy and I go up to my mother’s place just after they had finished dinner. She was at the community center swimming with my nieces. And I come in there with Tammy and my dog, to the pool, to go swimming with my nieces. And my mother comes out of the pool area to meet us, and she says, “Oh! you go in here and swim with your nieces, I’ll take your dog home and I’ll go make you supper.” It’s like – is this my mother? [laughs] I thought maybe it was because Tammy was there, and, you know – her son was with a woman. But it was so strange – she went home and made me dinner. Now, my mother would have never: A. – made me dinner, and B. – she would’ve never taken my dog home and made me dinner. (laughs)

## MUSIC

DG: Do you feel like you loved Matthew.... or was that just something you were pretending to do?

F: I don’t think I was pretending to love Matthew. I, I believe I loved him. I have to believe I loved him. There are times when I wonder whether I’ve ever loved anybody. But, if I start on that avenue, that’s a one-way ticket to insanity. So I have to trust that some aspect of my life is real. And yeah, I believe that I did love this man. As, maybe, as limited as my feeble heart could love anybody considering in what kind of state I was in, I guess I loved him all I could at the time.

DG: I asked Matthew if he thought that maybe he had served as Frank’s bottoming-out experience in his addiction process...

M: I was. I really was. Yeah. And that hurts to hear that and know on some level that that is true. Or, I could also frame it that I was the catalyst that helped him become more in touch with who he is as a spiritual person. But, in some of the conversations, he is definitely... severing a part of his life. [That] when you sever something, it fights to come back. So, you sever something, whether it's a desire, or a feeling, or an experience, and you negate its importance, it's gonna' come back – whether you believe it or not, it comes back to effect you in your life.

MUSIC/conclusion...

DG: Frank continues to explore his new life as a heterosexual Christian in Toronto, and Matthew continues to do his sexual/spiritual work in San Francisco.

MUSIC/STATION BREAK

DG: Still to come on Outright Radio, a father reunites with his daughter on the other side of a sex change, and Louise Rafkin takes us surfing with the guys. We'll be back with more stories of Crossing Over when Outright Radio continues on PRI, Public Radio International.

MUSIC (upbeat)

DG: You're listening to Outright Radio from PRI, Public Radio International. I'm David Gilmore. You can contact us by e-mail at [comments@outrightradio.org](mailto:comments@outrightradio.org) or call us toll free at 1-866 688-7234. Today's show – stories on a theme of Crossing Over...

DG: As a teenager, Noelle would sneak into her parent's room when they were out and steal lingerie. She'd cake on makeup and pose in the mirror wondering, "Is this what it is to be a woman?" Then she'd wash off the makeup and go out in her t-shirts and shorts. But she wasn't the only one in the house trying on a new identity – Noelle's father, Richard, would also wait for the family to leave before he would try on shorts and feminine blouses and then he'd think, "Is this who I am?" Aimee Pomerleau follows a father's and daughter's difficult transition to womanhood...

AP: Richard always knew he wasn't a boy, but if he acted like a girl, he'd be teased and called a sissy. And besides, he wanted to be a girl. He learned to hide his real self – stuffing it deep, deep down, learning the ways of boys and men.

MUSIC

AP: Looking in from the outside, Richard was successful. He had a wife, a daughter, and a six-figure advertising job in Cleveland Ohio. He was a very macho man, drove a sports

car, hid Playboys in the linen closet, and was bald – no one suspected. But his secret also came at a price – his family life was a wreck.

MUSIC...

Christine: I had to act like a man at work and in public – and I did that very well – so, when I was at home, if I continued to pretend to be a man all the time, I felt like I was disappearing. But it was also impossible for me to make the transition into living in any way like a woman, so what I did was just became numb. I became really non-functional emotionally with my family, which was hurtful to them, but it was about the only way I could handle it at the time.

AP: Richard's daughter Noelle:

Noelle: He sat in the corner and sulked for about 14 years, and drank, and I didn't like that, but at the same time, I didn't think about that as particularly unusual either, because most of the fathers of the friends that I had were not involved in their children's lives, so... I had no idea that something more complex was going on. I just thought it was regular "jerky-guy syndrome."

Christine: She would crawl on my lap when she was small – three, four, five – and give me a hug and I wouldn't hug her back, because as much as I loved her, and as much as I wanted to, because I felt that if I did that, then I would be behaving like the father, like the man, and that was terrifying to me because I thought I would disappear if I really completed this entire artificial persona.

Noelle: I knew that my parents really didn't have sex much (laughs) I don't know if kids are supposed to know that, but I pretty much did. I knew that they were not particularly romantic, because they were never really kissing and hugging, but, at the same, time I also thought that maybe there were things going on that I didn't know about and, of course, like most kids, I didn't particularly want to know about it. So, I was pretty much in the dark.

AP: Richard's wife knew from the start that her husband liked to cross-dress. She thought, "fuzzy sweaters? How bad can that be?" But as the years went on, Richard realized that cross-dressing now and again wasn't enough.

Christine: I had the mid-life crisis – red sports car and all that stuff, and just was miserable. I had to stop, I really hit bottom emotionally, although in no other way. And I just said, well, something has to change.

MUSIC

Noelle: My mother took me to the mall when I was 14, to buy back-to-school clothes, and she bought me all these designer jeans that she never would buy me and I was really excited, I mean – what great sense of largess has come over my mother? So I was pretty

happy. We got back into the car and my mother leaned over to me and said, “Your father likes to wear women's clothes.”

#### MUSIC

Noelle: So basically, my mother ‘outed’ my father to me as a transvestite, not as a transsexual, because they still didn't know she was a transsexual. And I burst out crying out in relief. Most people don't believe that. They think that I must have been so horrified or had some sort of visceral reaction to the thought of my father in a dress looking like Boy George or some sort of exaggerated image and that wasn't the case at all. I was so completely relieved that my father didn't hate me!

AP: So... you're in the car, you just found out your father doesn't hate you, and you go home – do you remember what happened after that?

Noelle: Well, I was not allowed to tell anyone because they were afraid my father would lose his job. He was a pretty well-paid advertising creative director, and had just gotten this huge promotion, we had just bought this big house, I mean we hadn't had all that much money while I was growing up, and suddenly we had money and it was really exciting to all of us. I was also scared that if this got out, I would be tormented in school. And so, I went home, I avoided my father as I always did... My dad came up a day or two later and said, “Look, if you have any questions about this, if there’s anything you don't understand or you want to know, please talk to me.” Which so threw me, because my father never said things like that!! And at the time, I had no questions – I wasn't completely sure what I was being told. I mean, I didn't have to come home and suddenly my father is sitting there wearing a feather boa and a teddy (laughs). It wasn't quite like that...I came home and everything looked the same.

#### MUSIC

AP: Richard found a therapist connected to a gender identity clinic, he'd spent most of his life creating a male persona. Over the next two years, he started to asking himself what made him happy – something he'd never done before...

MUSIC continues...

Christine: So I was at K-mart trying to pick out a potholder – there are hundreds of different kinds of potholders there – and I was looking at all of them and I was trying to figure out which one would make me happy... would it be the flowered one? No, that's too fancy too frilly... Is it the pink one? The one with the brick fireplace? Oh no, that's too masculine... it was sort of a whole gender discovery right there in the aisle of K-mart. I finally picked one, and I threw it into the cart and was just terrified because I thought somebody would see me – a man – walking around with a flowered potholder, so I went over to the automotive aisle and threw in some cans of auto oil, and a lug wrench, and a screw driver set, just about anything else I could find that didn't have flowers on it and rolled up to the checkout and figured the cashier was probably going to check everything

out and then look at the flowered potholder and call the police or something. So I had a whole story set up – I was going to explain that my wife was sick and she wanted a flowered potholder and here it is, and I got it for her, but it's really not mine, (laughs) it's somebody else's. But that never happened.

AP: So she didn't bat an eye...

Christine: No! She could have cared less.

MUSIC

Noelle: After my father moved out, we would do the weekend lunch routine that's pretty common for children of divorce. And on each successive weekend, my father would look just a little bit different. And it was almost an imperceptible change, you had to really be paying attention, and I was – I was really paying attention. She would start wearing clothes that buttoned down the other side, so they were women's clothes, not men's clothes, but they were almost identical, [a] unisex kind of style – so it was very subtle, or her nails were just a little longer than men's nails usually were. Or she would wear shorts, and I would notice she wouldn't have any hair on her legs. Slowly... her stubble started disappearing. I would see her cross her legs more at the knee – not ankle-to-knee (laughs) but knee-to-knee... just these little things that were more feminine. And yet things that were not so overtly feminine that anybody waiting on us in the diner would have come up and said, 'excuse me ma'am can I get you more coffee?' – but just enough to make me to feel a little uncomfortable.

MUSIC

Noelle: She was becoming a lot more open, a lot warmer, a lot more willing to show affection and to talk, and I pretty much rejected it. As far I was concerned, she had not been a very good father for 14 years and now, all of a sudden, she wanted to bond and be girlfriends, was kind of how I saw it, and I just thought that was ridiculous.

AP: Noelle's parents separated when she was in 10th grade. Outside of her sessions with the family therapist, Noelle was sworn to secrecy, but her friends knew something was up.

Noelle: My boyfriend, who I was very close to, would ask me again and again, "What's going on with your parents?" and I would get so close to telling him, but I would never really say it. I would say, 'oh there's something up with my parents and it has to do with my dad, and it's really bad, and if got out, my father would get fired, and you might not like me anymore... and basically, I learned later, my boyfriend thought my father was molesting me!

AP: He might have been relieved to hear the truth! (laughs)

Noelle: They were! They were all relieved to hear the truth.

## MUSIC

AP: So what was that moment like when you first appeared fully as a woman to the world?

Christine: I started going out in public and going shopping on weekends. One time I was read by a group of kids – they saw I was (laughs) a man in women's clothing and started screaming and yelling and it was pretty traumatic. I finally escaped from the mall and pledged that I would never do it again, and of course that lasted for about a day.

## MUSIC

Christine: I finally got the nerve to go back into a store – a shoe store – and they were giving out silk flowers to the women customers as part of their grand opening ceremony apparently. I walked in and they didn't give me a flower and I thought, 'oh my god, I've been read again, they didn't give me a flower because they know I'm a man.' I started to panic and I started to look around try to find my way back the car, try to get out of the store and then the woman turned around, apparently she hadn't been looking at me, and she (gulps) handed me a flower and said, "Welcome to the store!" and that was like my first "welcome" into this world – in my new persona... I spent a lot of time in that shoe store. [laughs]

## MUSIC

Noelle: I finally saw her dressed when I was 17, and she came up to the house, and she was wearing a wig – cause she's bald [laughs] – and a very nice suede shirt over a very lovely blouse [laughs] with slacks, she looked very nice. I thought at the time she looked like Suzanne Pleshette. I couldn't fathom that whenever I saw my father dressed like a woman, that she would not look like a man dressed like a woman. And she didn't! – she looked like a woman – and that really startled me. And that was when I started to accept what was going on, because it all looked right.

## MUSIC

AP: Richard now called herself Christine. In order to avert gossip, Noelle and her mother, Christine's ex-wife, threw a coming-out party at a country club for 200 of her business associates, family and friends.

Noelle: My dad wrote long this really long letter and it said, "this is what's been going on, this is who I am, this is what I'm going to be doing, this is how my ex-wife feels about it, this is how my daughter feels about it" because everyone was always saying, "How did they feel???" We just thought the best defense was a good offense [laughs] – you know, if we put it all out there, what were people going to say? A couple of people said, "Oh my god, this is awful, this is wrong, you're going to hell." And we said okay – so you're not coming to the party? [laughs]

AP: More food for us! Okay! [laughs]

Noelle: ...yeah, and moved on.

MUSIC

AP: What was that like after your coming-out party – how did people react?

Christine: Well it was great from a business standpoint. I wasn't employed by a company, but I was working freelance and I was doing a lot of freelance work with this one company. And the day after I came out, they called and said, "Come on in here, let's get to work!" and I did and that was tremendous. And I've always been indebted to them for that reaction. They were very accepting and we just kept working and I was working with the same clients I had been working with before as Richard, so that was a tremendous relief for me.

MUSIC

Christine: I wasn't sure if people would accept me – and some did and some didn't. I don't have the same history as most women, obviously, and that factors in, regardless of how accepting someone is. That's part of the price you pay for coming out publicly.

MUSIC continues...

Noelle: Over the four years of college, we became extremely close. Once I really opened up to her, I just thought she was a phenomenal person, just warm and wonderful and that we had so many things in common. We have the same exact sense of humor, we like to do the same things – we're sort of eerily alike. And I never would have known that until I allowed myself to be vulnerable to her again. But that was something that took a long time.

Christine: All I was trying to do was to be who I really was and to show her how much I loved her. And eventually that worked.

MUSIC

Noelle: When I was in college, I was this big women's studies chick. I cut my hair short, and was living in a women's collective and I come home for spring break to see my father, and my father has just become Martha Stuart. She came to the door and she said, "Hello!" and she had freshly-baked cookies, and she had made this lovely three-course dinner of mescaline salad and lasagna and everything in the house was mauve... There were little flowers arranged everywhere. She said she had taken up flower arranging, and she was really into cooking and liked all of this vacuuming stuff... and I was horrified. And I said, "You know, being a woman is not about cooking and cleaning, I mean, have you been watching too much Nick at Night?" I was pretty offended.

MUSIC continues...

Noelle: She was really upset with me, because she said, “Look, Noelle, I really haven’t ever had the opportunity to do some of these things.” And I said, “Yeah, well if you had really wanted to cook dinner, I don’t think my mother would have fought you on it!” So, I thought that was a pretty weak excuse. But, that was a phase she went through. It was not easy for any of us – even though the cookies were very good...

MUSIC continues...

But as time passed, she slowly took up all the hobbies she had as a guy. She had been a big bowler, she went back to bowling; she stopped flower arranging, and she stopped cooking – she really stopped... cooking! [laughs]

MUSIC

Noelle: I didn’t realize that I was going to miss any aspects of my father as a man until they were gone. The most painful moment I think of realizing that was when we went to Belgium in 1994 and I accompanied her to have her sex reassignment surgery and when she was laying there preparing to go into surgery, and she [sighs] was wearing a Tweetie nightshirt, [laughs] and she was laying there with her wig off, so she was bald again with these long, manicured fingernails, and her padded bra had been taken off – she’d never gotten breast surgery, so she was relatively flat-chested – it was the first time I’d seen my father without her wig since she had been a guy... it absolutely devastated me, it was like seeing a ghost, and... I love this woman who my father has become so much, but I wish I could visit [laughs], just because I do miss him. I lived with him for 14 years, and he wasn't the greatest in the world, but he was my dad... you know, he had that smell of Vitalis and aftershave and I will never smell those on my father again.

AP: While having one’s genitals altered and reconstructed may seem like a big deal, that’s not how Christine felt about it...

Christine: It was just a detail that I had to take care of. The major decision was actually deciding to make the transition in a lifestyle from man to woman – that was a big one – gigantic. The physical gender-reassignment surgery for me was not a major issue; it was not all that traumatic. It was just bringing my body into alignment with who I felt I was.

Noelle: Basically, the hardest part about the whole sex-change thing to me was the fact that we were in a foreign country, we were isolated, the hospital conditions there were nowhere near what you expect in the United States. There was no air conditioning and it was 98 degrees outside, and so it was like a sauna in my father’s room... the windows wouldn't open, there were paint chips falling from the ceiling, and the nurses called the room where my father was staying, 'the freak ward.' They thought I didn't understand that, because they said it in French, but I had taken French [laughs]. I would stay with her

all day – she was in there for about a week and a half – and then I would go back to the hotel and I would pass out and I would throw up, and have these bizarre dreams of genitalia [laughs] floating in the middle of the air... dreams you'd never want to have! And I made hundreds of dollars in international [laughs] phone calls from the hotel trying to feel connected to something. I had never felt that alone in my life.

## MUSIC

AP: Christine's mind and body now felt right, but it took her awhile to sort out her sexual attractions.

Christine: I'd started dating guys, and that went okay. But eventually it turned out that I wasn't really that attracted to men. I finally figured that out. It only could happen after I had really gotten grounded in my gender identity. And there was something attractive about the idea of being with a man, and then just being perceived entirely as a mainstream person, but that's not how it turned out [laughs], so...

AP: So have you found acceptance dating lesbians? Has that been difficult when you tell them that you were once a man?

Christine: Oh sure, some are very accepting, some aren't – just like every other segment of society, I guess. And I can see their point. Not only do males think they can do everything, they also think they can be women, well... 'No bub, I don't think so.' There is that attitude in the lesbian community; there are also lesbians who are very accepting. But I have come across some who – they weren't hostile, just... I would tell someone and she would say, one reason or another, in a week or so, the relationship would come to an end.

## MUSIC

AP: Christine has been living as a woman for the past ten years. I asked her what her life is like for her now...

Christine: My life is great... I'm working in my profession and I'm having a good time doing that. It's not a perfect life – there are consequences obviously that I have to bear for everything. But all in all – a very good life.

Music continues...

Christine: There's a great attraction to disappearing and just being a woman, and just accepted on that basis. It can be very trying to always be living that duality, always having the baggage of your former life around with you. I didn't take that approach. I wanted to tell people that transsexualism isn't something to be afraid of. But that was a conscious decision I made, and I'm glad I made it because I was also proud of the life I

had as Richard. I was reasonably accomplished and did a lot of things that I was proud of. I didn't really want that to disappear – that's part of who I am. You pay a little bit of a price for that in today's society.

MUSIC continues...

EPILOGUE:

AP: Both father and daughter write about their experiences. Christine wrote a one man/woman play about her life which was performed in New York. Noelle has edited a book of essays on the experiences of children of lesbian, gay and transgendered parents called, "Out of the Ordinary." She's currently in the process of writing a childhood memoir.

MUSIC continues...

DG: Aimee Pomerleau reporting from Berkeley.

MUSIC continues...

DG: Lesbian writer Louise Rafkin has this piece about what it takes for her to get on a surfboard and paddle out into a world dominated by straight guys with bad manners...

SOUND OF WAVES & then MUSIC...

LR: I've never played on a softball team. I once dated a really cute, but cranky, butch pitcher, and as a baby-dyke I passed many a Sunday afternoon reclining on the sidelines cheering (or was that beer drinking?). Still, my only experience with rounding bases is euphemistically, as in 'With her, I got to third base,' or, better yet, 'She brought me in home.'

I know this lack of experience on the field calls into question my membership in the 'lesbo nation'. Softball is to lesbians as ice skating is to gay men. "I play Softball" is basically short hand for "I'm one, too." My generation protested events that now seem almost benign – like beauty contests! And a girl was expected to join a softball team seconds after her first foray down another girl's panties.

But I balked – I hate team sports. Instead, I have pursued individual hobbies – karate and swimming. In these, if you drop something, or fall down, or fail to hit or pass a ball, you don't have to then face nine or fifteen other people giving you stink-eye.

MUSIC continues...

Several years ago at the crest of my mid-life crisis, I felt compelled to do something I'd never done before: I took up surfing. Though I grew up in San Clemente, a California beach town famous for the quality of its waves, I spent my youth on shore timing my

tanning sessions and watching my boyfriends surf. (Someone had to be at the ready with a dry towel!)

In the mid-70s, very few girls took to the waves. A few did, but they were rumored to be ‘that way.’ Meanwhile, not suspecting I might be ‘that way,’ too, I secretly aspired to be a ‘surfer-girl.’ Surfing looked to me like the ultimate sport – individual, exhilarating, freeing, cool... It is. It’s all of that and more. Two years into my new passion, my only regret is that I didn’t start 20 years ago. I love the freedom and the feeling of being on top of all that power, by myself. But, though I still shiver at the thought of joining a team, there are times, especially when I’m out there over my head – literally – when I do wish there were a few more of us bobbing in the swells. Maybe not a whole lot more, but a few.

MUSIC continues...

My people out there in the surf are mainly straight, 22 year-old males whose idea of a real solid put-down is ‘Fag!’ – as in “You fag – you pulled out!” (pulled out is surf lingo for failing to take off on a wave – lest you think dirty.) And gay is often bandied about disparagingly as in, “These waves are so gay!” These are the folks I am counting on pulling me from an early, soggy grave – should it come to that.

MUSIC continues...

That surfers aren’t actually a gang of liberal minded pro-homo activists hasn’t come as a great surprise to me. I went to high school with future surf champs, Surfer magazine came into play practically in my back yard, and my favorite high-school history teacher invented the ‘surf leash’ – the length of cord which attaches surfer to board and reduces the post wipe-out swim for your board to a mere tug.

MUSIC continues...

Actually, my very first job was sewing these ankles bands in the teacher’s garage. Surfers didn’t strike me then, and don’t impress me now, as people who are particularly accepting, or even tolerant, of differences. When I am visiting home, I am more aware of the stigma of being gay than I am almost anywhere else.

MUSIC continues...

Growing up in San Clemente meant respecting the sanctity of cliques: surfers didn’t hang out with ‘sochies’ (the popular kids), or Mexicans, or even the jocks. Everybody had attitude about everyone else. And even among surfers, there was, and still is, a fairly rigid code of beach behavior, which included a strict pecking order. Being local is foremost, of course, meaning you live within a bike ride of your surf spot. Being ‘valley,’ essentially means from anywhere more than a mile from the Pacific shoreline, meant suffering the disdain of the locals at the very least. Sometimes, this disdain escalated to verbal harassment and even, occasionally, a bout of fisticuffs. At my home break, the one within

a stone's throw of the house I grew up in, the local surf gang were such a insular group that the surfers who drove in from outlying areas routinely found their tires slashed or boards ripped off. There remains to this day a fine piece of faded graffiti at the entrance to our beach underpass, which ominously boasts the warning: "Locals Only! If you don't LIVE here, don't SURF here!" In California there are several breaks renown for the locals blatant unfriendliness. Malibu surfers are historically famous for their inhospitable ways, and will – I can attest – bully newcomers off their waves.

MUSIC...

Even in 1956, when the original girl surfer whom Hollywood packaged as Gidget – the girl midget – first paddled out at the 'Boo,' she returned to her car to find the distributor cap disconnected. Luckily, when I recently ventured out at Malibu I was escorted by accomplished surfer and lesbian folksinger [Phranc](#), who has been surfing that break for eight years. Walking down the beach with Phranc, she with her classic crew cut, toting her classic longboard, it was obvious that she was, if not one of the boys, completely accepted. She was greeted with respect. However, when I returned later in the week without my hero, I was treated much differently. "It took me about two or three years to earn my spot in the line-up..." Phranc told me... "I surfed every day, and the guys certainly looked at me funny, but I just kept paddling out until I became a fixture. That's what women need to do – surf everyday."

MUSIC...

I'm entirely passionate about surfing, and a little discrimination is not going to squelch my zeal. I find myself crossing into new territory. Perhaps, in some way, it's going home. It helps that my new best surfing buddy is a 'bi-guy' who passes for straight and under whose wing I am entering the sometimes not-so-friendly Santa Cruz waters.

MUSIC...

I've lived most of my life in places where being gay is nearly the norm, and, as a writer and martial artist, most of my intimate communities – even though I don't play softball! – are gay-saturated. Surfing has brought me to consider what happens when we let ourselves follow our passions, no matter where they might lead. Certainly venturing, alone or together, into non-gay waters has changed the world. The world is becoming less cliquy, less stratified, less this or that, you are or you aren't. Gays and lesbians are exiting softball fields and ice rinks and popping out in all kinds of places. Somewhere, I suppose, there are even be gay and lesbian skeet shooters. However, I'd like to encourage more gay men to take to the waves. If they did, I know we'd all be availed of more fashionable and flattering wetsuits.

MUSIC

DG: Writer Louise Rafkin. Outright Radio is produced in collaboration with KXCI in Tucson, Arizona. Senior editor for our show is Jesse Rose DeRooy. Our business manager is John Brennan.

Support for Outright Radio comes from this station and Public Radio International stations nationwide and is made possible in part by the PRI Program Fund, whose contributors include the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Additional support comes from the Gill Foundation, the Rainbow Endowment, the Gay and Lesbian Fund for South Florida and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

#### THEME MUSIC

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This is David Gilmore - thanks for joining us.

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